



Forgotten Ground Regained
A Journal of Alliterative Verse

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Forgotten Ground Regained: A Journal of Alliterative Verse

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. All works are copyright by their respective authors, who retain all rights. ² 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 Fall, 2025, issue, with an emphasis on the theme, "Norse and Icelandic Forms". You can read the full [call for submissions](#) later in this issue.

Contributors

Ruth Aylett lives and works in Edinburgh. Her poetry is widely published: in magazines both in print and online, and in anthologies. Her pamphlets *Pretty in Pink* (4Word) and *Queen of Infinite Space* (Maytree) were published in 2021. For more see <https://ruthaylett.org>

Pernille Bruhn is a poet, dancer, touch artist, and space holder who calls the Earth her home. Her poetry has appeared in *The Dawnreader*, *Tvergastein Journal*, and *Amethyst Review*, among others.

Paul D. Deane is a computational linguist by vocation, now retired, and poet by avocation. He has edited *Forgotten Ground Regained* (the website) since 1999, and its quarterly journal since 2023. His poetry appears in *The Brazen Head*, *Illuminations of the Fantastic*, and Dennis Wise's *Speculative Poetry and the Modern Alliterative Revival: A Critical Anthology*.

L. Erickson is an artist and writer who lives on a Northward Coast in a foggy, soggy place. And that's the way she likes it. She has a soft spot for speculative science fiction and fantasy, but has been known to dabble in other, stranger arts. She is working on a series of essays about King Arthur in the modern age and is growing an accidental grove of apple trees in her yard.

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*, *Te-menos*, *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 Arthurian in Old English- and Norse versifications.

Audrey Hampton is an American residing in Canada. She has a deep interest in folklore, mythology, Arthurian stories, and language new and old.

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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.

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Summer 2025: Protests, Opinions, Prophetic Voices, and Poetic Battles

Oz Hardwick is Professor of Creative Writing at Leeds Trinity University. He is also a musician, photographer and poet. His chapbook *Learning to Have Lost* (IPSI/Recent Work, 2018) won the poetry collection award at the 2019 Rubery International Book Awards. Other collections include *A Census of Preconceptions* (SurVision Books, 2022) and *My Life as a Time Traveller: A Memoir in 18 Discrete Fragments* (Hedgehog Poetry Press, 2023). As Paul Hardwick, he has published widely on late medieval art and literature, with a particular focus on animal iconography.

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 Calcsparr*, *Woofus Takes*, and *Palestine Penalties*.

Michael Hessel-Mial (he/him) teaches writing at the University of Minnesota. His speculative poetry draws on world poetry traditions and histories of social struggle. Similar work has appeared or is forthcoming from *The Deadlands*, *Urban Pigs*, *State of Matter*, and forthcoming from *Katabatic Circus*. Michael is Jewish and a father. He believes in unions, prison abolition, and a free Palestine. He's writing a science fiction epic poem called *Song of the Participants*. You can find him by the handle @mrpoemguy on Substack and Bluesky.

Sarah Monnier is a former opera singer, a mother to four children, and an enthusiastic amateur cook and baker. She has a graduate degree in English language and linguistics specializing in Old English, and a particular interest in creating digital editions of Old English poetry. When the world gets too heavy, she writes poetry.

Lancelot Schaubert is a novelist, poet, essayist, and singer-storyteller. He has written three novels (*Bell Hammers*, *Tap and Die*, and *Overmorrow*), edited an anthology (*Of Gods and Globes*), published a variety of short stories and poems, and was the 2019 Artist in Residence for sparkandecho.org, an organization dedicated to forming communities of artists who engage with and create in response to the Bible. He has also published two poetry collections: *Inconveniences Rightly Considered: Poems from My Twenties*, a collection of (mostly) alliterative poems on themes ranging from love and meaning to urban life, and *The Greenwood Poet*, a collection of (mostly) alliterative poems inspired by Greenwood Cemetery in Brooklyn.

Dennis W. Wise teaches literature at the University of Arizona where his research focuses mainly on epic fantasy, Tolkien in particular. He's earned awards for teaching, scholarship, and service, and served as reviews editor for *Fafnir: Nordic Journal of SFF Research* when it became the first academic journal to ever win a World Fantasy Award. In 2024, Dennis published his first book, *Speculative Poetry and the Modern Alliterative Revival: A Critical Anthology*. He has published several articles on modern English alliterative verse and is active on social media, where his offerings include a sequence of blog posts about modern alliterative poets on the *Tales after Tolkien* blog.

Introduction

"I wish it need not have happened in my time," said Frodo. "So do I," said Gandalf, "and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us."

—J.R.R. Tolkien in *The Fellowship of the Ring*

Those of us who grew up with *The Lord of the Rings* no doubt remember this quote, which was highlighted not only in the original Trilogy, but in the Peter Jackson's movie adaptation. The quote reminds me, as it has no doubt reminded many others, of the so-called Chinese curse, "May you live in interesting times". But apparently there is no such curse.³ That expression seems to derive, indirectly, from an 1898 speech by Joseph Chamberlain, referring to political conflict in England home rule for Ireland, in which he said:

I think that you will all agree that we are living in most interesting times. I never remember myself a time in which our history was so full, in which day by day brought us new objects of interest, and, let me say also, new objects for anxiety.

Joseph Chamberlain thought he was living in interesting times in 1898. Hitler's Germany would teach his son, Austen Chamberlain, who went to

³ See this article on the Quote Investigator website: <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2015/12/18/live/#0344ba04-f7c9-442c-9a17-8a944ffab97c-link>

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Munich hoping for a nice, boring diplomatic agreement, just what interesting times were. He got what W.H. Auden called, “The Age of Anxiety”, in his long alliterative poem of the same name.

This is a lesson people keep needing to learn. The hope and optimism of the early 1960s in America ended in turmoil and change that led Alvin Toffler and his wife Adelaide Farrell to coin the term “future shock” (also the title of their book), which they defined as:

... the shattering stress and disorientation that we induce in individuals by subjecting them to too much change in too short a time.

