General Bardic Studies for Liturgists 1

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Question #1: Write two poems of at least 16 lines each appropriate for performance at a High Day ritual. One poem may be in free-verse form, but one must employ some form of meter and/or rhyme. Note in each case for which High Day the poem is intended.

I wrote this poem as a Praise Offering for Alban Arthan (Winter Solstice), which I celebrate as the Feast of Lleu Llaw Gyffes, who was wounded and healed, much as the sun is at that time of year. This piece has both meter and rhyme.

Reborn

The mists roll gently on the land,
Though sun will surely come
To clear the mists and warm the place
Where He is huddled, cold and drear,
In pain and anguished fear.

His heart is broken by Her lies,
His body's broken, too.
He fled and limped upon the wind,
So angry, battered and abused -
So totally confused.

The blows had been so swift and sharp,
His body wracked in pain,
But when His heart was cleaved in two
His inner self was freed to fly
And heed his eagle cry.

And like the sun that weakens as
December comes around,
So, too, did Lleu upon that bough
Grow faint and weak with loss of blood
Shed by His false beloved.

The sun now peeks in through the leaves
And warms His blood a bit.
The sound of movement in the leaves
Below his perch cuts through His fears -
For Gwydion appears!

But springtime sees the sun grow strong,
And so it is with Lleu.
With healing comes His manly shape -
His strength returns with wondrous speed -
He does no longer bleed.

There will be justice for the deed.

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The following poem is written in blank verse and was written as a praise offering for our Samhain ritual. I shall perform it then!

Song of the Daghdha

That really was a lot of food I ate,
They thought that I would be undone, the fools.
But one big belch and I had room for more.
I do so like my porridge full of meat
And one small pit of oats is just enough!

But this young Fomor wench, with lidded eyes
Now looks in my direction – Oh my loins!
My mind now travels down my spine to rest
Where reason leaves and primal lusts reside.
Oh joy! My growing member gains her love!

I cannot think.

It's such a long walk back to our base camp,
And with my member dragging on the ground
Great furrows show the path that I have trod.
My belly is so full it bursts my belt
And rarely have I been so satisfied!

My mission to the Fomor was a flop –
They think that I have left with empty hands.
But sometimes wenches love what I can give
And melt and join my side when I am done.
Upon my face a sly smile slowly spreads.

I'll have her again!

Question #2: Compare and contrast examples from the work of three poets in one cultural tradition from at least two historical eras. (Minimum 300 words of the student's original essay material beyond the verses provided, at least one poem per poet)

The three poets that I am using are from the American cultural tradition. They are Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849), Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892-1950) and Robert Frost (1874-1963). I shall put the poems below first, and the essay shall follow.

Annabel Lee (by Edgar Allan Poe)

It was many and many a year ago,
In a kingdom by the sea,
That a maiden there lived whom you may know
By the name of Annabel Lee; -
And this maiden she lived with no other thought
That to love and be loved by me.

She was a child and *I* was a child,
In this kingdom by the sea,
But we loved with a love that was more than love –
I and my Annabel Lee –
With a love that the wingéd seraphs of Heaven
Coveted her and me.

And this was the reason that, long ago,
In this kingdom by the sea,
A wind blew out of a cloud by night
Chilling my Annabel Lee;
So that her highborn kinsmen came
And bore her away from me,
To shut her up in a sepulcher
In this kingdom by the sea.

The angels, not half so happy in Heaven,
Went envying her and me: -
Yes! that was the reason (as all men know,
In this kingdom by the sea)
That the wind came out of the cloud, chilling
And killing my Annabel Lee.

But our love it was stronger by far than the love
Of those who were older than we –
Of many far wiser than we –
And neither the angels in Heaven above
Nor the demons down under the sea
Can ever dissever my soul from the soul
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee: -

For the moon never beams without bringing me dreams
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;
And the stars never rise but I see the bright eyes
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee;
And so, all the night-tide, I lie down by the side
Of my darling, my darling, my life and my bride
In her sepulcher there by the sea –
In her tomb by the side of the sea.[1]

Moriturus (By Edna St. Vincent Millay)

If I could have
Two things in one:
The peace of the grave,
And the light of the sun;

My hands across
My thin breast-bone,
But aware of the moss
Invading the stone,

Aware of the flight
Of the golden flicker
With his wing to the light;
To hear him nicker

And drum with his bill
On the rotted willow;
Snug and still
On a grey pillow

Deep in the clay
   Where digging is hard,
Out of the way, -
   The blue shard

Of a broken platter –
   If I might be
Insensate matter
   With sensate me

Sitting within,
   Harking and prying,
I might begin
   To dicker with dying.

