

General Bardic Studies 1

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Question #1: Please define the roles of the representative occupations of our Guild's Branches and Concentrations (Seanchai [Storyteller], Filid [Poet], Bard [Musician], Cainte [Satirists]) in the early society of at least one Indo-European culture. (Minimum 100 words each)

Seanchai (Storyteller)

In the courts of medieval Ireland and Wales (and possibly earlier during the Pagan times as well), storytellers were held in very high regard. The fire in the hall was more than just a place to sit and be warm, but also echoed back to the ancient fire altars of the Indo-Europeans (Rees and Rees, 16). Kings and nobles would give their hospitality to traveling storytellers and bards in return for a good tale. In the fourth branch of the *Mabinogi*, Gwydion is described as, "Then Gwydion was the best reciter of lore in the world. That night he entertained the court with pleasing monologues and lore that was admired by everyone in the court, and Pryderi found it delightful to be entertained by him" (Ford, 93). In a story written in the 8th century, a storyteller told tales to the King all night long for the entire winter (Rees and Rees, 16), so a large repertoire of tales was certainly required. In 12th century Ireland there was a list of 9 score tales that any good storyteller had to know (Rees and Rees, 67).

Filid (Poet)

In writing about the ancient Gauls, Diodorus Siculus wrote, "They have lyric poets called Bards, who, accompanied by instruments resembling lyres, sing both praise and satire" (Koch, 13). The early Christian poets in Ireland did work of such skill that they probably inherited the forms from early, Pagan times. Often, early Irish and Welsh poetry does not translate well, since many poetic forms (such as the *Deibhidh* in Ireland and *Englynion* in Wales) require a very subtle form of stresses that simply don't work in English.

Poets were part of the Druidic class in the Celtic world, and held in very high esteem. In Ireland they were the official historians and took care of maintaining the Royal geneologies. Especially well-learned poets may also have been the judges of the time. And the Filid would compose the Praise Poems that were sung by the Bards for their Royal and noble hosts.

Bard (Musician)

As mentioned in *Filid* above, the Bards sang for their suppers even back in ancient Gaul. They were called *parasites*, or one who eats at another man's table. They would play on lyres, drums and play on pipe instruments – indeed, a lyre is depicted on a piece of 7th century BCE pottery. Trumpets, as seen on the Gundestrup Cauldron, were also well known and appear in the tales. In Ireland there is a vocal style, quite rare now, that is also remarkably similar to a similar one in India, showing that this might be the remains of an ancient Indo-European style. In the Irish tales, the Dagda had a magical harp that could make people either laugh, cry or fall asleep. This was stolen at one point and the Irish Gods went to great pains to get it back.

Cainte (Satirist)

Diodorus Siculus mentioned that in ancient Gaul the Bards would sing both praise and satire. And satire could be a potent weapon. In the ancient Irish tales, the King Bres was a very bad provider of hospitality and oppressed the Gods. In retaliation, he was the subject of the very first satire ever made in Ireland, and the magic of the words caused boils and other eruptions on his face. This was important because a king could not be blemished. Just before the second battle of Moytura, when the Gods were deciding what they would do against the Fomorians, Carpre the Poet announced that he would satirize the enemy (Rees and Rees, 37).

Question #2: Please define the roles of the representative occupations of our Guild's Branches and Concentrations (Seanchai [Storyteller], Filid [Poet], Bard [Musician], Cainte [Satirists]) within ADF ritual and practice. (Minimum 100 words each)

Seanchai (Storyteller)

In our Grove, the storyteller is a very important role. This person creates the play or tells the tale of the High Day, bringing it alive to the people. Without a storyteller, anyone who didn't know the significance of the holiday might never understand what is going on. The storyteller also needs to weave the story in such a way that later parts of the ritual, such as the invocations and workings, if any, are foreshadowed as well as made clear. The story is the time when the people can hear of the exploits and characteristics of the Gods, so that when they are invoked, the people will understand the allusions in the invocations.

Filid (Poet)

Poetry is what makes the spoken word beautiful. Poetry can be free verse or metric, and many styles are possible. When invocations are written and performed, or even created at the moment through inspiration, it is the poetry that makes them sing. In our Grove, the person who writes the liturgy must be a poet of some kind, in order to make the poetic parts of the ritual stand out. For if the poetry is good, it will allow the people to be swept along and will make it easier for them to 'see'

the Spirits being called. It also makes it easier for the Spirits to hear our call as well. Poetry is a work of labor, and as such is also appropriate as a praise offering or sacrifice to the Spirits.

