

Divination 2

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Question #1: Describe the geographical and temporal distribution of your chosen symbol set. If the symbol set was used cross-culturally, describe how each culture used your chosen symbol set. (min. 300 words)

My chosen symbol set, *The Druid Animal Oracle* by Stephanie and Phillip Carr-Gomm (with my own interpretations and changes), was created out of whole cloth towards the end of the last century.¹ The interpretations of the cards were based upon certain traditions out of Celtic lore, primarily that of Wales and Ireland. The book cites and retells specific tales for each card, using them to define each card's meaning.

Based on the source materials utilized, the temporal distribution of the sources of this set would be from the early Middle Ages through to the High Middle Ages. Many of the cards are based on tales such as the Irish *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (The Cattle Raid of Cooley), whose earliest recension dates from the late 11th/early 12th century CE² or the Welsh *Y Mabinogi*, whose earliest written version was found in the White Book of Rhydderch, dated about 1350 CE.³ Both of these sources may be, in fact, much older, as they portray events that seem to take place in the Pagan past. Other sources, such as the Welsh Triads (*Trioedd Ynys Prydein*) whose earliest copies date from the 13th century,⁴ may be based on older material. The earliest recensions we have need not be the oldest copies written, but only the oldest copies that have been preserved long enough for us to find. Wales and Ireland are both damp countries, and this could have a profound effect on manuscript longevity.

Since this is a new symbol set created only in 1994, none of the Celtic cultures that it was based on ever used it, except, perhaps, for modern Druidic practitioners. I should guess that since one of the authors is the head of the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids that many of his members in the UK and Ireland use this set for their divinations.

Question #2: Describe the division of sacred and profane use for this symbol set in a cultural context (i.e. how was the symbol set used in every day life, and how was it used in religious contexts?). If you find no such division, explain why you think that the set was either entirely sacred or entirely profane in the culture. (min. 300 words)

Unlike some symbol sets, such as the Ogham or the Runes, this set was not used in any cultural context other than a modern one, here in the USA, or in the UK, Ireland or in other English speaking countries, so I can only go by my own experience in answering this question.

In a secular context, this set can be used on a daily basis, to draw a quick omen of one to three lots each morning for that day, as a sign of how things are going to go. This can be quite helpful

¹ Carr-Gomm, Stephanie and Philip, *The Druid Animal Oracle: Working With the Sacred Animals of the Druid Tradition* (New York, Simon & Schuster, 1994).

² Wikipedia, *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, April 1, 2008,
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/T%C3%A1in_B%C3%B3_C%C3%BAailnge>

³ Davies, Sioned, Translator, *The Mabinogion* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007), p. ix.

⁴ Bromwich, Rachael, *Trioedd Ynys Prydein, The Welsh Triads* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1978), p. xviii.

for daily life and also is good practice to help the diviner learn the set and to become attuned to it.

It's also a good set for giving readings to other people (or for oneself, though that can be problematical), drawing on nine lots or cards to come up with a 'spread', where each card's position in the spread corresponds to a specific part of the question asked (if any) or to areas in the questioner's life, such as the past, present and future, and/or emotional states, final outcomes, etc. Only a few of the cards have an obviously negative slant to their meanings, though all of them could have negative sides to them, interpreted by how they show up in the spread. All the cards have a different meaning if drawn upside down, but they are so big that they are quite difficult to shuffle effectively for a random draw of right-side-up to upside-down, which tends to lessen their effectiveness. I've now made disks to remedy this problem.

In a religious context, this set can be used for drawing the Omen in ritual. For a simple draw of only three cards or lots, this set works quite well. In our Grove's Saturday rituals I do the prayer before the drawing, but then call on each of the people who actually made the invocations to each of the Three Kindreds to draw a card or lot for that Kindred. This ties that part of the Omen to that particular Kindred, and I usually also add in Past, Present and Future (Ancestors-Past, Nature Spirits-Present and Deities-Future) into the mix.

Question #3: Describe the life of a Seer in an Indo-European hearth culture, their techniques of divination and the respect they received. (min. 600 words)

In pagan Ireland (and even into the Christian era) the seers, called *fili*, were held in the highest respect. While there are no contemporaneous accounts of them, later literature is full of them. The wise men of Ireland were divided into three types, the *bard* (a term for a minor poet or reciter), the *faidh* (a prophet) and the *druí* (a druid or magician) but later sources lower the bard and instead include the *fili*. This word, *fili*, which is the usual Old Irish word for 'poet', actually had the original meaning of 'seer'.⁵

The roles of all three types, including the *fili* or seer, seemed to be blended into that of a judge, and kings were frequently seen taking counsel from them, with arbitration being one of the functions of these men. The welfare of the land (crops, health, etc.) was dependent on the judgment of these judges, which fits in well with the magical powers of the *fili*. This bleeds over to the later view of them as poets who could cause blisters on the faces of people they satirized (or on their own faces should they satirize the wrong person).⁶ In an eleventh century manuscript we read how in the final years of their training, the *fili* were taught how to recite spells, including one to retrieve stolen cattle. Other spells include ones for a new house and for a long life.⁷

Around 900 CE there was an account written by a devout Christian who can only be described as a hostile witness about a form of divination referred to as *imbas forosnaí* (or 'knowledge of enlightening'):

The poet (*fili*) chews a piece of the flesh of a red pig, or of a dog or cat, and places it afterwards on the flagstone behind the door, and sings an incantation on it, and offers it to the idol-gods, and afterwards calls his idols to him. And if he does not receive (the knowledge) next day, he then sings incantations on his two palms, and calls again unto him his idol-gods that his sleep may not be disturbed. And he lays his two palms on his

⁵ Ó hÓgáin, Dáithí, *The Sacred Isle: Belief and Religion in Pre-Christian Ireland* (Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 1999), p. 72.

⁶ *Ibid.* p. 77.

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 78.

two cheeks and falls asleep. And he is watched so that nobody may interrupt or disturb him. And what he seeks is then revealed to him after a minute of two or three, or as long as he was estimated to be at the offering.⁸

Another divinatory technique practiced by the *fili* was the *tairbfheis*, or 'bull sleep'⁹ (though *feis* could also mean 'feast', as well as 'spending the night', so this could also mean 'bull feast'),¹⁰ which was used to determine who should be king of Ireland. O'Rahilly states that:

A bull was killed, and a man ate of its flesh and drank its broth, and then lay down to sleep, and in his sleep the future king appeared to him.¹¹

Another form of divination according to Jeffrey Keating, which was said to be very effective, was to put the hides of bulls killed in sacrifice, raw side up, on a pile of wattles of mountain ash,

'and in this way they had recourse to the *geasa* to evoke demons, for the purpose of winning knowledge from them, even as the *togharmach* (evoker of spirits) does in the circle to-day.'¹²

M. Martin, in his *Description of the Western Islands* (1716) wrote about a similar practice in Gaelic Scotland:

In a solitary place, remote from any house, a man was wrapped in a cow's hide, and was left there all night, in the course of which 'his invisible friends' communicated to him the knowledge that he sought.¹³

O'Rahilly points out that the object of a seer was to communicate with the Otherworld, and to sacrifice an animal to the gods was to make the animal in some sense deified. So for the seer to chew on the flesh of the animal or to wrap himself up in its hide meant that he would absorb or acquire some of the knowledge of the gods when the seer slept or was in a trance.¹⁴

Question #4: Describe what you have done to connect with this symbol set on a spiritual level, where your ideas came from, and how it has affected your method of learning this set. Some examples might include (but are not limited to) carving or sacrificing for your runes, gathering each kind of tree for a set of ogham, or doing volunteer service at your local zoo to get more closely acquainted with the behaviors of animals. (min. 600 words).

Since my set is the Druid Animal Oracle, I thought it might be best to go to a zoo and watch the animals there to see examples of the behavior. Unfortunately, animals in zoos tend to either sleep or pace back and forth, which was very frustrating. Speaking to one of the docents there, I found that this is pretty normal for animals in captivity (unless, perhaps, they have extraordinarily large areas in which to roam), and she recommended that I try to find some books on animal behavior instead.

⁸ Ó hÓgáin, p. 79.

⁹ O'Rahilly, Thomas F., *Early Irish History and Mythology* (Dublin, Institute for Advance Studies, 1946), p. 323.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 323, f.4

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 324.

¹² *Ibid.* p. 324.

¹³ *Ibid.* p. 324.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 325.

