Forgotten Ground Regained
A Journal of Alliterative Verse

New Series 8, Fall, 2025

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. Submissions in or about alliterative verse are welcome.[1] You can email the editor at pdeane@alliteration.net. To join Forgotten Ground Regained's email discussion forum, navigate to the following link: https://gaggle.email/join/forgotten-ground-regained@gaggle.email. The journal is now open for submissions for the Winter, 2026, issue, with an emphasis on the theme, "Psalms and Meditations". You can read the full call for submissions later in this issue.

Key. The mediæval letters þ (from the runes) and ð you will encounter in some of the poems and articles in this issue denote the fricative *th*. Roughly speaking, the former character represents the unvoiced speech-sound as in "thin", the latter the voiced, as in "this".

Contributors

Frank Coffman is a retired professor of English and journalism at Rock Valley College in Rockford, Illinois and founder and moderator of the Weird Poets Society.

D.A. Cooper is a poet from Houston, Texas. In addition to *Forgotten Ground Regained*, his poetry and translations have recently appeared in *Illuminations of the Fantastic*, *Lighten Up Online*, *THINK*, and *Wayfare*, among others. He is an avid collector of degrees. Most recently he has received his MFA from the University of St. Thomas, Houston. He serves as an associate editor at *New Verse Review: A Journal of Lyric and Narrative Poetry*. He also enjoys translating dialect poetry from Italy, watching *The Office*, and looking at trees.

[1] Note: In poetry that follows the rules of Old English alliterative verse, editors usually mark the caesura, or break between half-lines, by adding extra space. However, in some 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.

Table of contents

Paul D. Deane is a computational linguist by vocation and poet by avocation. He has edited Forgotten Ground Regained (the website) since 1999, and its quarterly journal since 2023.

[2] **N.B.:** No part of this publication may be used or reproduced in any manner for the purpose of training artificial intelligence technologies or systems. Where no image credit is provided, the image is from the Microsoft Word stock image library.

An English professor by trade, **Peter G. Epps** is founder and director of the Servi Institute in Oklahoma. He is the author of several poetry collections, including *Depth Perception*, *Unanswered Rhymes*, and *Clay Pots*. His poetry has also appeared in The Society of Classical Poets.

Rahul Gupta, whom Tom Shippey once described as, "...the most accomplished, imaginative, and technically-correct exponent of alliterative verse since Tolkien", obtained his Ph.D. from the University of York in alliterative poetics. He 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.

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 *Palestine Penalties*.

Math Jones is a British poet & a practicing Pagan, author of *Sabrina Bridge* (Black Pear Press), & *The Knotsman* (Arachne Press). His work has appeared in various journals, & anthologies, including *Speculative Poetry & the Alliterative Revival* & on *Forgotten Ground Regained.*

Liz Kendall is a poet and non-fiction writer based in Surrey. Her co-authored book *Meet Us and Eat Us: Food plants from around the world* celebrates biodiversity in poetry, prose, and photography. Poetry publications include Candlestick Press, The Hedgehog Poetry Press, *Flights*, *Mslexia*, and *Amethyst Review*. Find her online at theedgeofthewoods.uk, on Facebook @rowansarered, on Instagram @meetusandeatus.

Marcus Lindenburg is a poet, archivist, and scholar of medieval Irish and Icelandic literature. He holds an MA in Literature (New York University) and an MSLIS in Library and Information Sciences (Long Island University), with a particular interest in archival practices and manuscript studies. His scholarship centers on the analysis of poetry within manuscript history, focused on the preservation and adaptation of material forms. His poetry can be found digitally and in print, in venues such as Stanford University's *MANTIS*, North County Public Radio, and The Greene Street Review. He is interested in the play between experimental form and traditional verse, particularly through Celtic and Norse forms.

Colin Mackenzie received his PhD in Old Norse and Old English from the University of Glasgow in 2014. He began translating Old Norse and Old English texts into Scots in 2021 and writing original Scots *dróttkvætt* verse on moving to Orkney in 2023. The Tale o Thorstane Grue (Þorsteins þáttr skelks) and Anent Thoralf Skolms son (Þórálfs drápa Skólmssonar) have been published in Lallans: The Journal o the Scots Leid Associe. More than thirty of his Scots *dróttkvætt* poems can be found on his blog, Auld Norse.

Edwin Morgan (1920-2010) was the first Scottish *makar*, or Poet Laureate.

Robert Rickard is a postgraduate researcher in the school of American studies at the University of East Anglia. He is author of Living things made rich & strange: two tree poems by an early eco-poet: Arthur **Sale**. He also edited a book of Arthur Sale's letters in collaboration with Richard Verity.

Jordan River writes folkloric horror, polemics and ritual verse. His work unearths forgotten myths, unspoken names, and the thin places where winter tales bleed and sing. River is intensely fascinated by the music of spoken language and can often be found composing verse under his breath. Or at least that is what he says when caught talking to himself. Author of two award-awaiting poetry cycles of unheralded skaldic wonder—*Banquet & Ashes*, and *Breaking Ground*—Jordan is currently writing the world's greatest adaptation of Treasure Island while caring for his very demanding Schnauzers in the desolate Great Plains of North America.

Joshua Walker, also known as The Last Bard, is an independent poet reviving ancient forms in a modern tongue. His work blends personal myth, schizoaffective vision, and alliterative craft. He has been published in *Solarpunk Magazine*, *Disturb the Universe Magazine*, *Dog Throat Journal*, *Shot Glass Journal*, *Temple in a City*, and other venues. He lives and writes in Oklahoma City.

Introduction

Old Norse poetry, like the poetry of the other ancient, pre-Christian Germanic languages, was written exclusively in alliterative verse. But Old Norse poetry is distinct. Except for small variations, every Old English or Old High German poem had the same form. But the Viking skalds developed dozens of different forms and deployed them for a variety of purposes – some for heroic lays; others for song; some for magical spells, and still others for praising the courage and generosity of kings.

This differentiation in form may have had several causes: the development of a class of professional skalds seeking the patronage of noble and especially royal courts; exposure to Old Irish or Old Welsh poetry, where a multiplicity of forms was well established; the simpli-fication of Norse word-forms, compared to other Germanic languages, which made it easier to count syllables rather than relying solely on the alliterative pattern to define the meter. But two developments are the most important: first, the shift from *stichic* poetry (with no formal organization or pattern across lines) to *stanzaic* patterns, with different rules for different stanza types, and second, a shift in the treatment of lines. In Old English poetry, a line consists of two half-lines. In Old Norse, half-lines are treated as lines in their own right. This means that most Old Norse forms are built from lines with two or at most three stresses.

The short lines of Old Norse, combined with other features of the language, make Old Norse poems sound compressed and telegraphic – haiku-like, if translated word-for-word. This effect is hard to carry over into modern English; often either rhythm or grammar suffers. This feature of the verse, combined with the Old Norse love of kennings, creates a gnomic, riddling effect. Depending on the stanza type, the basic template of alliterative verse could be supplemented with internal rhyme – whether slant rhyme or true – and a hundred other devices, lovingly catalogued by Snorri Sturluson, author of the Poetic and Prose Eddas.[3]

English is in many ways the opposite of Old Norse: prolix where Old Norse is terse, rigid where Old Norse is flexible, and flexible where Old Norse is rigid. Imitating Old Norse poetry is thus an exercise in transposing poetic patterns across a linguistic gulf. But the exercise is worth it. It is a discipline that creates meaning and energy out of the tension between language and form. In this issue, you will get a chance to see what kinds of creativity comes out of it.

During the Middle Ages, Old Norse changed little in Iceland, where it became modern Icelandic, and Norse poetic forms have persisted in Iceland until the present day. But Icelandic absorbed the influence of Latin Catholic culture and added end-rhyme to the poetic mix. This resulted in a family of forms called, in Icelandic, *rimur* – alliterative verse stanzas with well-defined rhyme schemes. Between Old Norse and Icelandic, we can find a wealth of poetic forms to imitate, if we so choose.

Here is a quick recapitulation of the basics of Old Norse versification. Each line is a phrase, with two or three stresses, following a predominantly falling (most often, trochaic) rhythm. There are always at least three syllables in a line (usually four). Two-stress lines come in pairs, joined by alliteration. The first line in each pair contains two alliterating stresses, or lifts, called *props*. They must alliterate with the first stress in the next line. That stress is called the *head-stave*. Three-stress lines sometimes pair with other lines in the same manner, but sometimes they appear alone, with two of their three stresses alliterating, depending on the stanza form chosen. Norse poetry sometimes allows extra unstressed syllables, as in Old English, but much more sparingly; and in many stanza types the number of syllables is fixed. In the most demanding forms, such as *dróttkvætt* (courtly meter), there are additional requirements – for instance, in *dróttkvætt*, which only uses three-stress lines, lines alternate between internal slant rhymme and full internal rhyme. The resulting sound can be described as more like the piano than the fiddle: precise and fluent, with every note standing out, clear and distinct.

I have arranged the poems more or less in order from loose, impress-ionistic, to stricter imitations of Norse forms (except for the last two poems, which imitate Icelandic *rimur*). Along the way, I provide copious notes to orient the reader to the forms illustrated. The issue also contains three articles. The first, Rahul Gupta's "'Not Unless Bound with a Chain': An Introduction to *Dróttkvætt*" not only describes *dróttkvætt* but situates it within the context of Norse religion and culture. The second describes the discovery of another early revivalist, Arthur Sale. In the third, Robert Rickard reviews the recent scholarly conference on alliteration in poetry and cultural history at the University of East Anglia (September 1st, 2025).

[3] Old Norse, like Old English, obeyed the rhythmic rules defined by the Sievers Types. Only a few of the poems in this issue do the same – it is much harder to manage in Modern English than in Old English or Old Norse. But sticking to those rhythms is what gives Tolkien's alliterative verse in The Lord of the Rings its distinctive feel. If you want to get a better sense of the Sievers Types, this page in my Field Guide to Alliterative Verse will be helpful.

Edwin Morgan

Jocasta[4]

She had guessed long ago · but gave up the thought
as too grubby, too godless. The green in his eye
had a family strangeness? That failed to stick.
There were gaps in his story, but so it goes.
Coincidence rules · in cradles not royal
as on couches in Corinth. Kings command,
gods garble. Pieces slip from the game.
Some said in malice · she might have been his mother,
but bitching throve · in bored Thebes.
She married him, cherished him, gave him four children.
The great bedroom was blue · and blazing with gold.
Rain rang on the roof; white sheets rustled.
When the sun was near · he would stretch naked,
fall on her at cockcrow · with uncooled force.
Yet his mate was his mother, as mouths had breathed
and as she had half known · yet needed him the more.
When everything was revealed · she veiled herself, vomited,
ran with a rough rope · under the rafters
and swung in purple · to be purged of her son.

[4] Copyright © Estate of Edwin Morgan, 1985. This poem first appeared in *Selected Poems* (1985), and was reprinted in *The Collected Poems of Edwin Morgan*. Reprinted with the permission of Carcanet Press.

Note from the Editor

I start this issue with two poems by Edwin Morgan (1920-2010), Scotland's first *makar* or poet laureate: "Jocasta" and "A Song of the Petrel". Neither poem is in any historic form. They are what Dennis W. Wise, in his *Speculative Poetry and the Modern Alliterative Revival*, calls *impressionistic* alliterative verse ("Jocasta" is probably about a 5, and "A Song of the Petrel", a 7 of 10 on Wise's scale from impressionism to faithfulness of historical alliterative form.)

"Jocasta" shows what a great modern poet can do if they take the *idea* of alliterative verse and run with it, letting alliteration fall where the rhythm dictates. "A Song of the Petrel" is more Norse in feeling. It calls up the feeling of Northernness, of the wild North Sea that the Vikings dared, through its liberal use of alliterative lines with clashing stresses and compound nouns that aren't quite kennings but have much the same feel. Edwin Morgan steeped himself in that Northern world, and this poem gives a sense of the power that can come from capturing not merely the metrical form but the spirit behind the form. Keep that power in mind as you read through the rest of issue 8.

Note that neither "Jocasta" nor "A Song of the Petrel" follow any of the Norse forms. They are inspired by Old English verse. Two facts make that obvious: first, they consistdeciof two-part lines arranged in half-lines. If they were Old Norse poems, each half-line would be in a line of its own. Second, there are no stanzas. Old Norse poetry always has structured stanzas.

Jocasta, mother of Oedipus, from a 15th-Century manuscript

Edwin Morgan

A Song of the Petrel

(translated from the Russian of Maxim Gorky, 1868-1936)[5]

Wind-called clouds crowd up to cover
the grey wave-waste. Wheeling between
the pride of the cloud and the press of the sea
is the proud petrel, black-lighting-bolt.
He screams skimming the scattered surf,
and the bold call of the bird comes
to the cloud's ear as clear gladness.
Cry of thirst, this, thirst for tempest!
A cry is in the clouds of fury's force,
of fire in passion and trust to triumph.
Seagulls in the storm shudder to moaning,
moaning their seafaring, and in their surfseeing
are ready to bury sea-bottom-deep
their terror of the tempest. The loons too mourn,
the blows of thunder burst their hearts,
battle-pleasures of unapproachable life.
The poor fearful penguin scuttles
With his plump plumage to the rocks. Alone
the proud petrel is poised free,
bold above the foam-pale sea.
Still lower bowed, still blacker loured,
The clouds are closing over the waves;
The waves are whistling, and their whipped crests
mount with thought to meet the thunder;
to thunder-grumble wave-rage-groaning
speaks in the teeth and strife of the wind;
see the wind seize in embrace of force
its flocks of billows and rush them on the rocks
with wild spite and swing, bursting
the be-emeralded sea-mass to dust and spume!
The petrel planes, black-lightning-bolt,
And cries as he climbs to the clouds like an arrow,
and sings as he swoops on the foam of the waves.
Some spirit of blackness he as he soars:
Spirit of the storm, laughing, sobbing,
laughing at the clouding, sobbing with rejoicing;
spirit-sensitive through that threat of thunder
to long-waiting weariness upon the waters
but waiting in will for the sure unshrouding,
The assured unshrouding and unclouding of the sun.
Winds howl to thunder's growl;
clouds piled blazing in pyre of blue
flock above the unfathomed sea;
the sea seizing the lighting streaks
quenches them plunged in its cavers,
and the javelin-images over the waves
quiver as they vanish like vipers in fire.
The storm is breaking into full being!
There flies the fearless petrel in his pride
through lightning and over the wave-wrath-roaring
and there like a prophet cries triumphing
'Let the tempest be unloosed to its last tide!'

[5] Copyright © Estate of Edwin Morgan, 1952. This poem first appeared in *The Vision of Cathkin Braes* (1952), and was reprinted in *The Collected Poems of Edwin Morgan*. Reprinted with the permission of Carcanet Press.

Peter G. Epps

Waning

Rain drops softly
Slowly soaking
Muted greens
And growing things;

Birds call, hidden
Hesitating
Wary waiters
In the wings;

Day is drawing
Slow to dawning,
Summer slumbers
Slouch toward snows;

Here we linger,
Hesitating,
While a lowly
Lifetime goes.

The author writes:

I have long experimented with Old English techniques "hidden" in Modern English verse, but have generally found Old English and Modern English too different to accomplish much **directly** using them. I saw your call for submissions & decided it was a good occasion to "play" with these techniques again.

In the below I have tried to use internal, rhyme, assonance and consonance to reinforce the effect of the dominant alliteration … The short lines of Norse forms are hard to work with in Modern English (hence our strong preference for iambic pentameter), but with subject matter that lends itself to haiku-like terseness and subtle "turns," it works well enough.

