

Bardic 1

Jessica A. Olson
ADF Member no. 2934
Clergy Training Program; Generalist Study Program

Question 1: Indo-European Culture: Discuss in general terms the bardic arts prevalent within a single (preferably ancient) Indo-European culture; explain how those bardic arts fit into that culture and religion. (300-600 words)

According to Willem Floor, “dramatic performance has existed in Iran throughout history.”¹ The music of Iran or Persian music has thousands of years of history dating back to the



Figure 1

Neolithic age. Evidence of Iran’s musical history comes from figurines playing the ancestor of the guitar, called a Tanbur,² (Figure 1) were excavated from Susa, Iran, and are dated to the 2nd millennia BC.³

It is not well-known that the Persians had their own form of minstrel poets known as *gosan*. These minstrel poets of Iran contributed to the resistance to Hellenism and it appears that they were influential on their entire society.

In the pre-Christian and pre-Islamic period the *gosan* was “privileged at court and popular with the people; present at the graveside and at the feast, eulogist, satirist, storyteller, musician; recorder of the past achievements, and commentator of his own times,”⁴ They must have had a powerful influence on public opinion. They also traveled widely and were probably a source for spreading news.⁵

The *gosan* was known among the Persians as well. In the poem *Vīs u Rāmīn*, there is a passage where the king calls for a *gosan-i navagar*.⁶ In another work ... an author says, “Like a *gosan*, who proclaims the worthiness of kings and heroes of old and himself achieves nothing at all.” This passage is important because it establishes that Parthian minstrels told tales about

¹ Willem. The History of Theater in Iran. Washington: Mage Publishers. 2005. 14.

² The Circle of Ancient Iranian Studies. Iranian Music: Tanbur (Guitar). Retrieved 05/05/2008. <[http:// www.cais-soas.com/CAIS/Music/tanbur.htm](http://www.cais-soas.com/CAIS/Music/tanbur.htm)>.

³ Photo by Zereschk. Iran National Museum.

⁴ Boyce, Mary. “The Parthian *gosan* professional singer and the Iranian Minstrel Tradition.” Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Vol. 1 & 2 (1957): 10-45.

⁵ Boyce, Mary. A History of Zoroastrianism, Vol. 1. Brill: Leiden, 1975. 59-60.

⁶ Boyce, Mary. “The Parthian *gosan* professional singer and the Iranian Minstrel Tradition.” Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Vol. 1 & 2 (1957): 10.

Parthian history and it provides support that Parthian minstrels were important to preserving Iranian history.⁷

The term also occurs in the Armenian texts and Moses of Xoren speaks of information about ancient Aram being derived from the songs of *gusans*. He also supplies that these “were in verse, were sung, and were not written down.”⁸ There are also references to *gusans* in the bible, namely in Ecclesiastes II, 8.⁹

In a canon of 488 it says, “of those who mourn for the dead, let the head of the household and the *gusans* be found and taken to the king’s court and punished.”¹⁰ From this it is evident that the church disapproved of the *gusan* as a professional mourner. Apparently, due to his part in pagan rites which were no longer in favor by the religious leaders of the time.

It seems that they either were, or were associated with, actors, acrobats, musicians, storytellers, eulogists, historians, professional mourners, judges, and satirists. The *gusan* is sometimes portrayed as a bawdy frequenter of taverns and other times exalted for his work.

Unfortunately, no references remain to give us insight into the *gusan*’s training. Though, it seems likely that training would have had to be extensive in order to learn the many tales and songs by heart.

Likewise, as most of their work seems to have been orally transmitted, little remains of the works of the *gusans*. Though many scholars believe works like the Persian epic poem *Shahnameh* (Book of Kings) written by Firdausi around 1000 CE were compilations of the oral traditions passed down until that time.