For the body at best
   Is a bundle of aches,
Longing for rest;
   It cries when it wakes

"Alas, 'tis light!"
   At set of sun
"Alas, 'tis night,
   And nothing done!"

Death, however,
   Is a spongy wall,
Is a sticky river,
   Is nothing at all.

Summon the weeper,
   Wail and sing;
Call him Reaper,
   Angel, King;

Call him Evil
   Drunk to the lees,
Monster, Devil, -
He is less that these.

Call him Thief,
   The Maggot in the Cheese,
The Canker in the Leaf, -
   He is less than these.

Dusk without sound,
   Where the spirit by pain
Uncoiled, is wound
   To spring again;

The mind enmeshed
   Laid straight in repose,
And the body refreshed
   Be feeding the rose, -

These are but visions;
   These would be
The grave's derisions,
   Could the grave see.

Here is the wish
   Of one that died
Like a beached fish
   On the ebb of the tide:

That he might wait
   Till the tide came back,
To see if a crate,
   Or a bottle, or a black

Boot, or an oar,
   Or an orange peel
Be washed ashore….
   About his heel

The sand slips;
   The last he hears
From the world's lips
   Is the sand in his ears.

What thing is little? –
   The aphis hid
In the house of spittle?
   The hinge of the lid

Of the spider's eye
   At the spider's birth?
"Greater than I
   By the earth's girth

Than Mighty Death!"
   All creatures cry
That can summon breath; -
   And speak no lie.

For He is nothing;
   He is less
Than Echo answering
   "Nothingness!" –

Less than the heat
   Of the furthest star
To the ripening wheat;
   Less by far,

When all the lipping
   Is said and sung,
Than the sweat dripping
   From a dog's tongue.

This being so,
   And I being such,
I would liever go
   On a cripple's crutch,

Lopped and felled;
   Liever be dependent
On a chair propelled
   By a surly attendant

With a foul breath,
   And be spooned my food,
Than go with Death
   Where nothing good,

Not even the thrust
   Of the summer gnat,
Consoles the dust
   For being that.

Needy, lonely,
   Stitched by pain,
Left with only
   The drip of the rain

Out of all I had;
   The books of the wise,
Badly read
   By other eyes,

Lewdly bawled
   At my closing ear;
Hated, called
  A lingerer here; -

Withstanding Death
   Till Life be gone,
I shall treasure my breath,
   I shall linger on.

I shall bolt my door
   With a bolt and a cable;
I shall block my door
   With a bureau and a table;

With all my might
   My door shall be barred.
I shall put up a fight,
   I shall take it hard.

With his hand on my mouth
   He shall drag me forth,
Shrieking to the south
   And clutching at the north.[2]

Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening (by Robert Frost)

Whose woods there are I think I know.
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods full up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.[3]

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The two time periods covered in these poems are the early 19th century and the early 20th century. The style of the poems of the two periods is quite apparent, even though the style of Millay's and Frost's poems are also different. Poe uses a very formal metrical system, essentially a tetrameter line (four feet) alternating with a trimeter line (three feet) using anapests (two light stresses followed by a heavy stress) and iambs (a light stress followed by a heavy stress).[4] There are some variations in this rhythm. This system gives the poem a relentless feeling, that of being dragged along, which is appropriate considering that the poem is about the death of a loved one that cannot be avoided, and the author's morbid reaction to it.

Millay's poem is also about death, but its metrical style is quite different from Poe's. She uses dimeter lines (two feet) arranged in 4-line stanzas, and maintains this throughout this rather long poem. While the beat is primarily iambic, there are lame feet scattered throughout. This gives the poem a robust quality, but unlike Poe's, this poem does not seem so relentless, rather more reflective. At times it also takes on a heartbeat quality, appropriate for a poem about death.

The poem by Frost, on the other hand, though roughly of the same time period as Millay's, is far less experimental in feel. Frost uses iambic tetrameter (a light stress followed by a heavy stress arranged in lines of four feet) and four-line stanzas. He also uses quite a bit of rhyme, the first two lines of each stanza rhyming with the fourth line. This pattern can have a singsong effect, and so fits well with the sleepy and contemplative feeling of the poem. Of the three poems, this one does not deal with the subject of death, but rather is more mundane, thought with a meditative quality.