I think some of my (half-)lines are one alliterated syllable short of perfect, but generally you'll find there's an aural effect compensating for that … I hope it gives a little pleasure.

Note from the editor:

This poem, as the author says, isn't in any of the strict Norse forms (note the rhyme scheme …) But it definitely captures much of the feel! Short two-stress lines with alliteration linking the odd-numbered lines with the following even-numbered lines, and lots of subsidiary assonance and consonance.

D.A. Cooper

Hellhound

Inferno VI: 4-32

Whichever way
I walk or turn,
I see the sufferings
of more sufferers.
Cold rain,
cursed and heavy
ceaselessly falls
in this circle of Hell.

Massive hailstones,
murky water,
and snow spill
from a dark sky,
pouring across
the putrid earth.
The strange beast,
Hydra's brother,

barks harshly
from houndlike throats
at the foul folk
sunk in the filth.
His eyes are bloodred,
his beard is greasy,
his belly is broad,
his claws like blades;

he scratches and slashes
and slices the shades.
The wretched ones howl
like dogs and hide
one side while the other
suffers the rain;
those sinners turn
and twist endlessly.

Note from the Editor:

The form of this poem is directly modelled on the most common of Old Norse forms, *fornyrðislag* (epic meter), which is very similar to Old English alliterative verse, with two major differences: First, half-lines are treated as full lines; second, lines are grouped into stanzas eight lines long. So the basic structure consists of four pairs of two-stress lines. In each pair, the first line is linked by alliteration to the following line.

This poem loosens the Old Norse form in ways that make it much easier to write modern English poetry. There is usually only one alliterating lift in each line, and the alliterating lift is sometimes the last stress in the line. By contrast, in Old Norse, you would have two alliterating lifts in the odd-numbered lines, and only the first stress in the even-numbered lines would alliterate (never the last!) Similarly, in the Old Norse form, there would always be at least four syllables in each line (sometimes one or two more), but in this poem, we encounter lines like "cold rain" or "showed his fangs". It is possible to imitate the Old Norse form more closely than this, but it takes work. And even with the looser form, the lilt of the underlying Norse form strikes the ear wonderfully well.

When Typhon's son saw us,
he spread his jaws,
showed his fangs,
shook with fury.
My guide grabbed
dirt from the ground
and flung fistfuls
into the frenzied maws.

And like a starving dog
hysterically yapping
that quiets when food
finally comes,
focusing on the task
of filling its belly,
so did the filthy faces
of the fiend Cerberus.

J.D. River

Song-Hall of the Bone-Mother

(From the Winter-Songs of the Codex of Hjalskring[6]*)*

Harp lay hanging, harrowed by dust,
string-road silent, song-flesh gone.
Frost-wolf fed · on famine's field,
kin-fire kindled · in cold-bound homes.

Caelen Chordwise, cold of thought,
heard in hush · a hollow strain—
wind-woven wail · from winter's mouth,
calling him close · from comfort's shade.

He fared beyond · the fallow bounds,
through briar's bite · and burdened stones,
where root-serpents · writhed in gloom,
and twilight thronged · to thread the path.

At world's worn edge · the word-fall failed,
speech lay still · and spell-smoke curled.
Shadow-hall thrived · with thorn-twined towers—
Crannmor crowned · in coldest sky.

No gate-ward greeted, no guard gave cry;
the wall stood wide · to winter's breath.
Bone-seat bore · the Bride of Snow,
mantled in mist · and moonlit thread.

Courtfolk crouched · as carrion birds,
thirsting for tears · that they might shed.
She spoke like sleet · on steel-bound helm:
"Play for my hall, and hold my crown."

Breathless he bowed, bore the harp,
sleep-forged strings · still with frost.

He struck the steel · of sorrow's chord,
night-notes nested · on nameless moors.

Stars grew starless, stone wept rime,
courtfolk wailed · with wind in throat.
Frost froze thicker · with each frail tone,
and owls went mute · in oaken dark.

"Mortal music · moves the dead;
your grief-song gilds · what gold cannot.
Take this token · to bind your grief;
wear cold honor · in winter's name."

She set it fast · on frost-burned brow—
bone-band bound · by blaze of ice
Its bite was deep, its bands unyielding:
"Sing till the sea · shall swallow stars."

He played as cloud · closed round the moon,
harp-breath heavy · with hail and hush.
Frost-fields flower · at fingers' touch.
and fire forgot · the form of flame.

Ice bit bone · and blackened root,
dreams lay drowned · in drifts of glass.
His name was gone · but not his song—
it wound the world · in winter's chain.

Snow sleeps deep · where seed once woke,
and Spring stays never · where song has gone.
Far northern night · where night is longest,
Crannmor waits · in wind's last hush.

Dusk-dreams drift · from deep-carved stone,
string stirred softly · by sorrow's hand.
Hollow hands · still hold the harp—
soul bound fast · to frost and sound.

[6] The *Codex of Hjalskring* is part of a fantasy setting the author is developing for a work in progress.

Note from the Editor:

Fornyrðislag is very close to Old English alliterative verse, as can be seen in this poem, where I have put the alliterating a- and b-verses on the same line. (Of course, this poem isn't, *strict* Old Norse *fornyrðislag*, since (for instance) there is sometimes only one alliterating lift in the a-verse. And yet how the wind (and the lines) sing!

Liz Kendall

Garlic - *Allium sativum*

A Riddle

A leek went to war.
A weapon healed woes.
A spear spouted fire.
Lips cursed kissing.[7]

Joshua Walker

Ash of the Oathbreaker

Blades brood over
  the broken promise.
    Steel does not sleep.
Storms find the false;
  fangs find the soft:
    No hall holds lies.

Note from the Editor:

One of the ways that Old Norse poetry differs from other Germanic verse traditions is that it allows the poet to build stanzas using short, three-stress lines with internal alliteration.

Liz Kendall's poem, "Garlic" does not echo any specific Old Norse form, but its three-stress lines illustrate how such lines worked. Three lifts: In Old Norse, that usually meant three matching dips, hence six or seven syllables (English seems to be quite willing to produce three-stress lines that only have four or five syllables). Two of the lifts alliterate.

Joshua Walker's "Ash of the Oathbreaker" is modelled on an Old Norse form that takes advantage of these three-stress lines: *ljoðaháttr* (song meter). A *ljoðaháttr* stanza can be described as having six lines. Lines 1 and 2 are normal *fornyrðislag* lines, joined by alliteration, as are lines 4 and 5. Lines 3 and 6 are short three-stress lines with internal alliteration.

If you write lines 1 and 2 as a single line, and lines 4 and 5 as a single line (as in Old English alliterative verse), you get a 4-line stanza with 4 stresses, then 3, then 4, then 3, rather like a ballad. If you add a rhyme scheme to this pattern, as in some forms of Icelandic *rimur*, the resemblance to ballad form is very close, indeed.

---

[7] *Answer:* Garlic

A leek went to war.
Gar is the Anglo-Saxon word for *spear*, *leac* means *leek*, and *lic* means *like*. So garlic is both spear-leek and spear-like, depending on the chain of etymology.

A weapon healed woes.
Garlic is a strong anti-viral, anti-bacterial weapon. Effective against respiratory illness, it also improves blood circulation and lowers cholesterol. Garlic is used in horticulture to prevent rot and repel slugs. Its mythical powers extend to warding off vampires and trolls.

A spear spouted fire.
Garlic's sulphurous compounds are excreted on the breath for hours after eating. These compounds developed as the plant's defence against animals. Eating parsley or an apple afterwards can help prevent garlic breath.

Lips cursed kissing.
See above.

Frank Coffman

The Galdrmaðr Weaves an Evil Spell

These *Þorpfólk*[8] threatened and spurned me—
these wrongs my wrath has stirred.
Verily, I, vengeful *Vitki*[9],
plan to repay their affront.
Tremble in terror they shall.

Erilar[10] am I, in anger eager;
bloodshed shall be their due!
Grudging *galdrmaðr*[11], grimly vowing
pain their price to pay—
sorrow sown by spells.

No seiðmann[12] I; I scorn the trance.
Though still my staff has power,
my tongue is weapon—both warp and woof
to weave with words my wrath;
fell phrases to unfold.

"By woven words, woe now sow!
let drought dry their crops,
skycandle seer, seed and stalk!
Their kine killed by famine!
Thus, they too shall starve!

"Let pestilence, pain pitiless reign,
sickness spread amain!
"Let scathing strife beset their days!
Murder and mayhem their curse;
may crowfeasts be common!

Note from the Editor:

This poem imitates *galdralag* (spell meter), a form used for chanted spells, incantations, and curses.

This stanza form starts out like *ljoðahattr*: the first four lines alternate between normal four-beat alliterative verse lines (sometimes punctuated as two lines), alliterating on the 1st, 2nd and 3rd stresses, and three-beat lines where two of the three beats alliterate. What makes it *galdralag* is the presence of one (occasionally more) extra three-beat line(s) (with 2 of the beats alliterating) at the end of the stanza.

"This murderous spell from my mouth,
I utter into the wind;
Rise, O dead, reeking corpses.
Arouse to roam abroad!
wend awake once more!

"Let earthwombs open; every gravemouth,
each moldering maw,
disgorge its dead! Dread wanderers,
though unliving—taking lives!
Make fresh feasts for ravens!

"Let no crops grow; let no kine thrive,
let all folk run or rot!
This land shall learn, By lessons lethal,
The price of pain to pay!
Thus I, Asfjondi[13], curse them
Þrøngvi[14] against their throng,
righting their wrongs to me.

[8] folk or people of the thorp or village
[9] *sorcerer, "wise one"*
[10] early Old Norse for "earl," in this case "high or royal magician"
[11] galdr-man, specializing in chants, curses
[12] magician using trances, shamanism to induce results
[13] "fiend against God": the sorcerer's name
[14] **enemy, opponent**

Colin Mackenzie
Mabie Forest

Fronds of finely
frosted, glossy
bracken buckle
backwards, racked by
harsh and hurtling
hail which flails the
ground with grinding
grit so bitter.

Colin Mackenzie
House Martins

Master silt-masons
mortar pond-quarried
blocks of beak-stucco,
building egg-villas.

Note from the Editor:

- "Mabie Forest" imitates *hagmælt* ('skillfully spoken'). This is a variant of *fornyrðislag* with internal rhyme (*skothending*, or internal slant rhyme, in odd-numbered lines and *aðalhending*, or internal full rhyme, in even ones, as in *dróttkvætt*).
- "House Martins" imitates *Haðarlag* ('Hǫðr's metre'). This is a variant of *málaháttr* (a meter that requires five syllables per line, and three stresses). Each line follows a regular rhythm (/ x \ / x). Alliteration works according to the usual Old Norse pattern: two props in the odd-numbered lines alliterating with the head-stave (first stressed syllable) in the following even-numbered line. Once again, there is internal rhyme (*skothending* in odd-numbered lines and *aðalhending* in even ones).

Colin Mackenzie

Merry Dancers

The Bear's noust was buskit
bricht, as langships flichtered
skinklin sails in seelent
seas abune the easin.
The ferlie fleet, skirin,
flitted throu the pitmirk
haugh o stervin hirsels,
heizin forestams bleezin.

The Hunter's heich winter
haen was filled wi siller
birks an beech in waretime
brechan, keenly sheenin.
Aiks an ash in back-en
armour scaumt the starny
fiel wi flame, a leemin
forest ower Orkney.

Sweelin jaws an swelchies
sank the skimin langships;
the trees tint their glentin
targets, reived by darkness.
Slockened ingles, smuikin,
smuired the Lion's tourin
shore wi coom. The carry's
cannles sist their dancin.

Note from the Editor:

This poem is in Modern Scots.

It was the joint winner of the Hugh McDiarmid Tassie for poetry in the Scots Language Society's annual Sangschaw competition.

It is written according to the rules of Old Norse *dróttkvætt* meter, which requires eight three-stress lines joined in pairs by alliteration according to the normal rules, but which adds additional constraints, such as requirements for internal rhyme and feminine line endings (see Rahul Gupta's article later in this issue for the full formal rules.)

Glossary

Merry Dancers: the northern lights (aurora borealis)
The Bear: the constellation, Ursa Major
noust: the place in which a boat is hauled up
The Bear's noust: the sky
buskit: adorned
bricht: bright
langship: longship
flichter: to flutter, fly awkwardly or unsteadily
skinklin: sparkling
seelent: silent
abune: above
easin: the edge of the sky, the horizon
ferlie: unusual, strange; wonderful, marvelous
skirin: bright, gleaming
pitmirk: dark as a pit, pitch dark
haugh: a piece of level ground, gen. alluvial, on the banks of a river, river-meadow land
stervin: freezing
hirsels: a flock of sheep, the number of sheep looked after by one shepherd or on one small farm
stervin hirsels: stars; **haugh of stervin hirsels**: the night sky
heizin: lifting, raising up, hoisting
forstam: ship's prow
bleezin: blazing
The Hunter: the constellation Orion
heich: high
haen: a haven, (natural) harbour
siller: silver
waretime: springtime
brechan: plaid
siller birks an beech in waretime: green auroral light
sheenin: shining
aiks: oaks
back-en: late-season
aiks an ash in back-en armour: red auroral light
scaum: to scorch
sterny: starry
fiel: field
leemin: gleaming, glittering
ower: over
sweelin: of water, waves: to roll, to spread, to flow with a swirling motion
swelchies: whirlpools
skime: to glance, shine with reflected light, gleam
tint: lost
glentin: glinting
reived: stolen, removed
slocken: quenched, put out
ingles: hearth-fires
smuir: to bury or cover over thickly so as to obscure or obliterate
The Lion: the constellation Leo
tourin: heaping up; rising high in the air, of flames
coom: coal-dust, soot
carry: the sky
cannle: candle
sist: stay, stop, or halt

Michael Helsem
"viaticum"

stones we raise
will be cloudstrange
emptiness
of the erst wood
the words lost
a lot of things
forebears knew
nor dreamed annul

Colin Mackenzie
Hail in St Mary's

The goose-gate's
gairies loudly
skailt their scree,
scarrach-snell an
cranreuch bricht.
Brattlin stanes fae
quarrled sky
skelpt the hooses.

The selkies'
siller ootfiel,
chingle baffed,
chittered cauld an
dark an tuim,
tremmlin lanesome
ablow the
bitter carry.

Note from the Editor:

Both poems on this page mimic Old Nose *kviðuháttr* meter, a variant of *fornyrðislag* in which odd-numbered lines have three syllables, and even-numbered lines have four. This can be a very challenging form in modern English, especially if the poet maintains the Old Norse requirement of double alliteration on the odd-numbered lines.

"Hail in St. Mary's" is in Modern Scots.

Glossary for "Hail in St. Mary's":

gate: way, road, path;
goose-gate: sky
gairies: crags;
goose-gate's gairies: clouds
skailt: scattered
scarrach: a flying shower
snell: quick
cranreuch: hoar-frost
brattlin: clattering
stanes: stones
fae: from
quarrled: quarried
skelpt: struck, slapped
hooses: houses
selkies: seals
siller: silver
ootfiel: outlying part of a farm
selkies'siller ootfiel: sea
chingle: coarse gravel
baffed: struck, hit
chittered: shivered;
cauld: cold
tuim: empty
tremmlin: trembling
lanesome: lonely
ablow: below
carry: the motion of the clouds, the sky

Math Jones

The Opening of the *Gylfaginning*, paraphrased in *fornyrðislag*

1. Gylfi deceived.

1.1.
Gylfi was glad — *The king of Sweden*
  to give to the woman,
(she'd made him laugh),
  as much of his land
as she with four oxen
  to furrows could plough,
in a single turn
  of the sun and the moon.

