

Cultural Authorship & Technical Aspects in Early Irish Literature

By now you have seen that early Irish tales have rich complexity. Their birth/creation and evolution/transmission somewhere within an oral/manuscript culture gives them depth and breadth not usually found in the works of a single author writing in a constricted time.

These stories may have been passed down with great fidelity. Even so, many filidh/scribes (not quite authors) had the chance to shape and reshape the stories, matching them to the beliefs and concerns of their people. More broadly speaking, cultural characteristics helped to shape these stories. After all, the traits that unified the filidh/scribes were cultural understandings and beliefs. And these cultural characteristics, over time, developed, deepened, and perhaps came into contradiction with earlier character traits.

These tales not only convey cultural meaning (for example, what it takes to be a great warrior) but they reveal a range of structural and technical features that make up the apparent conventions of early Irish storytelling.

In a well thought out and well written essay of at least six pages, identify cultural understandings and conventions imbedded within the tales (some, not all; remember to focus and deepen your discussion; you need not discuss each tale, but you ought to at least touch upon 4 to 6). Suggest ways that these understandings and conventions help us to grasp early Irish culture. Explain how the use of storytelling conventions helps to provide meaning to the tales.

Due September 29