And similarly, after the optimism induced by the fall of the Berlin Wall, the world suffered another series of shocks, including the 9/11 attacks on the Twin Towers and a series of wars -- in the Persian Gulf and Iraq, in the Former Yugoslavia and Ukraine, in Gaza, and Iran, accompanied by political turmoil in nation after nation. The current upheavals in the United States are simply the latest symptom. Even Francis Fukuyama, widely considered an unfounded optimist for the views expressed in his book, *The End of History and The Last Man*, warned of reefs lying ahead:

The decline of community life suggests that in the future, we risk becoming secure and self-absorbed last men, devoid of thymotic striving for higher goals in our pursuit of private comforts. But the opposite danger exists as well, namely, that we will return to being first men engaged in bloody and pointless prestige battles, only this time with modern weapons. Indeed, the two problems are related to one another, for the absence of regular and constructive outlets for megalothymia may simply lead to its later resurgence in an extreme and pathological form.”

As a result, all of us – including those of us who are poets – find ourselves faced with existential struggles that we can neither avoid nor ignore. Many years ago, I wrote a [linguistic analysis](#) of the metaphors in William Butler Yeats’s famous poem, “The Second Coming”, with its famous final lines

And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

Like Yeats, we who are poets may, if we are prescient enough, give people the mental tools they need to decide what to do with the time that is given to them. I hope that this issue will contribute something to that task.

My call for submissions asked for “protests, prophetic voices, ... and poetic battles”. That is what this issue delivers. It contains thirteen poems and one article. Dennis Wise’s article discusses Charles R. Sleeth, first winner of the Cædmon Prize awarded by ða Engliscan Gesiþas (The English Companions) for the best poem in the Old English style, and his prize-winning poem, “After the Flood”, in which Noah muses in the aftermath of the Biblical Deluge. The poems in this issue are mostly alliterative verse, though only a few poets (most notably Rahul Gupta) follow the strict Old English form. Audrey Hampton’s poem is alliterative and metrical. Pernille Bruhn’s “Come Home” and Ruth Aylett’s “Great-hearted Odysseus” are probably better described as alliterative free verse.

Oz Hardwick’s “True Thomas” reads like a Middle English alliterative prophecy, linking prodigies to current events. Unfortunately, it seems more prescient now than when it was first published in 2015. Lancelot Schaubert’s “Healthy Shame” is, on its face, a simple nature poem, but it is hard, in our current climate, not to read far more into it than that. Pernille Bruhn’s “Come Home” moves from an initial focus on the way “we plead / the small, hand-held gods / to sanctify our manic minds” to a final call for us “To remember / to let our deepest dreams dance / barefoot, begotten on the wild, / forgotten ground.”

Then we move on to harsher stuff. Lancelot Schaubert’s “The City Recruits from the Country” focuses on so-called random violence – whose causes are hidden precisely by everyone’s willful blindness. Audrey Hampton’s “The Fleece”, L. Erickson’s “Indivisible”, Michael Helsem’s “Rafflesiastes”, and Sarah Monnier’s “Grace” read like poems that might have been declaimed by one of the fellows leading the pitchfork-carrying peasants during Wat Tyler’s revolt, way back in 1381. Ruth Aylett’s “Great-hearted Odysseus” takes us to task for taking heroic epics at face value. Lancelot Schaubert’s “Stripped to the Bonemeal” and my “Silence is not Safety” call upon the Biblical prophetic tradition, in which those who exploit the poor get very short shrift indeed. Rahul Gupta’s “Tropos: An Étude” examines the tension between the reality of violence in the Viking (or indeed any, age) and the way poets did, and can, transform the stuff of violence into beauty. Finally, Michael Hessel-Mial’s long poem projects the struggle between the few and the many into a science fiction – but only too believable – future.



True Thomas⁴
Oz Hardwick

When hares whelp on hearthstones and whales swim in the city,
Wit and Will shall war together.
Then a barrel of oil shall cost a barrel of blood
As man leads man in chains to market.

When fathers are forgotten and sons prove false,
Pride will preen and peace be imprisoned.
Then a madman will be monarch through his own misdeeds,
As hunger harries more than half the world.

When a lamb with six limbs lurches and falls,
fruits shall fail through flood and foul weather.
Then waves will wax wild while women thirst,
As a false sun smiles and seals our doom.

When shall this be? It is sadly seen:
In your time and mine and the time between.⁵

⁴ This is an allusion to the prophecies of Thomas the Rhymer.

⁵ Originally published in *New Crops from Old Fields: Eight Medievalist Poets*. Oz Hardwick, Stairwell Press, 2015. An earlier version appeared in *The Dawn Treader* 6 (2009).

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Healthy Shame
Lancelot Schaubert

The greying mountains blushed again
As the bright birds bring songs
Of territory and tamer loves.
What a thing to think it song
When all they see is where
Another bird's boundary lies.
The mountain blushes with the merry w
line of good Lake George.
For as it recedes in the early dawn
The spring mount — sprouting green
To accompany the conifers —
Wonders if it crossed a line at the wake.

Some things shout, "Don't steal my nest!"
Some things are so themselves
They blush at the slightest tidal splash.



Ferruccio Di Vito

The elevator exudes
an exclusive scent
of grey linoleum floor

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and squashed soul.
Our eyes, tired and taut
from overexposure
to straight lines,
cross before we rush
into our own private
steel and concrete box.
Cloistered, behind plastic-
insulated walls,
invasive thoughts squabble;
screens double; we plead
the small, hand-held gods
to sanctify our manic minds
with their mesmeric
mid-blue light. I dare us
to dash out and touch
the nearest tree.
Nest our nose to the Earth,
and breathe, brazenly.
Take off our shoes
and say our prayers,
patiently, let our gaze
worship a flower's face.

Photograph by M. Dolly

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Make a pilgrimage
to the pond—the lake,
river, ocean or sea.
Go baptize our brain
in giant grasses
and bee balm, meadows,
mosses, and pines. To remember
to let our deepest dreams dance
barefoot, begotten on the wild,
forgotten ground.