1.2
'Come to me, sons!'
  Crafty Gefjon — *Means 'Giving one'*
brings her children,
  (born in the north,
their sire a giant,)
  sinks her ploughshare
deep into Sweden,
  draws out an island. — i.e. *Sjaelland, Denmark*

1.3
Her ox-lads leave
  a lake for Gylfi, — *Logrinn, 'lake', aka Mälar*
bays matching headlands,
  as Bragi says: — *Means 'poetry' or 'foremost'*

The author writes:

This project, recasting Snorri's prose into alliterative verse, was essentially started for fun and practice – ready-made material, and fitting too. With a very basic *fornyrðislag* form. This is the first part of nine, twice revised, to make this 'Third's draft'.

The plan has been to follow closely the text as presented in English translations. Primarily, I've used those of Antony Faulkes (Everyman) & Jesse Byock (Penguin), with additional study of J.I. Young & Edward Petitt (his Poetic Edda); also the original texts as best I could.

I've replaced, (beyond the opening section) the Old Norse names with modern English alternatives, just to see what effect that might have. Some have been obvious - Thunder for Thor - others much harder. I've relied on Rudolf Simek's Dictionary for translations to work from, with poetic licence and conjecture for the less obvious, or not known.

For the poems that Snorri quotes I've attempted to cast them in a form like to the original - *ljoðahátr*, *dróttkvætt*, etc.

I suspect that this may be best heard, rather than read - though you can be the judge. Earlier drafts were recorded to help in editing & reworking, and it felt like the drama, the energy, the humour, the tension, and themes of deception, emerged clearer for it. I shall be recording completed sections soon.

The project has kept expanding. *Gylfaginning* has been completed in early drafts. I could not help carrying on into *Skaldskaparmal*... until hitting the lists and lists of lists; I may just stick to the stories. And *Háttatal* gets a look in too, as much to figure out for myself what Snorri & Faulkes meant in the words they used - and as well write it as verse myself, than to struggle through prose.

Perhaps it's a crazy idea - it's a version, not a translation. It's not academic or scholarly. It's not even great poetry. But it might help some get into the prose (and the poetics), or to rethink it, and feel the stories, and the contradictions, as alive still.

1.4
Gefjon wins from Gylfi
A gift, of land lifted,
Drafted, gone to Denmark,
Drawn by oxen; four heads,
With eight moons all alight,
Effort steaming for it,
Leave behind a lake; waves
Let the new isle settle.

2. Gylfi deceived again.

2.1
Fool him the once,
  maybe fool him again?
Gylfi came — *Means 'sea, waves'*
  this king of Sweden,
hidden by age,
  to the halls of the Aesir, — *The tribe of gods?*
made use of his magic
  to mask his face.

2.2
He wanted to question,
  was it their nature,
or the gods they worshipped,
  worked things so
in accordance to their will?
  But the cunning Aesir
blew his disguise;
  they built their deceits,

2.3
put murk in his eyes;
  in the midst of their city,
a hall so high
  he can hardly see over,
with shields as shingles,
  shining on the roof.
Just as is told
  in the tale by Thiodolf: — *A human poet*

2.4
The ready warriors
Had roof-tiles of Odi — *i.e. shields*
Shining on their backs
Against showers of stone.

2.5
On duty at the door,
  a juggler of knives,
with seven in the air,
  served as a warden,
asked him his name.
  'Only Gangleri, — *Means 'tired of going'.*
traveller of trackless ways.
  Treat me as guest

2.7
'and answer me this...'
  'You may ask of the king!
I'll take you there myself!'
  Tracking then through
a range of wonders -
  warriors in battle,
drinkers and players -
  as the door shut behind,

2.8
saying to himself,
  from the saws of wisdom:

Before you go through, be thorough at a door.
Always be watchful
Always be wary;
To know if an enemy, knives at the ready,
Might sit at the benches unseen.

*** *** ***

3. Three thrones.

3.1
Thrones, there are three,
and three men in them.
He whispers to his guide,
'What are their names,
who is the ruler..?'
'High is the king, *Hárr*
As-High above him, *Jafnhárr*
over all is Third.' *Þriði*

3.2
High speaks first:
'Hale to the wanderer.
Have you food,
have you drink?
Sit at our table.'
'Since I am here,
I would like to be told
what learning is present?'

3.3
High made allowance:
'Unless you become
more wise than this,
you'll walk out in bits!
Ask, as you stand -
Those who answer will sit!'

4. The highest god...

4.1
Gangleri began,
a gauging question:
'Who is the oldest,
the highest of gods?'

4.2
'His name is All-Father, *Alfǫðr, i.e. Oðin*
but others he's had
in the tongue of the Old-yard, *i.e. "Old-Asgard"*
twelve in number:
All-Father, I say,
but also the Harrier, *Herjann*
Thruster, the third, *Hnikarr*
O'er-thrower, the fourth, *Hnikuðr*

4.3
'The Fullest-in-Knowledge, *Fjǫlnir*
Fulfiller-of-Wishes, *Óski*
Shaker-of-Shields, *Biflindi*
and the Shout-resounding, *Ómi*
Clasher-of-Spears, *i.e. Sviðurr*
and Calmer-of-all, *i.e. Sviðrir*
God-of-the-Storm, *Viðrir*
and the Gelding-stroke.' *Jalkr*

5. ...is where?

5.1
Gangleri asked,
 'This god is where?
Tell me of his might
 and the tally of his works!'

5.2
High, from his throne,
 threw this reply:
'He lives in all ages,
 all of the worlds;
has at his command
 the whole of his kingdom,
governs all matters,
 greater and small.'

5.3
As-High added,
 'Even the heavens,
even the earth,
 and everything in 'em.
These he made!'
 Third nodded sagely,
'The making of people
 is his mightiest work:

5.4
'unto each bestowing
 an undying soul,
though the body be burnt,
 or buried in dust:

5.5
'The righteous residing
 in the resting place, Unburnable, *Gimlé*
with him in the Wine-hall; *Vingólf*
 the wicked though,
down in the Hid *Hel*
 and into Dark-hid, *Niflhel*
in the ninth world--'
 ...

5.6
'But before all's made,
 before earth and heaven,
what was he doing?
 Where was he then?'

5.7
'Before there was anything,
 When first there was nothing?
He was with the Frost-Giants!
 Fair enough?'

6. The heaving well.

6.1

Gang-weary starts, *Gangleri*
 gasping for answers,
'Before that before,
 what first was there?'

6.2
'As the wand-bearer has it,' i.*e. the prophetess*
 High replies:

6.3
'Time had not yet toppled,
Had turned no thing.
There was no sand,
No sea bringing waves.
The earth had no founding,
Nor elevated heaven.
Only the Great-gap, *i.e. Ginnungagap*
Growing nothing.'

6.4
'Ages upon ages,'
As-high said,
'Nothing was lit.
But the lightless-home *Niflheim*
had a well in its keeping,
a kettle overflowing, *Hvergelmir*
a rage of rivers,
running into nowhere:

6.5
'Call their river-names!
The Cool-one, then *Svol*
the Battle-furrow, *Gunnþró*
the Fast-to-travel, *Fiǫrm*
the Great-speaker, *Fimbulþul*
Greedy, Sliver, *Sylgr, Slíðr*
Wolf-bitch, Wide, *Ylgr, Víð*
And Wild-storm, *Hríð*

6.6
Light-Leaping, *Leiptr*
Loud-Yelling - *Gioll*
Loud-yelling flows
by the fences of the Hidden." *Helgrind*

7. Spoiler's home.

7.1
'But there was,'
butted in Third,
'fierce in the south,
the fire-home burning. *i.e. Muspellzheimr*
Only those born there
can bear its flames.
Sooty lies there, *Surtr*
lurking in heat.

7.2
'Breaking its borders,
bursting with fire,
flame-sword in his fist,
flaring, Sooty
is to wage such war
at the world's end,
will spoil every home,
sparing nothing!

7.3
'The Seeress sees it, *ie. the vǫlva in Vǫluspá*
the song of her vision:

7.4
'Soot, from the south,
With his sword of fire,
Is spitting the sun
And the spoiled gods.
Troll-wives tumble.
Trodden's the road
Of heroes into Hid. *Hel*
Heaven is split!'

8. The unlit world.

8.1
‘What of the beginning?
  What were things like
before people were plentiful,
  putting out children?’

8.2
‘These eleven rivers *i.e. Élivágar*
  A long way flowing
so far from their source,
  they slowed in pace,
clinker-like,
  clagging to ice,
creaking and cursing
  come to a halt,

8.3
‘and all the mist,
  the murky vapour,
that sailed in their wake,
  settled in waves,
layer on layer
  lacking in motion;
rime, where rivers
  had run gap-greedy.’

8.4
‘The beguiling Gap *Ginnungagap*
  groaning to the north,
with the weight of ice
  and the wailing cold;
singed to the south
  by searing fire,
particles and sparks
  from Spoilers’ home.’ *Muspellzheimr*

9. The first being.

9.1
High and Just-as-High,
  hurling words together,
Third came through:
  ‘Thick and unlit,
the grim side
  of grappling ice;
burning and heat
  blinding on the other,

9.2
‘between them both,
  the breadth of nothing
was calm as waves
  on a windless day;
and the ice cooled fire,
  as fire quickened ice,
in a dripping and thaw,
  and the thermal debate

9.3
‘between motion and form
  flounders into shape:
a body on the ice,
  broader than sky,
naked as the day
  that had not yet been born,
and given a name
  to grow into: Twin. *Ymir*

9.4
‘Though the Frost-giants call them,
  first of their line:
Birthed-of-the-shingle, *Aurgelmir*
  or Bellowing-sand,

9.5
‘As is shown by this
in the Shorter Prophecy:

‘Sorcerers come from Swarthy, Svarthǫfði
Seethers come from Will-tree, Vilmeiðr
From Magician-wolf, come the seers. Vittólfr
The giants, out of Twin.

9.6
‘As Mighty-entangler said *Vafþrúðnir*
in making his answer:

9.7
‘How was he birthed,
Bellowing-sand,
Canny kinsman of giants?’

‘Spat from the rivers,
Spawned from their poison,
Out of these, the eater
Our ancestries gather
In that great and terrible.
Madness makes the furor.’

10. The first births.

10.1
‘Are they a god?’
Gangleri shouts.
‘Is that your belief,
in littering so many
generations of giants?
Don’t jest with me!
And how came it others
were caused to be born?’

10.2
‘We own them no god,
that ill-bringing thing,
and all their degenerates,
giants we call them.

10.3
“Tis said, as Twin slept,
they sweated, and grew,
from the pit of their arm,
a pair of eaters,
weapon-man, weave-man,
one of them each,
wailing and bloody,
wet from their birth.

10.4
‘Twin’s leg on the left
lay with the right,
begat then a boy.
Born this way,
the descendants come after.
sired by this one.
We call them Frost-giants,
but first was Twin.’

11. The cow.

11.1
‘Where,’ said Gang-weary,
‘where did Twin live?
And what was the food
that fed the giant?’

11.2
‘The frost dripped
  and the frozen melted:
there came into being
  a cow, Rich-hornless, *Auðumla*
full in each teat,
  four rivers blurting,
of milk to feed,
  to mother, Twin.’

12. The gods.

12.1
‘And what fed the cow?’
  ‘The frozen waste.
Rich-hornless licked
  the layers of rime.

12.2
‘Fresh and salty,
  the first day she licked
the stones all frozen,
  strands of hair
began to be seen.
  A second day,
she licked out of hoar-frost
  the head of a man.

12.3
‘A third day she licked,
slurping and slurping,
until from the ice,
  an entire body,
complete and bare,
  and he was called Bearer! *Búri*
Fair as the ice,
  a father, a maker.

12.4
‘He had a son
  named Son, a boy. *Burr*
Son married Bark, *Bestla*
  Bale-thorn’s daughter, *Bǫlþorn*
offspring of giants.
  Out of that pairing,
brothers: Wild, *Oðin*
  and Wilful, and Shrine. *Vili and Vé*

12.5
‘And this is our rede:
  these brothers,
Odin, Vili,
  and Vé, the other,
must be the rulers
  reigning over heaven
and earth. And of them
  Odin, foremost,

12.6
‘of frenzy! Of-fury! *Oðin*
  are fitting names,
this god, the greatest,
  most glorious we know,
and it would, we deem,
  go well for you
to agree, when you call,
  you call him so too.

Math Jones

The Opening of the *Háttatal* (or, the rules for *dróttkvætt*), paraphrased in *fornyrðislag*

In reference to the original text, to Anthony Faulkes' translation, & some decades writing in alliterative form, omitting the requirement for *vidrhending*, 'cause – modern English.

> *"Håkon is he, taking*
> *The host along the coast,*
> *Forbids abuse of peace;*
> *Bands to protect the land.*
> *A young & useful king,*
> *Gathering yields from fields*
> *All the way to Elba,*
> *Out from sands of Gandvik."*

What're the skills, the skull-craft,
the skald shall need?
I can think of three.
And they are what?
First, one must know
the form as it is set.
Then, the line that is allowable,
& the line that is forbidden.

What numbers are notable
in the knotting of words?
Three, I can think of –
and this is the first:
the variedness of verse-forms
of the very-great poets,
tallied & told of
in my treatise below.

Note from the Editor

This poem is based upon the opening of the Háttatal, one of the major sections of the Prose Edda – which means that in the original Old Norse, this description of Old Norse poetry is presented as prose, not verse.

Math Jones has chosen to recast Snori Sturluson's presentation in the most common Old Norse Eddic meter, **fornyrðislag** – 8-line stanzas, where every pair of lines corresponds to a single line of Old-English alliterative verse. However, the italicized poem about Håkon, quoted by Snorri Sturluson in the original Prose Edda, is *dróttkvætt* in the original Old Norse and translated into a *dróttkvætt*-like form in the text (but relaxing certain requirements, such ending all lines on a single-syllable dip, that are hard to accomplish in modern English.)

Next is to notice
the number of lines,
(like strings to be strummed),
in each stanza of verse;
and lastly, each line,
in the listing of styles,
has a certain set-limit
of syllables allowed.

What must we manage
in the making of verse?
There're two things to tell of:
our intended meaning
& the discernment of sound.
The sense of each word
is what makes up our meaning,
marked in our language,

but such is sound
  that syllables vary:
long ones lengthen,
  little ones are shorter.
Some of them are soft,
  certain ones are hard –
these specialties of speech
  come spilling out as 'rhyme'.

So then, to the setting
  of sounds in a verse:
Twelve head-rhymes
  are held in a stanza,
three of them required
  in each quarter pair of lines.
Six syllables only,
  to make a single line.

The stresses in a stanza
  are 'Staves'; and the first
in the second line is 'Chief'.
  It sets the requirement
that the staves in the first line
  must follow that sound
in both their stresses;
  bearing them as 'Props'.

If the Chief is a consonant,
  it is copied by the Props:

> "*Håkon is he, taking*
> *the host along the coast,*
> *forbids abuse of peace;*
> *bands to protect the land.*"

But less than this, or more,
  is not allowed in a quarter.

If the Chief is a vowel,
  then vowels must be props,
and elegant it is deemed
  if each one is different.

But there's license, (not a rule),
  to allow for more:
such as *a, am, an, as, at,*
  if, in, of, on, or, up, & *us.*

A second consideration
  With sound is this,
(Putting them in place
  For poetry's effect):
In the form named *Dróttkvæt*,
  the finer 'Court-measure',
Each quarter-verse
  Requires these same.

Here, in the odd line,
  "*Håkon is he, taking*"
showing *Håk-* & *tak-*
  both share the same end,
(though not the same vowel
  nor the beginning),
And this kind of ending
  We call 'shot-rhyme'.

