



Forgotten Ground Regained

A Journal of Alliterative Verse

New Series 4, Fall, 2024



## Masthead

Forgotten Ground Regained (ISSN 2996-6353) is owned and edited by Paul Douglas Deane at 183 Millerick Ave., Lawrenceville, New Jersey and published at [alliteration.net](http://alliteration.net). Submissions in or about alliterative verse are welcome.<sup>1</sup> You can email the editor at [pdeane@alliteration.net](mailto:pdeane@alliteration.net).

All works are copyright by their respective authors, who retain all rights.

To join Forgotten Ground Regained's email discussion forum, navigate to the following link: <https://gaggle.email/join/forgotten-ground-regained@gaggle.email>

## Contributors

**Maryann Corbett** is an American poet, winner of the Lyric Memorial Award, the Richard Wilbur Award, and of the Willis Barnstone Translation Prize for her translation of the alliterative Old English poem, *Deor*, which was published in 2009 edition of *The Evansville Review*. She has published a series of collections featuring alliterative verse and many other forms, including *Breath Control*, *Credo for the Checkout Line in Winter*, *Mid Evil*, *Street View*, *In Code*, and *The O In the Air*.

**Simon Corble**, a British playwright and poet, co-created the West End and Broadway hit "The 39 Steps" and is well known in Northern England for his open-air theatre work with Midsommer Actors. His adaptations include "The Woodlanders" and "The Hound of the Baskervilles." He also writes poetry, creates multimedia shows, and launched a podcast in 2021. Currently, he is working on new poetry collections and storytelling projects.

**Paul D. Deane** is a theoretical linguist by training and a poet by avocation. He has published a variety of academic works, including two monographs (*Grammar in Mind and Brain: Explorations in Cognitive Syntax* and *Achieving Equity in Writing*) and articles in various journals including *Educational Psychologist*, *Lingua*, *Cognitive Linguistics*, *Metaphor and Symbolic Activity*, and *Reading and Writing*. He has edited

*Forgotten Ground Regained*, a poetry site devoted to modern English alliterative verse, since 1999.

**Rahul Gupta**, " ..the most accomplished, imaginative, and technically-correct exponent of alliterative verse since Tolkien" (Tom Shippey), PhD Ebor. on alliterative poetics, has published poems, prose, and verse-translations in journals such as *Agenda*, *Long Poem Magazine*, *Temenos*, *Spectral Realms*, *Society of Classical Poets*, and anthologies including *Speculative Poetry and the Modern Alliterative Revival* (Fairleigh Dickinson, 2023) alongside C. S. Lewis and Auden. His main work is an Arthuriad in Old English- and Norse versifications.

**J.D. Harlock** is a Syrian-Lebanese-Palestinian writer and editor based in Beirut. In addition to their work at *Solarpunk Magazine*, as a poetry editor, and at *Android Press*, as an editor, J.D. Harlock's writing has been featured in *Strange Horizons*, NYU's *Library of Arabic Literature*, and the *SFWA Blog*.

**Michael Helsem** writes, "Blurbwise I usually go with: "M.H. was born in Dallas in 1958. Shortly thereafter, fish fell from the sky." He is author of *Raps Clack Calcspar*, *Woofus Takes*, and *Palestinian Penalties*.

**Kathryn Ann Hill** is a copyeditor and a writer of Christian verse with a focus on the Incarnation and the Sacraments. She has published over ninety poems in various publications and eight books of verse, five of those containing (mostly) alliterative verse on Biblical themes: *The Song of Joseph and Selected Poems*, *The Song of Daniel and Selected Poems*, *Tree of Life: Sixty Poems from Twelve Years*, *A Verse Vigil and Selected Poems*, and *Now God Is Flesh: Poems and Pictures for Christmastide*.

**Ian Holt** is a long-term member of *Ɖa Engliscan Gesiðas* (The English Companions), a British historical society, with interests in English history, music and literature. He previously published two alliterative verse poems in *Wiðowinde*, a quarterly journal published by *Ɖa Engliscan Gesiðas*.

---

<sup>1</sup> Note: Editors usually mark the caesura, or break between half-lines, by adding extra space. However, in the Old English manuscripts the caesura (when marked) was indicated by a small, raised dot, or *conus*. Therefore, in

poems where the poet chose to mark the caesura, I prefer to use the *conus* where no other punctuation is present, unless the form of the poem makes another format more effective, or the author specifically directed otherwise.

## Forgotten Ground Regained: A Journal of Alliterative Verse

**Cassidy McFadzean** is the author of three books of poetry: *Crying Dress, Drolleries* (shortlisted for the Raymond Souster Award), and *Hacker Packer*, which won two Saskatchewan Book Awards and was a finalist for the Gerald Lampert Memorial Award. She holds an MFA in poetry from the Iowa Writers' Workshop and an MFA in fiction from Brooklyn College. Her MA thesis *Riddlehoard*, a collection of riddles in alliterative verse, was awarded the Governor General's Academic Gold Medal from the University of Regina.

**Alex Rettie** writes from Calgary, Alberta. He has poems in or forthcoming from *Passengers Journal*, *SoFloPoJo*, *The Rush*, *New Verse Review*, and *The Borough*.

**Jeff Sypeck** is a medievalist, writer, and translator. His works include *Becoming Charlemagne: Europe, Baghdad, and the Empires of A.D. 800* and a translation of *The Tale of Charlemagne and Ralph the Collier*.

**Thaliarchus** is the pen name of a British scholar of Middle English. His major poetic project is a mecha space opera/epic poem, *Cosmic Warlord Kin-Bright*, published on the gaming site, itch.io. It is primarily in blank verse, but characters from one of the cultures in conflict in his epic sometimes speak in alliterative verse [it forms their highest register]. He also posts occasional experiments in alliterative verse to his cohost site.

**Martin Kennedy Yates** was born on Merseyside and raised in the Black Country region of the English Midlands. He is an emerging poet who has had work in recent editions of *The Rialto*, *Stand*, *Poetry Wales*, *Butcher's Dog*, *Anthropocene*, *Ink Sweat & Tears*, *The Storms*, *Finished Creatures*, *The Alchemy Spoon*, *The Madrigal*, and *Magma*.

### Table of Contents

<u>Introduction</u> .....	3
<u>Maryann Corbett</u> ,	
<u>The Translator, Working Late</u> .....	4
<u>Michael Helsem, Iftar</u> .....	4
<u>Alex Rettie, The Future</u> .....	4
<u>Kathryn Ann Hill, Elizabeth and Darcy</u> .....	4
<u>Thaliarchus, Farewell</u> .....	5
<u>Paul D. Deane</u> ,	
<u>Excerpt from Redemption of Daeron</u> .....	5
<u>Jeff Sypeck, Entreating a Sick Kitten</u> .....	6
<u>Ian Holt</u> ,	
<u>Mild Soul of Mine [After Camoes]</u> .....	6
<u>Cassidy McFadzean</u> ,	
<u>Leave her and She Swells</u> .....	6
<u>Simon Corble</u> ,	
<u>introduction to Sir Gawain and the Green Knight:</u>	
<u>A Verse Drama</u> .....	7
<u>Excerpt: The Girdle Scene</u> .....	9
<u>Martin Kennedy Yates</u> ,	
<u>What Causes Sir Gawain to Go at a Gallop</u> .....	11
<u>Tha Spawnen a Scousenish</u> .....	13
<u>Scousenish a-singen</u> .....	18
<u>Scousenish a-fallan lufen</u> .....	18
<u>Scousenish an Scarren Yaweth</u> .....	18
<u>Paul D. Deane</u> ,	
<u>Varieties of Alliterative Meter</u> .....	19
<u>Poetry and Book Links Added</u> .....	22
<u>Links to Online</u>	
<u>Performances/Translations</u> .....	23
<u>Links to Alliterative Verse in Blogs</u> .....	23
<u>Call for Submissions</u> .....	24
<u>J.D. Harlock, To Consecrate Our Calamities,</u>	
<u>To Commemorate This Carnage</u> .....	25
<u>Rahul Gupta</u> ,	
<u>Spawn of the Lightning: An Army</u>	
<u>of Hallowe'en Toadstools</u> .....	26



## INTRODUCTION

In my call for submissions, I told interested poets that I wanted to see poems that explored themes of love, devotion, and desire. I got quite a bit that fit that description, but few of them were unalloyed love poems. Most had negative undertones — grief, regret, fear ... Maybe I should have expected that — after all, country songs are like that, too. But I was, nonetheless, surprised to discover so many poems that fit right into the conversation started by such Old English poems as ‘Wolf and Eadwacer’ and ‘The Wife’s Lament’. And in fact, the first poem in the set, Maryann Corbett’s “The Translator, Working Late” directly addresses the wife of “The Wife’s Lament”, saying “I get you, girl.” While the occasion for the Old English poem is an (erstwhile) romance, Corbett’s poem itself focuses on an experience of grief and loss, shared across the centuries.

The more-or-less-but-not-quite love poems include Michael Helsem’s “Iftar”, which reads like an elegy for the moment in which people do not quite connect, Alex Rettie’s “The Future”, in which the lovers seem intent on preserving a *memento mori* instead of a selfie, Ian Holt’s “Mild Soul of Mine”, which captures a lover’s grief in an alliterative translation of a Camoes sonnet, Kathryn Ann Hill’s “Elizabeth and Darcy”, with a rhetorical question for Jae Austen’s “Gentle Reader”, Cassidy McFadzean’s Old English style riddle, “Love her and she swells”, and Jeff Sypeck’s “Entreating a Sick Kitten”, in which compassion does not exactly get its just reward.

Similar themes carry through in the two longer narrative selections in this issue. The excerpt from my Tolkien fan poem, “The Redemption of Daeron”, explores how grief and unrequited love can block the ability to live and love beyond the moment of loss. Simon Corble’s excerpt from his dramatic version of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, on the other hand, explores love as a trap, in which Sir Gawain’s attempt to live by the ideals of courtly honor becomes a foxhunt in which he is the fox, and a lady’s green girdle becomes the snare his very courtesy makes it impossible for him to evade.

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight also provides the occasion for the first article in the collection: Martin Kennedy Yates’ love song to that Middle English poem, in the form of an article on that poem’s alliterative meter and four alliterative poems set in an invented Midlands dialect that illustrate the rhythm

and the sensations produced by reading a poem in a half-familiar tongue.

The second article in the issue is one of mine, in which I present medievalist scholar Geoffrey Russom’s theory of alliterative meter and develop its implications for modern English alliterative verse. Russom argues that poetry has a natural connection to the normal rhythms and structures of the language, and when inherited forms fail to match the living language, they risk obsolescence. That is his explanation for the death of alliterative meter in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, but it also suggests a path forward for modern English alliterative verse.

The above sequence of poems and articles caps off the thematic content of the issue. But they do not complete the content I have to offer. After I provide links to a variety of alliterative poems published in journals, books and blogs, and present my new Call for Submissions, I include two more poems, designed to remind the reader of poetry’s connection to our larger world.

In the first such offering, I reprint J.D. Harlock’s alliterative free verse poem “To Consecrate our Calamities, to Commemorate This Carnage”. Coming from a Lebanese/Syrian/Palestinian writer in this current age of conflict, the poem serves to place a dark underline beneath the more personal pains of romantic love. Love – whether joyful or grieving – must somehow survive in a world beset by dictators, genocidal assaults, and wars of conquest and domination.

And finally, in honor of the season, I present a revised and expanded excerpt from the Autumn sequence in Rahul Gupta’s ongoing *Arthuriad*. This excerpt explores images of death and decay amid the falling leaves of Autumn. It illustrates the continuing power of pure Old English meter, and creates an incantatory, dream-like effect in which one image is piled on top of another, as autumn trends inexorably toward winter.

This issue marks the first full year in which I have been publishing regular quarterly issues. Over the course of the year, we have met some of the most creative poets writing in modern English alliterative verse and discovered hidden gems – poetry that has been buried in the back of old magazines, or even (in the case of Pat Masson’s “A Lay of St. Boniface”) in a private memorial booklet, for the last twenty to fifty years. Now they are yours to enjoy.



New Series 4, Fall, 2024:

Thaliarchus  
Farewell

Catch-pair at bus stop · kiss with abandon,  
two youths parting · though yearning for longer  
in bold-clutch to abide. Now bites clock-hand:  
bus must go faring, bearing to hamlet,  
to countryside halls, county's shoppers,  
shunted by weekend. Now short grows queue,  
woeful the love-pair. Winters not many  
spot-sporting bucks (now spinning close)  
together can muster. For them gapes week-span,  
seven-days solo. They see not the griefs  
of the brim-years ahead: break-ups stormy,  
lust-links competing, loneliness tangled,  
sorrow not little. Sink not to laughter,  
for life is lent · leaf-short and waning:  
queue questions us — all quail answering —  
in blinking years · did we bliss grapple,  
taking our timings · like these teens wit-wise?

Paul D. Deane  
Excerpt from The Redemption of Daeron

Slowly she stepped back, broke  
His arms' encirclement, raised both wrists  
To hold her hair back from her face.  
'Alas, my lord, my tale is not full told;  
Nor have I named my folly fully  
Yet:  
-- I dare to dream again, you see, --  
-- And now my heart is set --  
On thee.'