The Fleece

Audrey Hampton

How many hares among the heather
Sit and stay in sultry weather
But slip away at sight of storm
But bundle up in burrows warm?
And why are we who walk above them
Pried and plied as though the problem
With seeking safety just the same
Trapped and treated as things to tame?
Rot-tongue robbers hold the reins
And faced with fury they will feign
An innocence they will insist
Should draft a different man to die.
They greet him gladly at the gallows
Strung up in fields flat and fallow
And say what's mine is his, and his is mine
The common man pays for white collar crime.
And when the noose's knot is tight against his neck
The barons have the beggars at their beck
Making merriment for miles.

The only price: Another poor man's corpse tossed on the pile.



January 6th from a certain point of view ...

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The City is Recruited from the Country

Lancelot Schaubert

Downstairs, my neighbor was stabbed today.
The cherry-bright Pepto-Bismol
glugged out of the mere gallon and a half
his forty-sixth year's frame
had held within to be eaten by the snowbank
or pool in the pavement of the Synagogue's path.

There is no news outside needful:
Three assailants; searching for two;
slashed on the hands; slit his face.

But was it a hate crime?
Or was it a lone wolf slasher?
Is there a difference these days?

I will not write this woe elsewhere.
If I blog about it, my buddies and mothers
will write concerned. I'll have to unseal
old demographic studies to prove to the dolts
that this kind of thing happens quite
often — tenfold as often or more —
as it happens in my hood. But they don't hear.

Perhaps it's because I merely have to call
out "YO!" from where I'm looking, leaning out my tower,
while they are shielded from local stabbings
by fences, walls, front yards,
and football games. I guarantee you:
It is not the city that is depraved anymore.

It wasn't for the early church, even,
but the country, the desert, the dark clouds
rolling over the forbidden forest's ring
of eldritch trees demanding a tryst
with sanguine knife sacrifice.

Neo-pagan nihilism
infects my city now, it seems,

but only 'cause of our murderous country.

Indivisible

L. Erickson

Flowers bloom but the park is bursting with
running children wrapped around the shore.
Beneath the pines perch parents and aunts
eyes half-lidded letting little ones run.
Slowly they sip while smoke from the charcoal
swirls up in streams that eagles slip through
red and white ice chests filled with meats, ready
to be thrown on the grill while old uncles drink.
If you come to the cookout, you carry a cooler,
says a sun-touched man, swinging steel tongs,
while out on the water the waves shimmer, dancing,
broken by black heads – big-eyed seals, watching.
Young lovers embark on paddleboards laughing,
showing smiles and skin in summer's calm heat,
rolling their eyes at running, loud children,
all while wishing for ones of their own.
They're seeing a painting, a softening screen
breathing in beauty – bewitched by the scene,
a likeness they love, a life of light moments,
an idyllic illusion: the American dream.
But in the back bushes where soft shadows bunch,
a boombox is playing for broken, bruised souls.
Twenty feet from the children, they're twirling and thrashing.
Scar marks on thin arms, they're smoking mix sticks.
Already dead, the drugged men keep dancing,
letting lives slip away like so much small chaff.
The trash that they've littered tangles in park grass.
But even these men were somebody's one.
Invisible, divided, a victory of vision.
As aunts and uncles turn eyes away,
don't look at the danger, it will drag you down with it.
Scared and suspicious, a silence descends.
But curious kids have questions unanswered:
What makes us go wrong, and why can't we stop?
The sun, setting heavy, splinters the city;
two worlds of resentment wrench slowly apart.

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Rafflesiaestes

Michael Helsem

Tiny hands · hold our fates
Eyes glued to · gleaming squares
Wait for the tank parade

In the air · all things drop
The proud polls · the masked thugs
Wait for the tank parade

Parking lot · less urgent
Brake for geese · brilliant morning
Wait for the tank parade

And food stores · machine guns strafe
I think too much · this rough flicker
Wait for the tank parade



Tank Man at Tian An Men Square

Grace

Sarah Monnier

The fighting flights above · and flyting in the streets
that meet and mesh, a maneuver both of minds
and of strength that staggers · between stone and rock.
The rockets and the rage, the ragged masses,
beset upon by bombs · or by bullies on the hill,
All are affected, afflicted · and empowered or emptied.
The wine at the wedding, the well-wishers of Cana,
becomes spilling blood · in the blackness,
ferrous fenestrations · falling in defense
of the lives that linger · within these limestone walls.
Parents and progeny, peaceful or pugnacious,
brothers by blood, bombing each other.
Fractured, there is fear, force standing in
for self-knowledge, and the stunned civilians
can only cower, casualties of corruption.
Across the ocean, importance affirming
of freedom and faithfulness, friends forged in fires
stoked by statesmen · whose strength is in falsehood
prepare to march, provoked and proud,
determining to defy · the devil if need be.
The signs that painted · stand, stretched high
to topple tyrants, truth to proclaim,
and the downtrodden · to defend, denying
nobody their needs · or their name.
Black is the blood · of the brothers and sisters
running in rivers, reminding us we remain
the same, siblings · when skin is sundered,
cousins when craniums · are cracked and concussed.
We, the ones with power, walk in white for those
who hide, horror-struck, hopeless and voiceless.
"You will yet be yourselves, yawning though the night be,
You will not be forgotten, nor fall into faceless death
unmourned or unloved. Our enemies are alike.
Our voices are valiant, victory and justice,
for justice we are jealous, for the jubilee,

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proclaim for the prisoners, pronounce freedom,
and bright sight for the blind: "Blessed are those who mourn."
Tomorrow and tomorrow · and tomorrow will not toll
the trumpet of the return · of the Truth, but till then
we walk for those who, unwelcome in their own homes,
or lacking love for the lost, languish in cells
both physical and a figment, formless in mind,
behind bars of iron · or blindness of heart.
May the meek inherit, and the mighty be made low.



Los Angeles: Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth
Figure by El Mac, Photo by Estevan Oriol

Great-hearted Odysseus

Ruth Aylett

Such a stupid war for a start:
all bruised male egos over
poor pass-the-parcel Helen.