Question 2: Genres: Describe four “genres” of bardic arts, at least one of which must be poetry. For each genre, compare and contrast its appearance and/or use in two single (preferably ancient) Indo-European cultures. The two cultures need not be the same for all four genres. (300 words each)

Epic Poetry in Hellenic Culture

The Greeks are well known for their epic poems. Naturally, the first that come to mind are the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, which are commonly dated to the late 9th or 8th century BCE.¹¹ The *Iliad* itself contains 15,693 lines of verse, written in Dactylic hexameter (also known as “heroic hexameter”).

It concerns events during the final year in the siege of Troy. At the beginning of the tale the Greeks have just captured Chryseis, the daughter of Apollo’s priest Chryses and given her to Agamemnon. Achilles withdraws from battle after Chryseis is restored to her father and Agamemnon takes Achilles’ own prize, a woman named Briseis. Patroclus, who is beloved by Achilles, impersonates him and is slain in a battle against Hector. This sends Achilles into a mad rage and he kills Hector, refusing to return the body to the king for proper burial. King Priam finally convinces Achilles to release his son’s body and the poem ends with the funerary rites of Hector.

Epic Poetry in Ancient Persia (Iranic culture)

⁷ Ibid. 11.

⁸ Ibid. 13.

⁹ Ibid. 13.

¹⁰ Ibid. 14.

¹¹ Lattimore, Richmond, trans. The Iliad of Homer. Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1951.

The Persians too had their poets in a Persian epic poem *Shahnameh* (Book of Kings) written by Ferdowsi around 1000 CE, we find the story of *Sohrab and Rostum* in which Rostum engages in mortal combat on the banks of the Oxus, in the presence of their two respective armies, with his son, Sohrab, whom he has never met. Sohrab had been searching for his father, but fell by the hand of the hero whose prowess he had inherited before he could learn that it was his father he battled. This story is very similar to the story of Cuhuailain and his son Conla in the Irish mythology.

The story is written in Pahlavi Persian. It seems that Ferdowsi's major source was a Pahlavi text commissioned by Abu Mansir CAbd al-Razzaq, who was the governor of Tus during the first twenty years of the Ferdowsi's life. Though many scholars believe that the oral nature of the rhetoric used in the epic, imply that it was largely recorded from oral traditions.¹²

Satire in the Iranian Culture

Satirical writing is not infrequent in classical Persian literature. There were various forms of satire in Persia: *hajw* (satire in the sense of personal abuse) was the most common but examples of *latifah* (witticism) and *hazl* (obscene) are also found.¹³

One of the most well known satires was written by Ferowsi in response to the paltry sum offered by Sultan Mahmud for Ferowsi's life-work, the *Shahnameh* (Book of Kings). This was in the form of *hajw*. In it he demeans the Sultan with 100 lines of insulting text, in which he questions the purity of the Sultan's birth, the virtue of the Sultan's mother, and criticizes the Sultan's refinement and leadership. The language in many places seems very like the formal curse language found in earlier texts and utilized the optative mood in various statements of ill wishes. This satire is possibly the most well know ever written in Persian history and Ferowsi is considered a hero.

Satire in Germanic Culture

The Norse had a group of poets called Skalds who composed a number of varieties of courtly poetry. They were also known to produce satire (*níðvísur*) and occasionally, erotic verse (*mansöngur*). The *níðvísur* often hinted at connections between the enemy being slandered and homosexual behavior or bestiality. *Níðvísur* incurred severe penalties in Old Norse law. A man who overheard a slanderous poem recited about him was entitled to a financial compensation and could even kill the offender with impunity under certain circumstances.¹⁴ These penalties did not deter the most brave, or foolish, of skalds. They would instead conceal the personal name of their enemy in intricate circumvolutions, using complex word play that did not directly identify the person who they were writing about. Only those who knew the subject of the *níðvísur* would have been likely to identify the person being discussed. The circumvolutions were so complex that they are often translated literally by scholars who spend months or years pondering their meaning.

¹² Davis, Dick. "The Problem of Ferdowsi's Sources." Journal of the American Oriental Society 116.1 (1996): 48- 57.

¹³ Haidari, A. A. "A Medieval Persian Satirist." Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies 49.1 (1986): 117.