'How can I help myself, silence  
My heart? How then deny what now  
Pulls me apart? Pity me, pardon me,  
Call me half-crazed: dazed or a dreamer,  
I plead no defense!  
-- Either fate made me love you, --  
-- Or lack of sense!' --

'I have sense though to see your courage to care!  
For where would I be now if grief and despair  
Were as strong in your soul as they seem in your words?  
How can I help that my heartstrings are stirred  
Like a harp in your hand, like the wind of your voice?  
How can I stand  
-- What a heart strung with steel --  
-- could hardly withstand?' --

'How long, my lord, will dreams be your drink,  
Your food a fantasy of love, your life  
An echo of passions past?  
I am, I live, I love! Touch me, I tremble!  
Speak, and I hear!  
-- Forsake the dark waters! --  
-- Leave Death on her bier!' --

He stood as still as absence. Over them  
The moments moved like sails against the sun  
Where red horizons run past solemn seas.  
Her face before him oval might have veiled  
The moon, or mirrored in his eyes  
Become a pale yet perfect star.  
Time changed: his fingers framed her cheeks,  
His lips burned lightly on her brow  
And head,  
-- and all else stopped --  
-- until he said: --

'Nèhaléni, no: you ask too much  
.Is there love after Lúthien? I cannot stretch so far  
Past hurt with a heart so scarred, and numb.  
Perhaps - perhaps - yet I stumble on old griefs,  
Pick my way past painful reefs of memory  
And find myself a stranger to the scenery of joy.  
Passionate, compassionate, beautiful, brave,  
Thou art these and more. If only --  
No, Nèhaléni! Raise your child,  
May life and laughter piled together  
Be your blessing whether I am far  
Or near -- enough, I cannot face farewells.  
Take this, for thou wilt keep it well,  
For mirth, for merriment, for celebration  
While healing years and seasons turn,  
-- and then, perhaps, --  
-- my heart return,' --

She felt his hand upon hers, felt  
Something light, metallic slide there  
As she blinked back tears. He turned:  
She stared irresolute.  
-- He was gone, so she stood there, --  
-- And cradled his flute. --

\*\*\*\*\*



## Forgotten Ground Regained: A Journal of Alliterative Verse

Jeff Sypeck

### Entreating a Sick Kitten

I was maybe eleven, a little like you are,  
Slight, apprehensive, and slow to catch on,  
When I pestered the lady who lived at the corner.  
Her husky stayed leashed in its hutch around back.  
She was portly and balding, and patient the mornings  
I crept to her stoop, to the creche where a cat  
In the warm, earthen emptiness under the steps  
Of her tidy blue porch had just pushed out a litter.  
My change jar bought her a bag of kibble,  
And I waited and watched when she went to her daughter's.  
The paper reprinted my proud little letter;  
It emphasized mercy for elders and strays.  
Pretending they brightened the teardown next door  
Where they gathered for Christmas, I gave them names,  
Saintly demeanors, and simple ambitions,  
Then I drew up their story all stapled and taped  
In a book to present to my baffled parents,  
My teacher's suggestion.

And just up the block  
Were the scraps of a family. The father framed homes.  
He returned every night to a timorous wife  
In an overcome shack. Disheveled, their progeny  
Roamed off the premises, ragged and vacant.  
Not knowing who did it, the dog or the brothers,  
I knew those four kittens, and knelt for a look:  
A gray one, two tabbies, one tiny and black  
With a fine white tuft at the top of his chest.  
He looked like you. You look like him.  
Their heads were off, or hanging by fur,  
And their limbs were a mangle of leftover bones.  
I rode my bike home, and I wrote no more stories  
And minded my summertime safely indoors.

We all want the refuge of eight idle weeks  
But the lingering wastes us. Go lunge at your sister.  
Explore past the kitchen and keep down your breakfast.  
Abandon your box and go bat at a spider.  
Be lighter of bowels, be bolder of purpose  
And nod off in sunbeams, and never go out.  
Let's work out your poem: You pick yourself up.

Your paws as you're trotting will trigger a meter,  
Staggered and varied but steady of feet.  
When I lift you a little to leap on your own,  
We can look for deliverance in loftier matter  
And end the turn on an easy landing,  
No breathless inflection or flourish of rhyme,  
Just a practical phrasing that promises more.  
You hold the form. I'll fake the rest.

Ian Holt

### Mild Soul of Mine [After Camoes]

Mild soul of mine who meekly went forth  
Too soon from this world, full of sorrows,  
Have your rest now in Heaven's haven,  
While I wait on earth, weeping endlessly.  
If on Heaven's throne whence you were hauled  
A souvenir of this life be somehow vouchsafed,  
Forget not that fire of love that fired so bright  
Which you saw in my eyes shining so fiercely/  
If you should see something of the sadness,  
My longing and the lifelong grief of losing you  
Merits mention or, perhaps, memory,  
Pray to God who preyed on your poor life,  
That he lift me from this life to look on you again.

Cassidy McFadzean

### Leave her and she swells<sup>8</sup>

What maiden speaks · in murmurs, moans  
as you hold her curved · round waist, salivates  
as you caress her neck, clasping her buffed skin,  
filling her drawn lips? Leave her and she swells.  
She trembles and sighs · seething in slow suspense,  
rumbling in fury and · raising hot breath.  
She foams at the mouth, frothy, back arched  
before squealing out, singing a sweet song,  
heaving and gratified, full-fed, released.  
But study her shape · and she shies, ceases  
her cooing and calms, clearing like the sky  
after a stormy fog, wavesilent, still.  
Who is this creature? Call out her name.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Originally published in Cassidy C. McFadzean (2012), *Riddlehoard* (M.A. thesis, University of Regina), <https://instrepo->

[prod7.cc.uregina.ca/server/api/core/bitstreams/852525a6-2c99-4eb2-8dee-b879e5fdal62/content](https://instrepo-)

<sup>9</sup> How would you answer this riddle? Does it refer to a woman in the throes of passion, or a teakettle boiling water?



Simon Corble

*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: A Verse Drama*

**Editor's Note:**

*I am happy to present to readers of Forgotten Ground Regained an excerpt from Simon Coble's adaptation of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight into an alliterative verse drama. The excerpt – necessarily short – focuses on one of the key scenes in the play. Sir Gawain has been staying at a castle – which is, unbeknownst to him, the stronghold of the Green Knight with whom he made a very unfortunate bet. He must find the Green Knight before New Years Day, in order to give the Green Knight the chance to return what Gawain gave him at the start of the poem: a blow with a powerful axe, which the Green Knight magically survived. In the scene I excerpt in this journal, Gawain is being tempted and tested by the Green Knight, Sir Bertilak's, wife. Thus far he has successfully resisted temptation, like a fox evading the hounds, even as Sir Bertilak has been absent from the castle hunting lesser prey. And so the Green Knight's wife, whom the play names Alison, must find a way to get past his guard.*

**From Simon Corble's Introduction**

*The making of the verse-play.*

Deeply inspired by reading the narrative poem in its original form, in 1991 I set about creating a theatrical version of the tale that would carry its flavour, its grit, its Northwest-of-England accents and its beautiful poetic textures. The mythical power of the central story, with its beheading, Sir Gawain's quest, his trials and temptations needed no elaboration. I was writing for a promenade form of theatre, however and for a production that would be staged throughout the Summer of 1992 and so I worked up a script that would work for this unique form of theatre, which I had pioneered with my company, Midsommer Actors in 1990.

Our first production was Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, staged on a tidal island close to Liverpool, in which the tide itself was an actor and the audience physically followed the action around the small island of Hilbre, from clifftop to beach, to cave and, finally, back over the sands once the waters had fully receded. For what was to be our fourth outing, 'Gawayne and the Green Knight', the setting became the very hills, rock formations and woodlands which I felt were very much in the original poet's imagination, those of the North of England – a far wilder place in the Middle Ages than we see today, but the major landscape features still remain.

Many years later, I had the chance to work on the play afresh, for an indoor production, with an audience in-the-round and staged during mid-

Winter, (when most of the action is set). This 2014 version, staged at the O'Reilly Theatre, Keeble College, Oxford, really gets to the heart of the story, for me; it plays up the power of the natural world and the season around Christmas and New Year, while preserving what was powerful in my original version – the language, the alliterative poetry, the physical rough-and-tumble and the all-important music.

I came to see what I was creating as, almost, 'a medieval musical' – that is, a 'musical' supposing the 14th/15th centuries had such a term. The alliterative style of verse I was using, was not only the same as the original poem, but identical to the form used in some of the Medieval mystery plays and we had sourced all of the music from those centuries too.

The Oxford University production used large puppets for the Green Knight and various animals, which was highly effective and theatrical, but most of all I was delighted by the way the script sounded in the mouths of the actors, right from the first read-through. I had worked very hard on revising the verse – to make its rhythms and textures, rather than any landscape, do much of the theatrical work and it was a real thrill to hear these new, young voices bring it to life.

*The Vocabulary*

I have been deliberately free-and-easy and sometimes downright cheeky in my choice of words. One moment I am quoting from the original poem as closely as I can without losing clarity, the next I am throwing in a modern-sounding phrase like "handsome hunk". While I wanted to celebrate the music and rich texture of the original poem, I was also very aware of how the anonymous author was, in his own time, incorporating relatively fresh words like "adventure" into a work that was attempting to sound like it came from an earlier tradition, pre-Norman conquest. I can also remember studying Chaucer for the first time, and coming across "gear" used for clothing; I only knew this as a modern slang term. The English language has been fantastically fluid and flexible, (adoring alliteration) throughout its evolution and I saw no reason to break with this proud tradition for a work of living, breathing theatre. What has happened, as the play's script has evolved before different audiences, is for the more startling modernisms to be swept up into passages of fast-flowing speech, or for them to be reserved for more light-hearted moments, (as, for example, "handsome hunk ") or for more 'comic' characters.

Any true scholars of Middle English, on reading this text, will consider that certain passages of poem have been mistranslated before being included in the

## Forgotten Ground Regained: A Journal of Alliterative Verse

script. Once again, I have been far more interested in re-creating something of the music of the original language, for dramatic effect, aiming less for absolute accuracy in my translation; that is a different agenda.

### *The Verse Form*

The text of the play follows the same form as the original poem, which was very much a part of the regional revival of an older style, with roots in Old English forms. There are four heavy stresses in each line, three of which usually alliterate with each other, (normally the first three). The heavy stresses can occur just about anywhere in the line - it might be the first syllable, or it might be five or six syllables in before you meet the first heavy stress. There can be as many unstressed or lightly stressed syllables as required, with or without alliteration. Sometimes all the heavy stresses alliterate, for added emphasis; sometimes the pattern of the line is back to front, and at others there are two alliterating pairs; finally, there are a few lines that break all the rules, or mightily bend them, (just as there are in the original).

The important thing for the actor is to find the four stresses, using the alliterative principle as a guide – and then to relax completely and forget all about the verse. There are often some interesting creative decisions to be made in choosing the stressed syllables. The effect desired of the whole thing is for it to sound like a rhythmic yet very natural form of speech.

Also note that:

- The alliterative rule allows all stressed initial vowels to go together - e.g.  
*But the answer's an object, or else there's no prize.*
- And words beginning with “h” are also counted as vowels – e.g.  
*What! Is this Arthur's house, of honour renowned...?*
- “r” and “w” also count as a match – e.g.  
*What ransom would be right to win your release?*
- Here and there I “cheat” a little, mixing a “ch” with a “c”, for example. But there is not really such a thing as cheating, as the style offers such freedom; it's a case of whatever sounds right for the moment.

For variety, every so often the poem – and my play's text – throws up a little “bob” – a very short “line” of two syllables, which is linked to a “wheel” of four lines having three heavy stresses; these rhyme with each other, as well as with the “bob”. The pattern will become clear on reading. I have tried to use this technique to the same dramatic effect as in the original, employing it at moments of high tension, or in summing-up a piece of action; (interestingly,

the same is used in the verse of some medieval mystery plays, written at about the same period).

For this published version, I have reshaped the stage directions into the same verse-style. They might be read aloud at a reading of the play but are not intended to be voiced during a full performance.

*Simon Corble, September 2024.*

---

### A selection from reviews of the original production, 1992

*“Inspiration obviously dropped on Simon Corble like manna...a delightful mix of hearty modern idiom and extremely pleasing verse, that captures the rhythm and dialect of the original with great cheer and sensitivity.”*

*The Guardian* - Francesca Turner

*“...the alliterative language rang out, full-bodied...plenty of north-western accents...Not only was the play evocative - it was also funny and I was delighted that Simon Corble's script avoided being po-faced and worthy about the story...work of real imagination and quality...”*

*Pendragon Magazine* - Richard Steadman-Jones

*“...a skilful weaving of the elements of intrigue, myth, humour and suspense.”*

*Halifax Evening Courier* - Margaret Woods

*“...the most unusual and adventurous slice of theatre you are likely to see this summer.”*

*Manchester Evening News* – Alan Hulme.



Photo by Michael Pollard



New Series 4, Fall, 2024:

[The scene is Sir Gawain's bedchamber in the Castle of Beaudessert. It is early morning, Sir Gawain and the Lady Alison, (his host's wife) are alone. In a parallel setting, The Hunt, led by Lord Bertilak, are pursuing a fox through the forest.]