Question #3: Compare and contrast examples from the work of two poets of the same historical era from two different cultural traditions. (Minimum 300 words of the student's original essay material beyond the verses provided at least two poems per poet)

The two poets that I am using are Walt Whitman (American tradition, mid 18th century) and Lewis Carroll (English tradition, 1832-1898). The Whitman poems come from his Leaves of Grass and were written in 1867 and 1881. One of them is quite long, so I will only include the first two sections. The essay will follow the poems below.

You Are Old, Father William (Lewis Carroll)

'You are old, Father William,' the young man said
  'And your hair has become very white;
And yet you incessantly stand on your head –
  Do you think, at your age, it is right?'

'In my youth', Father William replied to his son,
  'I feared it might injure the brain;
But now that I'm perfectly sure I have none,
  Why, I do it again and again.'

'You are old,' said the youth, 'as I mentioned before,
  And have grown most uncommonly fat;
Yet you turned a back-somersault in at the door –
  Pray, what is the reason of that?'

'In my youth', said the sage, as he shook his grey locks,
  'I kept all my limbs very supple
Bu the use of this ointment – one shilling the box –
  Allow me to sell you a couple?'

'You are old,' said the youth, 'and your jaws are too weak
  For anything tougher than suet;
Yet you finished the goose, with the bones and the beak –
  Pray, how did you manage to do it?'

'In my youth', said his father, 'I took to the law,
  And argued each case with my wife;
And the muscular strength, which it gave to my jaw
  Has lasted the rest of my life.'

'You are old,' said the youth, 'one would hardly suppose
  That your eye was as steady as ever;
Yet you balanced an eel on the end of your nose –
  What made you so awfully clever?'

'I have answered three questions, and that is enough,'
  Said his father, 'Don't give yourself airs!
Do you think I can listen all day to such stuff?
  Be off, or I'll kick you down-stairs!'[5]

Jabberwocky (by Lewis Carroll)

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
  Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
  And the mome raths outgrabe.

'Beware the Jabberwock, my son!
  The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!
Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun
  The frumious Bandersnatch!'

He took his vorpal sword in hand:

Long time the manxome foe he sought –
So rested he by the Tumtum tree,
And stood awhile in thought.

And, as in uffish thought he stood,
The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame,
Came whiffling through the tulgey wood,
And burbled as it came!

One, two! One, two! And through and through
The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!
He left it dead, and with its head
He went galumphing back.

'And hast thou slain the Jabberwock?
Come to my arms, my beamish boy!
O frabjous day! Callooh! Callay!'
He chortled in his joy.

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.[6]

I Sing the Body Electric (by Walt Whitman – first two sections only)

1

I sing the body electric,
The armies of those I love engirth me and I engirth them,
They will not let me off till I go with them, respond to them,
And discorrupt them, and charge them full with the charge of the soul.

Was it doubted that those who corrupt their own bodies conceal themselves?
And if those who defile the living are as bad as they who defile the dead?
And if the body does not do fully as much as the soul?
And if the body were not the soul, what is the soul?

2

The love of the body of man or woman balks account, the body itself balks account,
That of the male is perfect, and that of the female is perfect.

The expression of the face balks account,
But the expression of a well-made man appears not only in the face,
It is in his limbs and joints also, it is curiously in the joints of his hips and wrists,
It is in his walk, the carriage of his neck, the flex of his waist and knees, dress does not hide him,
The strong sweet quality he has strikes through the cotton and broadcloth,
To see him pass conveys as much as the best poem, perhaps more,
You linger to see his back, and the back of his neck and shoulder-side.

The sprawl and fullness of babes, the bosoms and heads of women, the
folds of their dress, their style as we pass in the street, the contour
of their shape downwards,
The swimmer naked in the swimming-bath, seen as he swims through
the transparent green-shine, or lies with his face up and rolls
silently to and fro in the heave of the water,

The bending forward and backward of rowers in row-boats, the
horseman in his saddle,
Girls, mothers, house-keepers, in all their performances,
The group of laborers seated at noon-time with their open dinner
kettles, and their wives waiting,
The female soothing a child, the farmer's daughter in the garden or
cow-yard,
The young fellow hoeing corn, the sleigh-driver driving his six horses
through the crowd,
The wrestle of wrestlers, two apprentice-boys, quite grown, lusty,
good-natured, native-born, out on the vacant lot at sundown
after work,
The coats and caps thrown down, the embrace of love and resistance,
The upper-hold and under-hold, the hair rumpled over and blinding
the eyes;
The march of firemen in their own costumes, the play of masculine
muscle through clean-setting trowsers and waist-straps,
The slow return from the fire, the pause when the bell strikes suddenly
again, and the listening on the alert,
The natural, perfect, varied attitudes, the bent head, the curv'd neck
and the counting;
Such-like I love – I loosen myself, pass freely, am at the mother's
breast with the little child,
Swim with the swimmers, wrestle with wrestlers, march in line with
the firemen, and pause, listen, count.[7]