¹⁴ Gade, Kari Ellen. *Penile Puns: Personal Names and Phallic Symbols in Skaldic Poetry*. Retrieved 8/8/2008. <<http://www.illinoismedieval.org/EMS/VOL6/gade.html>>.

Theater in Iranian Culture

While theater may not be listed as one of the bardic arts in ADF, it is widely recognized as such in a number of cultures and it often served the same purpose educating the public, recording history, and reinforcing the religious beliefs of the audience. Iranian theater was initially of a ritual nature. It was a performance about man's relationship with nature, the gods, and other human beings. "Theater was born out of sacred rites performed by priests and lay actors dramatizing myths and legends at fixed times and often in fixed locations."¹⁵

Further, George Goyan argues that Armenian theater grew out of the funeral rites for the gods Anahita-Gisane, the Armenian counterpart of the contemporary of the Anahita-Ahura Mazda cult in the Iranian Empire.¹⁶ While, we know now that Armenian constitutes a separate Indo-European branch, there were close relations between Iranian and Armenian peoples, both geographically and historically (Iranian kings ruled Armenia at various times throughout history), and Armenian has borrowed so many words from Iranian that scholars once thought Armenian belonged to the Iranian branch of Indo-European.¹⁷

Theater in Hellenic Culture

Much like the Iranian theater it is believed that Hellenic theater grew out of the religious practices of the Greek. Specifically, it is understood that Greek theater arose from festivals in honor of Dionysis.¹⁸ In Greek theater only three actors were allowed on stage. Due to the limited number of actors the chorus evolved into a very active part of Greek theatre. The chorus was fixed at fifteen by Sophocles.¹⁹ Tragedies, dramas and comedy were all represented in Greek theater.

While there is no direct evidence that a specific group of people, such as bards performed these plays, it is evident that the plays themselves served much the same function as the storytelling and songs of the bards. They educated and entertained the public, preserving history and re-enacting mythological stories that reinforced religious belief.

Storytelling in Irish Culture

Perhaps the most familiar of the classes or types of bards is the storyteller. Storytelling is the first skill that is called to mind when someone says the word "Bard." In fact, storytelling is so important in the Irish culture that it has almost become a national pastime. In Irish storytelling is called a *seanchaí*, which means a bearer of "folk knowledge" (*seanchas*).²⁰ In the ancient Irish culture, the history of the people was memorized in long poems which were recited by bards in a number of settings, including the courts of tribal chiefs. According to Duffy, the Bards were

¹⁵ Floor, Willem. The History of Theater in Iran. Washington: Mage Publishers, 2005. 14.

¹⁶ Goyan, Georg. Teatr Dvernei Armeii. Vol. 1. Moscow, 1952. 67f qtd in Floor, Willem. The History of Theater in Iran. Washington: Mage Publishers, 2005. 14.

¹⁷ Mallory, J.P. and Douglas Q. Adams, "Armenian Language" in Encyclopedia of Indo-European Culture. London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1997. 26-30.

¹⁸ Haigh, A. E. & A.W. Pickard. Attic Theatre: A Description of the Stage and Theatre of the Athenians, and of the Dramatic Performances at Athens. 3rd Ed. Cambridge: Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1907. 1.

¹⁹ Ibid. 289.

²⁰ Dolan, Terence Patrick (Ed.). A Dictionary of Hiberno-English. Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2006. 206.

required to memorize many stories about the chiefs and kings and at least one-hundred substories.²¹ Other sources indicate that they were required to memorize up to 350 poems and stories.²²

Storytelling in Iranian Culture

The Gusans of the Persians were also storytellers and they were often called upon to tell these stories in court. For example, in the epic poem *Vīs u Rāmīn*, the king Mobad asks for a *gosan-i navagar* to sing for his wife, his brother (Rāmīn), and himself. The Gusan sings of a beautiful tree that shades the whole earth, beneath the tree is a spring with sweet water, a bull grazes by it drinking the water and eating the blossoms of the tree. The Gusan ends his story by saying “May this tree continue to cast its shade, the water ever flowing from the spring, the bull of Gilan ever grazing at it!”²³

The implications of this story may be clear to those who study the Norse pantheon; however, the king has a different interpretation. Mobad believes that the Gusan is trying to convey an allegory with the tree representing Mobad, the spring his wife (Vīs), and the bull his brother (Rāmīn), his wife’s lover. Instead of being enraged at the Gusan for telling such a dangerous tale in court, he becomes angry at his brother and attacks him, intending to kill him. This may indicate that the Gusans were privileged in court and had a certain amount of impunity.

