

Gwion Bach



Did he compose poems, songs or stories
before that fateful year in the bleak woods,
beside the cauldron lake - its turbid
undercurrents, its wild birds swooping?

We do not know - he inhabits a name
like a snake inhabits its summer skin.
Just as likely *Cian* as *Gwion* - limping
and heart-sore - the gloomy peasant boy.

Maybe she sent him there - three song
birds as guides - to the cauldron lake,
with the mountains all around. To the
Cailleach perched on the blue monolith.

Unrequited, suspicious of birds, did he bare
his soul to Ceridwen and Tegid? From pity
or in response to omens, did they offer
him employment? 'Stir this', 'fetch that'

for a year and a day. 'I have an ugly son'
she told him, then flinched to look at Gwion
(This he understood - hoof-scarred and
lonely). The brew was acrid - but he stuck

to his task. And the seasons passed -
there beside the pitiless lake, with
the swooping birds, and old man Morda
(made sightless by wild imaginings).

Did he glimpse Creirwy, her long hair and
sweet airs? - perhaps in the woods, or
singing while she bathed. And the witch
looked on, protective and thoughtful.

This much we know - she taught him well
(and grudgingly admired his courage)
Those freezing winter nights - spectres
looming, poisons boiling and frothing,

a year and a day beside the cauldron lake.
Cian or *Gwion* - a gloomy peasant boy? We
don't know, but he stuck to his task, and
history affirms, she taught the poet well.

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