Not Heat Flames Up And Consumes (Walt Whitman)

Not heat flames up and consumes,
Not sea-waves hurry in and out,
Not the air delicious and dry, the air of ripe summer, bears lightly
along white down-balls of myriads of seeds,
Wafted, sailing gracefully, to drop where they may;
Not these, O none of these more that the flames of me, consuming,
burning for his love whom I love,
O none more than I hurrying in and out;
Does the tide hurry, seeking something, and never give up? O I the
same,
O nor down-balls nor perfumes, nor the high rain-emitting clouds,
are borne through the open air,
Any more that my soul is borne through the open air,
Wafted in all directions O love, for friendship, for you.[8]

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Never could two contemporary poets be so different. The verses of Lewis Carroll are whimsical, light-hearted and, to be sure, contrived. The work by Walt Whitman is heavy handed, serious and shouted from the rooftops. A review of *Leaves of Grass,* written in 1867, describes him as being, among many other things, unintelligible.[9] There is no doubt that contemporary society was scandalized by the pure physicality of the work, its sensuous nature and refusal to accept the morality of the time. Even the 1867 reviewer admits the power of the work.

Whitman's work is free verse: non-rhyming and with no obvious meter. The words flow out at the reader in an unremitting stream. But they are also words of power expressing feelings that cannot

be ignored nor sublimated. It is easy to see how modern people, unfamiliar with the easy physical familiarity men had with each other at the time, might think that this work glorifies gay love.

The poems of Lewis Carroll, on the other hand, have distinctive meter and rhyme. In "You Are Old, Father William", Carroll uses tetrameter lines alternating with trimeter lines, and the overall meter is anapestic (two light stresses followed by a heavy one).[10] There are four lines to a stanza and his first and third lines rhyme, as do his second and fourth lines.

Jabberwocky, however, is considered a nonsense poem, though I have found a 'glossary' explaining all the odd words, originally published by Carroll himself. In this, for example, he defines 'brillig' as being "derived from the verb *to bryl* or *broil*, meaning the time of broiling dinner, i.e. the close of the afternoon."[11] The poem is broken into stanzas of four lines each, and the first three lines are in iambic tetrameter (four feet per line, with each foot made up of a light stress followed by a heavy one). The final line is iambic trimeter (with three feet in the line).[12]

Question #4: Compare and contrast two mythological or folkloric tales from two Indo-European cultures. Include a discussion of the use of narrative point-of-view, the element of time, and any relevant issues of religious (or other) bias influencing the narrative. (Minimum 600 words)

The two tales that I am going to use for this question are "Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed[13]" (Welsh) and the tale "The Labor Pains of the Ulaid and the Twins of Macha[14]" (Irish).

The story of the first tale, "Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed," is actually quite complex, and is really two stories in one. Pwyll encounters Arawn, a prince of Annwfn (the Welsh Underworld) and trades places with him for a year, defeating Arawn's mortal enemy and becoming a great friend. But it is the second part of the tale, that of the arrival of Rhiannon into his life and the connection with horses that is of greater interest. One day, while sitting on the Mound of Arberth, Pwyll sees a beautiful maiden riding a white horse nearby. He sends his men out to discover her identity, but though her horse never goes faster than a walk, none can catch up with her. Finally, Pwyll himself tries, and when he also cannot catch up with her, he calls out for her to wait, and she does, saying that she was only needing to be asked. He falls in love with her and the date is set for their wedding, but on the day he foolishly grants a boon to a rival suitor who then demands Rhiannon's hand. She manages to put off the wedding for another year, and she and Pwyll devise a stratagem to win the day. Later, after a few years, she finally has a child. But that night, the baby disappears and the maids blame the mother, claiming that Rhiannon had devoured her own child. In punishment, she is forced to carry visitors to the court on her back from the city gates. The child, meanwhile, turns up in another part of Wales, associated with a monstrous hand that steals a colt every year at Beltane. The child grows up extremely quickly, so that after a few years he is a young man, and his benefactor realizes that the child is the child of Pwyll and Rhiannon, and so the boy is returned to his parents.