Question 3: Forms/styles: Describe four forms or styles of bardic arts in either ancient or modern times or a combination of each. Include examples of each form. At least one such description should be for a poetic form; the remainder can be for any bardic form or style. (100 words each [examples not to be included in word count])

Musical Performance, Iranian Culture

While some members of ADF contend that music was relegated to the third function in Dumézil’s tripartite theory, I contend that it was probably found in all of the classes. Excavated evidence, such as the statues recovered from Susa (Figure 1), give us evidence that music in Iran (Persia) extends at least as far back as the Elamite Empire (3,500-644 B.C). Certainly there is evidence for its use in Iranian culture by the *gusans* (poet-musicians) and it is likely that the common people also had access to music of some form as well. It is recorded that *gusans* used a number of different instruments flutes, guitar-like instruments, and lutes. It seems that sometimes they sang minstrel-poems with music as accompaniment while at other times they simply played music without song.

Eventually, some of the minstrel-poems (songs) came to be written down. *Vīs u Rāmīn*, is an ancient Persian love story that probably dates from at least the 2nd century CE. It was so well loved and had such a profound influence on Persian culture that an unknown Persian patron of the era felt compelled to preserve it in writing. The lyrical description of the woman in the story is absolutely beautiful:

²¹ Duffy, Kevin. Who Were The Celts?: Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about the Celts from 1000 B.C. to the Present. New York: Barnes & Noble Publishing, 2000. 143.

²² Sawyers, June Skinner. Celtic Music: A Complete Guide. New York: Da Capo Press, 2001. 112.

²³ Boyce, Mary. “The Parthian *gosan* professional singer and the Iranian Minstrel Tradition.” Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Vol. 1 & 2 (1957): 10.

*She grew into a silver cypress tree,
Her heart was steely, and her spirit free,
And Wisdom gazing on her lovely face
Was baffled to describe her radiant grace.
It said, "She is a garden burgeoning
With all the freshness of the early spring,
Her eyes are two narcissi, and her hair
The purple violets darkly nestled there,"²⁴*

Historical Prose, Hellenic Culture

Prose history attempts the recording of actual events rather than describing the myths or legends of a given culture. Historical prose differs from chronicles in that prose history is written in a narrative form, rather than as a chronological record of historical events and the dates as they happened. Herodotus was really the father of prose history in the Western world. Before his *Histories* the epic poem was in vogue for thousands of years; however, these usually contained mythology as well as factual elements. He was perhaps the first historian and possibly the first historian to travel the known world to learn and write more accurate accounts, although this still involved second- and even third-hand accounts in relation to the Persian wars.

And when Mandane was married to Cambyses, in the first year Astyages saw another vision. It seemed to him that from the womb of this daughter a vine grew, and this vine overspread the whole of Asia. Having seen this vision and delivered it to the interpreters of dreams, he sent for his daughter, being then with child, to come from the land of the Persians. And when she had come he kept watch over her, desiring to destroy that which should be born of her; for the Magian interpreters of dreams signified to him that the offspring of his daughter should be king in his room.²⁵

Satire, Iranian Culture

A great example of the Persian satire form known as *hajw* (satire in the sense of personal abuse) can be seen in a translation of the infamous satire of Sultan Mahmoud, attributed to Ferowsi. This text demeans the Sultan with one-hundred lines of insulting prose, which often sound like the formal language of a curse, in which he questions the purity of the Sultan's birth, the virtue of the Sultan's mother, and criticizes the Sultan's refinement and leadership. In this satire the author, Ferowsi, also indicates that the Sultan was low-born, that his entire race was ignoble and, therefore, incapable of producing a qualified king:

*Such as thou art, the evilness of thy birth
Precludes each generous sentiment of worth –
Nor Kingly origin, nor noble race,
Warms thy low heart, the offspring of disgrace -²⁶*

²⁴ Gurgānī, Fakhr al-Dīn. *Vīs and Rāmīn*. George Morrison, transl. New York: Columbia University Press, 1972. 357.