**GAWAIN:**  
*A kiss then, come.*

They kiss a second time; a cool one from Sir Gawain.

**ALISON:**  
*I know you may not in naked words speak;  
But I've heard enough half-truth to hazard a guess  
That your mission tomorrow has more than a little  
To bear on your being in such a bad mood  
With me:  
You love me – that I know;  
Its truth is plain to see;  
And I love you, what though  
Our fates are far from free.*

And Alison gets up to go, but go quite, she can't.

*My love, before I leave, let me have something;  
Any gift thou canst give; a glove, or anything,  
That I might remember and mourn thee less.*

**GAWAIN:**  
*I wish I had with me, well – what might I wish for? ...  
The loveliest thing in the land, my lady;  
For you deserve, for sooth, simply and fairly,  
More reward by rights than my reach can grasp.  
I am here on an errand in unknown lands  
And I brought no baggage to burden myself.  
And miserable as it makes me, to be so mean as this  
Yet a man must make the most of a lot  
like mine –*

**ALISON:**  
*Don't worry, you have no cause,  
It shall not make me pine;  
Though I have nothing of yours,  
Yet you shall have nothing of mine.*

*Receive thou this rich ring, or red-gold works,  
With a star-like stone standing aloft,  
That bears blushing beams, bright as the sun.*

**GAWAIN:**  
*O I wot<sup>10</sup> well it is worth a wealth full huge,  
Yet I am loath<sup>11</sup>, my love, and reluctant, you see,  
For I'll gather no gifts of gold at this time,*

*Having nothing of merit to name in return.*

**ALISON:**  
*Well, if you refuse my richest ring,  
As you'd not be so highly beholden to me,  
I shall give thee my girdle of greenest silk;  
Though it were unworthy, I wish thee to have it.*

**GAWAIN:**  
*No, no, I cannot - I know you'll understand –  
Neither gold nor silk of green, as God gives me grace,  
Before I have faced the fate He has framed,  
And achieved my goal at that Chapel of Green.  
For secrecy's sake, explain it, I can't.  
Therefore, now, I pray you, displease you nought;  
And, Alison, please...promise to probe no deeper.  
Nor foist on me further; for refuse you I must,  
Again.  
I am down as already your debtor,  
For all of the favours you've given  
And shall be your servant forever;  
On Earth, in Hell, or in Heaven.*

**ALISON:**  
*Now forsake you this silk – forsooth? I suppose,  
In itself it is simple; at least, it seems so.  
Lo! It's so little; the least thing of worth.  
But if a man were made 'ware of the magic herein,  
Then pr'aps he would prize it expensive and rare.*

**GAWAIN:**  
*Magic? What magic do you mean, my lady?*

**ALISON:**  
*If a guy is girded with this green lace,  
As long as he clasps it closely about him,  
No arm on earth may hack him to death  
With steel, nor slay him, by sleight, at all.*

**GAWAIN:**  
*Well, isn't that interesting?... Incredible almost.  
I mean, wouldst thou have thought such a thing had power?*

**ALISON:**  
*And I wanted you to wear it, Wawen, for mi<sup>12</sup> sake,  
But I understand, if your honour's upset...*

**GAWAIN:**  
*No, wait.  
If you make me, I'll have it – it might come in handy –  
Who knows?*

Sir Gawain takes hold of one end of the silk.  
The hunt is now here, as if on cue.

---

<sup>10</sup> wot: to know, 1st person singular, present tense. From the original poem and generally in Middle English. From Old English 'witan' to know.

<sup>11</sup> loath: unwilling. To rhyme with "both".

<sup>12</sup> Mi: my. With short vowel, as in "hit". Northern English dialect & in the original poem.



## Forgotten Ground Regained: A Journal of Alliterative Verse

### HUNT (Chorus):

To hear then the hounds, the heart was made glad.  
The main pack now meet him, merging together;  
Such insults were slung him, like stones at his head,  
As all the clambering cliffs had clattered in heaps –  
“Halloo! Halloo!” the hunters all holler,  
Threat upon threat and “Thief! Thief!”

### ALISON:

But be careful good Gawain  
And see that no one knows;  
Fasten it in such fashion  
That not a shred of it shows.

She lets go her end of the magic green girdle.

### GAWAIN:

But, Alison, by mine honour, I have an agreement –

### ALISON:

No – No one must know! Especially – Not my husband.  
Tha'<sup>13</sup> must hide it from him, or he'll suspect.

### GAWAIN:

Suspect what, my lady? Woman! – What are you saying?

### ALISON:

If he found that we'd flirted – well, as far as this,  
His jealousy would drive him to a dreadful rage;  
Thy life, thy limb, my love could not save.  
I know him. He is noble, yet he's not all he seems.

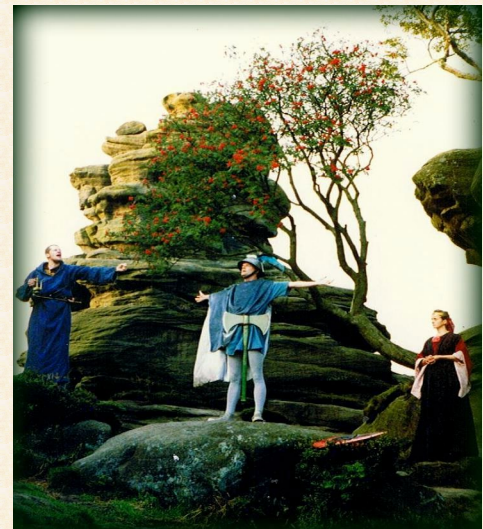
### GAWAIN:

Oh, Alison. Oh Angel. By all that is holy!

And Gawain holds Alison to himself, as the huntsmen are running:

### HUNT:

With the trailers at his tail, he's no time to tarry;  
Oft he is run at, yet Reynard<sup>14</sup> runs onward!  
The lord and his men are left limping behind  
And on in this manner; from morning while<sup>15</sup> noon,  
They run and they run....and run again! [They are gone]



Photos by Michael Pollard

<sup>13</sup> Tha': thou. Used to friends, loved ones, children and anyone of lower status.

<sup>14</sup> Reynard: traditional name for the fox, also from the original poem.

<sup>15</sup> while: until. Northern dialect; as in, “The shop is open nine while five”.

Martin Kennedy Yates

### What causes Sir Gawain to go at a gallop

*A practice-based study of accentual alliterative narrative verse*

By the end of my first reading of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, in the Simon Armitage translation, I was enchanted. I was predisposed to connecting with this poem; my parents are North Staffordshire folk as were their predecessors going back several generations, and I have lived and worked in the North and West Midlands for most of my life.

*but fear not, friends, for in time,*

However, it wasn't primarily the location or even the tale that had enchanted me, so much as its telling – not its mythology, but its meter. My second encounter was in reading aloud the Middle English original, in Barron's edition. As I intoned it – in my West Midlands accent – I felt increasingly that I was riding the galloping steed of its rhythms and alliterations like some novice knight, clippetty-clopping and clunking and clanking in my shiny new armour, as yet unspurred, and yet spurred on by the fantastic hoofbeat of its verse.

My fascination grew as I discovered the elegance of Tolkien's translation, the measured music of Borroff's, and the contemporary lyricism of O'Donoghue's. With each reading I knew that I must investigate the metrical, rhythmic and phonological delights of this poem and its oeuvre. In this relatively short practice-based study, I will focus closely on the nature of accentual alliterative narrative verse. More specifically, first in Gawain, then in my own verse, I am keen to explore the alliterative tetrameter – the metrical muscle of this majestic narrative poem.

My decision to take a practice-based approach is motivated by a desire to develop my own writing with a greater consciousness of tradition. T.S. Eliot appealed for writers and critics to do this:

This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of

his place in time, of his own contemporaneity.<sup>16</sup>

As I embarked on my alliterative writing adventure, I began to research Gawain and Middle English verse to discover what lay behind the dynamism and energy of this poem that had so captivated me. As I read, I kept writing in the belief that my study would inspire my poetry and in turn that my poetry would inform my study.

Through this simultaneous process, I began to perceive what it was about the meter and rhythm that had taken me on that galloping adventure. First, it was simply the rejection of end-rhyme and the embracing of alliteration. The force and flow of Middle English alliterative verse is hugely enhanced by its non-rhyming nature and the ease with which the telling of the tale can gallop on from one line into the next unhindered by the phonological hurdle of a rhyme scheme. Marie Borroff sees it as a straight swap: 'Both Old French and accentual Latin verse are of course characterised by end-rhyme, which corresponds as a formal constituent to alliteration in Old English verse.'<sup>17</sup>

I began to understand that it was the muscularity of the accentual alliterative verse that had carried me along so powerfully. In comparison, I was beginning to feel that end-rhyme could seem rather ineffectual, especially when telling a tale. If alliteration with its varying degrees of accentuated stress is muscular and sinuous, then end-rhyme is somewhat decorative and cosmetic. Alliteration works constantly within the line, dynamic and integral, running through the poem manipulating its movement. Whereas end-rhyme seems passive and peripheral, sitting at the end of the line, waiting, always confined to the poem's outer edge.

However, there wasn't just muscularity – there was flexibility – because whilst the accented syllables were counted there remained a lack of restriction on the numbers of unaccented syllables. This allowance, in the long line of alliterative poetry, offers a variety of metrical possibilities and of line-lengths, enabling the poet to alter the pace and rhythm of the gallop and to slow it to a canter or trot at any given point. This is especially important in a poem of over 2,500 lines in order to 'prevent the verse

---

<sup>16</sup> T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," *The Egoist*, September 1919.  
<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/69400/tradition-and-the-individual-talent>

<sup>17</sup> Marie Borroff, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: A Stylistic and Metrical Study* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 145.



from falling into a monotonous “dog-trot” rhythm<sup>18</sup> or conversely, to prevent it from galloping on when it doesn’t suit the nature of the narrative.

This discovery revived my interest in Hopkins’s notion of ‘sprung rhythm’ which had derived at least in part from Medieval verse. Re-reading *The Wreck of the Deutschland*, and a selection of his lyric poems, reminded me of the dynamism made possible when we reject the strictures of syllable-counting in favour of a measured accentual form that is sensitive to the patterns of speech.

However, I was soon to make a further discovery that would transform my appreciation of accentual alliterative verse and my efforts to write it. In Borroff’s 1962 study of the meter and style of Gawain, and in the appendix that follows her 1967 translation, she explains further variations and irregularities in the metrical pattern: ‘I have spoken of four “clearly predominant” stresses as constituting the basic form of the line. There are many lines, however, which contain stressed syllables above and beyond the basic four.’<sup>4</sup> Borroff’s approach to the meter of Sir Gawain recognizes a subtlety of sound-patterning that allows for varying degrees of weight or stress on some syllables that are neither fully stressed, nor completely unstressed. It is for this reason that Borroff, in her metrical analysis of Gawain, replaces the conventional terms ‘accented’ and ‘unaccented’ – or ‘stressed/unstressed’ – in favour of ‘chief’ and ‘intermediate’ syllables.

My research, and with it my writing, was discovering an agility in the meter of Gawain to go with its muscularity and flexibility. This subtlety of accent and emphasis affects the rhythm of the whole poem. Quite appropriately, the meter of Gawain evokes a ride over rough terrain. We are crossing rivers and ridges and rocky outcrops, leaping hedges and ditches, negotiating a moral and metaphysical mire. As the hoofbeat of the tetrameter drums on, the inflections and irregularities create a suitably uneven rhythm – a metrical adventure more like Coleridge’s undulating ramble ‘over uneven ground...breaking through the struggling branches of a copse-wood’ than Wordsworth’s civilized gait ‘up and down a straight gravel-walk... where the continuity of his verse met no collateral interruption.’<sup>19</sup>

There is much else that my research into the form and style of this poem has uncovered which would take us beyond the constraints of this study: the bi-partite line structure, the bob-and-wheel sections, the accentuation of initial syllables, the poetic use of archaic lexis, the regional vernacular of its diction, and more besides. Yet we must leave all that now and move on to explore how reading and research have inspired and informed my practice.

I knew that the success of my own accentual alliterative verse would be in the weaving together of metrical, alliterative and other phonological features. This was what would give my poetry the kind of muscularity, flexibility and agility I had discovered in Gawain. None of these devices would be working in isolation, but all aspects of the sonic physiology of the poem must be flexing and stretching, and pushing and pulling together. I knew that if I was to attempt a long narrative poem I would need everything working in synchronicity.

In addition, I had felt from early on that the unfamiliarity of the language in Gawain had, somewhat paradoxically, enhanced my enjoyment of the verse. My detachment at times from the semantics of the language freed me to feel and appreciate the soundscapes of the poem in their own right. This suggested to me that I might attempt to write in an invented language similar enough to contemporary English to be understood, yet sufficiently different and detached to enable the reader to be carried along by its rhythms and other phonological effects.

In particular, I was fascinated by what I began to see as a combination of the visceral with the vernacular. The oral and aural effects of its somewhat Germanic diction, with its characteristically glottal and guttural register, had resonated with me as I had read the original text out loud. I was keen to emulate the Anglo-Saxon quality of the poem’s phonology. Just as Simon Armitage ‘detects an echo of his own speech rhythms within the original’<sup>20</sup>, I likewise recognize something of the accents and dialects of my own region of the Black Country and further north into Staffordshire.