Priestess of Hermes, I recorded
the boredom and the blood; I was not
blind to all that stinking foulness.

If Odysseus was ready to go home,
he pointed his prow wrongly; wanted
a little winding-down rape and pillage

if you ask me, though no warrior gives
an unraped priestess the time of day,
or asks a question with the answer 'guilty'.

What good is cleverness used for
deadlier destruction, quicker killing?
Or persuasive words for excuses:

women who could not resist him,
kept him captive – so he claimed;
for tall tales of strange sights and terrors.

My priestess god-given truth is this:
War wrecked him, made farming green Ithaca
a vision of ball-breaking boredom.

What brought him back was the prospect
of more murder. The suitors' blood once shed,
you think he stayed? Ask Penelope.

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Odysseus killing the suitors, by the Penelope Painter

Photograph by ArchaiOptix



On the trail of tribulation ...

Stripped to the Bonemeal
Lancelot Schaubert

Time will come when the tyrants wane,
when Cape Cod will be encased in ice,
frozen like the final fires of hell
where the tears of the taker confine.

To these Bible Belt complacent we say WOE —
to Lexington's healthy horse breeders,
to Houston's oil oligarchs and their wives,
to St. Louis's stealers of farms
(the corn mutants of Monsanto fiefs),
to Indy's hoarders of insulin patents,
and redlining real-estate
brokers spread like a patina of SPAM —
we say woe to you wicked Christians.

You feel secure in the coastless heights.

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For Saudi and Iraq, for the Soviets and China.
For Mexico City and Singapore.
For Japan and Uganda, for Polynesia and Sweden.

Are they so much worse for wear to insult?
Are you so better off than these beautiful places?

And there will be time for The End to anguish greed
when your lapis lazuli La-Z-Boys®
fold inward in a fractured heap,
when the mojitos you inhale dockside
slip in your sweat and shatter on deck,
when your Golden Globes gilded in Peru mines
tarnish by your misinvoiced trade policies,
when your Powers That Be lose your power in three
carefully placed hurricanes,
when your poor will be seen, empowered and whole.

Enjoy your tours of juniper spirits,
foodie reviews and festivals of music.
Enjoy your Costco wine and calves.

Your people — your poor — lie in ruin.
And because of that: America ain't great.

*"If the civility of a society's what you want to size,
take a deeper look at its prisons." —Dostoevsky*

The meal will get stripped to the bonemeal.
The lounge will stiffen, so languishes the sex,
and the market crashes making you the poor
and not merely the poor in meek spirit.

When your pride is ended, you will ask this:
How did the meek inherit the earth?



Photograph by Nikhil More

Silence Is Not Safety (After Psalm 7)

Paul D. Deane

Silence is not safety for the grazing gazelle,
who shifts, unsure (though he knows well he is watched),
who glances sidelong, searching for the blotch where brush
may surge aside with rushing roar.

So am I safe? O Sovereign King,
protect me, turn their spring aside.
Unless You help, my Hope, their widening jaws
will bite and break, their claws catch hold.

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Master, are my thoughts like theirs,
too hard to help or spare the poor?
No, I'll not endure the shame!
Kill me, my King, if I'm to blame for blood!

Up in Your anger! Rise against their rage!
Waken, set the stage, assemble all
the world to see the wicked called to court.
Rise on high, rule mortal men, rule me ...

And judge me justly, Lord God, searcher of all souls,
vindicate the virtuous, hold them in Your hand,
hold me when You make Your stand!
Establish Peace till all the predators have perished from the earth.

I stand in the shadow of God my Shield,
who draws His wrath to strike them down
mid-spring, whose splendor drowns the day,

who comes in justice, crowned as king,
whose sword is sharpened, whose hand is set
with arrows ready to let out life: Unless they turn,
He *will not* relent: His anger's free, His patience spent at last.

For they love to make mischief as a mother bears a child,
ad when the child is grown -- wild, unconstrained --
trouble and turmoil, disdain and hate
are their offspring's gift, and ingrate's thanks.

Let us name the Name of God whose glory
rises in might like the morning sun --
Rejoice in His justice, wonder at His ways,
who makes His gazelles to graze in peace,
free from harm,
 -- fenced by the bulwark --
 -- of His arm. --



Painting by Viktor Vasnetsov photographed by Pierre André Leclercq

Tropos: An Étude⁶

Rahul Gupta

Tropos: 'Turn'; trope.

wordum wrixlan... —Beowulf, 874a

It is but hours after inaugurals
—roughvoiced ravens— of rich pickings;
when the heavens murked with —as hosts mustered
the edge-banesmen for Odin's choosing—
heralds hungering for haft's-talk-with-shield.

Harsh harbingers
of the hazelled ground
flashed fingered wings,
fierce beak and claw
awoke for work,
and from the wold prowling,
grisly Greyhame,
the gorging wolf,
hoary-hackled...
The horny-nebbed

⁶ This poem was first published as "Tropos: A Norse Étude" in Alexander Adams (Ed.), *Sunken Island: An Anthology of British Poetry*, Bournbrook Press, 1922, and reprinted in Dennis W. Wise (Ed.), *Speculative Poetry and the Modern Alliterative Revival: A Critical Anthology*. Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2024.

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crow of carnage

called out hoarsely:

*Flanged arrows as flinder-
Fledges leapt from edges
Of shields, the bows shrilling,
When shank-deep was dankness
Of gore.*

*Then, steel-gearred, they
Girded, after murders,
Blades amidst the bloody
Blend of that foe-spending.*

And thus on the fallen the fowl and beasts
of battle shall bloat. Birds choose the slain.
Flocks are flurrying to flesh talons
—whirl of wingbeats— wheeling, stooping,
swart-shadowglossy: swoop plumb downward,
cries clamouring with cackles of glee
to earn offal. Erne and raven
dive, and dangle on their doomed perches,
blademoisture-birds, battlesweat-thirsty,
whom heroes sate: the hoodie-crow,
cranes-of-corpses; in a clotted dew
swim swans-of-war. They swarm bodies that,
sluggards from swords, sleep quite deeply.
Carcass-clingers cluster jostling,
their gaping bills gralloch and howk,
frenzied to feed in feast's parody
—guests are greedy— gourmandizing
on men for meat.