Bard (Musician)

The Bard is the one responsible for leading the people in the songs sung in ritual. Many ADF rites use song as a way of unifying the people and of pointing up a high point in the rite. For instance, in our Grove we sing after each Kindred invocation. We also sing in Procession which is important in getting everyone working together as we begin the rite. Song and music are also good for punctuating the Story told of the Lore for that rite, and as a form of praise offering. Drumming can also be an extremely effective way of keeping the pace of the rite intact. A heart-beat gently played during a ritual keeps the dramatic tension going, as well as the tempo of the rite moving.

Cainte (Satirist)

I would argue that satire has no place in ritual. There is no way that satire can be done without hurting someone unless it is done very gently and the satirist includes himself in the satire. While this may work very well as entertainment at a Bardic Circle, I think that it could be very disruptive at a ritual open to the public. Should there be people there who are new to the Grove, a satire of someone or something they didn't know would leave them out. Only those 'in the know' would get the satire, and leaving people out would be rude. I can see no purpose for it in ritual at all.

Question #3: Please give examples and explanations of three kinds of early poetic forms.
(Minimum 100 words each)

There is a very old Indo-European poetic form called the Strophic Style. It shows up in the earliest Latin poem we have, a prayer to Mars for a three-fold sacrifice called the *Suouitaurilia*. A strophe is the first stanza of a pair of stanzas. The second stanza is called an antistrophe and contrasts with the strophe. In this particular prayer, there are four stanzas, with the second and third stanzas acting as a prayer within the prayer. The second stanza is about 'averting' and the third is about 'granting'. I will print the two stanzas below (Watkins, 197-203):

II. that you
 forbid, ward off, and brush aside
 diseases seen and unseen,
 depopulation and devastation
 storms and tempests;

III. and that you
 let grow tall and turn out well

grains (and) corn and vineyards (and) shrubwork
and keep safe shepherds (and) cattle
and give good health and soundness
to me, my house, and our household.

Another kind of poetic form is the *englyn* which shows up in Medieval Welsh poetry. An *englyn* is a metrical unit consisting of three or four lines with a fixed number of syllables (Ford, 191). These are used primarily in nature poems and in poems expressing a general truth.

In the fourth branch of the Mabinogi, Gwydion searches for the missing Lleu Llaw Gyffes and finally finds him in eagle form, wounded and dripping gore. Gwydion calls Lleu down to him out of the tree by reciting 3 *englyns*, each one bringing the eagle closer to the ground (Ford, 107)

There's an oak that grows between two lakes,
Gloomy is the air and the glen;
If I speak no lie,
This comes from Lleu's flowers.

There's an oak that grows on a high plain;
Rain wets it not, nor does it melt;
It nourished a score of torments.
In its top is Lleu Llaw Gyffes.

There's an oak that grows along a slope;
Stately prince in his temple.
If I speak no lie,
Lleu will come to my lap.

A third type of poetic form is the Norse *Eddic* verse from the *Poetic Edda*. This poetic form is simple of style and diction (unlike the Skaldic verse) and is very alliterative (which means that there is much repetition of the initial sounds of the words). There is also a great use of kennings, which are condensed metaphors that get used repeatedly. For instance, if one thinks of a ship galloping over the seas like a horse, then a kenning might be, "sailsteed" (Hollander, xxi) The stresses are also very important, and this form of verse uses very strong stresses and many weak ones. This can be seen in the following verse from the *Voluspá* (Hollander, 2):

5. From the south the sun, by the side of the moon,
 heaved his right hand over heaven's rim,

the sun knew not	what seat he had,
the stars knew not	what stead they held,
the moon knew not	what might she had.

Question #4: Please give three ways in which storytelling was used in the Indo-European culture of your choice with specific instances of occurrence to support your examples.

(Minimum 100 words each)

In Ireland there is still a tradition of storytelling, though it is disappearing rapidly under the strains of elementary education, radio and television. The ancient Druids had their Bardic class who would recite the tales of their chiefs and kings, often sung in verse. But these were the beginnings of the tradition of telling the tales which persisted into modern times. Rees and Rees tell us that just as the ancient priestly class of the Druids connected story to ritual, so they continued to be told for ceremonial occasions, such as during night vigils at holy wells, after religious services and after wakes and christenings.

Another use of the tales was to wile away the long winter evenings. Originally these tales would be told in courtly venues, by professional bards, but the tradition continued on long after the great courts vanished. It is said that the storytellers had so large a repertoire that they could tell a different story every night from Samhain to Beltane, or all winter. It was considered inappropriate for women to tell hero tales, and these same tales weren't appropriate to be told during the daytime, and had to be told at night, or bad luck would come of it. The tales could take from an hour to up to six hours to tell.