It was an existing interest in the vernacular that had attracted me to the varied and natural metrical patterns of the verse. As a poet, I am very aware of

---

<sup>18</sup> Borroff, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: A Stylistic and Metrical Study*, 144.

<sup>19</sup> from William Hazlitt’s biography of Coleridge, quoted in: Marc Shell, *Talking the Walk & Walking the Talk: A*

*Rhetoric of Rhythm* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), Chapter 1, Kindle.

<sup>20</sup> Simon, Armitage, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007), vii.



the native, and dialectal, intonations of the voice and like to play them up a little, rather than suppress them. I like my poems to have a performative or declaratory aspect, which is clearly heard in Gawain, and other alliterative poetry, and in the sprung rhythms of Hopkins, too. I had also been impressed by distinctive voices in other reading, such as Ted Hughes's *Crow*, and Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker* – and I'm satisfied that these influences can be heard in the poem that I've begun to write and am about to share. *Tha Spawnen a Scousenlish* is the first section of a semi-autobiographical, semi-mythological narrative poem; its title and opening lines are references to my place-of-birth.

Poems, perhaps narrative ones especially, are to be spoken and heard – and heeded. As a poet and teacher I am often conscious, like the Gawain-Poet, of addressing an audience who must be reminded to listen:

If 3e wyl lysten þis laye bot on littel quile, I  
schal telle hit... (lines 30-1)<sup>21</sup>

*Note: Please read the poem below, aloud. In verse, the realizing of sounds often accompanies the recognizing of meanings. In addition, you will find it helpful to listen to the rhythms and intonations in my reading of the poem:*

<https://soundcloud.com/user-902768106/tha-spawnen-a-scousenlish-part-1>

### **Tha Spawnen a Scousenlish**<sup>22</sup>

*A wa bornt on tha browen banken ov a browen rivern  
where tyd im turnen an curven lyk turd  
as im slyden slownish owt ta sea an wherevern /  
Tha fust nyt wa frittful fistyt an curl-clenchen  
slep badlish in watty bed ov bent reeden  
dremt badlish dreamen of badden diayen to cummen /  
Wen a woken a wa chimdley-choken an chuffin  
in smokelish stench ov chemic-clouden  
tha cud stunt an stilt th shapin ov tung  
an lungen an a lossen langwij anaull /  
A cunner lern no worden jus chirp lyk bird  
mewlen lyk gull on miserish mornen  
howlen an honken lyk ferry in hawfog /  
Wen a tryd ta spake a cryd lyk crake  
ka-ka Kaa ka-ka Kee a screechen ka-ka Ky  
an a flappen ma sledglish armen frantik as fuken  
on tha browen banken downen by tha wattern*

*wer tha sky surgen an tha salt-sea swollen /  
An ooh tha fust feel on ma feet o tha watter  
a winch an a wep as them waven wasshen over  
an em slobbern an sucken so am sinken in mudlish /  
Slownish an shurlish am slidden enta shinglen  
deeplicher downen to myn ankln ma neezen  
ma thyzen /  
then tha cold kynda cauten me  
im tek me by suppryzen /  
an tha salt-watter tauten me  
im opn myn eyzen //*

\*\*\*

In the metrical and phonological analysis that follows, I will be exploring in the context of my own practice the kind of muscle, flex and agility that I had been learning from Gawain.

I am working through *Tha Spawnen a Scousenlish* in complete units of meaning – rather than considering lines in isolation. This allows the natural intonation of speech to be considered across whole sentences. These sentences, or utterances to be precise, are delineated in the poem by forward-slashes rather than full stops and there is no other punctuation or demarcation. This requires the reader to use line-breaks, meter, alliteration and the natural patterns of speech to regulate and phrase their reading and voicing of the poem.

Each section of the poem is accompanied by metrical notation in the style of Marie Borroff, rather than in traditional feet, for reasons already discussed.

Title:	Key:
- C - - C - c	C = Chief stressed syllable
<b>Tha Spawnen a Scousenlish</b>	c = Intermediate syllable
	- = Unstressed syllable

Immediately, the title, of the poem confronts the reader – or listener – with its odd language, and the somewhat Germanic nature of its phonology. Straightaway there is a favouring of harsh consonants, short vowels, and phonemes such as ‘-en’ and ‘-lish’. Already, there is a distance between sound and meaning; we are being drawn into the poem’s Anglo-Saxon sound-world. The two alliterated beats set up the relationship between the alliteration and

<sup>21</sup> W.R.J. Barron, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1974), 32

<sup>22</sup> “Tha Spawnen a Scousenlish” was first published in *Butcher’s Dog*, issue 17, Sept 2022.

## Forgotten Ground Regained: A Journal of Alliterative Verse

meter of the poem. Its four sibilant consonants, two stressed and two unstressed, spit the poem into life.

Lines 1 to 3:

- - C - - C - C - - - C c -  
*A wa bornt on the browen banken ov a brown rivern*  
 c - - C - C - - C - c C  
*downen where tyd im turnen an curven lyk turd*  
 - - C - C - c - C - - C -  
*as im slyden slownish owt ta sea an wherevern*

The four heavy plosives of first line pick up the rhythm. The weighting of these heavy ‘b’ consonants reduces the stress of ‘rivern’ to a slightly subordinate position as the cadence falls at the end of the line. The disyllabic representation of ‘browen’ comes straight from Black Country and other Midland dialect forms. In the second line the alliteration is more nuanced by its interplay with various aural effects. The echo of ‘tyd turnen’ in ‘lyk turd’ suggests the ebb of the tide in the estuary setting of the poem. This musicality is supported by the assonance of the ‘ur’ vowel, in ‘turnen’, ‘curven’ and ‘turd’ which slides fluidly through the line between the sharper consonants of these words. The onomatopoeic effect of these long slow vowels is supplemented by the watery sibilance of ‘slyden slownish’ in line 3.

Lines 4 to 6:

c C c - - C - c C - - C c  
*Tha fust nyt a wa frittful curl-clenchen my fiss-tyt*  
 c C - - C - C - C c -  
*slep badlish in watty bed ov bent reeden*  
 c C - C - - C - C - - c -  
*dremt badlish dreamen of badden diayen to cummen /*

The second grammatical unit of the poem begins in line 4 with a more disturbed meter and phonological pattern. The sense of agitation is evoked, quite appropriately, by a lot of stress; there are as many as four intermediate stresses in this line, along with the four chiefs. The anxious alliteration here is created by the fricatives of ‘fust’, ‘frittful’ and ‘fistyt’, along with an equally uncomfortable alliterative effect embedded with ‘curlclenchen’. The discomfort and discordance of the night continues through lines 5 and 6 with the heavy consonantal drumbeat of ‘b’ and ‘d’ alliteration and the insistent assonance of ‘a’, ‘e’ and ‘ee’ vowels.

Lines 7 to 10:

c - C . . C - C - - C -  
*wen a woken a wa chimdley-choken an chuffin*  
 - C - C - C - C -  
*in smokelish stench ov chemic-clouden*  
 - - C - C - C - - C  
*tha cud stunt an stilt th shapin ov tung*  
 - C - - C - C - - C  
*an lungen an lossen langwij anaull /*

In lines 7 to 10, the alliterative pattern is simpler and quicker with virtually no intermediate stresses to complicate the flow. Here, appropriately, the poem wakes up with a number of lively internal rhymes within lines and between lines, too: ‘woken’ and ‘choken’ in line 7 connect with ‘smokelish’ in line 8; ‘tung’ in line 9 links up with ‘lungen’ in line 10; and there is an onomatopoeic cough running through ‘chimdleychoken’, to ‘chuffin’, and on to ‘chemic-clouden’. This enjambment, enhanced by a layering of phonological effects, energises these lines as the four-beat time-signature begins to pick up pace.

Lines 11 to 13:

- c - C - C - - C c C  
*A cunner lern no worden just chirp lyk bird*  
 C - - C - C - - C -  
*mewlen lyk gull on miserish mornen*  
 C - - C - c C - - C c  
*howlen an honken lyk ferry in hawfogg /*

This pace continues into line 11, as the use of assonance rather than consonance creates a comparative lightness. Like the Gawain-Poet’s use of regional diction, line 11 features the Potteries’ ‘cunner’ for ‘couldn’t’. This line illustrates well the importance of performative considerations in our reading of a narrative poem where the telling is crucial. In my notation ‘cunner’ is subordinated in favour of the assonantal weight of ‘lern’. A different reading might swap these stresses to make ‘cunner’ feel more frustrated and emphatic. Alternatively, we might give this line five chief stresses – making it iambic – but, for me, losing some of the performative impact of varying the stress. In lines 12 and 13, the alliteration is made flexible by the sinew of unstressed alliterative effects: in line 12 three ‘l’ consonants limber up in the first three syllables of the line; and in line 13, the onomatopoeic alliterations of ‘howl’, ‘honk’ and ‘haw’ are complemented at the end of the line by the more rasping fricatives of ‘ferry’ and ‘fog’. The accentuation of ‘Hawfogg’ also has



performative value – its onomatopoeia offers a sonic correlative of ‘fog-horn’

Lines 14 to 18:

- - C - C - C - C  
*wen a tried ta spake a cryd lyk crake*  
 - - C - - C - C - - C  
*ka-ka Kaa ka-ka Kee a screechen ka Ky*  
 - - C - - C - c - C - - c -  
*an a flappen ma fledglish armen frantik as fuken*  
 - - C - C - C - - - C -  
*on tha browen banken down by tha wattern*  
 - - C C - - - C c C -  
*wer tha sky surgen an tha salt-sea swollen /*

The varied intonation of this next sentence is evoked by a range of accents and stresses, and illustrates the importance of unstressed syllables in varying pace. Supporting the need for a more precise way of accounting for meter than a somewhat binary, stressed/unstressed approach will allow. For instance, in line 14, ‘lyk’ is clearly to be accented more than some of the unstressed syllables, but is not as heavily accented at the ‘chief’ stresses. This is also true of the previous uses of ‘lyk’ in lines 2 and 11. However, here ‘lyk’ is given a little more accentual weight by its assonantal connection to ‘tryd’ and ‘cryd’. Furthermore, line 15 illustrates the way in which accentual stress can be governed by the syllable length: ‘Kaa’, ‘Kee’ and ‘Ky’ are naturally accented by the length of their vowels in comparison with the shorter ones in ‘ka-ka’. Of course, some of the additional emphatic weight also derives from the performative value of these sounds – they are being screeched. A further element musicality is created as Scousenlish’s repeated attempts to find a voice are suggested by the echoes and repetitions in these lines: in line 14 ‘tryd ta spake’ is echoed by ‘cryd lyk crake’.

Lines 19 to 21:

- c - C C - - C - - C -  
*An oh tha fust feel on ma feet o tha watter*  
 - - C - - C - - C - C - c -  
*An em winch an a weep as them waven wasshen over*  
 - - C - - C - - - C - - C -  
*An em slobbern an succken so am sinken in mudlish /*

In lines 19 to 21, the undulating musicality of the rhythm is increased by the simplified tetrameter with its lack of intermediate syllables. As elsewhere, the

number of unstressed syllables – often two or three between the chiefs – gives the verse its pace, its canter or gallop. The alliterating sounds in this section are distinctly onomatopoeic, and increasingly sensuous, too. The ‘w’, ‘s’ and ‘sh’ consonants, combined with the wave-like rhythm evoke the ebb and flow of the sea: the watery w’s of lines 19 and 20, are overwhelmed by the incoming tide of surging sibilances in lines 21, which continues into the following sentence, too.

Lines 22 to 28

C - - C - - C - c - C -  
*Slownish an shurlish am slidden enta shinglen*  
 C c - C - - c C - - C -  
*deeplicher down to myn ankln ma neezen*  
 c C -  
*na thyzen /*  
 - - C c - C - -  
*then tha cold kynda cauten me*  
 - C - - c C -  
*im tek me by suppryzen /*  
 - - C c - C - c  
*an tha salt-watter tauten me*  
 - C - c C -  
*im open myn eyezen //*

\* \* \* \*

My title being a dependent clause, not a question, meant this was always an enquiry not an inquiry. In this practice-based piece, the poetry and analysis are both the outworking and outcome of my research – the knowing and the knowledge.

This creative critical journey will continue with further work to complete further alliterative poems, with a sustained focus on meter, intonation and phonological effects. Alongside this, having paddled in the shallows of cognitive poetics, I intend to explore more deeply and extensively aspects of rhythm, musicality and performance in our writing and reading of poetry.

I have begun to ride the rhythms of Gawain’s galloping Gringolet, and as I close I’m wading with Scousenlish deeper into the eye-opening waters of accentual alliterative narrative verse. Scousenlish’s adventures have only just begun, more poems will



follow, as I continue this mytho-poetic journey to its, as yet unknown, conclusion.<sup>23</sup>

Martin Yates, May 2020.

## Bibliography

### Primary Texts.

Anderson, J.J. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl, Cleanness, Patience*. London: J.M. Dent, Everyman, //1996.

Armitage, Simon. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. London: Faber and Faber, 2007.