I did find one set, *The Encyclopedia of Animal Behavior*¹⁵ that was moderately helpful. There are some animals that I had trouble relating to in the divination set, which I knew because I could never remember their meanings. One of these was the Wolf, which in the Oracle is said to mean Intuition, Learning and The Shadow.¹⁶ The Shadow I could understand because of the concept of the werewolf, who is the shadow side of a person. But relating it to actual wolves didn't seem to work for me. In the Encyclopedia, there is an article about the hunting behavior of wolves. While I knew that they hunted in packs, I did not know that they were in as much danger from being killed by their large prey animals as the prey were in danger from them. Thus wolves usually attacked from the rear, where large prey had no defenses, instead of from the front, where sharp hooves and antlers can be found. Wolves who tried to attack from the front either died or learned a valuable lesson. And in cases where wolf dens, with pups, were threatened by grizzly bears, a couple of older wolves would wander around the bear, staying between the bear and the pups (but not too close!), while the younger ones would harass the bear from behind until it finally gave up. Harassing was easy, but playing the part of the other two, with the bear's attention on them, would be much more dangerous, and was probably a learned behavior.¹⁷ Thus 'learning' actually makes sense for this card.

But the lore that the cards are based on was my main help in learning to relate to these cards. Hints would be given or stories told in Carr-Gomm's book for each animal, and often looking up the original tales would help. Also, I pulled a card everyday for months to see what that day's omen would be – and this was quite enlightening.

In Ian Corrigan's book, *Sacred Fire, Holy Well*, he mentions the importance of hallowing the tools of the magician.¹⁸ This seemed to me to be a perfectly appropriate thing to do with the tools of the seer, so at my home shrine I purified the cards (and later the disks) in ritual with fire and water, and then I filled them with the 2 powers, the powers of fire (heaven) and water (earth) which I pulled within myself and then projected outward from my hands, finally laying my hands on the cards (disks) and seeing the combined powers flow into them. Earlier in the rite, I called upon the Morrigan (she who prophesized before the Battle of Moytura) and upon Brigit (Goddess of Inspiration) that I might see true and be open to the inspiration of the Gods. I also sacrificed to my Ancestors, that they might stand behind me and whisper in my ear, giving me their wisdom.

The process of growing closer to my symbol set has been one of change as well. I try to be open to what comes to my mind when I read, and sometimes my perception of a symbol may alter a bit. For example, both Owl and Salmon mean 'wisdom'. But now I believe that Owl is the darker wisdom of failed or painful experience while Salmon is the bright wisdom of success or that wisdom which comes suddenly, found through inspiration.

Question #5: Describe the overall symbology of a chosen divination method as well as each individual symbol in that set. Review and compare to your answers to this question from Divination 1, explaining how and why those views have changed over time. If you have changed your primary divination set, why did you change? (min. 600 words for the descriptive essay, and 100 words per symbol)

In Divination 1 I used the Celtic Tree Oracle cards for my symbol set. However, they never really resonated with me, feeling overly complicated and obtuse, and so over time I simply went back to the Druid Animal Oracle, which I had started out using originally. I had gone to the Tree

¹⁵ Bekoff, Marc, Editor, *Encyclopedia of Animal Behavior* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004).

¹⁶ Carr-Gomm, 74.

¹⁷ Bekoff, Vol. 3, pp. 1181-85.

¹⁸ Corrigan, Ian, *Sacred Fire, Holy Well: A Druid's Grimoire* (Madison, OH, Tredara Hearth Publishing, 2006), p. 95.

Oracle (which relies on the ogham) for Divination 1 because, as a Celt, I felt that I really *should*, but now I realize that I'm either not ready for them yet, or that they have never been right for me. Perhaps if I had gone directly to oghams themselves and had not tried to fit myself into the meanings of the Murray's book, I may have gotten more out of them. I don't know. In any case, I live in Arizona, and we only have two of the trees of the Ogham that can grow here, while far more animals than not from the Druid Animal Oracle live in the state (or at least similar animals live here, such as the javalina for the boar, etc.).

Over the years that I've been using this set, I've noticed that some of the cards have changed meaning for me, or at least have come to have deeper meanings. The more I work with them, the better I relate to them.

These cards use animals that live (or, at least, once lived) in the Celtic parts of Europe and tries to create meanings for the individual cards based on ancient lore as well as the behavior of these animals. Philip Carr-Gomm, in his introduction to the deck, points out that we are destroying our world, and that many of these animals in Britain can only call to us as ghosts, as they have long vanished from the wild. But he says that these animals live on in the folk traditions, customs and sayings of the people there, as well as in the stone circles, sacred sites and Bardic remains, etc.¹⁹ Carr-Gomm is the head of the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids, and so strict adherence to scholarship was not a priority, I expect, so I think much of the authors' UPG went into the creation of these cards. Since he gives no citations I can never really know.

This is fine with me, however, as not all things in our religion need to come from scholarship, or even be based upon it. This also gave me the freedom to fiddle with the meanings of the various animals over time, and this is something that I shall probably continue to do. Unlike oghams or the runes, there is no single fixed tradition for the meanings of these animals (though there certainly are some traditions in the lore), and while scholarship may illuminate the possible meanings of the cards, it cannot supply everything. Here, UPG found in trance is needed to supplement the scholarship.

Something else that Carr-Gomm mentions in his introduction I did find very powerful and meaningful for me, and that is that by using a divination system that relies upon animals, we can connect with these animals in four ways, as real animals in the midworld, as our own 'inner animal' that has often been suppressed by society, as 'power animals' who can come to us in trance to give us healing, inspiration, advice, etc. and as a 'totem', which is a power animal that we grow particularly close to.²⁰ In my personal spiritual practices, I certainly have an 'inner' animal, and I have a totem animal that I work with constantly, and other power animals that I interact with on occasion. I find this aspect of the set very helpful, and hope to learn, over time, how to work with the other animals in the set on this level.

For the symbols of this set, I shall list them in alphabetical order. Then, in question #7, I shall come back to the four animals I no longer use, and why, as well listing the two I have added.

ADDER – The book that came with the set lists transformation, healing and life energy as the meanings for this card. To this I have added earth power and male sexuality. If drawn reversed, the card is supposed to mean abandoning the power to wound others.

Transformation comes from the adder's ability to shed its skin – a process similar to being reborn as something new. And since snakes were associated with Brigit, a Goddess of healing, then healing is appropriate for this card. Male sexuality is appropriate because of the snake's phallic shape, and since sexuality can bring on birth, life power works here as well. I've also

¹⁹ Carr-Gomm, pp. 4-6.

²⁰ Ibid. pp. 10-10.

added earth power to this, though, because snakes are very much of the earth, crawling in and out of holes in the ground (at least here in Arizona) or hiding under rocks.

BEAR – The book lists primal power, sovereignty and intuition married to instinct as the meanings for this card. I have removed sovereignty as I feel that is more appropriate for the horse (at least in an IE context). If drawn reversed, it says to beware being overwhelmed by the forces of anger or primal ferocity.

Carr-Gomm connects bear (*art* in Welsh) to the bear goddess Artio and the bear god Artaois, and through them to Arthur. While there may be a real etymological connection there, it is by no means certain. Sovereignty comes through Arthur in this system. But bears certainly are primal, and there is a connection between them and the Norse berserkers, who fought with unbelievable ferocity, connected to the primal parts of themselves (and possibly high as a kite as well).

BEE – The book lists community, celebration and organization, and based on bee behavior it couldn't be more appropriate. If drawn reversed, this card means that you feel out of place and not part of the group or activities around you.

Bees are amazing creatures that live communally in hives, all working towards the common goals of producing honey for food, raising new bees and defending the hive. Successful communities work together towards common goals, and are well organized, just like the beehive. And honey is the basis of mead, the drink that may be one of the oldest alcoholic drinks produced by man and thus a perfect symbol for celebration.

BLACKBIRD – The book lists enchantment, the Gateway and the inner call as the meanings for this card. If drawn reversed, it means that you may need to create a life of purpose or passion.

The European Blackbird appears in the *Mabinogi* in the second Branch in the tale of Bran. There, after he has been poisoned in battle, he instructs his men to cut off his head and retire back to Harlech in Wales, where for seven years they (and the living head) are held in enchantment by the singing of Rhiannon's blackbirds.²¹ I have always liked the meaning of 'inner call' for this card and it has always resonated with me.

BOAR – The set lists warrior spirit, leadership and direction for this card. If drawn reversed, it means losing one's sense of direction.

Boars are a definite warrior symbol, and show up in many places. The old Celtic war trumpet, the *carnax*, often had its bell in the shape of a boar head, such as can be seen on the Gundestrup Cauldron. As a warrior symbol, leadership and direction also go well with this card. It was a great feat to kill a boar, and such hunts were signs of great warrior skill and strength. The Welsh tale about the hunting of the great boar Twrth Trwyth from *Culhwch ac Olwen* comes immediately to mind.