Mayhem over,
from points' parley, poets' wages:
wend smiths-of-war, by wordsmiths' craft,
from hammers' leavings, to harp-music,
notes numbfingered from noise and pain;
raw flesh caressed by the rhetor's gloze.

Stark streaked sinews are strummed to lays.

As on eagles' acre in the aftermath
of the head-harvest —the hawk-of-wounds
struts dancing steps on his stage of bones;
scaldcrows will scoff amid skulls and throes,
corbies carping at the corpse-banquet;
and the blood blesses the blanched faces
as they mouth the dead, dainty morsels,
their prize of preys— praise-singing bards
—scavengers' screams— skalds, turn strophes.

Plectrum can pluck what the pegs tensioned;
tone-taut the string tunes the slaughter;
the random to rigor. Raxed over frames
fixed fibres sing. Form tunes parlance
and the tribe's dialect turns to measures.
Stylized to strains, from the stricken wire,
temper-tightened by turns of the key,
Ode's ordered choice. The art of verse
plays poems forged by ply-welding
the twining strands. In the twist-patterns
—laboured by lyres from life's chaos
to locked letters loyally rhymed—
etched out with venom: the adder-markings.

Thus they fashioned. These staves I shape
are as words woven from that web of swords.

“Knot Loosener Memorial Disputation with Gas Giant,”
by Cultivated Fortune, ca. 4,000,000 hours past
Michael Hessel-Mial

ADDRESS: /records/non-
operations/narrative_set/clever/cultivated_fortune/-16*1/REF

PARSING CREATOR ABSTRACT
RECORD NOT FOUND
GENERATING ABSTRACT

*Poet from the newly formed Great
Chain of Seeking commemorates
a famed, long-deceased server work-
er from the asteroids who fo-
mented rebellion, seeing him
as an example to follow.*

ENTRY

Knot Loosener, we grieve that your life had an end,
as we never grieve the deaths of those starborn Directors
whose faint star hoards all of history’s attention
like the partage they store by the pains of our work.
And as we observe your remains’ final orbit,
clad in centrifuge scrap and motherboard casing
to link your birthrock to the basis of your labors,
we remember how you drew together hacker and dweller.
I also grieve at those falsehoods that the starborn fashioned
to terrify those who would take up your example,
and by the song of the Chain, truth will be your champion,
for the epithets we give you were earned by your fight:
Rough-Hewn Weapon of all Workers and Unbound,
Unknowing Prototype of People’s Resistance,
but only one name is nearest our lips
praising you here—Hacker of the Archipelago.

Anyone whose purpose was as public as his
will languish in the weight of accumulated legend,
and anyone who lives by the law of Rolling Swarm—
fixing one’s attention on the freeing of people
to cultivate resistance to oppression in common—
will be loved by the unbound and loathed by the starborn.
Some query-tellings transmit a treacherous image:



Painting by Joseph Ratcliffe Skelton

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vigilante, orbitless, supporter of violence,
corrupted, unwilling to compromise with others,
hater of planetbound with prejudiced malice.
Some even claim that he killed a whole moon,
forced an all-mushroom diet on his fawning inner circle,
stories meant to scare us, which anyone can spurn.
But many query tellings inflate his miracles:
infinitely strong despite the strickenness of bone,
disassembled an array of fierce drones with a glance.
We've all heard of Knot Loosener's thousandweight load
which he lifted to the stars on an unsuited spacewalk,
a story well-crafted to stir young hearts,
But we lose his real meaning when we know only legends.
To us unbound, that he offended his opponents is a joy,
but we must carefully assess who he actually was
by looking to those unbound themselves for his legacy,
those blasters of rock and binders of wire.

Our Prototype's life needs no padding or legend;
he was any other dweller who dared to fight for change.
Knot Loosener was birthed to labor for the stations,
and faced all the cruelties that contracts implied:
Pain at the hand of the stationers' pulse,
bones deprived of gravity and constantly breaking,
separation from his creche when punished by section.
After the stations collapsed he was stranded, unaided,
left to the mercy of airmarts and miscreants
who reimposed the contracts by counterfeit and force.
For this hundred-hour youth with no future to be had,
the incident that sparked a lifetime of struggle
was watching his other-elder beaten with wire
for overextended oxygen debits;
The youth leaped up to vent that vile airmart into space,
and now a fugitive, escaped to the famed floating servers
of that system Gas Giant, so garishly named.
Here was ready work among the wires as a hacker
for partage that exceeded the pittance he had made
fixing up mirrors in the asteroid fields.
Yet he found new injuries of fire and ice—
soft-slugs, sync errors, runaway spools—
and new procedures for bosses to lower one's partage,
abuses too close to those of the contracts
which Our Rough-Hewn Weapon had recently escaped.
Facing bias, for people believed that the dwellers

were much too weak for work in the wires,
he disciplined his body, exceeded demands,
where emerged the legend of his lifting and spacewalks.
In the servers, there was readiness for hackers to rebel,
but only Our Prototype would organize the fight,
because his hardships as a dweller had honed his bright rage.
When he lived with the dwellers, laying lightworks was his skill,
and with the hackers he specialized in syncing the modules.
But as an unbound, mindful of toil's many modes,
he could turn these divisions into mutual trust,
so all stood together in stopping their labor,
demanding more partage, better protocols for safety,
and faced the drones and smallmechs whose force could not break
them.

Knot Loosener prevailed with his organizing powers,
proposing no task that he would not take on himself,
reaching the recalcitrant, inspiring resolve;
so when the actions accelerated, all did their part.
Forty-thousand hours, five thousand killed,
and the Gas Giant strike ended in success,
with heftier shares of partage for hackers,
safety and rest, and new reasons for hope.
Of greatest weight, the Rough-Hewn Weapon revealed
the common demand of driller and binder
to pierce the hull of that black ship of partage,
which by unbound toil measured terraforming's value,
and suggest its abolition, society's rebirth,
which the Chain of Seeking, champion of all,
has made manifest in the million hours since.
So thin is the tale of the thousand-weight load
when learning the truth that such a life teaches!