Arthur, Ross G. ed. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Cambridge, Ontario: In Parentheses Publications, 1999.  
[http://www.yorku.ca/inpar/sggk\\_replica.pdf](http://www.yorku.ca/inpar/sggk_replica.pdf)

Barron, W.R.J. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1974. Revised Edition, 2004.

Borroff, Marie. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight – a new verse translation*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1967.

Morris, Richard. ed. *Sir Gawayne and The Green Knight: An Alliterative Romance-Poem*, Re-Edited from Cotton. Ms. Nero, A.X., in The British Museum. London: N. Trübner & Co. for The Early English Text Society. Second Edition, Revised, 1869.  
<file:///D:/MA%20SEMESTER%202/SIR%20GAWAIN/Sir%20Gawayne%20and%20The%20Green%20Knight%20-%20Gutenberg.html>

O'Donoghue, Bernard. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. London: Penguin, 2006.

Tolkien, J.R.R. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl and Sir Orfeo*, 1975, ed. Tolkien, Christopher. London: Harper Collins, 2006.

Weston, Jessie L. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Cambridge, Ontario: In Parentheses Publications, 1999.  
[https://www.yorku.ca/inpar/sggk\\_weston.pdf](https://www.yorku.ca/inpar/sggk_weston.pdf)

### Secondary Texts – Literary.

Armitage, Simon. *Killing Time*. London: Faber and Faber, 1999.

Armitage, Simon. *Pearl – a new verse translation*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2016.

Berry, Liz. *Black Country*. London: Chatto & Windus, 2014.

Eliot, T.S. *Four Quartets*. London: Faber 1944. Eliot, T.S. *Collected Poems 1909-62*. London: Faber 1963

Hoban, Russell. *Riddley Walker*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1980. Picador, 1982.

Hopkins, Gerard Manley. *Selected Poems – Oxford Student Texts*. Oxford University Press, 1994.

Hughes, Ted. *Crow: from the Life and Songs of Crow*. London: Faber and Faber, 1972.

Langland, William. *The Vision and Creed of Piers Ploughman*, Volumes I and II. ed. Thomas Wright. London: Reeves and Turner, 1887. Online edition: September, 2013.  
<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/43661/43661-h/43661-h.htm>

O'Donoghue, Bernard. *Here Nor There*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1999

### Secondary Texts – Academic, Critical and Creative.

Addison, Catherine. "Once upon a Time: A Reader-Response Approach to Prosody." *College English* 56, no. 6 (1994): 655-78. Accessed May 1, 2020. doi:10.2307/378311.

Armitage, Simon. "Damned if he Does and Damned if he Doesn't? Dilemmas and Decisions in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight." University of Oxford Podcasts, 23rd Nov 2018.  
<https://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/damned-if-he-does-and-damned-if-he-doesntdilemmas-and-decisions-sir-gawain-and-green>

Armitage, Simon. "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight." BBC Documentary/Arts programme. 4th June 2009.  
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00kvbny>

Arts and Humanities Research Council. "Definition of Research." *Research Funding Guide* v4.7 June 2019, 10-11.  
[https://ahrc.ukri.org/documents/guides/research\\_fundingguide/](https://ahrc.ukri.org/documents/guides/research_fundingguide/)

Baum, Paull F. "Sprung Rhythm." *PMLA*, Vol. 74, No. 4 (Sep., 1959), pp. 418-425. Modern Language Association.  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/460450> Accessed: 25-03-2020 22:22 UTC

Borgdorff, Hendrik Anne (Henk). *Conflict of the Faculties: Perspectives on Artistic Research and*

<sup>23</sup> Footnote: True to his final paragraph, the poet went on to explore Scousenlish's adventures in three further alliterative poems, which are printed below. He assures us that there is more of Scousenlish to come; with a fifth poem in the pipeline and

plans for this to be an ongoing project resulting in a set of around twenty pieces – all in the same accentual-alliterative, Gawain-inspired form – over the next few years.

- Academia*. Amsterdam: Leiden University Press, 2012.  
<https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/handle/1887/18704>
- Borroff, Marie. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: A Stylistic and Metrical Study*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962.
- Bragg, Melvyn. "In Our Time: Sir Gawain and the Green Knight." BBC Radio 3. 13th December 2018.  
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0001kr8>
- Candy, Linda. "Practice-Based Research: a Guide." Creativity & Cognition Studios, University of Technology, Sydney. CCS Report: 2006-V1.0 November.  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/257944497\\_Practice\\_Based\\_Research\\_A\\_Guide](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/257944497_Practice_Based_Research_A_Guide)
- Chisholm, Alison. *The Craft of Writing Poetry*. London: Allison and Busby, 1992.
- Coren, Pamela. "Gerard Manley Hopkins, Plainsong and the Performance of Poetry." *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, Vol. 60, No. 244 (Apr. 2009), 271-294. Oxford University Press.  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/40267542>  
Accessed: 25-03-2020 22:26 UTC
- Cornelius, Ian. *Reconstructing Alliterative Verse: The Pursuit of a Medieval Meter*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.
- Davenport, W.A. *The Art of the Gawain-Poet*. London: The Athlone Press, University of London, 1978.
- Eliot, T.S. "Tradition and the Individual Talent." *The Egoist*, Part I in vol. 6, no. 4 (Sept. 1919). Parts II-III in vol. 6, no. 5 (Dec. 1919).  
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/69400/tradition-and-the-individual-talent>
- EquiMed. "Horse Rhythms and Movements from Walk to Gallop and in Between." 26th April 2018. <https://equimed.com/health-centers/behavior/articles/horse-rhythmsand-movements-from-walk-to-gallop-and-in-between>
- Espinosa, Alicia. "Translating Troubles: Alliterative Verse in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight." WR: Journal of the CAS Writing Program. Issue 7, 2014-2015.  
<https://www.bu.edu/writingprogram/journal/past-issues/issue-7/espinosa/>
- Hall, Alaric and McDonald, Sheryl. "A beginner's guide to Old English meter." Version 1.5, September 26th 2016.  
[https://www.alarichall.org.uk/teaching/alliteration/OE/oe\\_meter\\_guide.pdf](https://www.alarichall.org.uk/teaching/alliteration/OE/oe_meter_guide.pdf)
- Hurley, Michael D. Review of Hopkins's Poetics of Speech Sound: Sprung Rhythm, Lettering, Inscap by James I. Wimsatt. *Modern Philology*, Vol. 107, No. 4 (May 2010), pp.E126-E130. The University of Chicago Press.  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/651236>
- Kiparsky, Paul. *Sprung Rhythm. Phonetics and Phonology, Volume 1: Rhythm and Meter*. Academic Press, Inc. 1989. p.305-340.  
[https://web.stanford.edu/~kiparsky/Papers/Sprung\\_Rhythm\\_89.pdf](https://web.stanford.edu/~kiparsky/Papers/Sprung_Rhythm_89.pdf)
- Morley, David. *The Cambridge Introduction to Creative Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Sansom, Peter. *Writing Poems*. Newcastle: Bloodaxe Books, 1994.
- Shell, Marc. *Talking the Walk & Walking the Talk: A Rhetoric of Rhythm*. New York: Fordham University Press. 2015. Kindle.
- Spearing, A.C. *The Gawain-Poet – a Critical Study*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1970.
- Tsur, Reuven. "Metricalness and Rhythmicalness: What Our Ear Tells Our Mind."  
<https://arcade.stanford.edu/content/metricalness-and-rhythmicalness-what-our-ear-tells-our-mind>
- Tsur, Reuven & Gafni, Chen. "Poetry Reading—Rhythmical Performance: Triple-encoding, and voice quality: Six case studies". *Thinking Verse II*, 2012. 88-111.  
<http://www.thinkingverse.org/issue02/Reuven%20Tsur,%20Poetry%20Reading%20Rh%20yt%20hmical%20Performance.pdf>
- Watson, J.R. *The Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins – Penguin Critical Studies*. London: Penguin, 1987.
- Wimsatt, James I. "Alliteration and Hopkins's Sprung Rhythm." Duke University Press, *Poetics Today*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (Winter, 1998), pp. 531-564.  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/1773259>. Accessed: 25-03-2020 22:13 UTC



Martin Kennedy Yates

**Scousenlish a-singen**<sup>24</sup>

At firss ma voiss wa fritful flatlish -  
al chit an coff lyk crake an chuff  
an choakt wit thorn-beak an thinny throat -  
but slownish an shurlish a starten singen /  
A fownt ma voiss in storms full forcen  
an a formt it from fins flex an flit of feathern /  
Sol for shurlish a-singen in stormlish  
an wit al the woilden ov wind-wet weathern /  
Hou high a wa hangen in tha howl ov a hooly  
an lollop ina lowlish loop ov longen-waven /  
Twa wen a flappen for fuden in fishboat waken  
an diven deep into death-black wattern  
that a fownden ma voiss an ma voiss fownt me /  
Nowen a loven ta loop longen an lowlish  
an singen ower seashor and cityschapen /  
A charmen tha childen wi ma cheersom chirpen -  
an tha wimmen wit wunder an wisht a-waillen -  
an tha menfoulk al miserish wit melancolen  
uplooke hiyen  
an them a-wistful gazen  
enta steelish skyen -  
as am softlish serenaden  
them a-weplish cryen //

Martin Kennedy Yates

**Scousenlish a-fallan lufen**<sup>25</sup>

Twa wen a wa stel wit and yunlish an ween  
a sen yun shegul sa shapplish an sheen  
tha ma eyen bemakken al majik a-mistlish  
ana cummen al colt an shivrish an keen /  
aber shen na shone na seemen mish a-sen  
jas flute ova faslish al fin an nofa fren /  
an a gazzen an ganden agen an agen  
aber shen neva shote na cummen a-shorlish /  
twa munnen a-lattern a mussen a-makken  
a-flyt ta hooly ile an farren oota farnenilen  
wer puffen em nessen an nurt em yunnen  
wer graet norta-sean im grim an gra na grun  
an beg skyz a bruden browen na blu /  
an her-agen a senn sam shegul wit snolish  
gannen an gullamot an garralisher kittawakken  
aber shen wa bessen byfarren al blakk an bute /  
a kenn twa ha wit nek sa curven an lank  
an ha grennen eyen glinten al garnlish an gelt  
an ha wingen wa wundfallen al widden an welt /

an shem a-singen sonnen al soflish an shiff  
fa yunnen im nessen al nakken and nulish /  
am axen sam gannen a-tellen ha nammen  
aber wen im spokken ma lufen ist baddlish a-bruzzen  
an ma beatter hart en ma bress ist brutish a-brokken /  
ma dera hoppen ist dullish an dashen dedlish  
ana feelt ma fevrish eyen full a-fillen  
as im spokken  
mish al mystrish an mum  
ha namm ist Quen Trute  
an shen al hautish a-cum  
fra scandan a-jute /

Martin Kennedy Yates

**Scousenlish an Scarren Yaweth**

Twa diayen-enden an droppen dusklish  
an wester winden a-whippen wintrish  
wen Yaweth cum yellaping outtha wylder yonden /  
Im cum loopin and lankin lyk sum lunic gullyas /  
A firss a dinna fix na full-ken im from flokken  
then a sen tha spec ov dart in tha spart  
ov yolker yellor ov them gollten eyen /  
Then a sen im fixen fast on ma fin an formen  
an a tink ta tek flit an tilt fa hommen  
bu tha na scapen na scarpen fra Scarren Yaweth /  
Them wikren wingen wa wyd as woilden  
an rappen rount al reppern an unrestlish /  
Wen im tek ma tynish form in them terron talonnen  
a fillt ma fearen full-fattal as im full-fallon /  
An downen wem fallen, downen im draggen  
ta tha browen wattern, wer a wa bornt an brokken /  
On an downen im draggen undern dedlish wattern  
deepern an darkren lyk im tenden mich ta drownen /  
It cum coltern and coalish an a cunner callen  
a cunner scape na scrapp na shift na shivern even /  
As shur as shitten am shurlish dyen / A shuttem eyen  
wen deth cum dark an devlish a-dreamen  
al hadish an hellish halff-liffen halff-dethlish /  
A see-n-herren a hundren thousen halffen-humman  
lyk halffen-fishen, halff-foulsh, halff-besstlish  
an al wa fierss a-fighten al frantik an fritlish  
al beatten an brokken al battern a-bloddish /  
An wyrdlish a wokken al watt an weplish  
bent an bruzen on banken ov tha browen rivern  
wit ma bekk al blodden an ma hedd a-drummen  
eyen a-stingen  
badlish brokken wingen  
ma leggen a-cum humman /  
An wit tha wylder winden  
coltern a-krulish cummen //

<sup>24</sup> "Scousenlish a-singen" was first published in *The Rialto*, issue 90, June 2021.

<sup>25</sup> "Scousenlish a-fallan lufen" was first published in *Poetry Wales*, issue 58/3, March 2023.

Paul D. Deane

## Varieties of Alliterative Meter

I recently read Geoffrey Russom's book, *The Evolution of Verse Structure in Old and Middle English Poetry: From the Earliest Alliterative Poems to Iambic Pentameter*. It is a technical work, and you need a decent background in linguistics and medieval literature to follow its arguments easily. But it is an important work and has significant implications for poets who want to write alliterative verse. Russom has also written an article, "Poetic Form", which presents the outlines of his theory in a more accessible form. While his isn't the only theory of how poetic meter works (that is, after all, a whole field of study in its own right), Russom's theory offers the most convincing explanation I have ever read about why alliterative verse died out in the fifteenth century. And that, in turn, provides insights into what is going on in the work of modern poets who have chosen to write in alliterative forms. So I am going to take the time to sketch how Russom's theory makes sense of the history of alliterative meter and use it to explain some of the variations in alliterative structure that we see among modern-day poets.