And in the half that follows:
  "*the host along the coast*",
shows 'host' & 'coast'
  coming together
with all the same sounds
  except for the first,
and this is known
  as 'Noble-rhyme', true.

This, in every quarter,
  is required by *Dróttkvæt*,
most often used
  in the making of poetry,
and from this verse-form,
  all variants are made,
as speech-runes uttered
  will spark other runes.

Dr Rahul Gupta

"Not Unless Bound with a Chain": An Introduction to *Dróttkvætt*

Plan of Contents

§I. Aim.

The target of this essay is to equip aspiring *skalds* (poets) with an understanding of far and away the most important Old Norse Skaldic verse-form, *dróttkvætt*. I aim to supply here a correct and orthodox, if needfully short and simplified, account of the technique and tradition of its poetics.

What follows is a not a paper of academic theory, but a statement ventured by a traditionalist practitioner. A how-to guide to the "nuts and bolts" of the versification will be found hereunder towards the close of this treatment **(§VII. Versification).**

The main Eddic versification is *fornyrðislag*, "Old-Story-Mode". Metrically this is essentially identical with Old English "alliterative" verse (so called). The paramount and quintessential Skaldic form is the *dróttkvæðr háttr*, or *dróttkvætt*.

§II. Disclaimers.

Metre is a debated issue theorists and (if any) practitioners disagree about as such. The battle over Metre in Modern English has been waged by dint of pamphlet and manifesto in public controversy since the days of George Puttenham in the Renaissance.

Proposed scansions of lines in any piece of verse may, normally within certain limits, be contested by different readers.

As to provenance, the immediate origins of Old Norse poetry lie in ancient Norway, yet our sources are texts written down later in the Middle Ages in Old Icelandic.

It should be confessed at the outset that we cannot surely know how the Viking skalds understood technically their traditional versecraft. We have almost nothing for Old German and Old English. For Icelandic, we have *Grammatical Treatises* from the twelve- and thirteen-hundreds, and Snorri Sturluson's treasured work, the *Poetic Edda*, of the early 1200s.

For all he bequeathes us, Snorri does not furnish a full system of metre in the modern sense. Nevertheless, the quantity and quality of the Old Norse evidence stands us in far better stead than our plight as regards Old English. Happily, it can hardly be gainsaid that their kindred traditions were essentially the same in metrical principles. However, in Scandinavia the inherited tradition was handled differently.

II.i, *Limitations*. Some preliminary qualifications. An overall allowance must be conceded. The doubt may be acknowledged even as to whether it is linguistically possible to recreate Old English and Norse versifications in Modern English with perfect correctness. We must be content with the understanding that what the Modern English revivalist assuredly can achieve is to contrive a more or less close allusion to the early mediæval poetry; a symbolic echo of the source-tradition. Each revivalist is likely to

differ intellectually and artistically as to how far he tries to go in honouring the originals, where he draws the line in his image of acceptable authenticity. The ideal target for the beginner should likely be, at least for a start, to strive as far towards faithful correctness as practicable.

The disagreeable truth is, Pound, The Inklings, Auden *et al.* notwithstanding, full and faithful Modern English recreation of Old English and Norse metre and verse-style, as discriminated from something like *Middle* English alliterative, has in reality been vanishingly rare hitherto.

The outline of the versification sketched in few pages here is offered as good enough for reasonably decent recreation of the form, as feasible in Modern English.

It is impossible and undesirable to escape making reference in the following discourse to Eduard Sievers' 19th-century system of metre for Germanic poetry. *Sievers' Types* define the accentual patterns of "Lifts" and "Dips" shaping the half-lines in this versification. To expound Sievers' system to readers with no prior knowledge would require another essay.

II.ii, *"Translation".* In a pregnant way, this whole undertaking may be seen as Philological: arising from the discipline of interpreting texts in ancient languages, and founded in notions of "*translation*".

However, it should be axiomatic that the greater the poetry —the more absolutely it fulfils the peculiar capabilities of its language— the *less* translatable it must be; hence, for instance, Mallarmé. *Dróttkvætt* is impossible to "translate", in our usual current sense, into the same versification. It is wellnigh impossible to *compose*; and for linguistic reasons, even nearer the event-horizon of impossibility in Modern English than it was in Old Norse. It is still "easier" to compose *new* poetry in a verse-form, than to make imitative translations. For this reason and others, example Modern English *dróttkvætt* stanzas are quoted below to illustrate this form —alongside an Old Norse model, as, nevertheless, there is no substitute for dutiful direct acquaintance with the sources.

Three stanzas from *Hávamál*, an Eddic text purportedly recording utterances from Odin himself, are quoted hereunder. These represent by the way the next most important Eddic versification after *fornyrðislag*, the "song-form" *ljóðaháttr*. The second shows the variation *galdralag* ("spell-metre"): note the added fifth internally-alliterating line, varying the content of the preceding. The third quotation shows the use of shortened half-lines. These verse-translations have been made by the present author.

§III. Beginnings: Theology.

III.i, *Runes*. Our earliest witness of alliterative verse is runic inscription. Crucial though it is to appreciate that alliterative verse was originally, and is essentially, oral-formulaic poetry addressed as speech to the ear, there was a natural early linkage between verse and the method of notation to hand.

The Roman writer Tacitus records that the barbarian Teutons recited by rote ancient songs about divine heroes; that their warlike tribesmen in battle-array boomed a chant into the hollows of their shields; and that they observed auguries practising sortilege by casting billets of wood engraved with magical symbols.

The word *rune* means "secret" and implies something whispered or muttered: it lived on for a while in English as *roun*, compare German *raunen*. It was borrowed into Finnish, wherein it means "poem, canto, incantation".

Runic inscriptions have been unearthed on artefacts such as weapons and talismans, jewellery, combs, bones and standing stones. Not seldom they are in verse. Many name gods and other magical beings. The epitaphs and boundary-claims often add curses. Some seem to be encoded. Several seem to be libretti for mysterious ululations we cannot now decipher: syllables sigilled as bind-runes, thought to be religious invocations, ritual war-cries, conjuring incantations. We can, for instance, learn from these that the title *earl* seems at first to have signified a warlord who sought triumph in battle by his mastery of versified rune-magic.

This body of inscriptions hints that alliterative verse was quickening amidst the formulas of runic magic and the liturgy of religious ritual in the Germanic hinterlands (that "womb of nations") of vast forests and mountains beyond the Northern frontier of the Roman Empire in the Iron Age.

Our words *book* and *write* recall runes. The latter means to "cut" or "carve". The former refers to *beech*-wood. (We still write them; on their leaves.) The word for letter, as for an alliterating speechsound, was *stave*, and several runes are named after trees: Birch, Oak, Ash, Thorn. The Celtic word *druid* means "oak-knower", literally in English "door-wit". The name

Gwydion, of the trickster-magician in *The Mabinogion*, affiliates him to trees. Compare the Irish "tree-alphabet", ogham. The icon the bards, who sought inspiration in the murmuring of branches, envisaged for its patron deity was a sage whose worshippers were enthralled to his tongue with chains.

III.ii, *Odin.* Tacitus tells that the god the Teutons worshipped most was Mercury, and that they offered him human sacrifice. The French still call midweek *Mercredi*; we call the day between Tyr's day and Thor's day *Wednesday*: the day of Woden. English *Woden* may also be traced in a lost word for "mad rage", which survived from Middle English into Early Modern, *wode*, *wood*. A word for poet or eloquent speaker in Old English was *wóþ-bora*, a bearer of *wode*-ness. *Woden*, *Wotan*, is cognate with Latin *vātēs*, a divinely-inspired poet-prophet. This is the supreme deity named Odin (*Óðinn*) in Old Norse. The stem *óðr* actually means "divine inspiration", passing into senses including "mind" and "voice, song". Hence the god's very name is "the *óðr*", construed as "master of inspiration", "lord of the possessed". As Adam of Bremen wrote: *Wodan; id est furor.*

So Odin was the Norse god of Poetry who bestowed ecstatic inspiration as a kind of *frenzy*. The skalds called Poetry "Odin's Mead", a flowing honeywine that gets you drunk, and loquacious.

III.iii, *Kvasir.* Yet Snorri teaches further. The tale goes that the two clans of gods sealed their truce after primæval cosmic war by spitting into a vat. The mingling mouthfuls of divine saliva begot the being Kvasir. His name is akin to "squash", "queasy", and is readily seen in the Russian-named Eurasian liquor *kvass*. The underlying meaning, a juice *squeezed* out and soured to fermentation. Kvasir was a sage of perfect wisdom who spoke in verse.

So Dwarves soon murdered him and brewed mead from his exsanguinated gore. This blood-beverage fell into the clutches of the Giants, who hid it in their mountain. But Odin burrowed through the rock in serpent's form, seduced the Giantess guarding it, swallowed all the mead, and escaped as an eagle. This Mead regurgitated from his craw is his gift of the Elixir of Inspiration to poets among Mankind. As an obscure 21st-century skald has written in *fornyrðislag*:[15]

> Thus pantheons' parley in pact of truce
> spewed forth from spittle the inspired minstrel,
> undwindled in power though Dwarves kill him:
> they brewed from his blood bards' honey-essence.
>
> This juice was passed through Giants' clutches,
> arms of Gunnloth, till by eagle and serpent
> the Gods regained gore of Kvasir
> and to Man bequeathed The Mead of Poetry.
>
> So spent spittlings and spilth of blood
> mulled the makings; murder and wily
> deceits suffered and sacrifices:
> both blood and honey blend the elixir
>
> distilled through struggle of storied beings,
> each race of Elves, through Ogre and Dwarf,
> airy eagle and earth-serpent,
> to be milked into mouths of Mortal poets.

III.iv, *Sacrifice; The Noose.*

> I witness I hung on a windy tree
> every night of nine,
> gored by spearpoint and given to Odin,
> myself unto myself,
> on that tree-gallows of which tells no man
> whence its roots may run...
>
> —*Hávamál*

The Elder Edda preserves the myth of Odin undergoing an initiatory ordeal recalling the practices of shamans and fakirs suspended on ganching-hooks. For he hanged "Himself unto Himself", impaled with his weapon the spear, from a noose on the World-Tree.

Yggr (compare "awe", "ugly") is one of Odin's many names. *Yggdrasill*, the name of the World-Tree, means "Ygg's horse". The victim is said to "ride the

[15] **Editor's note**: "an obscure 21st-century skald" and similar references later in this article should be interpreted as referring, modestly, to the author.

gallows" from watching the kicking movements of his legs as he strangles.

Odin learned thereby the occult knowledge from the Netherworld that is encoded in the runic *futhark*. The Hanged God could revive gibbeted corpses and enchant their dead lips to divulge their secrets. Elsewhere it is hinted that he forfeited an eye for prophetic vision: foresight and insight. Suggestive: as the eyes enmesh, crisscrossed, to the brain-hemispheres with their differing outlooks in interpreting what they behold. The seeming-misfortune of the Tarot's Hanged Man of dangling upside-down vouchsafes him the advantage of seeing reality revealed from another angle. Poetry is primarily a way of conceiving and perceiving the world: The Poetic is *a mode of thought*.

We glean from the literature that runes had to be written, that is, cut, but then "stained" or "coloured". This was with blood: understood to imbue the writing with sacrificial life-force that unleashed the power instinct in the glyphs.

III.v, *Riddles.* Therefore, Odin was held divine patron at once of Poetry and of the runes, of language and the mind, of hierophantic wisdom and sorcery. Wizard, weapon-dancing mystagogue, shapeshifter and trickster, he was the wellspring of secret knowledge and soothsaying, a god going under litanies of different names, who liked to travel in disguise, and to play at posing and solving riddles—whereby seemingly alien voiceless things conceal, and reveal, themselves by addressing us in enigmas.

Like his Græco-Roman counterpart Hermes-Mercurius, he was a *psychopomp*, that is, spiritguide of the Dead: eloquent but guileful messenger, traversing all three realms. Magicians in the Renaissance spoke of Hermes *Trismegistus*. The ancient North made not Thunderer nor Lawmaker king of the gods, but a figure of *intelligence*. Tellingly, from *Hermes-Mercurius* we get *mercurial*, we get *hermetic;* and *hermeneutics*: the interpretation of meaning from texts. *Analysis* is Greek for "unloose, unknot". Our words "glamour", and "grimoire", come from *grammar*.

III.vi, *The Fetter-God.* The word *religion* is akin to the word *ligature*. Odin knew runes that spellbound like chains, and unloosed them: not unlike his riddles, in which the answer is locked up then released upon solution. A story in Bede witnesses to similar beliefs among the English: a prisoner who cannot be bound by his captors is asked whether he must not have upon him "letters of releasing, as fables tell of", to account for the magical unlocking of his shackles. The English version has "unloosening runes".

> This Fourth [spell] I know of: if foes shackle
> my bended limbs with bonds,
> I sing such sigaldry I saunter away:
> it springs my feet from the fetters
> and the hasp from off my hands.
>
> —*Hávamál*

Odin was likewise believed to weave an enchantment over armies called the "host-fetter". This enchantment spellbound warriors awaiting the onset with the paralysis of panic—yet also granted the unleashing of the frenzy which, as the shield-walls clashed and battle broke out, possessed the elite fighters who were his most zealous devotees: the *berserks* ("bear-sarked") and the "wolf-hooded".

Waiting to charge, their "berserk-going" would come upon them, a kind of staring-eyed trance with frothing at the mouth as they gnawed the rims of their shields. You can see this in the Lewis Chessmen; berserkers carved in walrus-ivory for the gameboard. Shocktroops, eaters of raw meat, they spearheaded the front line, howling like the beast-totems whose pelts they wore. A Norse skald speaks of them as "those blood-quaffers". They would bite out the throats of their foes; but while berserk no blade would bite on them.

III.vii, *Norse poetry* not *secular.* Hence it is a fundamental mistake to suppose Skaldic poetry was "secular" on the grounds that it is often, as is *dróttkvætt*, about war. "Secular" is a wholly modern post-Abrahamic category. In traditional cultures there is no concept of "secular"; and it is scarcely likely that any great art is not "religious".

"Mythology" is our term for pagan religious stories. (Other cultures throughout history understood "myth" to mean "truth": we have blasphemously reversed its meaning.) Eddic poetry is largely "mythological": therefore, religious. When Skaldic poetry is concerned with war it is equally religious—because, the chief god, also of Poetry, presided over war.

He it was who egged on mortals to combat and conquest; he inspired

battle-frenzy; he designed the woven pattern of conflict on the field, guiding the destinies of kings and nations by the allotment of defeat and the award of victory. His pet ravens feasted on the carnage—so they could whisper into his ears the secrets of the Dead. The scavenging wolves were also his messengers. Norse poetry about battle is religious: because it must be clear that, due to such creed, the Norsemen believed war was worship.

A number of passages in the surviving texts invite reconstruction of an archaic practice whereby before combat was joined a spear was hurled over the opposing battlefront, a ritual accompanied by a consecrating formula of dedication: "*Thus I give ye to Odin*!" Hence war was a form of *sacrifice*, an offering of the fightingmen slain in that immolation.

As "Father of The Slain" Odin chose heroes from the slaughter. The word for these battle-slain, *valr*, is the first term in such compounds as "valkyrie" and "Valhalla". The *valr* should be understood not merely as corpses, nor even honoured bodies of "the fallen", but rather as much closer to Saints, passionately martyred, the Elect. He was picking these dead champions for his own army, the *Einherjar* who feast with him in Valhall ("hall of the slain") till Ragnarok.