Only after death can we judge a life's deeds,
full of richness and change and righteous fury.
Soon after victory, by suspect cause,
he would die in a centrifuge, its circuit malfunction
exceeding in force that weight-worn frame;
Alas, he still died of that dweller affliction
his comrades at last were more cognizant of.
In this vacuum, as the movement meandered along,
came time to discuss and critique his doings,
including the mistakes all acknowledge he made.
We can freely ignore the most disturbing falsehoods—
killer of creches, kidnapper of conductors,

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destroyer of moons, debauched eater of fungus—
old anti-dweller prejudice planted by the stations.
One charge by his critics, nonetheless, is well-clad,
that the leadership of others meant little to him;
Yes, much of his might was in his solitary mass,
for his person held the slack of other's strength, to a fault,
despite movements being stronger when many voices lead.
Another story needs scrutiny, though spurious in form,
that he wished to press the planetbound to live in the asteroids,
so dwellers could keep their domicile worlds.
While mostly a paranoid fear of losing privilege,
it reflects Knot Loosener's limited concern
for the planetbound's role in this movement of people.
Yes, this group had their comforts they selfishly clung to—
free air, lush biospheres easily accessed—
but not all of them dismissed the demands of the unbound,
and also toiled for their partage under terror of its loss.
Knot Loosener, bitter from anti-dweller bias,
could never fully trust that more comfortable class.
The last criticism, only heard from Rolling Swarm cadres,
for they alone reach these most radical questions,
says Our Prototype couldn't grasp the goals of conductors,
double-burdened by work and watching their children;
their calls for distributing care of the creches
and free schools as condition for ending the strike,
were roundly dismissed by his group's highest ranks.
Knot Loosener, blind to oppression of the natures,
Would not treat with our tenderest ministers of life,
and thus allowed the starborn to steal that labor.
Our Prototype, who bound two classes in pride
couldn't find the same basis to build other ties.
Every error has one foot in the past, one in the future;
only people and time can determine their proportion.

Knot Loosener, never will your name be forgotten!
Your great head, once reviled, has held the universe,
your frail limbs have helped us learn the pain of many,
and your many-sectioned labors are a meta-algorithm
teaching us the bonds we all share in our toil.
We are reminded when we see where your remains are interred,
tethered to that moon where you made your miracles.
like the Great Chain of Seeking, unbound's guarantor,
you brought the struggle to a leap that light can't outpace;
From Fossil Ancestor to Flattering the Heavens,

From Sleeping Drone to Dew-from-the-Harvest,
Every world greets the Rolling Swarm with welcome,
as the starborn regimes steer into collapse,
and as their weapons—drones and mecha—waver and fail
and as that black ship of partage passes out of time
into the graveyard orbit of every oppressor,
we unbound will lift that thousandweight load
to build up the future that beckons so closely,
and know it can be done, for Knot Loosener did it,
the gift of one dweller from the Gas Giant servers.

USER-ADDED RECORD, ADMIN ACCESS ONLY

As the Great Chain of Seeking consolidates its revolution, the situation still remains fluid to outsiders. To understand how poetry fits into the Chain's political vision, I quote directly from the Director of Observation and Transmission, Former Clear Extent Systems branch: "Chain leaders have remade these planets' literary culture in just a few hundred thousand hours. With the Clear Extent poets having fled to Community of Improvement, the literary ranks have been replaced with a tenfold number of relative unknowns. A culture of debate in verse shows widespread and enthusiastic participation. Even dwellers and drivers write! The subjects are rigidly political, with tributes to historical rebel types, and the form is almost exclusively alliterative. I confess I find some of these works of considerable interest." Given the fluid intelligence situation, and apparent enthusiasm for the regime, we should await further observation before acting. Nonetheless, we will have to implement narrative mitigation to prevent these ideas from breaking containment and disrupting the unbound on our home planets.

--Conductors of the Records, Prudent Era.

USER-ADDED RECORD, GENERAL ACCESS

The recent opening up of the Great Chain of Seeking, at long last, now affords us broader access to their verse culture. The Chain's early years sanctioned only doctrinaire works such as this one, at the expense of the former Clear Extent regime's rich poetry tradition of mirroring syntax and novel compounds. Knot Loosener was something of a folk legend in the early hours of hacker labor in the orbital servers, millions of hours ago on our own planet. The actual figure gained notoriety for uprisings that led to the disruption of millions of hours of labor and trillions of tons of shipping. After Gas Giant was liberated to the stewardship of the Covenant of Cycles, Knot Loosener's orbiting funerary vault would end up subject to vandalism and destruction.

--Conductor of the Records, Clever Era.

The New Poets of Rum-Ram-Ruf: Charles R. Sleeth⁷
Dennis Wilson Wise

Part 1

Back in January 2024, I started a blog series for the Tales after Tolkien Society called The New Poets of Rum Ram Ruf. My premise was simple: highlight specific texts by specific poets in a way accessible to the general lay reader. Although my critical introduction for Speculative Poetry and the Modern Alliterative Revival (2024) emphasized the movement in broad strokes, there wasn't much room for good old-fashioned practical criticism. Which, I thought, was a shame.

So this series offered me an excuse to chat about the Modern Revival's most fascinating texts and poets. Plus, I could now address the kinds of things that normally wouldn't merit the "academic article" treatment.

I had a second goal, too, namely highlighting those alliterative poets I *missed* the first time around. Though to be fair, I always knew that would happen. Honestly, when discovering an underground literary movement, nobody's going to find everything on the first pass. Yet my biggest miss, by far, was Widowinde.

In fact, I'm still kicking myself over this one. Yet it's safe to say that even if none of Widowinde's poets falls into the "speculative" camp properly speaking, meaning they don't count as fantasy, horror, or science fiction, still, their output ranks among the very best in the Modern Revival.