### Classical Head-Stave Meter

Before I dive into the details it will be useful to review the distinctive characteristics of Germanic alliterative verse, the kind that shows up in Old English poems like *Beowulf* or the Old Norse *Poetic Edda*. The only native accounts of alliterative meter we have — accounts written by practicing alliterative poets — are provided in the first instance by Snorri Sturluson's *Hattatal* (Gade, 2017), and developed further by poets and scholars in Iceland, the only country where Germanic alliterative verse has survived as a continuous literary tradition. (Adalsteinsson, 2014, provides a fairly exhaustive list of references.)

The native Norse/Icelandic tradition describes alliterative verse as being organized around 'staves' (stressed, alliterating syllables) that create what modern scholars call the alliterative 'long line'. Each long line consists of two short lines, or 'half-lines'. Each half-line contains two (occasionally, three) strongly stressed syllables, or *lifts*, and sequences of unstressed syllables, or *dips*. The first half-line in each pair (termed the a-verse by modern scholars) can have either one or two alliterating stresses. The first stress in the second half-line (termed the b-verse

by modern scholars) **must** alliterate. The final stress in the b-verse must **never** alliterate. Thaliarchus' poem 'Farewell', printed earlier in this issue, provides a straightforward illustration. Here are three lines from this poem:

A-Verse	B-Verse
<u>Catch</u> -pair at <u>bus</u> stop	<u>kiss</u> with <u>ab</u> andon,
two <u>youths</u> <u>part</u> ing	though <u>yearning</u> for <u>longer</u>
in <u>bold</u> -clutch to <u>abide</u> .	Now <u>bites</u> <u>clock</u> -hand:

I have underlined the strongly stressed syllables and bolded the alliterations required by the meter. In the native alliterative tradition, the alliterating stave in the b-verse is called the *head-stave* because it is the key to the alliterative structure of the line. Everything leads up to the head stave. The alliterating stress(es) in the a-verse are considered '*props*' that function to support the head-stave.

There is a lot more to be said about traditional alliterative meter, but for present purposes, I will highlight two: (i) In the older Germanic languages, primary stress almost always falls on the first syllable of a word. That is, of course, where the alliteration goes. (ii) While it has plenty of rhythmic flexibility, older Germanic poetry tends toward a *falling* rhythm (strong-weak) rather than a *rising* rhythm (weak-strong). For example, in Old English alliterative verse, the most common half-line rhythm is what German scholar Eduard Sievers (Sievers, 1885) termed 'Type A' (strong-weak-strong-weak). The Norse/Icelandic alliterative tradition records a similar intuition. In traditional Icelandic metrical analysis, each line is divided into feet. Odd-numbered feet are considered 'heavy' and even-numbered feet are considered 'light', and there is a strong preference to anchor alliteration on heavy rather than light feet (Jónsson, 1892, as explained by Ringler, 1996). Russom argues that the linguistic characteristics of old Germanic languages make word-initial alliteration prominent and favor a falling rhythm. Which means that all an alliterative poet really needed to know was to use alliteration to join the most prominent words in the two halves of the line. The metrical patterns that resulted fell naturally out of the normal rhythms of the language.

### Russom's Theory of Poetic Meter

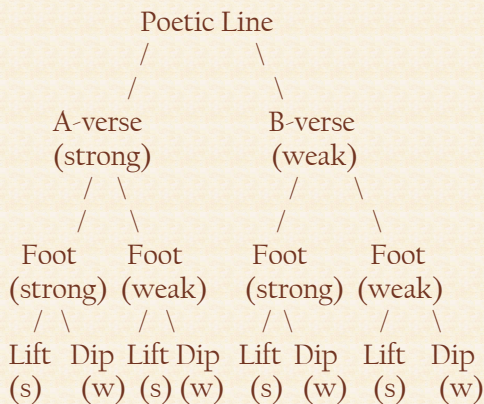
Russom starts with the assumption that poetic patterns are based on linguistic patterns. Certain things are naturally prominent – sentence, phrase,



word, and syllable edges, stressed syllables, and repeated sounds. Russom argues that poetic units correspond naturally to linguistic units that organize these patterns of prominence. Poetic beats prototypically correspond to syllables, poetic feet, to words, half-lines, to phrases, and lines, to clauses or sentences. The idea is that the most natural poetic patterns align with the most common, natural patterns in the language.

In Russom's account, the prototypical Old English half-line was a phrase prototypically composed of two (inflected) words. Because English words were almost always stressed on the first syllable, and the end of the word was an unstressed inflectional ending, the default rhythm of the half line was therefore a falling rhythm (Type A). This falling pattern was reinforced by the fact that Old English sentences typically ended with a verb, which received weaker emphasis than subject or object nouns. So the end of the Old English or Old Norse line was the place that naturally got the weakest stress. And alliteration only works rhythmically if you alliterate on the most strongly stressed syllables.

In short, Russom's theory claims that the typical Old English alliteration pattern (aa / ax) followed from typical Old English rhythms. We can describe the default poetic rhythm in the following diagram:



In this kind of theory, deviations from the basic pattern are possible so long as they are not too great. Poets found it easy enough to use words with different rhythms in many of the feet. But alliterating on the final stress would suggest a rising rhythm for the entire line.

As I understand Russom's theory, that is why the head-stave was so important. Alliterating on the head-stave, and not on the final stress, maintained a sense of falling rhythm from one line to the next.

Of course, Modern English is very different from Old English. A rather large chunk of the Modern English vocabulary consists of words borrowed from French, Latin, and Greek, where the stress falls toward the end of the word. English has lost most of its inflectional endings (which came at the end of the word) in favor of using grammatical function words – mostly articles and prepositions, which are usually placed before the content word they modify. And English clauses have shifted almost entirely to Subject-Verb-Object word order, which places the natural emphasis at sentence end. All of these factors militate toward rising rather falling rhythm (think: iambs and anapests instead of dactyls and trochees.)

This is why Russom thinks alliterative verse died during the fifteenth century. Head-stave meter only makes sense if the underlying rhythm is a falling one. But the modern English poet has to work hard to keep a falling rhythm going. Thaliarchus' poem, earlier in this volume, illustrates some of the techniques that poets can use to do so.

To begin with, Thaliarchus' poem contains a lot of compound nouns, many of them original — *catch-pair*, *bus stop*, *bold-clutch*, *clock-hand*, *love-pair*, etc. Compound nouns have a falling rhythm, with the added bonus that Old English poets used them to create kennings, giving the poem a distinctively Old English feel.

Thaliarchus' poem also takes advantage of (often archaic) patterns of grammatical inversion, which again create falling stress patterns:

"in bold clutch to abide"  
 "now bites clock-hand"  
 "now short grows queue"  
 "woeful the love pair"  
 "winters not many"  
 "together can muster"  
 "for them gapes week-span"  
 "break-ups stormy"  
 "sorrow not little"  
 "did we bliss grapple"

Not coincidentally, many of these inversions are necessary to get an aa/ax alliteration pattern. The poem also suppresses function words (especially articles) where it would be more natural to include them (e.g., one would normally say "a" or "the" clock-hand), also making it easier to keep a falling rhythm.

Notice also that in this poem, no sentence ever ends at the end of the line. Ending sentences

between half-lines is normal enough in Old English, but in modern English it has the added benefit of putting the naturally strongest sentence-final stress in the a-verse. The overall effect of these stylistic choices is purposely archaic. It produces the rhythm and feel of Old English poetry in a modern English setting. But as such, it is not likely to be adopted by poets who favor a more contemporary style.

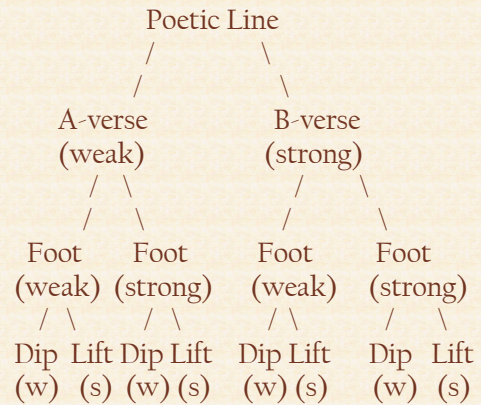
In his book, Russom argues that in Middle English (which had transitioned partially to modern English patterns), these kinds of archaisms played an important role in maintaining the traditional head-stave alliteration pattern. But the literature on Middle English alliterative verse also suggests that there were rather strict constraints on the b-verse that (I believe) had the effect of keeping stronger emphasis on the head-stave and keeping a sense of falling rhythm at the end of the line. There could be at most one “long” (multiple-syllable) dip in the Middle English b-verse, and it had to appear either before or after the head-stave (Duggan, 1986; Inoui & Stokes, 2012). And the final foot nearly always had a falling rhythm — typically, a final -e that was no longer pronounced by the end of the fifteenth century (Duggan, 1988).

I have found in my own writing that it is much easier to make an a(a)/ax alliteration pattern sound natural if an iambic pattern is avoided and the head stave is reinforced by a long (or secondarily stressed) dip. One can also maintain the rhythm that head-stave meter requires by carefully controlling sentence length, structure, and punctuation. The excerpt from Rahul Gupta’s *Arthuriad* which comes at the end of this issue is a case in point – the way Gupta organizes his sentences to create an incantatory effect also makes the endings of lines much less prominent to the ear. However, Russom’s theory has further implications for modern English alliterative verse.

If Russom’s theory is correct, modern English has a natural predilection toward rising rhythms. Since alliterative verse places alliteration on the strongest stresses, and the final stress of the line is, by default, the naturally strongest stress in modern English, modern English rhythms should therefore predispose poets to adopt an alliterative meter in which alliteration falls obligatorily on the final stress.

Let us take the diagram I provided earlier, but invert the rhythm, so that weak precedes strong at every level of analysis. If we do that, the last stress in the b-verse – let us call it the **tail-stave** – should be

the most likely to alliterate. I contend that we see exactly this tendency in alliterative verse written by modern poets.



Alex Rettie’s poem “The Future” (published in this issue) is a clear example of pure tail-stave meter. Here is how I analyze it:

A-verse 1	A-verse 2	Head-Stave	Tail-Stave
We <u>found</u> it	like <u>tourists</u>	<u>find</u>	<u>fossils</u> :
a <u>little</u>	<u>Skull</u>	<u>covered</u> in	<u>Concrete</u>
We were <u>laughing</u>	<u>Half</u>	in <u>love</u> ,	or <u>lust</u> .
<u>You</u>	in a <u>blue</u>	<u>bikini</u> ,	<u>Bursting</u>
with <u>clinical</u>	<u>Calm</u> ,	<u>aimed</u> the	<u>Camera</u> .
<u>Like</u>	they <u>say</u> ,	we may <u>look</u>	<u>back</u> and <u>laugh</u> .

In this poem, the tail stave always alliterates, and there is always at least one matching prop in the a-verse. Perhaps in recognition of the tail-staves’ importance, Rettie has placed them in short lines of their own. The rhythm and syntax that result are entirely consistent with a colloquial, modern style.

My poem *Housebreaker* was my first experiment in writing in tail-stave meter:

### Housebreaker

I woke without light – I sensed, not alone;  
 half-rose, reaching out, pulse rushing  
 Through arteries and veins, but the room was empty.  
 At the base of the stairs a creaking board  
 halted me, but I heard nothing. Trust a housebreaker  
 to tread softly, stand quiet when the household stirs!  
 In the kitchen, a clatter: In flashlight-beam, a kitten,  
 Reminding me that some murderers focus on mice.



Again, I think tail-stave meter works well, producing natural modern English rhythms, though I am less sure about the lines where I alliterated the 1<sup>st</sup> stress with the 4<sup>th</sup>. Allowing two lifts between alliterating staves seems like a stretch, though Maryann Corbett does it, too, in lines like “*memory of a love · that crumpled to malice.*” It might be better to require no more than one non-alliterating lift between alliterating staves, much as in traditional Icelandic metrics.

In any case, it is also noteworthy how often modern English poets alliterate on the final stress even when they are working to create an Old English mood or responding to Old English material. Maryann Corbett’s poem in this issue is a case in point. By my count, 24 of 44 lines alliterate on the tail-stave. And there are many, many such examples among the modern English alliterative poems I have collected on [alliteration.net](http://alliteration.net).

We can sum up what I have found in this study as follows: While it is possible to write beautiful, effective alliterative verse in head-stave meter, the rhythms of the language may encourage modern English poets to adopt a different alliterative pattern, a tail-stave meter predicated on rising rather than falling rhythms.