BULL – The book lists wealth, potency and beneficence as the meanings for this card, and if it is drawn reversed it means difficulties in getting motivated or lack of sensitivity to others' needs (like a bull in a china shop).

Cattle in the ancient Indo-European world were symbols of wealth, and a man's status might depend on how many cattle he owned. In any reading or omen where this is drawn, money would certainly be involved. Bulls also have enormous testes, and this certainly implies great potency. A gift of a bull would be a very special gift indeed, and so beneficence. This card particularly resonates with me.

²¹ Squire, Charles, *Celtic Myth and Legend* (Franklin Lakes, NJ, New Page Books, 2001), p. 296.

CAT – This set lists guardianship, detachment and sensuality as the meaning of this card, and if drawn reversed, warns against becoming too lazy, like an old cat in front of a warm fire, indolent or self absorbed.

These meanings certainly come from the behavior of a cat. Anyone who has owned one will know that they can be very detached from what goes on around them, and some don't relish receiving affection. And there is no creature more sensuous – watching them move or stretch or even sleep (sometimes in impossible places, like on top of a steel typewriter) proves that.

COW – The set lists nourishment, motherhood and the Goddess as the meanings for this card. If drawn reversed, it says to examine the ways you give fully to the world.

I had trouble with this card and its apparent duotheism until I realized that the cow was sacred to Brigit, the Goddess of the hearth. So this card relates to domestic femininity and motherhood. The milk that comes from the cow is made into all sorts of foods, like butter and cheese, which are both quite nourishing. So for me, this card also represents the home and the Goddess of the hearth.

CRANE – The book gives secret knowledge, patience and longevity as the meanings for this card. If drawn reversed, it says to find the balance between being alone and being with others, sort of an anti-hermit card.

Patience is certainly obvious. The crane will stand still for hours waiting for the right time to strike below the surface of the water for a tasty fish. The crane is also associated with the ogham, as a flock of cranes "make letters as they fly."²² And 'crane knowledge' was a term used for the secret knowledge of the ogham as well as arcane knowledge of any kind.

DOG – The set lists guidance, protection and loyalty as the meaning for this card. I would also add companionship to this. If drawn reversed, it asks one to examine the folks around them to see if they are lacking in faithfulness or loyalty.

Seeing-eye dogs certainly guide the blind through the perils of physical movement, and hunting dogs can help find prey. Dogs are extremely loyal and will fight to protect their 'pack', even if the pack is confined to their human family. And while cats can be companions, dogs are most known for it, being given names such as 'man's best friend' or being associated with concepts like 'a boy and his dog', meaning an inseparable pair.

EAGLE – The book lists intelligence, renewal and courage as the meanings for this card. If drawn reversed, it meaning would be to guard against too much intellect and not enough emotion.

The eagle flies high and gets a true 'birds eye view' of the world, implying the ability to view life through a wider context. Why this would mean intelligence is not clear, but the stare of an eagle does give one the feeling of intelligence. Renewal comes from the eagle's ability to dive into a lake in search of fish, and to dive, and then re-emerge again is like a renewal.

FOX – The book gives diplomacy, cunning and wildness as meanings for this card. I would add secretiveness to this as well. Should it be drawn reversed, it gives a warning not to use your cleverness dishonestly.

Foxes have long been thought of as being cunning or wiley (for example the phrase, 'wiley as a fox') and quite secretive. In the world of diplomacy, secretiveness and cunning are essential for

²² Carr-Gomm, p. 60.

negotiations, especially difficult ones. And the wildness of the fox contrasts well with the simple domesticity of its prey, the sheep. Scottish bard MacIntyre blesses the fox for preying on sheep, and thus preventing them from destroying the landscape.²³

FROG – The book gives sensitivity, medicine, and hidden beauty and power as the meanings for this card. If drawn reversed, it means learning how to embrace difficult circumstances.

Frogs have very sensitive skin, living both in and out of water as they do. Carr-Gomm says that its ashes were used to stop hemorrhaging and was considered a cure for rheumatism. I have not been able to confirm that. But the old tale of a princess kissing a frog who then turns into a prince is part of our heritage, and as such, hidden beauty and power are good meanings for this card.

GOOSE – The book lists vigilance, parenthood and productive power as meanings for this card. If drawn reversed, it suggests that one should beware of being overly protective of one's rights, possessions or territories.

There was a pen of geese sacred to the Goddess Juno on the Capitoline hill in Rome at the time that the Celts successfully invaded the city in its early history. But when the Celts tried to sneak up onto the hill in the night, the geese set up a loud racket, alerting the Romans to the stealthy attack in time. And this vigilance applies to their goslings as well. Geese make very protective parents, and manage to fight off most predators. And they can lay a lot of eggs, being quite productive.

HARE – The set gives rebirth, intuition and balance as meanings for this card, though I would add good fortune to the list. If drawn reversed, it suggests that there may be imbalances in one's life.

Hares are associated in our minds with the 'Easter bunny' (originally hares drew the cart of the Goddess Eostre, whose name was given to Easter), who appears bearing eggs at Spring Equinox which is a time of the earth's renewal and rebirth. And since the equinox is also a time of balance, this works as well. But the lucky rabbit's foot that permeates our culture also gives the hare the meaning of good fortune in my opinion.

HAWK – The book lists nobility, recollection and cleansing as the meanings of this card, and if drawn reversed, suggests that a person might be paying too much attention to detail.

Hawks were long associated with nobility and the sport of hunting. While falcons were reserved for kings and the higher nobility, hawks were great hunters for lesser nobles. There is an old Irish tale of a hawk who could remember the coldest night one Beltane. He was the Hawk of Achill and remembered events that Fintan, the oldest man, also remembered.²⁴ And hawks were valued as great hunters of vermin, thus cleansing the towns.

HIND – The book gives subtlety, gracefulness and femininity as the meaning for this card, and if reversed, warns the person to be less self-effacing.

Hinds (female deer) just give one the impression of femininity and gentleness. They are also very graceful when they run and are quite beautiful to watch. They have 'doe eyes', which look soft and gentle, also inviting. In the tale of Lugaid and how he became king of Ireland, it was foretold that whichever son caught the hind would become king. After catching the hind, the men discovered an old hag, who demanded a kiss. Young Lugaid kissed her, and the ugly hag

²³ Carr-Gomm, pp. 35-36.

²⁴ Rahilly, p. 319.

that he kissed suddenly turned into a young, beautiful lady (possibly the Goddess of Sovereignty).

HORSE – The book suggests that this card should represent the Goddess, the Land and travel. I have added sovereignty to this mix. If drawn reversed it asks us to look at the roots of our own restlessness.

Again, the duotheism apparent in these meanings bothered me, but horses have been associated with land and sovereignty goddesses all over the Indo-European world. The Irish had a sovereignty rite that involved the king copulating with a mare, and Vedics had a sovereignty rite that reversed that, with the queen lying next to a sacrificed horse, both under a blanket. As sovereignty goddesses are also land goddesses, this works well, and for millennia, horses were the preferred means of overland transportation, hence 'travel'.

OTTER – The book gives joy, play and helpfulness as meanings for this card. If drawn reversed, it means going against the tide or swimming upstream.

Anyone who has ever watched an otter knows that they are the most playful of animals, full of joy and exuberance, sleek and strong in the water. Otters show up in the lore, such as one of the animals Gwion Bach turned into as he fled from Cerridwen, and as otter kings in the lore of Ireland. The lore is not particularly helpful here in determining the card's meanings, but the animal's behavior is more than enough.

OWL – The set lists detachment, wisdom and change as the meanings for this card, but as a Welsh Celt, I would also add that the wisdom may be a dark one, coming from negative experiences. When reversed, it means to be wary of withdrawing too much from the world.

Owls are famous archetypes for wisdom all over the Indo-European world. The Athenian owl, sacred to Athena, symbolized wisdom. And owls only come out and hunt at night, seemingly detached from the world we live in, living in secrecy. In the fourth branch of the *Mabinogi*, Lleu Llaw Gyffes' wife Blodeuedd (Flowers), is punished by being turned into an owl, which is *Blodeuwedd* (Flower Face) in Welsh. That is a great dark change.

RAM – The book gives sacrifice, breakthrough and achievement as meanings for this card. If drawn reversed, the meaning would be to let go, to stop locking horns with someone or something.