²⁵ Herodotus. *The History of Herodotus*. Trans. George Campbell Macaulay. Vol. 1. New York.: MacMillan and Co., 1904. 55.

²⁶ Arberry, A. J. *Persian Poems: An Anthology of Verse Translations*. Tehran: Yassavoli. 2005. 183.

Epic Poetry, Anglo-Saxon

There are a number of well known epics to select from when writing about the epic poetry of the Indo-Europeans. The *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, the *Shahnameh*, and *Beowulf* are among the most well-known of these. *Beowulf* was written in alliterative verse, rather than rhyme. In alliterative verse each line is divided into two phrases (hemistiches) and connected by the same consonant sound which repeated (pivot) throughout both phrases.²⁷ Despite this, translators have persistently attempted to render *Beowulf* in rhyming form.

In this epic *Beowulf*, the protagonist of the story, battles three antagonists: Grendel, who has been attacking the mead hall in Denmark; Grendel's mother; and later an unnamed dragon. *Beowulf* is fatally wounded in the final battle.²⁸

*The noble kinsmen felled the foe; their valour took
his life,
And laid him low. Like them always be knight and
thane in strife!
Last of the prince's victories it was, in life's-work got
By his own deeds!
The wound that erst the dragon gave grew hot,
And swelled; and soon Beowulf felt death-throes
within his breast,
And inward poison working. Then deep-pondering
he pressed*²⁹

Question 4: Bardic Figure: Describe the life, fame and general techniques of a historical or mythical bardic figure in a (preferably ancient) Indo-European culture. (minimum 300 words)

The Epic of *Shahnameh* (The Book of Kings) was presumably written by Hakīm Abū l-Qāsim Firdawsī Tūsī, commonly referred to as Ferdowsi. It contains over 62 stories, 990 chapters, and 60,000 rhyming couplets (more than seven times the length of the *Iliad*). It was extremely influential in the formation of a national identity for Iran and is considered by many to be the most significant literary work in Persian literature. There are a number of legends that surround Ferdowsi and how he came to write his *Shahnameh*. The most often cited is similar to the one provided by the Iran Chamber Society.³⁰

As a young man he wanted to find a way to reinforce the bridge of his hometown, which was prone to flooding and was damaged every year. He resolved to become a great poet and when he was grown he did just that and was employed by the palace. The Samanid princes of Khorasan, promised him 10,000 dinars (gold) for every 10,000 couplets he wrote and, after 30 years of work, he presented his ruler with a work of 60,000 couplets. However during this time

²⁷ Michelle. Alliterative Verse, or Unleash the Onions of War!. 25 August 2007. Retrieved 8 August 2008 <<http://michellereid.wordpress.com/2007/08/25/alliterative-verse-or-unleash-the-onions-of-war/>>.

²⁸ Tinker, Chauncey Brewster, trans. Beowulf. New York: Newson & Company, 1901.

²⁹ Lumsden, H. W., trans. Beowulf: Translated into Modern Rhymes. 2nd. London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co, 1883. Lines 2706-2716. 126.

³⁰ Iran Chamber Society. Hakim Abol Qasem Ferdowsi Tousi: Persian Language and Literature. Retrieved 11/08/2008. <<http://www.iranchamber.com/literature/ferdowsi/ferdowsi.php>>.

the Samanid dynasty was conquered by Mahmoud of the Ghaznavid Turks who were not interested in Ferdowsi's life-work. The new Sultan offered him only 20,000 dirhams (silver) for his work and Ferdowsi left the palace angry and bitter.