But another use of the tales was to confer protection upon the person who heard the tale. There were three wonders associated with the saga, *Táin Bó Cuailnge*, and one of them was, "a year's protection to him to whom it is recited" (Rees and Rees, 17). Even St. Patrick was said to insist that anyone hearing the tale, 'The Fosterage of the Houses of the Two Methers' would receive numerous blessings. And blessings just weren't for the listeners. Also associated with the *Táin* is a colophon (a notation placed at the end of a book about its production) that says, "A blessing on everyone who will memorize the *Táin* with fidelity in this form and will not put any other form on it" (Rees and Rees, 17). The integrity of the tales was very important.

Question #5: Please explain the value and role of encomium (praise performance) and satire in one ancient Indo-European culture. *(Minimum 300 words)*

Praise performance and satire are the two sides of the poet in ancient and medieval Ireland. Kings and nobles would house and feed bards in their halls in order to have them sing of the royal battles

and lineages, thus propping up the King or noble in the eyes of their people. Poetry was held in such high esteem that a good poem of praise only added to the honor of the person praised. In a culture highly aware of reputation, this was no small matter. The second century CE writer, Athenaus, quoting Posidonias, wrote in his *Deipnosophistae*, "Finally when the celebration had come to an end, a Celtic poet arrived too late for the feast. He composed a song for Lovernius praising his greatness and lamenting his own tardy arrival. Lovernius was so pleased with this poem that he called for a bag of gold and tossed it to the poet as he ran beside his chariot. The bard picked up the bag and sang a new song, proclaiming that even his chariot-tracks gave gold and benefits to his people" (Koch, 11). Obviously, the first song praising the chief's greatness and largess could only help his reputation, and by giving gold to the bard in so ostentatious a manner, bringing on as it did another song of effusive praise, that his reputation could only improve.

But if encomium was the bard's bread and butter, satire was his weapon. The rules of hospitality insisted that guests, once invited in, had to be well fed, with lots of good drink, and respectably housed. Any host would know that should he be stingy with a bard, he surely risked having his name abused in other halls. In question #1 above I mentioned Bres and how his stinginess brought upon his head the first ever satire in Ireland, and how he became blemished as a result. While any poet could do satire, those that specialized in it were classed with those 'sons of death and bad men' who were at the bottom of the social hierarchy (Rees and Rees, 128).

Question #6: Please expound upon the duties and position of the musician in an early Indo-European culture. (Minimum 100 words)

In medieval Ireland, the musician was considered to be part of the lowest class, and associated with the province of Munster in the lore (though they could come from anywhere). Whereas the poet was at the top of the hierarchy, the musician was at the bottom. In some royal halls, the king and his nobles would sit at the top end, with the Court Poet who would recite of kingly exploits and geneologies, while the court bard would sit at the bottom end of the hall with the soldiers and sing his songs there. In fact, the honor price of a bard was only half that of a poet. Musicians were considered disreputable entertainers of the people at fairs and inns, and only those who could play the harp had any chance of rising in the world, and then only if they only played for the nobility.

Question #7: Define the role of the Bard in ritual as practiced in ADF and as utilized in the wider community. (Minimum 300 words)

The ADF ritual, the Bard can have many functions. As Liturgist, the Bard writes and/or performs the poetic invocations to the Spirits. The Indo-European tradition of invocation and prayer is based in poetic forms, using alliteration, rhyme and meter, though free verse is also used. Invocations can

be a form of encomium, or praise performance, and indeed, ADF liturgy has a special place for offerings of praise which may be performed by anyone, but especially Bards. In the early days of ADF, the only sacrifices made to the Powers were offerings of praise and song.

As storyteller, the Bard is the person who brings the myths and lore alive for the people, allowing them to fully comprehend the purposes of the rite at High Days. There is also the factor of unity, where the people come together as audience for the tales. A well-told tale is also entertaining and can help bring the people back High Day after High Day.

As musician, the Bard leads everyone in song and also can maintain the 'beat' of the rite, keeping the energy flowing and unifying the ritual. In magical workings, the drumming, music and song can be used to raise energy.

Outside of ADF, bardry exists in ritual, though it might not be as common. In the section on how covens work, Margot Adler states that "some covens use music, chanting and dancing to raise psychic energy within the circle" and "The most common form of working is known as "raising a cone of power. This is done by chanting or dancing (or both) or running around the circle" (Adler, 109). The use of drumming is well known in trance and power work.

The bardic arts also appear in the wider community through the use of performances at Pagan festivals, coffee shops and even in large auditoriums. ADF has a bardic group in *Awen*, made up of Ian Corrigan and Liafal, who not only play at ADF festivals but at other Pagan festivals as well, particularly Starwood. There are also many Wiccan, and other Pagan, singing groups and bands.

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