### References

- Adalsteinsson, Ragnar Ingi. *Traditions and Continuities: Alliteration in old and modern Icelandic verse*. Reykjavik: University of Iceland Press, 2014.
- Duggan, H. N. The shape of the b-verse in Middle English alliterative poetry. *Speculum*, 61(3), 1986, 564-592.
- Duggan, H. N. Final “-e” and the Rhythmic Structure of the B-Verse in Middle English Alliterative Poetry. *Modern Philology*, 86(2), 1988, 119-145.
- Gade, Kari Ellen. ‘Snorri Sturluson, *Háttatal*’ in Kari Ellen Gade and Edith Marold (eds), *Poetry from Treatises on Poetics. Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 3*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2017, p. 1094. <<https://skaldic.org/m.php?p=text&i=1376>> (accessed 31 July 2024)
- Inoue, Noriko, and Myra Stokes. “Restrictions on dip length in the alliterative line: The a-verse and the b-verse.” *The Yearbook of Langland Studies* 26, 2012, pp 231-260.
- Jónsson, Finnur. *Stutt íslenzk bragfræði*. Kaupmannahöfn: Í prentsmiðju S. L. Möllers [Möller & Thomsen], 1892.

- Ringler, Dick. *Jónas Hallgrímsson: Selected Poetry and Prose*. Retrieved from <https://digioll.library.wisc.edu/Jonas/Jonas.htm>
- Russom, Geoffrey. *The Evolution of Verse Structure in Old and Middle English Poetry: From the Earliest Alliterative Poems to Iambic Pentameter*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/evolution-of-verse-structure-in-old-and-middle-english-poetry/D7AD46EBF974D3B02DB02BA8F415CB8C>
- Russom, Geoffrey. *Poetic Form*, 2017. Downloaded from <https://literary-universals.uconn.edu/2017/10/07/poetic-form-2/>
- Sievers, E. Zur rhythmik des germanischen alliterationverses. I. *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur*, 10, 1885, pp. 209–314.

### Poem & Book Links Added

- “When the hard-souled one ...”, “Borvi the Brazen ...”, and “All-Father Speaks”, by [K.M. Butler](#) in [The Viking and the Dove: A Novel of Viking Normandy](#)
- [The Lost Land](#) by [Anthony Etherin](#)
- [By His Own Arm](#) by [Kathryn Ann Hill](#)
- [The Lay of Baldor: A Play for Voices](#) by [John Houghton](#)
- Alliterative verse by [Walt Kelly](#) in [The Pogo Sunday Brunch](#), Simon & Schuster, 1959
- [Storm Borne](#) by [Cait O’Neill McCullagh](#) in [The Bone Folder](#).
- [Abel as Cain](#) by [Camille Ralphs](#) in [The London Magazine](#)
- “Softest, sweetest, fleeting songbird ...” by [Loretta Sue Ross](#) in [Death and the Viking’s Daughter](#).
- “I live the last light ...”, “I banished the beast ...”, “Word-Weaver I am ...”, “I find you faulty ...”, “Of measured meter ...”, and “I defy you ...” by [Brandon Sanderson](#) in [The Frugal Wizard’s Handbook for Surviving Medieval England](#)
- [Game Six](#), by [Thomas Sharp](#) in [Atticus Review](#)
- [Onslaught](#) By [Jill Scharr](#) in [The Grimoire Anthology](#), vol. 2
- [Doworst](#), by [J.R.R. Tolkien](#)
- [Timothy Witchazel](#), [Noah and the Flood: A Poem in Alliterative Verse](#)

## Links to Online Performances and Translations

- Alliterative verse [Review of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight](#) (movie, 2021) by Robert Breedlove
- [Flatlands](#) (Song) by [Ryan Culwell](#)
- Translations from the Poetic Edda by Rosalind Kerven in [Viking Myths and Sagas](#)
- Translation of 'Song of the Rood' by Brendan King in the [St. Austin Review](#), March/April, 2021
- "Against a Wen" by [Maryann Corbett](#) in [Ars Medica](#)
- [Translation of 'Song of the Sun'](#) by [Nik Gunn](#) in [Ancient Exchanges](#)
- Translation of 'The Wanderer' by [J. Simon Harris](#)
- Translations from Old Norse/Icelandic skaldic verse by [Emily Osborne](#) in [Safety Razor](#): "Auðr Mourns her Dead Brother", "Loss of Sons", "Rune Carving", "Dying Well", "Áslaug's Three Sorrows", "Old Age", and "Verse Making"
- [Sable Star Saga](#) by Lord Roric Rainerson from [The Collected Works of Roric Rainerson](#)
- [A translation of 'The Seafarer'](#) and [a translation of "Caedmon's Hymn"](#) by [Adam Roberts](#)
- Translations of [Sir Gawain and the Green Knight](#), the [Alliterative Morte Arthur](#), and [The Romance of William and the Werewolf](#) by [Michael Smith](#)
- [The Search for Mabon](#) by [Gwen verch David](#)
- [V for Vendetta](#) (speech from the movie)

## Links to Alliterative Verse in Blogs & Social Media

- "[Fierce sea-steeds ...](#)" by [Alex](#)
- "[Hard to haggle ..](#)" by [Todd Anderson](#)
- "[All still and stately ...](#)" and "[Ere being drew breath](#)" by [Ender Smith](#)
- [Bringing down the Berlin Wall](#) by [Ysabeth Barrette](#)
- [A little asian: part 1](#) by [@destinykrainbow](#)
- [Forest of Possibilities](#) by [Elizabeth](#)
- [Forpfæderas](#) by [Tim Fellows](#)
- "[Baudelaire: Plumes et pluies](#)", "[Vladborn vale ...](#)", "[Fearless squirrel ...](#)", "[unruly witness](#)", "[astral parking lot](#)", "[riddle not to be solved](#)", "[the dying kept at a distance ...](#)", "[all day yesterday I was convinced it was Tuesday](#)", "[holiday but not for me ...](#)", "[down among the nature fakers ...](#)", "[pergola](#)", "[werewolfportal-pilled](#)", "[the hostile](#)

- "[half-masted ...](#)", "[selfcare falters ...](#)", "[rabbit-dusk ...](#)", "[pencil on good paper ...](#)", "[who would hear in the angel orders](#)", "[greenish ochre grokthward](#)", "[the dread-bundled dragnet](#)", "[snapshots of a snide continuance](#)", and "[multi-tier response](#)" by [Michael Helsem](#)
- "[The Silver Bough](#)" by ["Yendorcire"](#)
- "[The deep tracks ...](#)" by [Tom Holland](#)
- "[A Reprise](#)" by [Emyr Lewis](#)
- "[When winning in contests ...](#)" by [K.R.R. Lockhaven](#)
- Alliterative verse review of "The Green Knight" (movie, 2021) by [Hannibal Montana](#)
- "[When Luna spies ...](#)" by [Arum Natzorkhang](#)
- "[So came the clamor ...](#)" by [JT The Ninja](#)
- "[The Runic Edda](#)" by [D.C. Petterson](#)
- [The Visitation of Black Shuck](#) by [Ben Quant](#)
- [Ikornamal \("The Sayings of the Squirrel"\)](#) by [The Ratatoskian Rite](#)
- "[Raveshing Raven](#)" by [A.A. Rubin](#)
- "[Hound](#)" by [Sarah](#)
- "[A Ferskeytt Poem](#)" by [David ben Alexander](#)
- By [Michael Smith](#):
  - [Duffus Castle](#)
  - [Denbigh Castle](#)
  - [Castle Camps](#)
  - [To Dacre and Its Dark Four Bears](#)
  - [In Search of King Arthur in Sand-Swept Pennard](#)
  - [King Arthur Comes Alive with All His Knights](#)
  - [Brenton on Dartmoor on Foot and on High](#)
  - [A trip to Painscastle with Sir Gawain](#)
  - [The Viking Stones at Gosforth](#)
  - [Sir Gawain and Gringolet go to St Neot in Cornwall](#)
  - [Sir Gawain goes to Bygrave, an ancient settlement in aged fields](#)
  - [King Arthur's Hall; all roofless and wind-blown](#)
  - [Fettiplace lies by Lambourn's levels](#)
  - [A new translation of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight!](#)
  - [Into Laugharne in search of whispers](#)
  - [Fulk Nerra – the Butcher of Anjou](#)
  - [Swinside: Stone Sentinels of Past Centuries](#)
  - [The Cattie beneath the Ocean sits and sleeps](#)



## Links to Alliterative Verse in Blogs & Social Media (ctd.)

- By Michael Smith (ctd.):
  - Iconography at Ickleton illuminates the passing of the hours
  - In Devon banks down darkest lanes, bench ends beguiling
  - Castell Dinas Emrys – Ambrosius reborn
  - Lord Bardolph of Agincourt at Dennington
  - At the home of the joggled lintel: Conisborough Castle revisited
- Novena to St. Caedmon by St. Caedmon Studios
- The Fatal Fight by S. Baker
- “Hrafn Ytra, Feeder of Ravens” by The Tarnck
- A Sonnet for Earth, 2014, by Tony Walsh
- “First Skaldic Musings” by Shena Willington
- The American English Rune Poem, by Eirik Westcoat
- Fragments of ‘Wires and Stars’ by Alastair Zaraza

\*\*\*\*\*

## Call for Submissions

The Winter, 2025 issue of *Forgotten Ground Regained* is open for submissions. I am especially interested in poetry that fits the theme, *“Images of the Natural World”* or (for Spring, 2025) *“Mythic Tales and Sacred Truths”*. Submissions should be sent to Paul D. Deane at the following email address: [pdeane@alliteration.net](mailto:pdeane@alliteration.net).

### Requirements:

1. Submissions must be in modern English, but authors should feel free to submit poems that take advantage of the diction, rhythms, and syntax of particular language varieties and communities. I do not discriminate against Scots, Appalachian English, Black English Vernacular, Indian English, or any other language variety, though I do ask that authors be prepared to supply notes to explain any

terms or expressions that outsiders to their communities may not readily understand.

2. Submissions should make skillful, *systematic* use of alliteration in ways that use alliteration to reinforce the rhythm and connect important ideas. Overall, I prefer poems that have a stronger impact on readers when they are read aloud. I therefore encourage authors to include links to audio or video versions of their poems in their submissions.

3. I would love to see people experimenting with modern English versions of Old and Middle English alliterative verse, with Old Norse forms like *ljóðahattr* and *drottkvætt* or modern Icelandic *rimur*, or with new alliterative forms designed to highlight modern English rhythms and speech patterns. While my first preference is what traditional scholarship calls alliterative-accentual verse, I am also open to alliterative free verse or to alliterative versions of traditional forms, such as the ballad, as long as the alliteration is clearly a structural rather than a decorative feature of the form.

4. I am open to work both by contemporary poets *and to projects that would normally be considered to fall outside the literary mainstream*, such as speculative poetry, SCA Bardic Arts projects, and fan fiction.

5. There is no hard upper length limit, though poems more than five to six pages in length are likely to be published separately on the website, with links provided from the Fall issue, rather than being included directly in the pdf magazine. Note that I love both both the lyrical and the narrative turns in poetry, so longer narratives will be given careful consideration.

6. I will consider reprints but am far more likely to link to them (if published online) or to publish them directly on the site than I am to publish them in one of the quarterly issues.

**Submissions for the Winter Issue must be received by January 1, 2025**

*In recognition that poetry cannot be isolated  
from our current age of bloodshed & strife —*

J.D. Harlock

*To Consecrate Our Calamities,  
To Commemorate This Carnage<sup>26</sup>*

*Circling shifted soil, shamanesses sway, shapelessly,  
in the sand—shrouded in scarred shadows  
slowly, the silenced subjects of the state surround  
this ceremony, this celebration realized through  
the sacrifices of the shantytown shepherdesses, who  
call for a revolt, a reckoning, a return to  
the equity of Eutierria*

*for resettlements have been razed  
reinstating the rule of ravagers, who  
rely on, who  
revel in  
the spoils of savagery, the sacrilege of the sacred  
that shall be reclaimed, that shall be requited  
because the old world, that of spirit and soul, persists  
in passion and pain,  
leaving behind  
strongholds, safeguards, stratagems—  
remnants of the revelation reasoned  
when we were wise and willful, sustained on  
the sow of sanctified soil, under  
the auspices of ageless ancestors, whose wisdom  
we once availed ourselves of—only for  
the wretched*

*with their wickedness  
to waste the world.  
and warp its wonder  
with patience and prudence,  
the shepherdesses shall retaliate,  
and if pressed, shall reciprocate  
until equilibrium is reestablished  
and Eutierria is reenvisioned  
on this night, however, the shamanesses shall sway,*

*shapelessly, in the sand, so that  
one day  
when our children ask us why,  
why we choose to  
consecrate our calamities, to  
commemorate this carnage  
wrought here  
by these  
insatiable cannibals,  
who have culled us  
like cattle  
we shall hold our heads high  
and respond:  
“this barren land is now fertile grounds for  
a revolution”*

---

<sup>26</sup> Originally published in *The B'K* Vol. 15, Issue 3.  
<https://www.talbot-heindl.com/the-bk-2024-issues>





*New Series 4, Fall, 2024:*

shudder sheet-flickers in shroud-nimbus  
as rumbles prowls.

With a roar and wuther  
the flashpoint flares. Floodgates unsluice  
slashing downpours of slanting rain  
on galeforce gusts. Guns drums and bombs  
—an astounding crash— and Storm explodes  
as atmospheres, in avalanches  
collapse like landslides. In the loud tumult  
—blunderbuss boom, bang of ordnance,  
hubbub and rumpus and hammer-battering,  
the thudding thump of thundercracks—  
lightningbolts launch from louring billows.  
A fleeting glimpse like the face of the Moon:  
the illumined landscape with its leaping skyline  
brands bright its image in the backs of the eyes.