I sometimes think that the meaning of sacrifice given here is actually more Abrahamic than Indo-European. Most of the information I've found on Celtic sacrifice, say, involves bulls. The Romans sacrificed rams, though. But breakthrough certainly works for this card because of the behavior of rams 'butting heads' when jousting over a female. It's a short leap from butting heads to breaking down doors. And when one has finally broken down that door or wall or barrier, one has certainly achieved a goal.

RAVEN – The book lists healing, initiation and protection for this card. I would also add Otherworldly influences to this list. If drawn reversed, it says to beware of the forces of destruction in your world.

The raven is sacred to the Morrigan, and it was she who uttered prophecies after the 2nd Battle of Moytura. Ravens have long been seen as prophetic birds, uttering prophecies. But it also means protection, as seen in the story of Bendigeidfran (blessed Bran) from the 2nd Branch of the *Mabinogi*. *Bran* is the Welsh word for raven. Bran's head was buried on White Mount (where the Tower of London is now) facing France, and as long as it was there, no invasion could come to Britain. It's a pity Arthur dug it up.

SALMON – The set gives wisdom, inspiration and rejuvenation as the meanings for this card. I would add that this wisdom, unlike that of the owl, would be a bright wisdom coming from inspiration and positive experiences. If drawn reversed, this card means trying too hard to reach goals.

In the tale of Fionn, he accidentally ingests some of the salmon of wisdom that he is cooking for the old druid who caught it, and so is suddenly filled with the wisdom himself. A bit of the boiling salmon juice splashed on his thumb, and he sucked on it to cool his thumb, thus gaining it all. In the Welsh tale of *Culhwch ac Olwen*, the salmon is the oldest and wisest animal of all. Rejuvenation comes with the idea that youth and inspiration can be linked (youthful spirit, youthful vigor).

SEAL – The book lists love, longing and dilemma as the meanings for this card. If drawn reversed, it means having to face a dilemma.

Much of this must come from the old Scottish stories of the *selchie*, who are folks who live as seals in the water but who can change into human form, dropping their skins. In one tale, a man and a selkie fall in love and have children, but she still longs for the sea. Her husband hid her skin away so that she could not leave him, but she finds it in an old chest, and is faced with the dilemma of staying on land with her children or returning to the sea. She goes back to her original home, but out of love for her children she teaches them how to fish.

SOW – The book gives generosity, nourishment and discovery as the meanings for this card. And if drawn reversed, it means to revise one's self image, and resist greed or 'pig-ignorance'.

The sow is a very fertile and abundant animal, and this abundance can give us the wherewithal to be generous of nature. They are also great nourishers of men, providing much food and abundance on the farm. And in the story of Lleu Llaw Gyffes and how he had been mortally wounded, it was a sow that his uncle Gwydion followed which led him to the bleeding and half-dead God, allowing Gwydion to heal him.

STAG – The book lists pride, independence and purification as the meanings for this card. If drawn reversed, it advises us to examine our lives to see how much pride may be hindering us in our growth.

Stag is such a proud animal – strong and majestic with his noble antlers. And he is very independent, living alone and only searching out others of his kind at mating time. And since the antlers of the stag are borne by the God Cernunnos, there is a connection between them that hints of the Underworld. In prehistoric times, hunters would dress as stags in magical (and religious?) workings to ensure a successful hunt, as we have seen in paintings on the walls of caves.

SWAN – The book gives soul, love and beauty as the meanings for this card. If drawn reversed, it means that one may have to come to terms with a separation.

Carr-Gomm says that while the crane is pictured as carrying souls to the Otherworld, the swan is the soul itself. I have not been able to confirm this. But in the tale of the dream of Oenghus, 151 maidens would gather on Samhain to transform into swans, with the beautiful Dewberry, the woman he has fallen in love with in his dream, wearing a gold chain while all the other wear silver. He goes to them and recognizes her and he makes love to her in the form of a swan. They then fly off to Newgrange together.

WOLF – The book says that intuition, learning and The Shadow are the meanings for this card. To this I would add working together. If drawn reversed, it suggests that it may be OK to be alone, and that to be alone need not mean loneliness.

Wolves are actually very social animals, and they hunt and protect their young together as a group. Young wolves must learn how to attack large prey or defend against bears correctly or get killed themselves. The shadow side of our natures is reflected in the old idea of the werewolf, which is a symbol of our basest instincts.

WREN – In the book, this card is listed to mean humility, cunning and God. And if reversed, it means that we should take a hard look at ourselves to make sure that our humility isn't actually rendering us invisible.

I'm not happy with the duotheistic idea of God here, and tend to ignore it. But in the Scottish tale of the King of the Birds, it's the wren that hides under eagle's wing, waiting until the last moment to fly out and a bit higher than the eagle, thus becoming king of the birds. It was very cunning of this little bird to do this. And wrens are hard to see in the wild, thus giving the impression of humility.

The following four cards are the elemental dragon cards, which I'm not comfortable with. To me a dragon means withholding things, hoarding, being stingey, etc.

WATER DRAGON – In the book, this card means passion, depth and connection. If drawn reversed, the meaning is to explore the psyche with caution.

This dragon is meant to convey the idea of Water as the elemental form of deep emotions and passions. Connections are made to the Loch Ness monster and the Lambton Worm, both of whom are connected with lakes or wells. It's about being overwhelmed with emotion or drowning in self-pity. It can also mean great emotional depth. It brings that which is hidden to the light of day, such as things that have been repressed deep in the subconscious.

EARTH DRAGON – This card is meant to mean power, potential and riches. Sort of like the bull card, only on steroids. If drawn reversed, it means that we are relating to our inner resources in some inappropriate way.

The riches connection works with the Indo-European dragon, except that the earth dragon may not be hoarding it. Instead he is merely guarding it. But in any case, this dragon is certainly similar to the IE one. There are lots of tales of dragons guarding treasure, and this dragon is supposed to be guarding the treasure of the inner self, a symbol of the inner journey of self-discovery. We can only confront this dragon when we are ready.

AIR DRAGON – The meaning of this card, according to the book, is inspiration, insight and vitality. If drawn reversed, it means that we are in danger of becoming a slave to a specific idea, dogma or belief system.

There are traditions of some aerial dragons in British folklore. In Devon a dragon was supposed to fly every night across the Exe valley. Carr-Gomm says that dragons are like tornados, and so would be connect to sky or storm gods. The striking of lightning in a storm could be like a bolt of inspiration that comes from nowhere, and this card could be likened to the other inspiration card, Salmon, only on steroids.

FIRE DRAGON – The Fire Dragon is meant to mean transmutation, mastery and energy, and if drawn reversed, it is to mean that we are repressing a lot of anger.

The only connection to the lore that I can find that fits is from the story in the *Historia Brittonum* about Ambrosius, Vortigern and Dinas Emrys, where the boy Ambrosius correctly foretells the cause of the castle walls falling down, which is a battle in the earth between a white dragon (Saxon England) and a red dragon (Wales), which the red dragon would ultimately win. There is

lots of fiery energy here. And fire is that which transmutes and transforms our sacrifices, in ADF theology, so that fits as well.

Question #6: Describe the primary sources available regarding your chosen symbol set, explain the place of inspiration in your interpretations, and describe how the synthesis between historical source work and inspiration plays in your personal practice. (min. 1000 words)

As I have mentioned earlier in this paper, this divinatory system relies heavily on the lore of the insular Celtic countries as well as on the behavior of the animals themselves. I also expect that the four elemental dragons draw from the ceremonial magic/Wiccan/general Neopagan paradigms as well.

Let me give an example of how a meaning could come from the Lore, using the card, Raven. The raven is a bird sacred to the Morrigan, the Goddess of war, as it is a carrion eater and crows and ravens would always gather at the scene of a battle to feast on the remains. The Morrigan was also a prophetess. Another example from the lore would be Bran (which means 'raven' in Welsh), in the second branch of the *Mabinogi*, who prophesied about where his head should be buried, and why.

Just after the Battle of Moytura there are two passages, 166 and 167, which show how the Morrigan was a prophet.²⁵ I'll give passage 167 below:

167. She (the Morrigan) also prophesied the end of the world, foretelling every evil what would occur then, and every disease and every vengeance, and she chanted the following poem:

I shall not see a world
Which will be dear to me;
Summer without blossoms,
Cattle will be without milk,
Women without modesty,
Men without valour.
Conquests without a king...
Wood without mast.
Sea without produce...
False judgments of old men.
False precedents of lawyers,
Every man a betrayer.
Every son a reaver.
The son will go to the bed of his father,
The father will go to the bed of his son.
Each his brother's brother-in-law.
He will not seek any woman outside his house...
An evil time,
Son will deceive his father,
Daughter will deceive...'

