

I am the River, I am the Sea

I am the flower and I am the seed
Round and around, and round again
I am the river and I am the sea
Round and around, and round again
I've been a bird singing alone
A girl in a garden, a flute made of bone
I am a wonder whose source is unknown
Round and around, and round again

I've been imprisoned inside a white hill
Round and around, and round again
I've been a mouse in the wall of the mill
Round and around, and round again
Once in a field I saw a tree
One side was fire, the other was green
I am a leaf swept away on a stream
Round and around, and round again

I was a talker before I could speak
Round and around, and round again
My birth has no hour, no day of the week
Round and around, and round again
I've been a sword gripped by a king
A star in Orion, a bright wedding ring
I've been a hawk with a broken wing
Round and around, and round again

It's I who taught Homer the names of the sea
Round and around, and round again
And I who stole fruit from the tallest of trees
Round and around, and round again
If language is fire, I am the spark
I'll teach the dirt riddles, I'll instruct the dark
For I was a nail in the side of the ark
Round and around, and round again

This is a song inspired by the many "I Am" poems in the Celtic tradition, two of the most famous being the Irish "Song of Amergin" and a poem attributed to the Welsh bard Taliesin. In both poems knowledge of the world is attained through transformation, by a wild magic in which the singer goes beyond metaphor into the bright burning presence of every snowflake and sparrow in creation.

This song also draws on other elements as well, in particular the white hill described at the end of the story "Branwen Daughter of Lyr" (in the Welsh *Mabinogion*) and the burning tree described in "Peredur Son of Evrawg" in the same collection. The otherworld is a constant presence to the Celtic imagination, an understanding perfectly expressed by the tall tree green with leaves on one side and burning with flame on the other. —Jay Leeming