Legend then tells that Ferdowsi composed a *hajw* (satire) of 100 verses, which reads more like a curse, about Sultan Mahmoud and inserted it into the preface of the *Shahnameh*. Though, some scholars contend that this satire was inaccurately ascribed to Ferdowsi. The satire was quite scathing and castigates Mahmoud for his bad manners, blaming his uncivilized background for his failure to live up to the ideals of kingship. In one verse the author says:

*Didst though not tremble, conscious that the muse
Wou'd eminently scorn thy sordid views?
Didst thou not fear the man, whose hev'nly strain,
Bounding o'er time, made monarchs rule again –³¹*

or alternatively:

*A poet who is offended composes satire;
satire endures until the day of resurrection.³²*

The story goes that he then offered to dedicate the *Shahnameh* to Shahreyar, as a descendant of the ancient kings of Persia, instead of to Mahmoud. Shahreyar, persuaded him to leave the dedication to Mahmoud, and bought the satire from him for 1,000 dirhams a verse. He then expunged it from the poem. The whole text of this satire has survived to the present just as the author predicted.

According to legend, Ferdowsi died just before Sultan Mahmoud determined to make amends for his shabby treatment of the poet by sending him 60,000 dinars' worth of indigo. His daughter, a very outspoken woman, refused the gift and the Sultan used the money to improve a nearby traveler's way station.

It appears that Ferdowsi himself was well aware of how monumentally important his epic would become when he wrote yet another predication:

ما اءدن ز ن م هك م ري من سپ ن آ زا
ا اءن ك ا ر پ ا ر ن خ س م خ ت هك

*az ān pas namiram ke man zendeh'am
ke tokhme sokhan rā parākandeh'am*

*I shall not die, these seeds I've sown will save
my name and reputation from the grave,³³*

or alternatively:

³¹ Arberry, A. J. Persian Poems: An Anthology of Verse Translations. Tehran: Yassavoli. 2005. 183.

³² Macan, Turner. Shah Nameh: an Heroic Poem, Containing the History of Persia from Kioomurs to Yesdejerd. Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1829. 66.

³³ Davis, Dick. Shahnameh: The Persian Book of Kings. New York: Viking Adult. 2006.

*Henceforth I shall not die, since I have lived
and dispersed abroad the presents of my words.*³⁴

Question 5: Role of the Modern Bard: Describe the role of the modern-day, Neopagan bard in the context of ritual (100 words), *Ar nDraiocht Fein* (100 words) and the greater Neopagan community (100 words).

In ADF the role of the Neopagan bard in ritual might include to entertain and educate the people during ritual. Their songs and stories may keep our modern, more impatient members interested in ritual and can engage the children as well. It can also serve as an educational tool and bring history or myth alive for participants in ritual. Additionally, the bard can remind the participants of which songs they will sing at which time. The Bard adds an element of the dramatic to ritual, he engages the participants with his stories and songs and draws them into the world of the divine with his words.

As I see it, the role of the Bard in *Ár nDraíocht Féin* can be many things. They can remind us to not take ourselves too seriously with humorous songs, they can deepen our spiritual understanding and connection to the divine with songs and chants, and they can make ritual enjoyable and memorable with catchy tunes and powerful lyrics. The Bard also serves as a oral historian. While we use the written word in the modern age, the stories are not the same when read as they are when heard or performed. Somehow the stories come to life more effortlessly in the spoken word and if they are written in good prose they are easier to remember.

In my view, the role of the Bard in the Greater Neopagan Community is to act as a representative of ADF. A quality bard should be a scholar as well as a bard, should have some understanding of tact and be capable of employing exceptional social skills, and in general be a paradigm of everything ADF has to offer the Neopagan community. He should also be contributing works to the array of music, stories, and chants already flourishing in the Neopagan subculture. While there are a number of stories, music and chants available in the Neopagan culture there is a dearth of academically accurate pieces available, this is where I feel our Bards should be focusing their attention.