In the second branch of the *Mabinogi*, Bran was mortally wounded by a poisoned spear in the foot. He ordered that his head be cut off and then prophesied.²⁶

²⁵ Blamires, Steve, *The Irish Celtic Magical Tradition: Ancient Wisdom of the Battle of Moytura* (London, Thorsons, 1992), pp. 236-37.

²⁶ Davies, p. 32.

'And take my head,' he said, 'and carry it to the Gwynfryn in London, and bury it with its face towards France. And it will take you a long time; you will feast in Harlech for seven years, with the birds of Rhiannon singing to you. And you will find the head to be as good company as it ever was when it was on me. And you will stay for eighty years in Gwales in Penfro. And so long as you do not open the door towards Aber Henfelen, facing Cornwall, you can remain there and the head will not decay. But as soon as you open that door you can stay no longer. Make for London to bury the head. And now set off across the sea.'

And later in the tale it says:²⁷

And though the road was long, they came at last to London and buried the head on the Gwynfryn. And that was one of the Three Fortunate Concealments when it was concealed, and one of the Three Unfortunate Disclosures when it was disclosed; for no oppression would ever come across the sea to this island while the head was in that hiding place.

The mention in the above passage about the Three Fortunate Concealments and the Three Unfortunate Disclosures refer to another source for the Welsh material that I want to mention here. These two references are from *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, the Welsh Triads, which were used by bards and storytellers as devices for remembering stories. Triad 37 is where these two references come from:²⁸

37. Three Concealments and Three Disclosures of the Island of Britain:

The Head of Brân the Blessed, son of Llyr, which was buried in the White Hill in London. And as long as the head was there in that position, no Oppression would ever come to this Island;

There then follow two more examples of other concealments and disclosures (unrelated to Bran) to finish out the triad.

As far as animal behavior is concerned, I've already mentioned wolves in question #4 above. The Encyclopedia of Animal Behavior is an excellent primary source, even if not a literary one, as it reflects current scientific studies. One of the entries on bears substantiates a meaning of the bear card, which is 'intuition married to instinct.' The article on 'Feeding Behavior: Grizzly Foraging', mentions that when bears first wake up in the spring, instinct drives them to look for protein, and it's taste that leads them there. Only later in the season do they broaden their diet. But bears also are able to learn quickly how to get at food that is inaccessible. One grizzly learned her own technique for opening clams using one paw to hold it down and the other one to use a claw like a bottle opener. Other bears would use different techniques. It's no wonder that bears quickly figure out how to get into campers' coolers.²⁹ While instinct drive bears to forage for protein sources immediately upon waking, it's their intuition that allows them to figure out how to get into inaccessible foods. Thus we have the marriage of instinct and intuition.

These examples of the use of the lore and of animal behaviors to find meanings for the cards has made this set actually quite rich in meaning. Rather than just taking the Carr-Gomm's word for it, I have managed to fill out the meanings of most of the symbols to make them more real to me. Knowing more about the animal also gives me the ability to let go of the established meanings occasionally, to allow my own inspiration to build on what I know about the animal in order to expand on what the card means. For example, in one reading I pulled 'Eagle', which

²⁷ Davies, p. 34.

²⁸ Bromwich, p. 88.

²⁹ Bekoff, pp. 583-4.

means intelligence, renewal and courage. But the image that came to me that time was of the person being 'eagle-eyed', seeing from afar by flying high, and it turned out that she was foreseeing a problem with her mother that probably wouldn't take place for some time. But then again, it would take intelligence to navigate this coming upset successfully.

Question #7: Maintain a journal of regular divinatory practice (entries at least weekly; daily is ideal) for 5 months. At the end of that five month period, write an essay reflecting on the importance of daily practice; the results seen (including whether your ability to work with this symbol set has increased and why you think it has); and your feelings about the symbol set's strengths and weaknesses after this period of work (min. 1000 words)

I began journaling for this course on October 26, 2006, and I am still doing my divinations now. By December 15th of that year I had fully gone back to the Druid Animal Oracle, abandoning the Celtic Tree Oracle.

For the first year or so I only did my divinations weekly, but have since been doing an additional single pull of a card (or now, a disk) every morning when I get up, and after my morning devotional. One thing that is clear to me now is that the more I use the symbols, the more connected I become to them. I don't consider myself a seer, really, in the sense of giving readings for people, but I can do it, and I must admit I am amazed that my readings usually work out so well. And the use of divination is essential for my magical and priestly practices, to help me determine the way something needs to be done as well as the drawing of omens for my work in public rites.

I have had trouble with some of the symbols in this set, probably because some of them don't seem all that connected to the lore, but my discovery of the *Encyclopedia of Animal Behavior* has helped me see that some of these animals are best understood by their behavior, rather than any connections to the lore they might have. At the same time, some animals are fully reflected in the lore, such as the Raven (above) and so resonate very strongly with me.

One thing I have discovered is that I am not very good at pulling omens for myself, at least not full readings. I'm so wrapped up in my own life that I can't see the forest for the trees sometimes. Just before going to Pantheacon in 2007 I did a full rite and pulled the following omen. I was not happy about attending, as I'm not very fond of non-ADF festivals (excepting Starwood, where there are lots of ADF folks) because I get impatient with the general Neopagan view of the universe. I attended because Meredith needed me to run the ADF rite there. The omen was:

Past: Wren (reversed) – too self-effacing. This confused me so I pulled two more cards, Boar – leadership and Stag (reversed) – excessive pride. Then, I had no idea what this meant. Now I can see that I was feeling insecure about not being 'somebody' while there, even though I am a natural leader, and this was due to excessive pride or ego. Sheesh.

Present: Crane (reversed) – there is a need for balance between working alone and with others. I pulled two more: Otter (reversed) – going against the natural flow; and Goose (reversed) – too concerned with rights and possessions. Again, this is obvious in retrospect – I was in need of branching out beyond ADF, and the reason I didn't want to was inertia and, again, my ego.

Future: Fox (reversed) – be honest and lie low. I again pulled two more cards for clarification: Bee (reversed) – feeling out of place and Bull – potency, beneficence and wealth. And that's what I ended up doing – I was humble and friendly, even though I did feel out of place there, and the ADF rite went off extremely well. It's all there clearly, but I sure couldn't see it at the time.

Since I've been pulling daily, individual disks from the set of animal disks that I made, I'm more able to see my day ahead of me. Perhaps it's because I only pull one (usually). Or maybe I'm just getting better at getting out of my own way. In any case, this practice is keeping divination at the front of my mind. Just this morning I tried to pull one disk, but two came out of the bag, which is unusual. The result of today's pull was Goose (productive power) and Blackbird (the Inner Call), and this was just as I was setting out to work hard on this paper after a difficult day yesterday. The omen meant that I'm being productive to further my calling to the priesthood. But today's writing has been much easier than yesterday's, and now I realize that Goose was referring not only to the whole concept of writing this paper, but also to how well it would go today. I prefer knowing how a pull has worked out sooner (the same day) rather than later (13 months later, at least for the Pantheacon reading).

While I like this set overall, there were some cards that I just don't care for. Carr-Gomm has four elemental dragon cards representing earth, water, air and fire that never felt comfortable to me. Dragons in IE lore were creatures that hoarded cattle or treasure, so the dragon card should mean stinginess, parsimony, something held back. Also, the cards are so large that they can be difficult to manipulate, especially in ritual. So I recently bought a bunch of wooden disks (like the ones Skip Ellison uses to sell his ogham system) and using a wood-burning tool, burned the names of the animals on each disk. For this, I only made one dragon disk, and have decided that I shall try it out for a while longer before I decide whether to continue with it or bring back the four elemental dragons. I have also added another animal, which I am calling Totem. I called it this instead of my own totem animal (jaguar) because I wanted it to be more generic, as in any totem, rather than just my own totem. The meaning I've given to this disk is "Spirit Helper, Fetch, Spirit alliance". It's totally UPG, but it fills a void I've been feeling.

I'm keeping the bag of animal disks under my pillow at night and pull a disk each morning after rising. Yesterday, I pulled the Dragon for the first time. And that afternoon I found out that the venue for Desert Magic Festival doesn't remember telling us we could use one of the buildings, and doesn't want us to have it, even though we've already sold out. So 'hoarding' or 'holding back' sure seemed appropriate for yesterday!

One thing about going to disks from cards is that there are no longer any 'reversed' meanings. I have all those meanings in my mind when I pull a disk, but they are not automatic. Instead, I am now forced to rely upon my own intuition and inspiration to decide which set of meanings to give to the disk. We'll see in the future how this works out.