It was Odin who possessed mortals with ecstasy; he granted the altered state of the berserker, the *aretḗ*, killing-skill, of the transfigured warrior. Just so it was him bestowed the intoxicating gift of Poetry on the inspired skald.

That poetry celebrating, and in an important way transmuting into stylized aesthetic abstraction representing, this worship, is a religious poetry *because* it sings of bloody mayhem and violent death, an art presided over by the divine inspirer of berserk frenzy and poetic furor alike. As the aforementioned twenty-first century skald has written:

> Blood-blended Mead the brew of the skald;
> the hero drunk on the honey of battle:
> his frenzy is freed from the fetter-of-armies,
> as from locked letters: release of meaning.
>
> Bearsark and bard are brothers sharing
> the gift from their Father, gore of Kvasir;
> both bear the marks that bind them together:
> ruddy-stained the runes, as raw as their wounds.
>
> Chant chains the scop's chafing halter
> —the skald's scarring for skilled verses;
> the fighter pays the fee for glory:
> the wounds of The Spear; the weals of The Noose.

§IV. Background: Eddic and Skaldic.

By custom Old Norse poetry is sorted into two classes: *Eddic* and *Skaldic*. These do overlap somewhat.

The Eddic is the primordial tradition. The poems are anonymous and impersonal. They are narrative poems, if ballad-like and dramatic, retelling mythology about gods such as Thor and Loki, or legends of heroes such as Sigurd. This is the Epic poetry of Old Norse.

Whereas, the Skaldic poems are not immemorially ancient. They are not narrative, albeit they refer to narratives. Their authors are usually known, individual named poets, understood to be composing and speaking these verses. Although typically fraught with mythological allusion, they are personal, even autobiographical, showing the poets reflecting upon themselves and their experiences, in a fairly modern fashion that reminds us of Lyric. A number of skalds are the eponymous heroes of prosimetric sagas, biographies which portray them speaking their poems.

It is true that *skald* is the common term for "poet" in Old Norse. This noun sounds like English "scold", and is likely related: that is, someone who drones on nagging noisily. Something like this may be seen in the strangely browbeating manner African *griots* use barking the genealogies of their chieftains. (In Germanic culture these would be *thuls* reciting *thulas*).

Yet the title *skald* is most meaningfully applied to the professional court-poets of the Viking Age who often served in the entourage of kings—who could themselves be accomplished poets and nitpicking critics.

The main poetic purpose of the skald was to celebrate his patron's prowess in battle, for which he would usually be handsomely paid in such valuable goods as treasure, weapons, slaves. The calling of Poetry is rather less well-rewarded today.

Likewise, skalds composed poems in a very large range of verse-forms, including Eddic forms such as *fornyrðislag* and *málaháttr*. *Fornyrðislag*, "Old-Story-Mode", was the original form of verse, synonymous with poetry as such in Norse culture. When characters in the prose sagas telling ancient

legends speak in verse, they utter *fornyrðislag* stanzas. However, though skalds did write in Eddic forms, they developed and specialized in other versifications, duly called *Skaldic*, especially practised by the skalds, and not appearing in the Eddic corpus.

IV.i, *Poetic Diction.* It is also the case that some of the poetic *diction* is shared in common by both Eddic and Skaldic. Raising the issue of diction invites stressing the point that versification (verse-making) is not an art limited to *metre*. Metre is not the whole story. He that presumes to compose in a given tradition of poetry must do more than accomplish the metre only (even successfully). It is but a part, necessarily interwoven with *diction* and indeed *style* more broadly, such as with the verse-rhetoric and verse-syntax.

A handy demonstration of the way diction and metre interact is to notice how compounds lend themselves to the building of Sievers' Types C (wSSW, x//x), D (SSsw, //\x), and E (SswS, /\x/), which of course demand abutted lifts.

In Germanic poetry the outstanding element of poetic diction is the *kenning*. Borges was rare amongst twentieth-century writers in perceiving this trope's potential. For example, putting *Odin's mead-gift* or *the dwarves' ransom* instead of "Poetry", saying *brow-moons* for "eyes", *bone-house* for "body"; ears can be *hear-hands*, graspers of sound. *The heaven-candle* or *elf-roundel* may be used in place of "sun". *The sickness of serpents* was winter; hail was *the coldest of corns. The foe of branches* is fire. *Giants' roads* are mountains; *Dwarves' doorways*, rocks. By the same token, *the swans' sailroad* means "sea"; it is also *the blue land*, and *the fields of fish*. Ships yield many: *stag-steed of waves, beast of billows, antlered elk of tides, foam-furrower*. A viking *steered steeds of the sea*. Woman (almost as beautiful as ships) can be *the goddess of linen-kerchiefs*, or *necklace-Freyja*. Thor could be named as *the goat-goader*, and Odin as *bosom-burden of Frigg*, Heimdall *the son of eight and one mothers*. —*Riddles*, again. Shakespeare (an Odinic name if ever there was one) has Macbeth blurt out a whole *thula*, or rigmarole, of *kenning*-like variations on the theme of "Sleep". Battle was *the storm of steel, the clash of banners, the kiss of axes*. The warlord was *steel storm-urger, battle-abetter, woundsnake-wielder*, he *gluts gulls-of-wounds*.

The skalds sandwiched double- and triple-decker kennings together. A simple instance would be *the gulltrack-steed* for "ship". Victorious kings, *wolf-tongue-reddeners, speeders of spears*, were often hailed as *saters of the wolf* or, naming that other carrion-creature, *gladdener of ravens*. Offerings to Odin. Yet as wolves were depicted mythologically ridden by Giantesses, one might say the versified equivalent of *the ring-bestower feasted with wound-dew the trollwife's mount*; or, *the tall tree of battle regaled the gull of gashes with blade-liquid where the whale rides*.

The second dictional ploy is the *heiti*, a word akin to archaic English *hight*, "call". *Heiti* calls something not with a kenning but by replacing the common noun with a poetical synonym, such as *steed* for "horse", *brand* instead of "sword". *Brand* is a *heiti*; *wound-fire* a kenning. *The main* for "the sea" is a *heiti*; *Ægir the Alesmith's brewfroth* is a kenning. The two kinds of circumlocution can of course be combined.

Whilst these devices do feature in Eddic poems, as also in smaller measure in Old English poetry, Eddic poetry uses kennings far less often and is altogether plainer and more straightforward. Skaldic verse cultivates riddling circumlocution and convoluted, disrupted syntax to baroque excess, seeking thrills in risky extravagant artifice.

Eddic poetry, the collective utterance of the race, tends to be closer to rough-hewn, even *naïf*, folk-art. The verse-forms of the skalds are much more exacting, and inordinately more complicated, than the Eddic forms, their achievement feats of ostentatious literary craftsmanship performed by self-conscious artists for an audience of connoisseurs.

IV.ii, *Composition & Performance.* In the sagas we read of skalds composing and uttering meticulous stanzas sometimes on the spot (often tight ones). We read of long poems being shaped in their heads overnight, and performed from memory. And it was a poetry of spoken sound, voiced by mouth to the ears of hearers. This was a poetry made by poets who did not write: it was not drafted on paper and was not meant to be read on the page; although in *Egill's Saga* the hero's daughter records his *kviðuháttr*-threnody for his sons in runes.

IV.iii, *It was* not *sung to the harp.* An oral-aural performance; yet it should be remarked that all the evidence, as well as intelligent appreciation of the inherent nature of this versification, turns out to weigh heavily against this poetry's being sung musically to instrumental accompaniment. The sagas invariably phrase it "he spoke, said, this verse". Description of

composition, or performance, to the harp is wholly absent (as also, NB, in the thumbnail of the *scop* composing a heroic lay in *Beowulf*). The typical response is "that poem was well-recited". Hence Skaldic verse was, presumably in some fashion that rendered manifest its intricate architecture, chanted by the speaking voice alone.

§V. The *Dróttkvætt*.

The foremost, indeed royally prestigious, verse-form practised by the skalds was *dróttkvætt*.

V.i, *Parsing the term.* The second word in this compound is the Old Norse cognate of our word *quoth*, [*be*]*queath*: a common word with the sense "say, speak", with forms meaning "recitation, poem".

The first element *drótt* refers to the household, entourage, of a king as leader of the warband, compare Old English *dryhten*, "lord", *gedryht* "retinue".

The compound has been rendered "courtly metre". This may risk misleading suggestions in English. *Dróttkvætt* expresses the idea of a form of poetic recitation deemed fitting for the retinue of a warlord; poetry for the chieftain and his serving bodyguard, his *comitatus* of housecarls.

V.ii, *The Battle of Stamford Bridge.* In the unspeakably disastrous year 1066—the ruinous outcomes whereof are still very much with us to this day—there were of course two invasions. On the 20th of September King Haraldr III Sigurðarson of Norway, nicknamed *harðráði*, "hard-rede-y, of stern counsel", that is, Harald "Hardrade", and his ally the banished traitor Tostig Godwinson, brother of the English king Harold, moored their dragon-ships at Riccall and triumphed in battle against Earls Morcar of Northumbria and Edwin of Mercia at Fulford, two miles south of York. Ouse and Foss ran red.

The city, already an Anglo-Norse enclave, surrendered on the 24th. Yet on that day Harold Godwinson at the head of his forces, need having driven them north with haste, marching four days from London reached Tadcaster and pushed on to Stamford Bridge on the Derwent. There on the 25th, a day of belated summer heat, the enemies encountered; though Hardrade had not thought to face the English there and so soon. Thus the Norse warriors were taken at unawares; and, for the heat, had doffed their mailcoats and left them onboard. But it is said the helms and hauberks of the outnumbering English host glittered like ice in the sun. At parley before, Harold offered Tostig his brother his erstwhile earldom of Northumbria; adding however that Hardrade might seek at his hand only "seven feet of English earth; or more by so much as he is taller than other men."

Upon the brink of battle King Harald, who, unlike William The Bastard of Normandy counted poetry among many talents, had spoken one stanza in *fornyrðislag*, having eight lines with at least two alliterating staves in each, every one showing the metrical patterns shaped by syllable-count, stress, and syllable-length, the simplest metre. But the King declares that poem "ill wrought", and, as the shieldwalls embrace, proceeds to chant, as his berserk-going came upon him like the aura of a migraine, a poem conjuring up a spinetingling, shimmering hallucination of terribly beautiful valkyries interceding in the slaughter before him:

> Krjúpum vér fyr vápna,
> valteigs, brǫkun eigi,
> svá bauð Hildr, at hjaldri,
> haldorð, í bug skjaldar:
> hátt bað mik, þars mœttusk,
> menskorð bera forðum
> Hlakkar íss ok hausar,
> hjalmstofn í gný malma.

A challenge even to gloss verbal denotations but by way of dull echo:

> We do not creep behind the hollow of the shield into combat before of the crash of weapons: so, holding her word, Hild {"Battle"} of the [carrion-]hawk's allotment {=the arm} (=valkyrie) bade me, the necklace-wand {slender prop of necklaces} (= female) had told me before to hold the helmstem (=my head) high where Hlokk's ice {icicles of the valkyrie named "Battle-noise"} (= blades) meets brainpans amid the grinding din of forged metal.

The king strode into the mellay wielding his sword two-handed in fury. In the havoc of the oncoming ranks he fell with an arrow through his throat. (Probably shot by a poetry-hating Anglo-Saxon, whose prolific progeny survives.)

Hardrade's death, and that, but some twenty days later at Hastings, of

Harold Godwinson, marked the end of the Viking Age. Godwinson was the last English king; and kinsman himself, on his Danish mother's side, to Knut, the king in the legendary parable about commanding the unstoppable tide at Gainsborough.

VI.iii, *How to die in Old Norse.*

Die kine, die kindred,
dies oneself the same;
but renown of Glory shall never perish
for the warrior who has won it.

—*Hávamál*

One thing is sure about mortals on Middle-earth: our Death is certain and inexorable. The Norsemen believed it foredoomed to each of us by Fate, the rune-casting of those Weird Sisters the Norns. Not an If but a When, for a warrior in the Dark Ages it was likely to befall soon.

Soon or late, you cannot escape it. What matters therefore is the way you face and undergo that which truly is in whatever way predestined us, imposed indifferently regardless: what remains yours is how well you endure, and perform, it.

If you wish for a Norse picture of Life, it is being bound in a snakepit playing the harp with your toes. This is the iconic image of Gunnar tortured by Attila the Hun for the Nibelung Hoard. For a little while, Gunnar's music charmed the serpents.

Thus Gunnar outbraved and outwitted Attila in death, manœuvring to impose his own unyielding will, to die defying and thwarting his killers, and *with style*: remaking defeat and imprisonment into psychological and aesthetic victory. This ethos is a typical "moral" or message taught in this literature.

Gunnar's legendary doom gets replayed in the story of the still-famed Ragnar Loðbrók in King Ælla's "wormgarth" outside York. "Laughing I die", and with threatening jokes about his sons avenging him; and a deathsong of twenty-nine spur-of-the-moment Skaldic stanzas.

As a warrior is likely to meet his death at the hands of foes, he must finally cheat them of the satisfaction of their subordination of his will to theirs. Gunnar is, as he expected, utterly defeated, completely prey to Attila's merciless power, and yet no victim: unconquered, indomitable, never beaten or broken. Attila loses face; his captive stage-manages even this extremity to deny him his prize and show him up. In the end the tables are turned: it is Gunnar who holds the power. Tyrants and tormentors cannot prevail over a man so long as he commands himself. Ragnar takes the last laugh from Ælla. Attila's henchmen tie Gunnar's brother Hogni down: he laughs in their faces as they rip out his heart.

The last great accomplishment was to assert heroic control over Death itself, and transmute it into an act of deliberate aesthetic performance: like the Thane of Cawdor, or Mishima.

In Norse belief Odin's valkyries have throughout human history been harvesting heroes, "lone-fighters", from the world's battlegrounds to muster an army to be fielded at the armageddon of Ragnarok. All-Father shall lead them against the hordes of Monsters that Doomsday—even though they all know perfectly well they march into certain defeat.

"We do not creep behind the hollow of the shield..."—Two sentences; 48 syllables, 6 per line, every one ending on an unstressed syllable; 12 alliterations; 8 internal slant-rhymes, 8 internal full-rhymes, and kennings Russian-dolled in kennings—such were the last words of King Harald Hardrade: a *dróttkvætt* stanza.

§VII. Versification.

Eddic and also Skaldic verse-forms started out somewhat less fixedly regular than they later became, whilst even *dróttkvætt* admitted of licenses and variations sanctioned and enumerated by Snorri.

Skating over details of finegrained tendencies and preferences observed in Old Norse, here is a short and simple outline of the basic rules for attempting *dróttkvætt* in English:

The stanza must have 8 lines.

Every line must have 6 syllables.
—A provision which may prove troublesome in English reception is that resolved syllables counted as 1.

Every line must have 3 main lifts (strongest-accented long syllables).

Every line must end on a falling, "feminine", cadence.
—Thus the last two syllables form the foot termed a trochee in Classical prosody.

In the odd lines, 2 of the lifts must alliterate with each other: and with the first lift of the next line.
—This pattern of headrhyme is familiar from Eddic and Old English metre: the alliterating first lift of the even lines answers to the headstave.

In the odd lines, 2 of the lifts must slant-rhyme with each other (*skothending*).

In the even lines, 2 of the lifts must full-rhyme with each other (*aðalhending*).

The second of these internal rhymes must be on the penultimate syllable (=third lift) of the line.

There is typically some sense of a structure of halves (*helmings*) (4 + 4 lines), not unlike the volta betwix octave and sestet in the sonnet.

Dróttkvætt can be offered as occasional lyric in a single freestanding "loose" stanza, a *lausavísa* (pl. *lausavísur*).