Question 6: Practical Bardry: Compose or find a bardic piece (of any appropriate genre or form) suitable for ADF ritual. Describe the process you used for discovery and/or composition of the piece and how it was (or could be) used effectively in a ritual context. (100 words [text of piece not to be included in word count])

Last year I wrote two liturgical poetic pieces for an ADF “Blessing Way” ceremony. One of the members of our Protogrove was expecting the birth of her daughter and she wanted a blessing done to protect her and the child during the birth process. These are the words I came up with for the rite:

Open Like a Flower

Celebrant: Open like a flower
Celebrant: Bring her in to this earth
Participants: Open like a flower
Celebrant: As you give her birth

³⁴ Knight, Charles. “Knight’s Quarterly Magazine.” 1824: 349.

Participants: Open like a flower
Celebrant: Let her know her kith and kin
Participants: Open like a flower
Celebrant: Let her new life begin

Participants: Open like a flower
Celebrant: Let her be loved among the folk
Participants: Open like a flower
Celebrant: She will grow like a mighty oak

Participants: Open like a flower
Celebrant: Let her sweat smile be seen
Participants: Open like a flower
Celebrant: She'll be treated like a queen

Participants: Open like a flower
Celebrant: She will be your treasure
Participants: Open like a flower
Celebrant: Your love will be unmeasured

May the Way be Ready

Celebrant: May the way be ready,
Celebrant: To receive this child of light.
Participants: May the way be ready,
Celebrant: As we entreat and invite.

Celebrant: May the way be ready,
Participants: Celebrant: Gather together as one folk.
Celebrant: May the way be ready,
Participants: Celebrant: As _____ we invoke.

Participants: May the way be ready,
Celebrant: We call on you young one.
Participants: May the way be ready,
Celebrant: Your new life has begun.

Participants: May the way be ready,
Celebrant: We await you little bloom.
Participants: May the way be ready,
Celebrant: Awaken from the womb.

We did an ADF blessing rite, painted a shield on her belly with "Ancient Blue" and recited these chants to protect her and the child. The blue paint lasted until the birth of her daughter almost two week later.

I feel that we need more rites of passage in ADF. This is a side of our spirituality that hasn't been addressed as fully as I'd like and it is always nice to see liturgy that involve major life events like marriage, birth, death, coming of age, and even divorce.

I also recently wrote a piece which could be used for funerals. It is a poem at the moment but I plan to work it into a song at some point. Again, I feel we need more rites of passage and death is one that people in our culture often avoid dealing with. This piece was recited at Samhain last year for the death of the granddaughter of one of our members.

Earthly Rest

Moist, cool moss and deep, dark shadow;
Beneath the soaring peaks.
Grey-green boughs and lofty treetops;
Where only the Sidhe speak.

Thick, green brush and rich, damp earth;
Beneath the bending limb.
Deep, blue lagoon and laughing waters;
Where the fish and wood ducks swim.

In moist, cool moss and deep, dark shadow;
One day I'll be called to rest.
In thick green brush and rich damp earth;
Within our mother's breast.

And my battered body worn and loved;
Scarred with life's affection.
Will find its peace in the cool embrace;
Of nature's own perfection.

With my burdened soul enlightened;
Freed from earthly form.
I'll soar among the downy clouds;
And ride the raging storm.

In moist, cool moss and deep, dark shadow;
One day I'll be called to rest.
In thick green brush and rich damp earth;
Within our mother's breast.

Describing my process for discovery is tough. I don't usually plan a poem or literary work. When I try to figure out what I want it to say in advance it usually comes out completely different than I expected and often does not accomplish what I had intended.

Usually at least one line, often the first one, comes to mind and then another follows without much effort. After that I may struggle with a line here or there but not for very long. When I get stuck I sometimes make a list of concepts that I want to incorporate and then refer to a rhyming dictionary to find appropriate rhymes for those themes.

I am a major skeptic when people tell me about the divine inspiration they have received for their work so I hesitate to say that this is what is happening. However, it does often seem as though the words are already there just waiting to be transcribed. My execution is sometimes clumsy and the meter is not always right but I can recognize when I got it right as if there was already a definite right way for it to come out.