Question #8: Describe your method of taking an omen or doing divination in your private practice, from start to finish. Include any prayers said, deities invoked, or sacrifices made. (no minimum word count)

I take omens in my personal practice in one of two ways. Either I do a simple pull after my morning devotional (or, occasionally, when I feel the need) or I do a three-pull omen in the omen section of a full home rite.

My morning devotionals are a time when I offer incense (if I'm someplace where I can do this – most motels frown upon it) and sing to the three Kindreds. I also have a couple of charms that I sing – the clergy charm as I start and a personal charm at the end. When this is done, I put the burning incense into a soft bit of ground (when outside) and leave it there as my sacrifice as I go to my bag for the omen pull.

(Ian, if I shouldn't post this next bit about the clergy charm, let me know and I'll delete it.)

My devotional goes roughly like this (the entire center section is as the spirit moves me):

Opening Charm (sung)

A journey through mists to the mound
Two keepers of vision ahead
Three gates to the Chamber of Fire
In wisdom and wonder we work.

Kindred Praise (sung)

Mighty Gods, Ancestors and Nature Spirits, I call upon you now!

(The rest of this section is off the top of my head. I call on all three Kindreds, at least, and sometimes include the Goddesses of the night or dawn, my Patrons, all my Gods, etc.)

Ending Charm (sung)

I am a Spirit Warrior at the Center of the Worlds -
I feel the structure of the Cosmos flowing through me!

I am a Spirit Warrior at the Center of the Worlds -
I feel connections throughout all the Cosmos!

I am a Spirit Warrior at the Center of the Worlds -
I know now that the Kindreds will provide!

So be it.

And then I pull my disk.

In full rites, I do the same thing I would do in public ritual, as described below in question #10. My personal full rites are always done in full Core Order of Ritual style (except that I may not call on a Deity of the Occasion), and all my magical workings take place in the Workings section of the rite, with the omen for the working taking place right after the general rite omen.

Question #9: Describe the results of nine divinations you have done for others (without assistance from a book). (min. 300 words per reading, and 600 words for a summary)

For these divinations I decided to use the spread suggested in Carr-Gomm's book called the 'Awen Spread'.³⁰ The spread is based on the shape of OBOD's 'Awen' symbol, but as the Welsh word *awen* means 'bardic inspiration' or, more poetically, 'flowing spirit',³¹ this spread tended to appeal to me more than some of the other spreads. And I need to add here that the design of a spread is actually irrelevant, really. How you lay the cards or disks out doesn't matter except that there should be agreement between the seer and the Kindreds beforehand as to the meanings of the positions of the layout. I could just as easily have made up my own spread and assigned meanings to them, and as long as I made my intention clear, the inspiration of the seer would be valid.

In any case, this particular spread involves nine cards or disks laid out in three rows of three. The three vertical rows are assigned (left to right) to past, present and future, respectively, and the three horizontal rows are assigned to (top) the guiding ideas, impulses or dynamics

³⁰ Carr-Gomm, p. 156.

³¹ Ibid, p. 156.

involved; (middle) the emotional effects; and (bottom) the physical or spiritual manifestations or outcomes of the preceding two rows.

This layout is actually trickier than it looks at first glance. The entire spread is a progression from beginning to end, and it all has to work together. For this to work for me, I have to start looking at the upper left hand card first, work down that vertical row (the past) to the bottom, and then start at the top of the second vertical row and go down to the bottom and then do the same with the third vertical row.

But it's also not just a simple progression (though it can seem to be). And this is where the inspiration comes in. Cards or disks in one place can reflect of cards or disks that are not adjacent to them, and can be on the other side of the spread. I find that I must try to come up with a cohesive whole before I can even start talking to the subject. In other words, the total can be greater than the sum of its parts. The 'total' will often give me a feeling that can be quite difficult to put into words, but which sums up the entire process, and which can give me a good idea of how a total stranger ticks.

My own personal preparation is very important if I am going to give readings. I'm usually not in the middle of a full rite, connected with the Kindreds at the Center of the Worlds (as opposed to when I pull Omens), and so there are some things I have to do first if I want these to work. First, I go through and look at all the cards or disks and think about what they mean and who these animals are. This can take five minutes or so. And then, while holding the symbol set in my hands, I go into a light trance and fill myself with the powers of heaven and earth through the 2 Powers meditation, and then I project these powers into the set through my hands. Only once I'm feeling well connected to both the Cosmos and the symbol set am I able to do a reading.

I also like to do a few readings in a row, if that's possible or feasible. I hate to admit it, but I get better the longer I do it in one sitting. The *awen* seems to flow more easily, like I've finally managed to open the 'tap' more fully, or something.

Below I will give the results of my 9 divinations. The first eight were done with the cards, and the last one was done using only the disks. For the purposes of privacy, I will only refer to the subjects by their first initial and their gender.

1. This is a reading I did for *N.* (a woman):

The cards I pulled were:

Swan
(love, soul, beauty)

Blackbird
(the inner call)

Frog
(sensitivity, things not as they appear)

Water Dragon
(hidden depths)

Hind
(gentleness, femininity)

Cat
(sensuous, guardianship)

Bear
(primal power, intuition/instinct)

Fire Dragon
(transmutation, energy)

Hawk
(cleansing, remembering)

This clearly gave me her history. She has had a very loving past, and is probably in a good marriage/relationship, but deep down there are strong emotions that are buried. She knows this instinctually and her intuition is good. These emotions are strong and possibly destructive. She has buried them to protect herself, and this certainly served her in the past. Her shape is indicative of what hiding these emotions has required, and has even given her power in some deep and primal way.

But now she is on a strong and powerful spiritual path that is showing her places within that can be calm and pure and quiet. This has been very comforting and safe, but this silence also allows her to more clearly see the buried emotions and the damage that not facing them has done. She will be forced to confront them, which will change her greatly. And it won't be a painless process. In fact, it could be like standing in fire as it burns the pain away.

She will end up seeing herself more clearly as different from the person that others see her to be. And she may still guard her inner self fiercely, not letting others know everything. But should she lose the weight she is hiding behind, there will be a whole new sensuous side of her life not connected with eating. But in the end, she will have cleansed herself of all the unwanted parts of her life so that she may finally remember who she really is.

2. This is a reading I did for *B.* (a woman):

Hare (balance, rebirth)	Bee (community, celebration)	Ram (breakthrough, achievement)
Wren (humility, cunning)	Seal (love, longing, dilemma)	Cat (sensuous, guardian, detached)
Hawk (cleansing, recollection)	Wolf (learning, shadow)	Hind (gentleness, femininity)

She can see clearly who she is and how she behaves. She is quite able to step back and let others do their thing, and actually is quite humble. But parts of her life have changed – she has let go of some things (or they have gone away of their own accord) and is able to remember who she has been in the past.

But there is a problem going on currently where she is feeling alone in the group, as though she doesn't really belong, and she knows it. This is creating a problem for her in that she is experiencing a longing for something that is not clearly defined. And she's not sure what to do about it. The group energy is the only thing keeping her centered at the present time. This longing, however, is giving her a dark place in her soul but this is necessary for her to be able to find her way out. It's as though she has to hit bottom before she can recover.

But she is a determined woman and will bend her will to see that she accomplishes what she needs to do. The ability to do this may come suddenly and as a surprise, but it will change everything. Suddenly her sensuous side will come to the fore, even if a part of her stands back only to watch, but this will bring a calm and gentle time. In fact, the feeling I'm getting is that there will be a new man in your life (at least a sexual partner, not necessarily a love interest), and this will end the longing that you are currently going through.

3. This is a reading I did for *K.* (a woman):

Horse (the land, travel)	Salmon (wisdom, rejuvenation)	Otter (joy, play, helpfulness)
Wren (humility, cunning)	Seal (love, longing, dilemma)	Wolf (learning, the shadow)
Frog (sensitivity, things not as they appear)	Earth Dragon (potential, riches)	Hare (balance, rebirth)

She has come from a place where she had to struggle to be heard, where her natural strength and sense of grounding has held her in good stead. But folks think that she is so strong that

nothing hurts her, when that could not be further from the truth. The wounds go deep, but she does not usually let other people see them. And she's very good at hiding them.

She has also succeeded in transforming herself into an independent woman who has great magical and spiritual resources that she can use to find balance. She is also self-sufficient even though she may not feel emotionally complete at the moment. And she also has a great deal to offer. But this feeling of a lack of completeness is central to who she is, and is something that she must deal with in order to be happy.