Though the original subject was praise for the ruler and patron, for his openhandedness (especially to poets) and above all his war-prowess, *dróttkvætt* was used for detailed allusive mythological works, and personal reflections even including love poetry, usually in *lausavísur*.

However, the classic full-scale presentation of *dróttkvætt* was as a *drápa*, a sequence of about 25 stanzas framed by interweaving refrains.

VI.i, *Dróttkvætt compared with other forms; & Sievers' Types.* As to the metre of lines as such, a trend can be descried in Norse practice beyond *fornyrðislag* to shift away from the units of the half-line of two main lifts (making up, coupled with a second half-line after a medial cæsura, the full-line of four main lifts). This is already seen in the internally-alliterating, 3-beat lines in the major variation on *fornyrðislag*, the verse-form of many important poems in the Edda, *ljóðaháttr*.

But Sievers' Types *pertain to* the half-line shape of 4 syllables and 2 main lifts: whereas in *dróttkvætt* the line has 6 syllables and 3 lifts. One can see that the line can be fitted to a Sievers half-line with an added disyllabic "foot"; the exigent practicality of meeting the pressing demands of the form in English, the very narrow choices imposed by *dróttkvætt* itself, tend to override adherence to the old patterns.

All Old Norse metre strongly favours trochaic rhythm, Sievers Type A (SwSw, / x / x), by definition the most frequent type fundamental to the whole prosodic tradition. This falling ending is the prevailing rhythmic signature in Eddic verse. Yet in *dróttkvætt* the trochaic cadence is actually *fixed*. Types B (the iambic wSwS, x / x /), and the clashing spondaic C (wSSw), are found more rarely in *dróttkvætt*. It may be helpful for the English revivalist to think of the underlying model of the *dróttkvætt*-line as three trochees.

In view of the problem of the usual slackness of Modern English, it is worth remarking that, just as *fornyrðislag* begets *málaháttr* by adding syllables, the roomier Skaldic form *hrynhent* is made by lengthening *dróttkvætt*'s lines to 8 syllables with another trochaic foot.

Strict syllable-count is a feature of the Skaldic verse-forms yet *dróttkvætt*, quintessentially Norse in so many respects, may be felt in prosodic character and principle an oddity, rather unlike the rest of alliterative verse: in view of its un-Germanically monotonous invariable cadence and fixed penultimate internal full-rhyme. Celtic influence is plausible. Certainly, the Norse tradition diverged widely from the old stock of her sibling branches: in the first place by becoming stanzaic, and indeed teeming with variations; then sprouting her lyrical Skaldic offshoot engrafted with newfangled rhyme.

That said, one can envisage how *dróttkvætt* could have sprung from the *fornyrðislag* stanza. Despite *fornyrðislag*'s striking family resemblances to Old German and Old English alliterative verse, not only is it stanzaic not stichic but a bent towards treating the half-lines as lines proper linked metrically by alliteration only may be perceived, with the outcome of a stanza of eight lines, structured more or less as halves.

§VIII. *Dróttkvætt in Modern English.*

Attempts to recreate *dróttkvætt* in Modern English would likely struggle to be accepted as flawless by the Old Norse skalds or their critical poet-kings such as Harald Hardrade. The aim must be to get as close as Modern English allows; the problem lies in the interpenetration of inflectional syntax with the metre and syllable-count. There is also the difficulty common to all revival of alliterative verse in Modern English, the problems of Quantity (and Resolution).

We have a Modern English *dróttkvætt*-stanza from Tolkien:

> Winter's winds had hunted
> waves as dark as ravens,
> their leaden ship laden,
> lightless, sea-benighted.
> Forth now fared they mirthless
> far from mortal portals
> in caves coldly-builded
> kindled fires that dwindled.

This allusion to *dróttkvætt* may be sleuthed down within Auden's *Age of Anxiety*:

> Hushed is the lake of hawks
> bright with our excitement
> and all the sky of skulls
> glows with scarlet roses;
> the melter of men and salt
> admires the drinker of iron:
> bold banners of meaning
> blaze o'er the host of days.

The present author has published this *dróttkvætt*-stanza embedded in a longer battle-poem in Old English verse as the words spoken by a raven:

> **FL**ANged ARRows as **FL**INder-
> **FL**EDGes LEAPT from EDGes
> Of **SH**IELDS, the BOWS **SH**RILLing
> When **SH**ANK-DEEP was DANKness
> Of **G**ORE. Then, STEEL-**G**EARED, they
> **G**IRDed, AFTer MURDers,
> **BL**ADEs aMIDST the **BL**OODy
> **BL**END of that FOE-SPENDing.

I have have also published a short *drápa* of ten *dróttkvætt* stanzas with refrains titled *Gleipnir*, on the theme of the binding of Fenris-Wolf with that magical fetter. The poet should think how a form embodies and orchestrates a given theme; of verse-forms as symbolic structures extending from their language: versifications are of and in themselves meaningful.

§IX. Why?

How might the supreme prestige, the mystique, of *dróttkvætt* be accounted for?

Causes must include the extreme demands of its formal constraints; the sheer difficulty of achieving so virtuoso a performance. It is to harness the tempest and drive that storm through the eye of a needle.

As shown above, there are good grounds for taking the roots of *dróttkvætt* to lie deep in runic, and runic-*numerological*, magic, and the theology of the Odinic cult.

A striking design, which Hindus would recognize as a *yantra*, is attested on early Anglo-Saxon funeral-urns and on Scandinavian artefacts. It is a kind of triquetra, braided of three interlaced triangles: a form of what Knot Theory terms Borromean Rings or Brunnian Links. It is often seen on Viking-Age picture-stones next to images of Odin and is referred to in archaeological iconography as the *valknut*, "the knot of the slain": a convincing label in view of the amassed evidence. This emblem graphically portrays an interlocking, impossibly Endless Knot. It could very fittingly symbolize a divine, infinite, noose.

Tacitus records that the centre of Teutonic religion in ancient Germania was a sacred grove amidst the dark forests. It was hallowed by human sacrifice. But the holiness of the shrine was honoured by another strange custom: *nemo nisi vinculo ligatus ingreditur*—"none might step into that grove unless bound [ligatured] with a chain", in token of worship of the *regnator omnium deus cetera subiecta*, "the all-ruling god to whom others are subject". Astoundingly, readers of the *Elder Edda* will meet with mention of

a place named in Old Norse *Fjǫturlundr*, "the fetter-grove", where moreover a man is slain with a spear.

The Yggdrasill of wisdom springs and spreads from the ash-key of asking the right questions. Seldom asked is: *Why*?

Today's very theory of "explanation" is wrongheadedly fatuous, but it is instructive to pursue instead understanding of the true significance of this difficulty. Why the extreme difficulty of *dróttkvætt*?

—Because *Metre is* a *technique of ecstasy*, a yoga of trance, inducing a possessed state whereby the prosaic thisworldly mind is de-ranged and re-ordered, re-tuned from the sonics and syntax of mortal language so that it may echo the music spoken and understood by the gods: for they cannot hear prose.

Yeats declared his poems made of a mouthful of air. The noose asphyxiates. Verse recited imposes, as do mantras or the rosary, an alternative regulation upon the breath. Breath, *pneuma*, is Life, exerting immediate effect on heart's pulse. Control of the breath, of airflow to brain and blood, is the simplest technique for inducing meditation and other altered, and ecstatic, states.

Think then of the bondage and ligature of *dróttkvætt* as the passion of the noose: submission to constraint which liberates with transcendence. There can be no "hack" —to stoop to the degraded jargon and degenerate mechanistic mentality of our impoverished age of automatic convenience— whereby to shirk this discipline. No sidestep circumventing, nor shortcut to bypass, the unfashionable nuisance. No substitute or surrogacy, no dodge to cheat the sacrifice. It is no accidental discomfort but of the essence. For the magic to happen, you must undergo the ordeal of the rite. The only way to reach the experience of enlightenment is by suffering the agony. There comes no transfiguration save through rapture by divine violence. *None enters unless bound with a chain.*

An illustration of Odin, in the shape of an eagle, stealing the Mead of Poetry from Suttungr, from an Icelandic 18th century manuscript

Paul D. Deane

Arthur Sale and Noël Grudgings: Two Early Revivalists[16]

We can glean from the early lives of the Inklings that, for a certain kind of young man in the early 20th century – studious, romantic of bent, with an aptitude for languages – the legends of the Germanic North, and alliterative verse, their poetic vehicle, exerted an irresistible attraction. In his autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*, C.S. Lewis wrote:

> My eye fell on a headline and a picture, carelessly, expecting nothing. A moment later, as the poet says, "the sky had turned round." What I had read was the words *Siegfried and the Twilight of the Gods*. What I had seen was one of Arthur Rackham's illustrations to that volume … Pure "Northernness" engulfed me: a vision of huge clear spaces hanging above the Atlantic in the endless twilight of Northern summer, remoteness, severity … I passed on from Wagner to everything else I could get ahold of about Norse mythology … If I could at this time have found someone to teach me Old Norse I believe I would have worked at it very hard.

While he was still a schoolboy, when he was about 14 or 15, Lewis began his first alliterative poem, *Loki Bound*. Similar tales can be told of J.R.R. Tolkien. At about the same time, Tolkien "delighted his friends with recitations from *Beowulf*, *The Pearl*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and recounted horrific tales from the Norse *Völsunga Saga*, with a passing jibe at [Richard] Wagner whose interpretation of the myths he held in contempt."[17] Meanwhile, inspired by his course in Anglo-Saxon at Hamilton College, Ezra Pound was writing his own alliterative juvenilia.[18] But Lewis, Tolkien, and Pound were hardly alone. This period came in the aftermath of the great 19th-century discovery of the old Germanic poetry in moldering and sometimes half-burned manuscripts, of Wagner's libretto for the *Ring* cycle, set in *stabreim* – the very first modern attempt at reviving alliterative verse in any form. It was an era that erected public monuments to Cædmon, the first English poet and supported the first wave of translations of the major alliterative poems "into the original meter".

It is thus probably not too surprising to discover that Lewis, Tolkien and Pound were not alone – that there were other young men in the first half of the 20th century who made the attempt to write modern English alliterative verse. I came across two of them almost by accident: Cambridge academic and minor poet Arthur Sale (1912-2000), and Noël Grudgings, who despite a deep interest in Norse literature made his living as a pharmacist. As the editor of *Forgotten Ground Regained*, I frequently do web searches for mentions of alliterative verse, and in the course of one such search, I ran across the following letter from the modernist poet T.S. Eliot to George Herbert Read, one of the most prominent British poets of his day:

> 18 January 1938 *The Criterion*
>
> Dear Herbert:
>
> I think I had better return your poet Arthur Sale's stuff to you, as I don't see that I can use any of this. He is a hopeful young man as soon as he works out of his imitative stage. His alliterative verse seems to me the best so far, but that I think it is only a useful exercise. I will leave the nursing of him to you, as you have taken him on already.
>
> Yours ever, Tom

Arthur Sale was an undergraduate at the University of Nottinghamshire, where he studied under medievalist Alice Selby. One of his fellow-students, and lifelong friend, was Noël Grudgings, who in 1931 self-published a book of Norse-style poetry, entitled *Grimnismal*. After his death, Grudging's extensive library of books on Old Norse and Icelandic literature was donated to the University of Nottingham library. So during the 1930s, when Lewis and Tolkien were writing some of their best alliterative poems – though none of those would see the light of day until decades later – two young poets were also trying their hands at writing alliterative verse. Of course, after a reaction like T.S. Eliot's, it is perhaps no surprise to learn that Sale never published any alliterative verse in his lifetime, though it appears that George Herbert Read had a much more positive view than Eliot of Sale's alliterative attempts.[19]

I followed up on this discovery by writing to Robert Rickard, a scholar at the University of East Anglia who wrote his thesis on Arthur Sale as an early ecopoet, and who had obtained copies of his manuscripts from his widow, Penny. When he wrote back to me, I learned that he had independently discovered some of Sale's alliterative verse. He is currently

[16] Read Sales' obituary in *The Guardian* for more information on his life.

[17] Humphrey Carter, *J.R.R. Tolkien: A Biography*, 1977, p. 46

[18] Chris Jones, *Strange Likeness: The Use of Old English in Twentieth-Century Poetry*. Oxford University Press, 2010, Chapter 1.

[19] Robert Rickard, personal communication, based on letters from Read to Sale.

working on a paper on Arthur Sale's development as a poet, but he and Penny Sale graciously granted me permission to reprint some of his work. All of Sale's poetry presented here are copyright his estate.

I must note that the alliterative verse I am about to share with you appears to be the product of Sale's undergraduate years. These poems are nowhere near as strong as the (non)alliterative poems he published later, in two books: *Under the War and Selected Poems* (1975) and *Selected Poems* (1999). Two of them ("The Awakening of Agantyr" and "Lodding") may actually be Noël Grudgings' work, though Robert Rickard (personal communication) believes that they are Sale's. The latter two poems appear both in Arthur Sale's papers and in the Noël Grudgings collection held at the University of Nottingham, whose catalog attributes them to Grudgings.

In his own handwriting, from late in his life, Arthur Sale annotated the following poem as a "timid exercise in Anglo-Saxon manner and metre (era: undergraduate)":

After daywalking weary separate
One abandoned at crossroads homes across land
conscious of nails now only noticed
Second ascended to empty city
quartered in barracks coldest of fares
alone by difficult fire Limping third
northward travels on trolleybus top
Smiles of farewell have set in face grooves
Forgotten outposts to aching hearts

Lodder appears to be a riddle in the Anglo-Saxon spirit, though it is only intermittently alliterative:

Lodder[20]

In a thin house the man lives
Black with drippings from glum poplars
And secret copper beech. His wife lay

Days dead before found rotting.
Funerals he furnishes says the notice
Once—but now odd joinery keeps him

Blabbing in pubs of devilries done—
Foes work charms on his old trees
And treasure—his—is turfed in his orchard.

* * * * *

At club—him peering—they wink
Run out of ready, soon get more!
Return, seem laboured, and stand drinks

Laughing. He shrinks with hate and slouches
Home, and in the night goes with a gun,
Seeing all roads he roves his trees

Whiten with witchery, hearing clogged thuds
Of spades digging and showing his gold.

The longest piece of alliterative verse that Robert Rickard has been able to locate to date in Arthur Sale's papers is a translation from the Old Norse: *The Awakening of Agantyr*. It is very rough, as someone – probably Arthur Sale – himself notes in an introduction he added to a typescript of the translation, which I reproduce below:

(*Notes on the prosody of an undergraduate shot at translation from the Old Norse*)

In a word, there is none, but there seems to be an attempt to come close to the *effect* of Old Norse heroic verse, which has a tight internal line structure based not on stress as in English but on alliteration and rhyme. The rules (as I remember them from a time almost as remote as the original texts – so don't trust me) are:

- that each line is divided into two
- the *first* half must have *two* rhyming alliterations plus one early in the *second* half, and the rest of this half line is left to look after itself.

This last is what makes literal prosodic imitation impossible—or affected—for *our* lines are *braced* at their endings rather than systematically allowed to fall away at will. I discussed this difficulty with Seamus Heaney, who is translating *Beowulf* (Old English prosody is *alliteratly* [sic] identical with the Norse but *without* the structural *rhymes*), and I notice he does not deliberately attempt that prosodic final free-for-all.

Your skald (Old Norse poets who composed
on the spot; minstrels)
Kettle Bignose (translation of Kettle
Flatnose, an Old Norse Thug!)

[20] *Lodder* meant "wretched person or beggar" in Middle English but fell out of use by the early modern period. In dialectal use, it could mean a watercourse or drainage canal. Lodder was also the surname of an aristocratic family in Somerset.