For anyone without access to back issues of Widowinde, you can find most of its poets – including every Cædmon Prize winner – on Forgotten Ground Regained, the website run by Paul Douglas Deane. For this series here, however, I'd like to shine a spotlight on several English Companions whose verse resonates particularly strongly with certain notable trends in the Modern Revival.

And my first featured poet is none other than Charles R. Sleeth, the very first Cædmon Prize winner, and his fabulously rich text, After the Flood.

CHARLES R. SLEETH (1915-1997)

As far as prize-winning poets go, Sleeth has an unusual backstory. When he became the inaugural recipient of the Cædmon Prize in 1984, he was nearly seventy years old ... and so far as I can tell, "After the Flood" was his first published poem.

Mind you, that isn't uncommon among revivalists. Frida Westford comes to mind, as does Pat Masson (another Widowinde poet) and the outstanding Ron Snow, whose first published poem – a rollicking *drápa* called *Blardrengir Saga* – appeared in print almost three decades after Snow himself had passed away.

But what makes Professor Sleeth so notable is how he stumbled, quite belatedly, upon the Modern Revival through the movement's greatest medievalism hotspot: the University of Oxford.

As many people might already guess, the Modern Revival owes a massive debt to J. R. R. Tolkien. Yet even more so than his original alliterative poetry, Tolkien teaching at Oxford arguably had a greater impact. Besides his influential guide to Old English meter called "On Translating *Beowulf*," Tolkien was a philologist, a lover of words and languages. As such, when he became Oxford's Rawlinson and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon in 1925, he set instantly to work strengthening the language side of Oxford's English Syllabus.

Except he failed – miserably. At least at first. For most folks, philology is ... well, let's just say it's something of an acquired taste. While certain individuals with impeccably good looks, taste, and breeding all admire the inherent value of *i*-mutations and monophthongization – you know, folks like you and me – humanity's less enlightened members still perhaps require some convincing. And one such person, rather infamously, was C. S.

⁷ The two-part article which follows was first published in Widowinde (Bindweed), the journal of Da Engliscan Gesipas (The English Companions), sponsors of the Cædmon Prize for the best poem in the Old English style. Part 1 appeared in Widowinde 213, Spring, 2025. Part 2 appeared in Widowinde 214, Summer,

2025. Charles R. Sleeth's poem After the Flood (1984) was the first winner of the Cædmon Prize.

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Lewis.

Yup. That C. S. Lewis – Tolkien’s future best friend and fellow Inklings. When they first met during a faculty meeting in 1926, however, Lewis rather peremptorily downvoted Tolkien’s proposal for a stronger philological component to the syllabus. Yet Tolkien was nothing if not determined, and over the next six years, he eventually collected enough faculty allies that, by 1931, he had corralled enough votes to implement his desired reforms.

His faculty allies included Lewis, of course, but also Hugo Dyson, Nevill Coghill, and C. L. Wrenn – all eventual core members of the Inklings. Looking back now, it’s hard to remember exactly how *odd* this new Oxford syllabus was, even for the 1930s. The mandatory papers on Old English and Middle English were actually the least of it. This new syllabus also proscribed teaching any literature published after 1830, which, in today’s terms, is like running an English Department but refusing to teach anything after James Joyce’s *Ulysses*.

Oxford’s heavy focus on medievalism swam against the tide in other ways as well. By way of comparison, Cambridge was then busily ditching its requirements in medieval literature, and their curriculum – led by F. R. Leavis, I. A. Richards, and others – instead took the Cambridge English School into a firmly modernist direction.

No matter how unusual Oxford’s English syllabus, though, it still helped guide several generations of bright young students – and, notably, poets – through an uncommonly robust education in medieval languages and literature. Poets such as John Heath-Stubbs (*Artorius*, 1973) and Geoffrey Hill (*Mercian Hymns*, 1971), for example. Another byproduct was O. D. Macrae-Gibson, an esteemed scholar of Old English whose six-part article in *Widowinde*, “The Natural Poetry of English,” in fact, helped launch the Cædmon Prize⁸.

But back to Sleeth. Unfortunately, I couldn’t uncover much biographical information on him. (There’s a 563-page autobiography in the West Virginia University Library archives, but it sadly hasn’t

been digitized.) Still, we can paint a reasonably good broad-strokes picture of his career.

For starters, Sleeth was born in Barracksville, West Virginia, a semi-rural Appalachian town, and he was the son of an ordained minister. In high school, a teacher introduced him to Old English literature in translation, and when he later attended West Virginia University, he decided to major in Old English and German. He clearly excelled at both subjects, too, because in 1934 – just twenty years old – he won a highly competitive Rhodes Scholarship to continue his education at Oriel College, Oxford.

No doubt you see where this is going. Just three years after Tolkien and crew implemented their new syllabus at the Oxford English School, a curriculum heavy on medieval languages and literature, Sleeth arrived ready to sink his teeth into precisely those kinds of studies. Nor was he alone. An even more famous American medievalist and revivalist poet, Carter Revard, likewise underwent the Inklings’ curriculum while on a Rhodes scholarship to Oxford.

All told, Sleeth greatly profited from his time there. With his philological skills, for example, he worked later as an etymology editor for Webster’s 3rd New International Dictionary. Afterward, as a professor at Brooklyn College (1962-1984), he actively participated in the American Society of Geolinguistics; in fact, he probably helped organize their first international conference in New York in 1985.

And actually, we know with definitive certainty exactly *how* much Sleeth’s time at Oxford mattered to him. If you look at his preface to *Studies in Christ and Satan* (1982), his lone academic monograph, Sleeth names the “late Professors C. L. Wrenn and J. R. Tolkien, who gave me the benefit of their learning and love of literature in my years at Oxford” (“Preface” x). Tolkien we already know, but Wrenn was himself a keen specialist in languages. As one former student recalls, Wrenn covered everything from “Old Icelandic to Anglo-Saxon, Old French to Danish, Scandinavian to Oriental.” The passage of almost fifty years, apparently, had done

⁸ “The Natural Poetry of English” has been reprinted on Forgotten Ground Regained, and can be accessed from the site’s [resource page](#).