She is a woman who has a great capacity for fun and play, and will continue to play and have lots of fun in the future, but that dark place of a lack of emotional fulfillment will still be there underneath, and her helpful ways will still be used to cover them up from view. But all is not lost, there is a chance that through experience she may be able to overcome this.

Her friend *F.* told her that she should get back into practicing her personal magic – and if she decides to do so, it's apparent that she has the resources (earth dragon) to find a new rebirth leading to balance (hare). So I advised that she go for it!

4. This is a reading I did for *E.* (a woman):

Bear (primal power, instinct/intuition)	Wolf (learning, the shadow)	Crane secret knowledge, patience)
Hawk (purification, remembering)	Goose (then Otter) (productive power) (Otter-joy, play, helpfulness)	Seal (love, longing, dilemma)
Earth Dragon (potential, riches)	Hare (balance, rebirth)	Horse (the Land, travel)

When I first laid out this spread, I was immediately struck with a thought upon seeing Goose (productive power - in present emotions) next to Seal (love, longing, dilemma) in future emotions). And so I asked her is she was thinking about having children. And she replied that indeed, she had been, and that she was wondering if her first child-to-be was demanding to be born! So I pulled another card to expand on the meaning of Goose, and pulled Otter (joy, play, helpfulness). This changed things. The productivity modified by joy and helpfulness made me think that this could be job related instead. She seemed to agree.

So this reading told me that she has pulled herself together through instinct and intuition and is now ready to move towards success. She has great resources and a great ability to be productive but is only learning how to access these things now. And, indeed, this learning is something that she has to consciously strive to accomplish. This learning is now a dreary chore, but rather may actually be quite a lot of fun to do. But since she is balanced in her life (finally?) she should be able to find what she needs to proceed.

Since the final manifestation is Horse (travel), I think she will end up with a job that will require travel, and she may not be all that happy about that, with longing for her home complicating things. But she has outgrown her current life and it's time to move on.

5. This is a reading I did for *L.* (a woman)

Air Dragon (reversed) (Insight, vitality, inspiration)	Ram (breakthrough, achievement)	Owl (detachment, change)
Wren	Cow	Goose

(humility, cunning)

(nourishment, the hearth)

(productivity, vigilance)

Swan

(soul, love, beauty)

Cat

(sensuous, guardian, detached)

Eagle

(intelligence, renewal)

She has had unrealistic expectations that have held her back by keeping her less than she could be. Others have been looking past her, not really seeing her, which in some ways has been a good thing since she's been able to get her way on things simply because some folks didn't notice. She's been flying under the radar, as it were, and in her spirituality she has been ok all along. In fact, this humility she has been experiencing has endeared her to others, to her advantage.

But she is now struggling to break out of old moulds and make her life more the way she would like it to be, but one thing that has been holding her back is her need to take care of her family and to spend time working on or with her home. And as a result, she has been good at caring for other's needs. But she is stretching out and releasing old tensions, stretching out her 'claws', as it were, ready to move on to what comes next. And she is also beginning to look past drama and see things as they really are.

She will see that what she was experiencing is true for her, that it's time to take a step back from the craziness of her life and see the changes that she will need to make in order to achieve the breakthrough she is wanting. Should she do this, she will find great strength in being productive, in watching out for her future, and in getting what she wants. But she must have courage if she is going to renew her life.

6. This is a reading I did for *R.* (a man)

Otter

(joy, play, helpfulness)

Frog

(sensitivity, things not as they appear)

Air Dragon

(insight, vitality)

Bee

(community, celebration)

Ram

(breakthrough, achievement)

Hind

(subtlety, femininity)

Dog

(loyalty, guidance, protection)

Hare

(rebirth, intuition, balance)

Wren

(humility, cunning)

In the past, he only looked for fun and games and he found this within a warm and comforting community, perhaps a coven? And he was extremely loyal and protective of this place and these feelings.

But now he knows that he is only playing a role, that really he is someone else inside, someone who is more sensitive than folks thing, who only see the clown, and this has made him determined to achieve some kind of great change, even if it means giving up what he has had. Only this way can he find balance and the new life that he so desperately feels he should have.

But there is a man (an air sign?) who is very vital, which may mean younger than *R.* is, and he is all *R.* can think about, and this man makes him feel so very receptive and wonderful, in both emotional and physical ways. Just what he wants, and he believes that through humility that he can get what he wants.

We had to pull more cards to discover the nature of this man he knew and where this relationship was going. *R.* was experiencing great longing (**seal**) and otter showed us that the man was fun and playful, but by spending so much time with the man, *R.* was becoming an outsider in his own group (**wolf**). Travel to visit him will require patience (**horse, crane**). Also,

he will wait to go until he can also visit other friends (**bee**). Safeguard yourself and your tongue (**cat**).

7. This is a reading I did for C. (a man)

Fire Dragon (transmutation, energy)	Ram (breakthrough, achievement)	Frog (sensitivity, things not as they appear)
Air Dragon (vitality, insight)	Owl (detachment, change)	Dog (loyalty, guidance, protection)
Wren (humility, cunning)	Salmon (wisdom, rejuvenation)	Boar (and Stag) (leadership, direction) (Stag – pride, independence)

I also pulled another card, Stag, after the Boar card to clarify what was being said here.

In the past he has had to take over his own life, to take it back, as it were, and this took a lot of energy to accomplish. But as a result, he felt a great deal of vitality in his life, like he was finally 'living', and through a bit of dissembling and by not making obvious waves, he managed to make it work and be a new man. Folks have tended to underrate him, and think that he is less able or intelligent than he really is.

But now he needs to achieve something else, something that is difficult for him to do (and at this point he told me that it was self confidence he desperately needed to achieve). He is not all upset about this need, but quietly knows, almost in a detached way, what he must do to get this self-confidence. And knowing this has made him feel like there's hope, that there's a way out, and he is rejuvenated by this idea. There's finally a light at the end of the tunnel!

Others will discover that he really is not who he seems: that the loyal, mild mannered young man that people think him to be actually is just a facade that hides all sorts of strength and power, that he can be a leader and act with a warrior's power. This will give him the pride he needs to stand on his own two feet and get the respect he deserves.

8. This is a reading I gave for M. (a man) after I had a vision in trance that required confirmation. Before the trance, I had agreed to do a healing rite during the main rite of the festival I was attending. M. is of Norse hearth culture, and I had wanted to have two Norse Gods that I could call on to aid with the healing. Thor was an obvious choice, but I was having trouble coming up with the other. My personal inclination would be to call on the Irish Goddess Brigit.

In the trance (doing the bear posture) I very clearly saw blackness filled with stars, and felt that the Vedic Goddess of the night, Raitre, was calling me to invoke Her for the rite. But I needed to be sure, for M.'s sake. He needed to be on-board with this or his own skepticism could ruin all the good we were trying to do.

So I pulled:

Water Dragon (passion, connection)	Fire Dragon (transmutation, mastery, energy)	Cow (reversed) (hearth, nourishment)
Bull (potency, beneficence)	Bear (primal power, intuition/instinct)	Hare (balance, rebirth)
Blackbird	Seal	Cat

(the Call, enchantment)

(love, longing, dilemma)

(guardianship)

The card in the middle position is the Bear, and the name of the posture I was doing during the trance was the bear posture, so this is significant, for that is the present emotion. I think that the past ideas refer to Thor, a god of, among other things, seafarers. It is also about emotional depth, and *M.* has had deep emotions about his illness. He was obviously wanted healing and wellbeing, and this need has led him to making the call to the Otherworlds which is what we will be doing in ritual soon.

The present idea is about mastery, energy and changing base metal into precious ones (a metaphor for changing him from ill and 'less than' to something better and more valuable). And fire is of the sky and of the stars. The present emotion is about finding the primal power needed to do this thing, and the longing he has felt is making this healing happen, and also points up the dilemma we are facing regarding a choice of Goddess to aid us.

Normally in my healings I call on Brigit, the Goddess of fire and the hearth to aid me, but the future idea is cow reversed! That is Brigit reversed! So it can't be She. Looking back at the present emotion I see the Bear, which is also instinct mixed with intuition, and so my instinct to call on Raitri must be correct. The future emotion is balance, which is what we want, and if I follow my instincts then we end up with guardianship, which may mean that he will be guarded by the two Deities I call (Thor and Raitri).

At this point, the Archdruid, Skip Ellison pulled an ogham and got honeysuckle, which binds and brings all things together, so *M.* and I were convinced.

9. This is the reading I did for *S.* (a man and a Buddhist priest) using only the animal disks I have made instead of the cards. The question he asked was, "What is my path now?"