The author is right that we should not trust his memory; he has confused the rules for internal rhyme in *dróttkvætt* with the general rules for alliteration in Old Norse. But his comments show his sensitivity to one of the key features of alliterative verse – the way the line "falls away" at the end, where alliteration is not required. This is a topic I have discussed at length elsewhere, in my article Varieties of Alliterative Meter, which discusses Geoffrey Russom's theory that the alliteration pattern of Old and Middle English verse is linked to the falling rhythms of a language (like Old English) that has subject-object-verb (SOV) word order, and that the abandonment of alliterative verse in the 15th century was at least in part driven by the mismatch between that alliteration pattern and the rising rhythms of modern English, which has strict subject-verb-object (SVO) word order. This transcript's testimony indicates that not only the author (Sale?), but the rather more prominent poet Seamus Heaney, were aware of this rhythmic feature of Old English and Old Norse verse, and had discussed the difficulties it created for poets attempting to reproduce the form in modern English.

Here is the opening of *The Awakening of Agantyr*:

Maid has met in Moon Bay
Fallow folding against sun-falling.

Herdsman: *Who on island hies alone?*
quick as come let quest for quarters.
Hervor: *My goal is in no guest house*
Unknown am I to any islander.
Show me a way to walk on
To heaps where Hjorvard is hid in ground.
Herdsman: *No man in his wits will walk there;*
Friend of dead to death you will fare.
Fleet as drag feet fly.
Fires after burn fall.
Hervor: *Collar I unclasp to keep, for counsel.*
Heroes' lover not easy to be let.

As you can see, the commentary at the beginning of the transcript was quite correct. This poem is at best an impressionistic attempt to reproduce Old Norse poetry in modern English and suffers from other faults common to many older translations of Old Norse poetry, such as its attempts to imitate the extreme syntactic compression of Old Norse. Interestingly, several times, the poet alliterates on the final stress, even though his comments from many years later, reproducing his memories of his undergraduate understanding of Old Norse verse, indicate that he knew that the end of the line should not alliterate, but should be allowed to "fall away". It is hard, in Modern English poetry, not to put the rhythmic peak at the end of the line.

However, I do not believe that the poems I have reproduced here are all the alliterative poems that Arthur Sale produced; I rather suspect that what George Herbert Read and T.S. Eliot read must have been rather stronger, to get Read's wholehearted support for a young poet, and even back-handed praise from Eliot. But they are what we have to date. Noël Grudgings' alliterative work is mostly contained in his *Grimnismal*, though additional works in manuscript are available in Special Collections at the University of Nottingham.

Robert Rickard has expressed the opinion to me that through much of his career Sale wavered between an impulse toward alliterative diction and the blank verse that became his characteristic form. You can see that struggle in the following excerpt from his poem "The Triangle", which is metrically blank verse. It makes one wonder what might have been.

Craning across its inside bend the beach
Midway turns back in gracious fear to find
Milk roots and self on opposed banks displayed
Like swan or goose with wings swept fore or aft.

Differences despite, beechbole, beaches, brook,
Strong angle irons, concerted to the sky
Present in a triangular frame of shade
That makes all other waters less than washed
A tray of water fixed upon the flux
that flashes signals at the light to dip
Down, sip, strip, drown, and then abandon
Nylons and heart in a delighted panic –
Relics to irradiate and wreak miracles.

Robert Rickard

Long live alliteration!

New Perspectives on Alliteration in Poetry Conference, 1st September 2025, at the University of East Anglia – a view from the hall

What a day to savour, and what better way to pinch-punch the new month with a Monday munching over battle raps before breakfast; lays at lunchtime; sagas after sunset!

The deceptively dry-sounding title masked a conference (organised by the indefatigable Dr. Tim Anderson of UEA) covering a remarkable range of alliterative verse across the world and time.

The long day slowly simmered into a sort of sound-miracle: not simply a tribute to the depth of alliterative expertise in those turning up, but in the practice of writing and reciting what clearly turns out to be a living language, form and tool. Yet all this in what might seem to most a pretty arcane alleyway of wordsmithing; and from a plethora of places from Oxford to Oregon, Madagascar to Texas, Utah to Otaga, the Great Lakes to London, Stockholm to Hong Kong, Lincoln to New Jersey - and many more.

What a witness to the many living languages sharing chiming, rhyming runes and rites – in ways and tongues unknown to most present, I suspect. And what more appropriate setting than the City of Literature? [Warning in this write-up: an alliterative urge starts to sting, so pleas for forgiveness if it affects one observer's view of events… .]

Though many may have known childhood cartoons and tales, of Thor and Odin, Freja and Loki, picturing Vikings in vivid, violent victories in vague Northern places, before this bewildering array of lectures ('across five continents', as David Nowell Smith put it) who present or screening could have considered that alliterative verse still is savoured and very much matters to so many?

And of what did the speakers sing their spectators? Here are four sample highlights this one listener happened to hear (though NB: there were fifteen others):

Paul Deane came from America specially to set the scene with infectious lightness of touch on the whole 'alliterative revival'; ushering us swiftly through well-known 'cultists' of Anglo-Saxon history, myth and verse: Tolkien and C.S. Lewis; but also via less obvious contributors: William

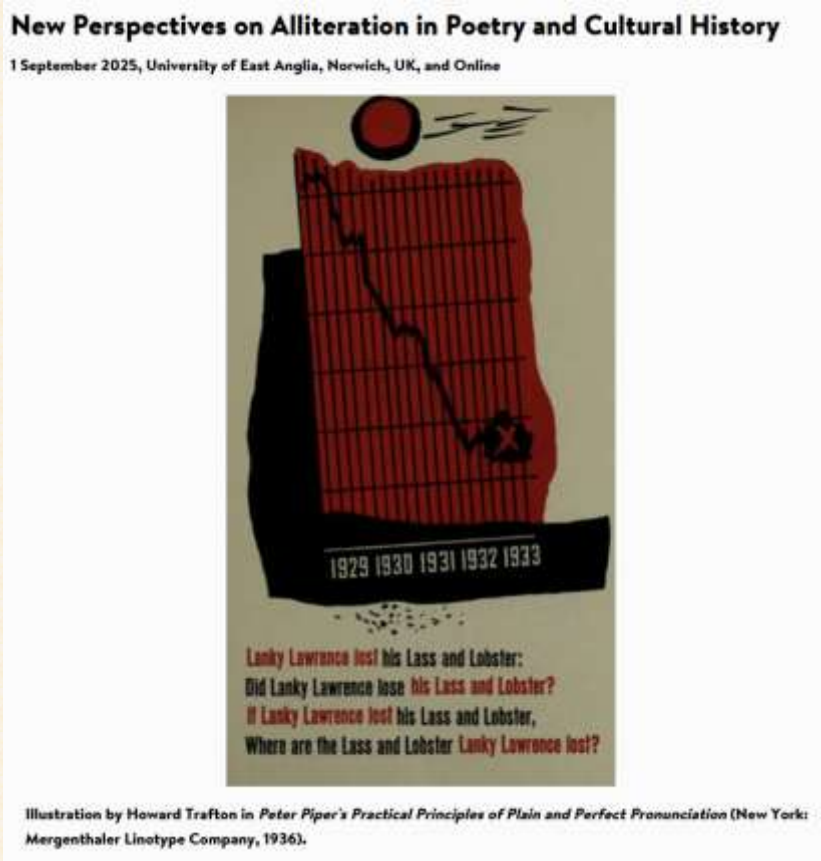


Illustration by Howard Trafton in *Peter Piper's Practical Principles of Plain and Perfect Pronunciation* (New York: Mergenthaler Linotype Company, 1936).

Morris, W.H. Auden (who liked his names sounding Old English), and Rudyard Kipling (in a 1904 poem framed as an automobile advertisement). And much much more. His website, Forgotten Ground Regained, is probably definitive.

Harriet Truscott of UEA then showed our group how typographical spaces matter in writing—for example, in the distinctive half-line break or 'caesura' in much older alliterative verse, as well as Modernist poems by people like Pound. This reminded me of others: famously, Emily Dickinson giving us pause with her hyphens (infamously eradicated by her early

publishers); but also of lesser-known poets - one the present writer is researching, Arthur Sale, let his words breathe and 'inter-connect beyond their prose syntax'; but who also (as Paul Deane coincidentally re-discovered) dabbled in alliterative verse.

Margaret Ann Noodin then showed how the oral expression of the Ojibwe people of the Great Lakes (not written down till the late eighteenth century, apparently), oozes alliteration from every pore of every word; she demonstrated these in the gentlest, touching 'phonemes folding, waves of words', of an indigenous language, now clinging to life in modern America;

Selene Genovese then showed us similarities in the opposite-seeming other end of makking/marcatura: made clear how the two-thousand-year-old written tradition of Latin still bubbles with alliterative plays - specifically in the pointed Roman-dialect satires of a thirties' poet named Trilussa.

In all this I couldn't help starting to ponder a much wider question: one I really wasn't expecting on such an arcane alliterative day. This concerns perhaps the central problem in modern English poetry: against all the tongue-twisters sonorously-sounding across the Julian Study Centre, might mainstream contemporary verse not seem all the more 'stuck'? All the more lost in its (generally) limp linguistic limbo? (By this, think the rapid decline in 'popularity' from a time when a Tennyson was a true media star; since 'the collapse of language' (Sale), the not-often now even reported 'dumbing-down of words' in the mass media. Any sort of poetic tradition may be drying up into separate small pools: what's taught in schools (and that shriveling in the inscrutable face of the 'Knowledge-Based Curriculum'...); navel-gazing free-verse droned out to hesitant clapping in a very few open-mic nights in backrooms in bars; lyrics parked on plinths of 'folk ballad' or birthday-card ditty.

And **yet**: some need for poetic expression persists, is present in every love-lorn, political pop song; still sometimes surfaces – in sincerely-sung sentiments: penned for weddings and funerals. What the wide-ranging rhetoric of UEA's Alliterative Conference made this bystander consider was that as the day rolled on, and forty-plus people present from across our sphere shared their obvious love for still-vibrant alliterative soundscapes, might they be being offered some obvious clue – or at least one hiding in plain sight – as to how to make a living – shared – poetic language sing again? Might alliterative, rhythmic and even spatial aspects of the 'old worde craft' still have a place, as a tool to make our words sing more simply, more passionately?

After all - I pondered the next day, playing with my grandson - our first words are all alliterative. Even writing this write-up, the tuneful tendency – whatever the wellspring – seemed on the day towards a rich, spoken and listened-to verse. After exposure, almost impossible not to hear the chiming consonants, sibilant shivers, assonant nuances, that bind each phrase, and – more importantly, some of the talks suggested – move it on.

Might alliterative sounds and pulses even drive the music of contemporary poetry - whether Browning or Bolivar (Adam, who travelled from Oregon to UEA, and is one of an elite band of professionally-practising Anglo-Saxon poets I didn't even know existed!)?

Finally (not just to show the impulsive enthusiasm is still measured!): I readily confess my own inner muse-jury is still out on Anglo-Saxon reconstructions and translations. The conference evening culminated in impromptu readings in the unlikely gardens of the Georgian House Hotel, seducing us with their incredible range: gory, guttural authentic compositions by the (virtuosic) Rahul Gupta; meticulously-pinpoint English realisations by the afore-mentioned Adam Bolivar; wonderfully-crafted mock-epics by Martin Vine (cf. a Cædmon-prize winning baby dragon guarding its hoard); and on to Paul Deane's wittily-/chillingly-observed imagining – in lightest, loose prosody – of the chilly demise of (Elon) Musk's future Mars settlers. Though all this too (particularly the last) sang us how Anglo-Saxon rhythms and sounds can, still, feel substantial and resonant, still they seem to me something from another language.

Possibly because they are... . Nevertheless, though such a freely-voiced verse may or may not be compatible with the more or less syllabic tradition gradually predominating from Chaucer on in mainstream literature, it does not mean these invigorating soundscapes don't still have a real – perhaps unexpected? – place in helping modern poetry regain real voice and vigour. Why? Because alliterative verse generally sounds like it needs such speaking aloud, not muttered by isolated poets in garrets. Older ones (like Margaret Ann Noodin's Ojibwe...) never written down, and so written to be remembered – and recited.

Publications Noted

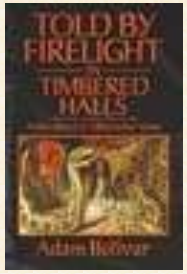
Awards

- Pat Masson's The Last Valkyrie from Issue #2 was not only a finalist, but won an honorable mention in the Rhysling Award competition. It has now appeared in the 2025 *Rhysling Anthology*.

Articles, Reviews, Discussions on Blogs, other Web Resources

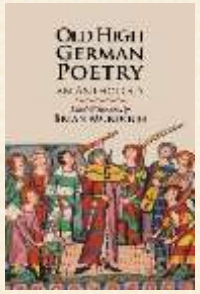
- Douglas A. Anderson, Review of Dennis W. Wise (ed.), *Speculative Poetry and the Modern Alliterative Revival: A Critical Anthology*, in *Mythlore*.
- BeowulfTranslations.net provides resources on Beowulf, including comparisons of over 100 English translations
- CLASP (A Consolidated Library of Anglo-Saxon Poetry) provides parses of Old English poetry, including Beowulf.
- Paul D. Deane
  - Love, Grief, and Alliterative Verse in Tolkien's Legendarium. Presentation at Mereth Aderthad, 2025. (Video available here).
  - Alliterative Verse in Arda (Oxonmoot 2025 presentation)
  - The Late 20th- and Early 21st-Century Alliterative Revival *(with notes on its early 20th century roots)*. Presentation at the Conference on Alliteration in Poetry and Cultural History, the University of East Anglia, Sept. 1, 2025.
- Nelson Goering, The Fall of Arthur and The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún : A Metrical Review of Three Modern English Alliterative Poems. Journal of Inklings Studies.
- Michael Helsem
  - Getting your feet wet in Old Norse prosody
  - The impossible meter (contains pretty much all the *dróttkvætt* published in modern English by 2024)
  - Pieces of Cosette, A Lost Early Twentieth-Century Alliterative Practitioner
- Michael Hessel-Mial, Behind the Poem: Knot Loosener Memorial Disputation.
- Joe Hoffman
  - **New Perspectives in Alliteration (well, half, anyway)**. Report on the Conference on Alliteration in Poetry and Cultural History at the University of East Anglia, Sept. 1, 2025.
  - The Hunt for Alliterative Melody. Presentation at the Conference on Alliteration in Poetry and Cultural History at the University of East Anglia, Sept. 1, 2025.
- Tom Johnson, Supereffable (a review of *Chasing the Pearl Manuscript: Speculation, Shapes, Delights*, by Arthur Baht), in the London Review of Books.
- Jack Laurel, Anglo-Saxon Rhythms and The Muse of Song
- Pauline Park, Tolkien & The Anglo-Saxon Heritage of Beowulf
- Saroful, How To: My Ridiculous Dróttkvætt Writing Process, on *Textwall*
- Graham Scheper
  - The Misconception Behind Beowulf's Name
  - The Syntax of Beowulf
- Thaliarchus, Spearhand Faring Postmortem
- George Walkden, The Status of Hwæt in Old English. *English Language and Linguistics*.