In the second tale, "The Labor Pains of the Ulaid and the Twins of Macha," a widower by the name of Crunniuc encounters a mysterious and beautiful woman coming towards him. She settles into his house as though she had always lived there, and she slept with him that night. She brought prosperity with her to the house. Some time later, the Ulaid had a fair and he went up to it, with the woman admonishing him to say nothing foolish. But there, when Crunniuc hears the boast that nothing is as fast as the King's horses, he claims that his wife is that fast. Taken to the King, he is forced to bring her to court to test his boast. Even though she is very pregnant with child, she is not reprieved. She tells the King her name is Macha and races against the King's chariot. Just as she wins the race, she screams and gives birth to a son and a daughter. She curses the men of Ulaid that any who hear her voice, and their descendants, would suffer labor pains for five days and four nights (or four days and five nights) for the next nine generations. Only Cú Chulainn, his women and children did not suffer the curse.

Both of these tales take place over a long period of time, with entire years passing in a single sentence. The Irish tale is quite spare (only two pages in the book), while the Welsh tale is full of

detail and takes up some 20 pages. Both tales are also written in the third person, as though a Bard were performing the tales. There definitely is a Christian gloss on the Welsh tale, as the characters are always saying things like, "I swear to God!" and "May God provide for you, and God's welcome to you." But this tale was only written down (that we know of), around 1300, as the earliest copy we have is from the White Book of Rhydderch (AD 1300-1325).[15] The earliest copy of the Irish "Book of Invasions" that we have is dated to the 12th century CE, but Kenneth Jackson places the formation of the Ulster tradition to between the 2nd century BCE and the 4th century CE.[16] Wales was Romanized, unlike Ireland, and Christianity came earlier to Wales than to Ireland, and when it did arrive in the latter, the monks recorded the old stories with a zeal that the Welsh did not.[17] Many feel that the Irish tales are less tainted with Christianity than the Welsh ones.

Some fascinating comparisons exist between these two tales. The male protagonist in both stories meets and marries a mysterious woman who has otherworldly attributes – Rhiannon rides a horse that cannot be overtaken, and Macha can win a race with a horse drawn chariot. Both men do something foolish – Pwyll accidentally giving Gwawl the right to ask for Rhiannon's hand in marriage, and Crunniuc boasting that his wife can run faster than the King's horses, leaving the women to clean up the mess.

But it is the horse connection that holds the greatest interest. Both ladies are associated with horses in the presence of the King and his grandees. The horse is also associated with sovereignty in both Ireland and Vedic India.[18] Echoes of this must have appeared in the Welsh tale. And there is the theme of "The Adventure of the Mare and the Boy" (*Cyfranc Caseg a'r Mab*),[19] which may have been an older tale than that of "Pwyll". Rhiannon gives birth to a child that is miraculously switched with a colt, which is later given to the boy to raise, and Macha gives birth to twins while racing horses, behaving like a horse.[20] Rhiannon is also forced to carry strangers to the court on her back, like a horse.[21] Rhiannon's horse is described as being 'pale-white, whitish' (*canwelw*) while one of the twin horses, born to Macha, is described as 'grey' (*liath*).[22] Thus, the parallels between these two tales are remarkable.

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[1] Mary Oliver, Rules for the Dance, (New York, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1998), pp. 152-153.
[2] Mary Oliver, pp. 134-139.
[3] Mary Oliver, p. 146.
[4] Mary Oliver, pp. 12-13.
[5] Christopher Ricks, Editor, *The Oxford Book of English Verse*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 475.
[6] Christopher Ricks, pp. 476-477.
[7] Walt Whitman (Emory Holloway, Editor), Leaves of Grass, (Garden City, NY, Doubleday and Co., 1926), pp. 79-80.
[8] Walt Whitman, p. 104.
[9] Robert Buchannan, "Broadway Magazine 1", November 1867, (Sept. 18, 2005), <http://www.whitmanarchive.org/works/leaves/1867/reviews/broadway.html>
[10] Mary Oliver, pp. 12-13.
[11] <http://homepages.math.luc.edu/~vande/jabglossary.html>
[12] Mary Oliver, pp. 12-13.
[13] Patrick K. Ford, Translator and Editor, *The Mabinogi and Other Medieval Welsh Tales*, (Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 1977), pp. 35-56.
[14] Jeffrey Gantz, Translator, *Early Irish Myths and Sagas*, (London, Penguin Books, 1981), pp. 128-129.
[15] Ford, p. 2.
[16] Gantz, pp. 6-8.
[17] Jaan Puhvel, Comparative Mythology, (Baltimore and London, John Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 175.
[18] Ford, p. 9.
[19] Ford, p. 4.
[20] Ford, p. 7.
[21] Ford, p. 52.

[22] Ford, p. 8.