Stag

(pride, independence)

Adder

(transformation, healing)

Seal

(love, longing, soul)

Wolf

(the shadow, intuition, learning)

Owl

(wisdom, detachment)

Cat

(guardianship, sensuality)

Dog

(loyalty, protection, guidance)

Dragon

(withholding, hoarding)

Salmon

(wisdom, rejuvenation)

The stag in past ideas is about him being proud and independent and not following his original path of being a Buddhist priest. At some point in the past he left his path and journeyed to discover his shadow side, the dark side in himself that he needed to explore in order to learn who he actually is. But in the recent past he has gone past all this to rediscover the guidance he needed by returning to his faith.

Currently he is filled with the need to change his life completely, to transform himself in such a way as will bring about healing, and going to Japan to sit in temple for months is what he knows he must do, and this wisdom is allowing him to find the detachment he needs for his faith. The treasure he seeks is still hidden away inside, and has yet to be found and claimed.

The future idea of the seal is all about the longing he will know for his soul. It will be longing for the love he wants to feel for all who are in suffering and sorry, and he will also need to guard against the feelings of sensuality and sexuality that he may experience when he is in Japan. But out of all of this will come the wisdom he seeks, and this wisdom will totally rejuvenate him, and have his soul leaping for joy at his regained and newfound peace.

Question # 10: Describe the method you would use for drawing an omen in public ritual, how it is different from any private practice you do, and how it is different from taking an omen for another individual. (min. 600 words for essay)

Drawing the omen in a public ritual is totally different from those done in my personal practices. In public rites my preparation is what I would do for any rite, usually a bath or shower with time to decompress, some private meditation and/or trance work, and then a grounding or unity trance with the other celebrants. Then, in the course of the rite, the Center of the Worlds is re-created, the Gates are opened, and offerings are made to the Kindreds, at least, and at High Days to the Patrons of the rite as well.

One good thing is that in a full rite an offering is made to a Bardic deity or ancestor, and this call for inspiration applies as much to the seer who takes the omen as to the need of the other celebrants to be able to speak with honeyed tongue and words of beauty. The inspiration that the Gods bring to the rite is necessary for a competent omen. And the Prayer of Sacrifice, if done well, will cover all the intentions and desires in the rite that the omen is meant to reflect. Some groves take the omen to discover if the offerings have been accepted, and this is fine, while other groves ask what wisdom or blessings the Kindreds are offering to us in return for those offerings. In some ways, these two approaches are similar (wisdom that is given can hurt, after all), but bad omens may cause a rite to be abandoned in groves using the first method while not in the second.

Even though offerings have previously been made to a Bardic deity or other spirit, it's never a bad idea to call on the Kindreds again for help when the time comes. The Senior Druid of my Grove, Nora Ford, wrote a nice chant that I always sing quietly to myself as I'm shuffling the cards (or mixing the disks in the bag), and this chant helps me concentrate and go into trance for the pulling of the omen:

"Ancient symbols
Speaking to me,
Ancient symbols
Speaking through me,
It's your wisdom
We're receiving,
Words unspoken,
Whispered now."

Then, in a large High Day rite with many attendees and where we have called Deities of the Occasion, I pull the three cards or disks. If it's a smaller blessing rite with 30 folks or less, and only the three Kindreds have been called, I'll often take the cards or disks to the folks who made the invocations, and let each of them pull a card or disk for that Kindred. As is my usual pattern, the Ancestors omen may also refer to events or ideas in the past; the Nature Spirits omen may include ideas or events in the present, and the Deities omen may reflect ideas or events in the future.

In omens I pull for myself, I, of course, am the focus of the omen. In readings I give for other people, it's all about them. But omens pulled in public ritual have to function on at least two levels. One is the level of the grove or group for whom the ritual has been conducted. The symbols need to be interpreted by the seer for the benefit of everyone and the grove or group itself. But these symbols also have meaning for each individual person present, in their own lives. It's not practical for the seer to interpret them for each person, but he or she can give as much information as possible about the general meanings of the symbols so that the people can see for themselves how the omen applies in their lives.

Question #11: Give and explain the results of three omens taken by you in public ritual. (min. 300 words per omen)

In 2007 I was the Seer at three High Day rites held by the Sonoran Sunrise Grove, and so I will give those three omens here.

1. Midsummer, 2007

The Grove's Midsummer Rite is in the Gaulish pantheon and stresses work needed to help bring on the monsoon rains, which are so important to southern Arizona. We called on Taranis, the God of Thunder, to bring his clouds and storms to the state that the thirsty earth might drink of His bounty. Added complications this year were that this was only the third rite after the Grove left the stone circle at Summerlands, and the first rite to be held indoors in years.

For this omen, I pulled three cards, but a fourth card popped out of the deck with the third one:

Ancestors, and the Past

Dog – loyalty, guidance, protection

Spirits of the Land, and the Present

Hare – balance, rebirth, intuition

Shining Ones, and the Future

Wren – humility, cunning, success against all odds

Bee – celebration, community, organization

In the past, our grove has been steadfast in its commitment to excellence and the full ritual experience. We have guarded our relationships with the Kindreds and have grown under their watchful eyes.

But now we are in a totally new situation, a place of confusion and wonderment as we start afresh in the history of the grove. We are also in a place of stasis or waiting as we think about what we need to do to secure our future.

But we will succeed in holding this grove together against all odds through our understanding of our place in the world and through humility, knowing that we are not the stone circle or the buildings at Summerlands, but rather that the grove is actually its people, the folks who strive for community and fellowship and who celebrate what we have and who we are. As long as we hold fast to our aims and fill our spirits with joy and fellowship, we will continue to thrive and grow.

2. Lughnasadh 2007

In the past we had usually held our men's retreat and warrior games at Summerlands, but the year before we had branched out and camped (in a massive thunderstorm) in Oracle on the north side of the Catalina mountains. This year we camped in the back yard of one of our members in Vail, on a large piece of land where we could also hold our games. The men spent the evening making offerings for the next day's High Day rite and prepared for the upcoming games.

After the games our rite was held, and the omen was:

Ancestors, and the Past

Goose – productive power, parenthood, vigilance

Spirits of the Land, and the Present

Crane – patience, longevity, secret knowledge

Shining Ones, and the Future

Salmon – wisdom, inspiration, rejuvenation

We as a grove have been holding our rites and our Warrior Games for many, many years now, and over this time we have watched over the growth of our grove much as parents watch over the growth of their children, keeping a wary eye out for any threats they might face and rejoicing in their wonder and abilities to learn and grow and create. So, too, has the grove grown with learning and with creativity.

Now, in our long exile from our own place, we must continue to be patient and lean on our deep, inner resources to maintain our existence. We are learning now that we must access knowledge about zoning and building codes that none of us ever thought we'd need so that we can open our eyes and see how we might create our own future.

But the Gods will give us the wisdom that we will need. The inspiration of the Kindreds will flow down into us, filling us with ideas that we will use to ensure our future, and this time of exile will actually be good for us, giving us new purpose and direction that we may look towards the future with renewed hope and vigor.

3. Alban Elfed (Autumn Equinox)

Once again an extra card came out with the last draw.

The day of the ritual was spent at the Fall Fest event held in a local park by the Tucson Area Wiccan/Pagan Network (TAWN) and where we had held a children's ADF ritual in the morning. Most of us decamped early and went to our new High Day venue, the rose garden of the Metropolitan Community Church (the gay church), to set up and perform our rite. Only 25 people attended, but that's not surprising as the Fall Fest event was also having their rite at the same time.

The best parts about this new venue were that we actually knew people on the church board, which gave us confidence about being allowed to stay, and the fact that the price was much cheaper than what we had paid before at Beltane and Midsummer. Also, we could again have our rites outdoors and with a good fire.

Ancestors, and the Past

Bull – wealth, potency, beneficence

Spirits of the Land, and the Present

Goose – productive power, parenthood, vigilance

Shining Ones, and the Future

Air Dragon – inspiration, insight, vitality

Earth Dragon – power, potential, riches

We as a grove have been doing very well in our exile, and folks are stepping up and making good donations to our grove land fund as well as the general fund. We are still a force to be reckoned with in the local pagan community and are seen in a very positive light.

And now we are doing so well! We have a wonderful new temporary ritual space here in this rose garden and even though the Greek Orthodox church next door is having their festival this evening and we seem to be performing our rites to the tune of "Never on Sunday", there is definitely a celebratory mood in the air.

Our future looks very good as well! We are vital and our understanding of what we have to do, and where we have to look, is growing, and we have the potential for great and wonderful things in our future.

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