Poem and Book links Added



- Adam Bolivar, *Told by Firelight in Timbered Halls: A Wordhord of Alliterative Verse*. Jackanapes Press, August 20, 2025.
- Jackson Crawford, *Poetic Edda*, 2nd edition, 2025.
- Ágnes Cserháti, Ghost Hands, in *Dust Poetry* (alliterative free verse)
- Joshua C. Frank, First Dealings with Death, *Society of Classical Poets*
- Timothy Green, Pre-War Revolver
- Christine Gullette, The Fates, at *Poets.org* (alliterative free verse)
- Colleen Harris, The Letter L, in *Autumn Sky Poetry Daily*.
- Rolfe Humphreys, Green Armor on Green Ground: *Poems in the twenty-four official Welsh Meters and Some in free meters, on Welsh themes*. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956.

- J.M. Jordan, Overheard Whisper from a Backyard Fort, in *New Verse Review*. (half lines without consistent alliteration)
- Peter J. King, Riddle, in *Unruly Riddles*, Lucy Newlyn & Darrell Barnes (eds.), Chough Publications, 2020.
- Amit Majmudar
  - Word-Hord, in *The New Criterion*.
  - Pink in *The Dark Horse* magazine
- Brian Murdoch (editor and translator), *Old High German Poetry: An Anthology*. Uppsala Books, 2025.



- Brian O'Sullivan, King Lear's Museum of Nothing in *New Verse Review*.
- Emily Osborne, "The Making of a Poem: The Cruel Loss of Sons" (translation of Norse poem by Egil Skallagrímsson), in *The Paris Review*.
- Alice Oswald, Mist. In *The Guardian*. Alliterative free verse.
- Steven Rojcewicz, Saint Patrick and the Short Pint, in *Capital Psychiatry*, the e-magazine of the Washington Psychiatric Society.
- Steve Searcy, Fiber to the Home, in the September issue of *IEEE Spectrum*, both in print and online.
- Thomas Sharp, A Manner, A Turn, A Way (Our Longland is Dreaming)
- Joy Sullivan, Tomatoes, in *Maria Shriver's Sunday Paper* (alliterative free verse)
- Laura Varnam, *Grendel's Mother Bites Back: Poems wið Beowulf* in *Primers Volume Seven* from Nine Arches Press.
- Theresa Werba, Bleed, Saxon Blood, in *Society of Classical Poets*
- Eirik Westcoat, *Shining Mead*. Skaldic Eagle 2025.
- Martin Kennedy Yates, *This Wilderness and Other Concerns*. Broken Spine Press, 2025. Contains the "Scousenlish" poems previously published in Forgotten Ground Regained.
- Jeff Young, Burial, in *New Verse Review*.

Links to Online Performances and Translations

- Nik Gunn, Welcome to Set Yet Speaking (plus a translation of Beowulf lines 1687-98a)

Poems Posted on Blogs & Social Media

Published under the Author's Real Name

- G. Finlayson Boswell, On the Diminishment of Seafarers' Laments
- Paul Vincent Cannon, Wiles
- Paul D. Deane, "English speech eagerly moves …"
- Karen Pierce Gonzalez, After Hours (alliterative free verse)
- Alex Guenther, alliterative haiku
- James Hart
  - Earbending (*dróttkvætt*)
  - Sense the Shift
- Michael Helsem, multiple experimental poems on Bluesky under the hashtag #rumramruf.
- Keith Howden, Language for Stone
- Dennis Johnstone, Build Me No Castle
- Math Jones
  - Wyrd is simply / the way things are … (*fornyrðislag*)
  - Boc (Part 1 / Part 2) (*fornyrðislag*)
- Jack Laurel, "…The might of the architect …"
- Kris Lindbeck, After Cædmon
- Ben Quant,
  - Poem 413 – Run"
  - Poem 414 – Season's End | Ode for the Day
  - Poem 453 – Fragments From a Forgotten Saga
  - Poem 686 – "Interviews and in-laws …"
  - Poem 723 – Twilight Driving
- Alex Rettie, There Is A Lady
- Edward Rinaldi, alliterative haiku
- David Rowe, Psalm 133
- Lindsay Sfara, Heart's Drum
- Andrew Smardon, Ideas of North (translations of skaldic poetry)
- Matthew M.C. Smith, A Garden at a Stately Home

- Michael Smith, Behold the shifting, shingled shore …
- Laura Varnam, 'Against Misdirection': Mapping Poetic Desire Lines in Creative Criticism on Beowulf
- Zdenka Waldner, The Death of Bëor the Old

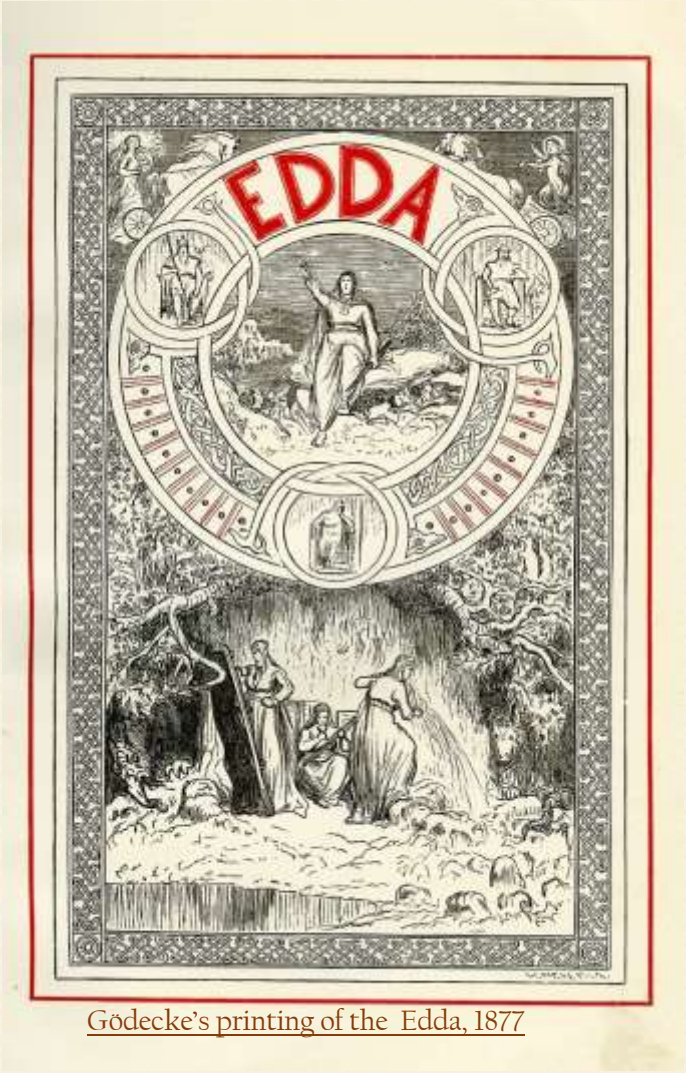
Posted under Pseudonyms on Blogs and Social Media

- Alfgifu, Mighty in Paperwork
- @alinhumairaa, "Who hurled the moon …"
- chalkwhitehands, translation from Hippolytus
- @drplaces, "Sacred stones stand silhouetted …"
- Quest for Glory (game): Anglo-saxon style alliteration in-game
- Runekaster_Juvenilia, Feathersorg the Mighty
- Thaliarchus, *Spearhand Faring* (on itch.io)
- @tolkienthoughts, a flyting scene from Beowulf
- @whoshim, Reassigned to Rigel II and The Stand
- Zorbo_Jorks, The Death ofTúrin Turambar, Niënor Níniel, and Brandir the Lame, in *2005-2025 Mereth Aderthad* Fanzine.

Posted to the alliterative poetry page on Michaela Macha's site, Odin's Gift

- Michaela Macha
  - The Fight for the Necklace
  - The Binding Ones
  - Gudrun and Brynhild
  - Gerd Meets Frey
  - Fenris Unleashed
  - The Song of the Mill
  - Starkad's Fate
  - The Lay of Hildebrand
  - Hakon's Passage version 1
  - Hakon's Passage version 2
  - Under the Cloak
  - Hadding
  - Angrboða
  - Son of Fury

- Math Jones, Almighty Frey
- Lady Rosalind Jehanne, At the Battle of Maldon



Gödecke's printing of the Edda, 1877

- Mikal Hrafspa, The Skaldkonger (Bard King)
- Celestial Elf, The Mead of Poetry

Call for Submissions

The Winter, 2025 issue of Forgotten Ground Regained is open for submissions. I am especially interested in alliterative poetry on the theme, "Psalms and Meditations". Submissions should be sent to Paul D. Deane at the following email address: pdeane@alliteration.net by **January 1, 2026.**

Note that topics have been set for the next four issues, though submissions are currently open only for the Winter issue:

- **Winter, 2026**: Psalms and Meditations
- **Spring, 2026**: Moments Sensed and Seen
- **Summer, 2026**: Alliterative Verse in Arda [Middle Earth]
- **Fall, 2026**: Speculative Visions

Form and Content

- **Submissions must 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.
- **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 variety of English, 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.
- **I will not publish metrical poetry or free verse that does not make systematic, structural use of alliteration.** I would love to see people experimenting with modern English versions of Old and Middle English alliterative verse, with Old Norse forms like *ljoòahattr* and *dróttkvætt* 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. Note that I love both the lyrical and the narrative turns in poetry, so longer narratives will be given careful consideration.
- I am open to contemporary poetry 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.

Editorial Policies

- I accept simultaneous submissions but require authors to notify me in a timely fashion if a work is accepted elsewhere. I reserve the right to withdraw acceptance if a work has been accepted or published elsewhere without my knowledge.
- I am not able to offer payment for publication. However, authors retain all rights (except, of course, for granting me a non-exclusive right to publish their work on alliteration.net).
- 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 Winter issue, rather than being included directly in the pdf magazine.
- 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.
- As editor, I have final say on any and all issues of copyediting, formatting, punctuation, layout, illustration, and the like. I will endeavor to take an author's wishes into account, but in any cases where the author and I cannot reach agreement, they have the choice either to accept my decisions or to withdraw their work from publication in this journal.
- It should not be necessary to state this, but in the age of generative AI, it is best to be explicit. I expect submissions to be entirely the author's work. If a work has benefited in any way from reference to generative AI, I expect the author to provide logs of all interactions, both prompts and AI responses, so that I can judge whether a poem is the author's authentic creation.

Marcus Lindenburg

Lament to Vinland's Sailor

Kiss me now, kill me later;
I left you on that dead dock.
With my heart heavy then,
And you in wicked wind.

Bury me new married
With flowers at my feet;
Shaven by the shipyard
You've taken back your seat.

What utterance of will,
The ocean gods brought thee;
Bloody-hair there will blow
Taking you from me.

Your sword changed for the oars,
And mine no briny bliss;
Won't warrior no more,
soon covered with a kiss.

Stay stony on the bay,
Sea fire not for me;
nor Christian kin to be,
long lovers' dove won't see.

Bremen's land begs your brand,
Wine-berries all what carries;
And leave me left to grieve,
No breath brought from the faeries.

Had Heimdall had his call,
We would be one and good.
But I am none and all,
In church given no wood.

Note from the editor:

At this point I must ask the reader to shift gears. These last two poems are strongly influenced not only by the Norse habit of turning poems into riddles through the use of kennings, but by Icelandic *rimur*, which like much Middle English alliterative verse married alliteration with regular rhyme schemes. As a result, Marcus Lindenburg's poems are close kin to alliterative ballads like Ted Charnley's I Find the Naiad's Place, and Mine – but with kennings, so you need to read these poems like riddles. The author has provided glosses for anyone who needs them.

Glosses for the Kennings in "Lament to Vinland's Sailor":

- **Shaven by the shipyard:** sailor/warrior's beard shaven to return home.
- **Bloody-Hair:** Blóðughadda, one of the nine daughters of the sea gods, representing different types of waves.
- **Sea-fire:** Gold. See above.
- **Bremen's land:** Vinland. Referring to Adam of Bremen, a medieval German chronicler who travelled to Vinland and was the first European writer on the New World.
- **Wine-berries:** Referring to Vinland. According to the Saga of the Greenlanders, Vinland was named after wineberries (vín=wine), meaning grapes.
- **In church given no wood**: not given wood (i.e., a coffin) for a churchyard burial.
- **Braided with bronze**: adorned with bronze fittings
- **A scope to string your journey**: an astrolabe (held up by a string) as an aid to navigation.

I miss the mead's sweet bliss,
The seal's song—day-long;
Living long to linger,
Yet soil stuffs my song.

I hope you have my rope,
The braided made with bronze,
And scholars bring a scope,
To string your journey strong.

Marcus Lindenburg

The Tale of Skorri's Song

Keep the kettle quick to weep,
Cannot care no longer.
Woman wills me now to sleep,
Smither's myth not stronger:

Norns adorned now carelessly,
The shores of thoughts embraced.
You maddened me most merrily,
But now here comes my case.

Tragedy, the tale I bring
On mine own humble oar.
So you seek a song I'll sing,
A kiss of love and more:

Fast your fire, but for now
Return, rejoice, I will!
Bury you, your bidding brow,
Drink Skorri's tale your fill.

Skorri seemed a kindly skald,
Skilled he, in pouring knife.
And ne'er was he known to brawl,
So gentle, all his life.

Yet gold did green make yellow,
His youth it all was lost.
And such an able fellow,
Learned loving was his cost.

A beauty few did bully,
Nor aggravate at home.
But Skorri saw that it was she,
That made an axe a comb.

She shook the poet's shadow,
Made him see his might.
And Skorri's skerries rowed,
To let up all her light.

Her father frowned and furrowed,
No sea-flame Skorri famed.
Sought seeds another sowed,
And offered up her name.

The pained poet's eyelids thawed,
Thought this would be his death.
But he kneaded, neighed, and gnawed,
And begged her for her breath.

The gift the girl did give him,
Kept tender with a kiss.
Neither grabbing to the grim,
That followed with her mist.

When Svana left like swallow,
And Skorri kept alone,
He felt his bones turn hollow,
His stomach turned to stones.

There felt his hands to feathers,
And could not poem keep.
All smaller than the heathers
Chained voice was but a cheep.

He flapped to fly her flagship,
Effaced in his efforts.
Yet glim and lacking glibness,
His forage had no force.

Skorri flew to forest's king,
Sat tender on his arm.
Sadly, there, began to sing,
Till field became fish farm.

The oak awoke to Skorri,
A corrie at its base,
His tears glowing new glory,
From tree-floor to his face.

So still Skorri stays singing,
Valor lost from velvet.
His river his new offspring,
Help brought to those with helmets.

Glosses for the Kennings in "The Tale of Skorri's Song":

- **Kettle weeping**: a reference to the pouring of the "mead of poetry".
- **Here now comes my case:** The first two stanzas are meant to be a *mansǫngr* lead into the poem. The poet has expressed his sorrow about a woman, as is traditional to the form, but he now moves forward with the story he is meant to be describing, rather than lingering on his own woes.
- **Smither's myth**: referring to poetry.
- **Shores of thoughts**: a chest or breast.
- **Own oar:** Tongue, especially in reference to poetry.
- **Pouring knife:** rather, pouring tongue.
- **Green made yellow**: green of youth, yellow of old age.
- **Made an axe a comb:** to make an axe a comb, meaning to turn a life of war into a life of domesticity.
- **Skerries:** a reef or rocky island. Also used to refer to teeth, in the context of speech
- **Skerries rowed, to let up all her light:** sought to make her happy by convincing her father to let him marry her
- **Sea-flame:** Common reference to gold.
- **Eyelids thawed:** He wept.
- **Grim:** tragedy
- **Mist:** disappearance
- **Forest's king**: Tree.
- **Corrie**: a divot or valley formed by water, often glacial erosion
- **Velvet**: human treasures (velvets, furs, silks.) Valor no longer gets him such treasures.
- **Help brought to those with helmets**: warriors passing near Skorri's tree are comforted by his song.