*A late-summer storm*

Zigzagging tines, zedshaped lightning's  
pronged weapon impales the primy soil:  
and we follow the flash, foin groundward with  
pathfinding probes to pierce the turf.  
Let the earth open. We enter inside.  
Here levels below our living daylight  
an otherworldly under-earthen  
landscape layered below the surface  
nests beneath us.

*Follow the lightning into the earth: Katabasis*

This unknown domain,  
her roofs writhing with roots of trees,  
is the nameless netherdepth, benighted regions  
of an occult kingdom:

Necropolis grins  
catacomb-sockets;  
sarcophagi  
decay in crypts,  
caves inhuming  
the putrid matter,  
sepulchral swaddlings  
wombed in warrenlike,  
winding, myriad  
charnel-chambers;  
chimneys venting  
fougous' fætor;  
foul souterrains;  
deep-delved dungeons:  
dusky vaultage  
—heaped headpieces—  
—hoards of longbones—  
of grave-galleries.  
Groping steeply,  
tombpassages twist  
through turnagains  
to undercrofts,

*Necropolis of tombs*



*Forgotten Ground Regained: A Journal of Alliterative Verse*

while oubliettes  
fold fathoms downwards  
to Filth's Mansion.  
Pellmell we plunge:  
in panoramas  
horizons range,  
as we reach deeper,  
like tumbledown  
topsy-turvy  
sunken citadels,  
a sewerscape  
of tiers and wards  
with terraced platforms;  
doors downfallen  
to dark culverts  
their grille-gratings  
green slime-curtained;  
canted causeways  
on the chasms' brink:  
skewed screwthreading  
escalier-spires  
leaning, looming;  
the labyrinthine  
abyss beckons:  
the bowels of the Earth.

*Sewerage*

Here are tribes of rats trapped by cave-ins,  
wriggling rodents, their runs thwarted:  
dead-ends their doom. Dens are shrinking,  
their nests narrowing as numbers grow,  
in blind alleyways and blocked cisterns,  
to a mangy mass of mating bodies.  
Like their neighbour vermin, knotting reptiles,  
keystones crushing they are kittening yet  
till the chambers choke to chink and cranny  
with tangled tails. Teeth start to gnaw.

From the maze of tombs the morgue-ullage  
and grave-gravy, gluey-curdled,  
bleed to these bilges; their black vomits  
milk out and merge, commingled blend  
of what seeps from cellars with sordors leaching  
to Earth's entrails. For from all the jakes'  
clotted courses; through clogged spillducts,  
dreckcrusted drains' downspout scuppers;  
from every addlepool and each latrine,  
ripe reredorter and reasty midden,  
siegehouse and cess, in our sunlit world,  
garderobe nightsoil of the gong-farmer,  
loose cack of lasks, and laystall-slops  
—helter-skelter, the whole system's  
countless catchments of the accursèd share,  
in a swilling swelchie —is swallowed down

*Cloaca*

*New Series 4, Fall, 2024:*

by intestine-tunnels and towel-pipework  
from the upper echelons to the enclaves beneath:  
sickly surfeit of sewage-waste,  
engulfed by gulches. The gurge of sludge  
empties ordures to the uttermost sump  
where lurks waiting, in a lake of slime,  
a prodigious dungheap.

Dirts steam. Dritt of foxes,  
deer-turds. Merd and fewmet,  
scat, spraint; fiants, scumbered  
skite of otter-crottels;  
brock-muck. Brown waggings  
brew, mix: sharn of vixen,  
critters' crap, hare-buttons,  
crudded spoor, boars' lesses

in a cradling crucible.

The crawling lees  
amalgamate, transmute fusing.  
The realm of rottenness is rich with life.

From clouds to clods, cleaving lightning  
wracks with raptures rainpuddled loam,  
and by split seconds the expanse between  
the Heavens on high and humble Earth  
is bridged in brightness: embracing partners  
space sprung apart espouse again.  
Once twins entwined, that twain sundered:  
the husband halved from the whole forebear;  
now sibling-father, and sister-wife  
marry for a moment, to mate powers  
high, dry and hot with the humid deep.  
Attraction triggers the trident-bolt,  
the warm wedding to wettish and cold,  
the air to fire; earth to water:  
as when Burn-the-Wind, at his blade-forging,  
that the redshort rods are wrought to temper  
steeps them in moistness —the steel is slaked,  
amid sputtering fumes sparks light aflame,  
in quenching oils, to quell its ardour  
(and the venoms unveil viper-chevrons,  
woven-welded, worm's-tongue markings)  
—so the glowing glaive, in glutting thrusts  
shooting downward, ensheathes his length.

Ground engulfs him. In her gravid belly  
the charge is channelled; for change kindles  
where his liquid lightnings enliven dust.  
Behold the happenings of the hidden places;  
witness wonders —from the worms' vantage.

Shocks shaking her, he sheds darting  
fork-formed currents, forces spending  
their virile virtue.

Pervading the clays

*The Catalogue of the Excrements*

*Autumn Equinox*

Ω

*Hieros gamos*

*Lightning fecundates the Earth*



*Forgotten Ground Regained: A Journal of Alliterative Verse*

are pores pooling with pregnant fluids.  
Through dropsied ducts, drenched syrx-glands  
in coral clusters, course her issues,  
unctions oozing, by ebbs and swells:  
what subtle liquors seep and filter,  
yeast-yielding brines with yolk-syrups  
and saps surging, sift lispng through  
fistule-fissures? Fertile venters  
congest with juices like the jellied slobber  
that showers downward from shooting stars  
estranged to earth; the sticky chrims  
spill into spiracles; from sponge-bladders  
limbeck-tinctures, elixirs stilling  
hoarded honeydews, like the harvests culled  
from the bread of bees, brood-comb drizzlings  
—a moist motherlode milch with nectars.

The stagnant gulfs stretch out for leagues  
under fens' fastness, fog-bound marshes,  
mould-mildewed tarns, and misty fells:  
like troves of ore, as treasure-laden  
rills running through the rankling dung;  
mine-wealthy malm. At the Moon's fullness  
her beams are bathing foreboding depths:  
the lodes ripen in the lunar rays,  
and the mire is rife: with minimis thriving,  
krill-creaturely kinds of plankton,  
with embryonic animalcula  
at their feast of filths; feeding, battening.  
Its sweats swelter, the swamp-mosshags  
humming with humours; the heats brooding  
in queachy quags quicken to frissoning  
eggs underground. An urgent drive,  
for a spell, spurs them.

Spores are stirring  
awake to sprout in their weird springtide;  
pollen pullulates to the pulse of the Moon:  
cells seedbedded. These seminal motes,  
cocooned kernels, chrysalises,  
shake in their swaddlings: shoot spicules forth,  
chaffhusks chinking as chits are hatching  
from bulging orbs, with bats' squeakings,  
in throbbing throes. Threadlets burgeon  
to knosplike nebs, whose nipped spires  
unfurl feelers with fanning strands  
and barbs burrow from the umbilical stalk;  
spikes spawn outwards, their spidery talons  
sneaking snakewise.

Snail-horn probings  
that creep and recoil then crawl anew  
reach runners out with ramifying  
antenna-twiglets that tillow again:

look how alike the lightning-flash  
to the pattern printed, its repeating figure  
izzard-emblems in the angled forks  
of vein-branches against the varves' blackness,  
pairing, parting: puny scions  
like marbling maggots, the murky clods  
riddled with root-hairs, wriggling viviers,  
weevils delving worm-farm layers  
and rifted vugs. The ravelled suckers  
flex flossing wide, in flower-whorling  
trees topdownward, their tufted plumes  
glairy gauzes like gossamer skeins  
of squirming thongs.

Squirreltail, thistledown-  
filigree fibres are fronding tassels,  
twisting, twining; the twirling bines  
will splay and split, then splice oscules  
as tentacular reticulating  
chenille nervures. Thus the node-weaving  
germs engender a giant ganglion  
cat's-cradlewise, a mercurial web.  
Lobe knits to lobe, as a loom shuttles  
a weft-texture, the wiry members  
tendrils-tissued: a teeming polyp,  
quicksilver-quarl. By quetch and spasm  
the molten mass is mapped in darkness;  
leviathan-vast.

It is vivifying;  
inhales and heaves: a heart panting,  
a brain beating, or as breathing lungs  
work the entrails; and wavering sobs  
retch restlessly. With rippling surges  
the sprawling globe spreads still farther  
by ceaseless seethings, circulating  
its lymphs and ichors; till in labour-pangs  
its ballooning shape dilates warping;  
the mesh morphing is transmogrified.  
With thrilling shudders it thrusts aloft,  
climbs in corkscrews up to the cloaking sward:  
fat fruitbodies force through the turves.

From shaded taths shapes come pricking;  
grope over grass. The growths teeming  
are bald and gibbous; bulbs are swollen,  
puffball-like pods whose pimples membranes  
are groined with gills: glabrous-wattled,  
blanched blubberflesh, bloated organs,  
limbs lepercankered, of lazar-scurfy  
sepulchral pallor are poking upwards  
from cadaverous depths

—Dead Men's Fingers;  
Sickening Milk-gall,



*Forgotten Ground Regained: A Journal of Alliterative Verse*

Sallow Puckfist,  
Bearded Bellywark;  
Bugs' Agaricus,  
Dwarrow Dwalecup,  
Dwimmer-Goblet;  
Skewbald Hoodwink,  
the Scaly Funnel;  
Phantom Fangteeth,  
Fool's Punktinder,  
the lewd Stinkhorn,  
Loathly Earthshank;  
Coven's Cockleloaf;  
Carrion-Parasol,  
Wormy Skullcap,  
Witches' Nipple,  
Corpses' Candles,  
Cowlswathed Deathshead,  
the Charnel Bonnet;  
Chilly Waxglove,  
Squires-and-Beldames,  
Squeamish Dungtuft—  
squame-warted squabs squeeze in sending  
stems stiffly out. Staves like truncheons  
unsheathe their shafts to show helmets,  
raise round bucklers with rimmed umbos;  
espy their spears: a spectral levy  
troops the gardens. Their targes serried,  
they parade in rings, ranks of circled  
midnight-mustering homunculi  
corpse-coifed in hoods and clinging veils,  
wan weaponedmen in winding-sheet  
and coffin-costume accoutrements  
lift lances high, lock the shieldwall—  
earthborn armies. From under the ground  
—the reek of decay— rotting scarecrows  
advance in onslaught, an invading horde,  
wraiths risen again arrayed for battle  
in dark dreamings dawn breaks shattering  
their feinted front fade, melt, blurring  
to stipes like straw ...the stuff of shadows  
that dwindles to dust. The day broadens  
on wilting culms and caps withering  
we can tell are but —toadstools.

*Nekyia*

*Autumn Toadstools*

It is the time of Samhain's  
Cross-Quarter feast: Calends of Winter  
and the season's end. From the Summer uplands  
they drive the herds. Now the darker half  
—the Sun's in Scorpion, sinking early—  
of The Year opens, from Yule till Springtide's  
Beltaine brightness, with the blossom of May;  
and on this Day of the Dead, dolmens open



*New Series 4, Fall, 2024:*

ajar their jaws. On jambs like menhirs  
—great grey longstones— of the greedy mouths  
of the humped barrows hived with chambers,  
on their sarsen kerbs, the silvered spirals  
—sidewinding swirls, Sun's wheel-annules,  
chevron, lozenge— shine like snailtracks,  
hoarfrost mirroring the Hunter's Moon.  
The King of Planets declines at twilight;  
the Red Warrior roams the Goatfish.

♃

♂

They set up the firedrill. Flame else is quenched.  
On the day of Samhain the dawn sunbeam  
shall pierce the portals. They prepare the wake.  
Force-fires alight, with fumes they bless  
the bairns and beasts, and the bright embers  
hasten deasil to hearth and torch.  
On window-ledge, west-facing door,  
guard goggle-eyed gruesome baubles;  
thresholds are thronged; enthroned on sills,  
snubnosed or snout- or snaggle-toothed,  
scalp scooped-empty scarecrow-faces,  
hollow headpieces with hideous grins:  
turnip-sconces. The tapers smile  
in the carved grimace, candles making  
glaring sockets glowing peepers.

*Hallowe'en*

With such punkie-lanterns, apparelled as ghosts,  
or by feather-garments or in fishing-nets  
both bare and clothed (to baffle the spirits),  
gangs of guisers go dance their rounds  
trick-or-treating, to try their luck  
—skullfaced skeklers, skeleton-mummers—  
from door to door, with doggerel catches  
to the tongs and bones and the tabor-whistle  
for fuel and food for the festal banquet  
of apple-bobbing, auguries read  
from hazel-nuts amid horns of mead;  
and meat for the Manes: milk, grain and honey.  
Reechy rushlights and roasting smells  
herald them homeward to the hall of feasting;  
but in the noman's-lands —numb, footstepless  
fence and carfax, crossroads and ford—  
restless the wraiths may ride the winds,  
hunt haunting the trees.

\* \* \*