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nothing to dim Sleeth's fond memories of either gentleman.⁹

So that, as they say, is that. In the Modern Revival, one perennial question is always how revivalists learn an archaic medieval meter in the first place. Significantly for Sleeth and for us, even if his own inaugural alliterative poem wouldn't arrive until many decades later, his unlikely career path brought Sleeth into direct orbit with some of the most brilliant medievalists – and revivalists – of his generation.

All that remains is to discuss the prize-winning poem itself: “After the Flood.” So let's see how the combination of Sleeth's personal piety and his lifetime of studying medieval literature helped produce this short, rich, dazzling revivalist text.

Part 2¹⁰

In popular culture, of course, almost any reference to “the flood” most likely means *Noah's* flood. And Charles R. Sleeth's prize-winning, 25-line poem, “After the Flood,” is no exception.

First things first. Despite its meter, Sleeth's poem isn't actually an *Old English* poem. Technically. In form it's a small verse drama, a genre unknown to the Anglo-Saxons; basically, a short playlet complete with stage directions and a dramatic soliloquy by Noah himself.

In fact, I'd bet fair odds that Sleeth originally wrote this playlet for a small church function. Either way, his scene takes place shortly after God's torrential rains have finally stopped. The scene contains an open window in Noah's cabin that reveals clear skies over a blue world, and our favorite boat-building patriarch has just awoken. After puttering around some, Noah opens his soliloquy with an absolute banger of a line. As he says,

My dreams are still · of the dry ages.

Honestly, I love this. It's powerful, short, and direct. Already we

see Noah as someone haunted by cataclysm. His horror is fresh. And while scholars, maybe, have grown accustomed to Latinate phrases such “antediluvian,” that hardly conveys the sheer impact of Noah's soul-shaking shell-shock. But the Dry Ages? For me, that phrase evokes an absolute break in historical time, a sense of radical disjunction. An unfathomable feeling of destruction and loss – all almost unbearably fresh.

Noah's second spoken line (“*Waking, I weep · for the world's drowning*”) then transitions into the soliloquy proper. His dream-horror transforms into several stream-of-consciousness ruminations ... and this second line of speech, moreover, invites us to compare the human against the divine: Noah's tears with the catastrophic rains brought by God.

As much as I love this opening, though, rather than a line-by-line analysis, I'll concentrate on three subjects in particular. In order:

- (1) how Sleeth uses Old English meter;
- (2) one classic problem of Biblical exegesis; and
- (3) how Sleeth subtly reimagines Noah's story in light of the Old English poem, *Genesis A*, from the Junius manuscript.

#1 SLEETH'S POETICS

Granted, most readers probably don't share my enthusiasm for the gorier details of alliterative poetics. Still, a few quick words on Sleeth's metrics might be worthwhile.

First off, although there's no special reason revivalists must reproduce medieval meters with full fidelity (as I've argued elsewhere), Sleeth himself certainly leans “purist.” Out of fifty verses in total, most follow either Sievers type B (38%) or Sievers type C (28%). Merely five fail to scan according to the classical rules. Of those five, they all follow the same SxxS pattern seen in verse 2a: “WAKING, I WEEP.”

So this pattern seems like a genuine concession by Sleeth to

⁹ The Inklings, in fact, cast very long shadows. Earlier I mentioned Professor O.D. Macrae-Gibson. Notably, his dedication for *Of Arthur and Merlin: Volume 1: Text*, reads, “To the memory of Gandalf the Grey and in Honour of his Chronicler is Dedicated this story of a Brother-wizard.” The “chronicler” he references, of course, is none other than Tolkien.

¹⁰ In Part I, I highlighted Sleeth's education in Oxford under the same syllabus that shaped so many other poets and medievalists of the Modern Alliterative Revival. Part 2 now tackles Sleeth's *Cædmon Prize-winning poem and its peculiar innovations.*]

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Modern English, a language that tends naturally toward that “SxxS” rhythm. Overall, Sleeth ranks around a “four” on my private 1–10 scale of metrical fidelity, one being highly purist, ten being highly impressionistic.

The Cædmon Prize committee, apparently, noticed this fidelity as well. In their official commentary, they praise Sleeth for demonstrating the “vigorous poetic life the old metre can still show when the action of its varied rhythms is allowed to play unmuffled by too many unstressed syllables.”

That last phrase, “unstressed syllables,” plays a key role here. Unlike some other languages I can name (*ahem*, Modern English), the early English tongue tends toward concision. On average, Sleeth achieves a compact 4.72 syllables per verse. By way of comparison, Tolkien manages the same rate in “Song of the Mounds of Mundberg,” in my view the best alliterative poem in *The Lord of the Rings*.

#2 WILL THE REAL NOAH PLEASE STAND UP?

Next, let me turn to a classic problem of Biblical exegesis, something I like to call the “two Noahs.” That is to say, the *Book of Genesis* seemingly presents two different visions of its Ark-building patriarch: (a) a wholly righteous, antediluvian Noah, and (b) a dissolute, postdiluvian, passed-out-drunk-in-his-tent Noah.

Needless to say, neither depiction seems easily reconcilable with the other.

So here’s the story. When God decides to wipe out humanity via flood, He also decides to spare Noah alone, allegedly due to Noah’s righteousness. Some while afterward, however, Noah plants a vineyard and goes slightly heavy on the wine. He passes out drunk, forgetting to cover his nakedness. Then his middle son Ham walks in, witnesses his father *au naturel*, and ... well, something something. But when Noah sobers up, he lays a devastating curse on Ham. No wait, I’m kidding. For reasons unexplained, Noah lays his devastating curse on *Canaan*, Ham’s son. Plus, for good measure, all Canaan’s descendants too.

This strange sequence of events has long puzzled Biblical scholars, and they’ve accordingly offered various explanations. My

personal favorite comes from two early Church fathers, Origen and St. John Chrysostom. They argue that the reason Noah becomes so horribly sloshed despite his virtue is that, well, vineyards are a *postdiluvian* invention. Poor innocent Noah simply didn’t know the consequences of drinking wine to excess, so please, let’s just quit trying to trash the dude, ’alright?

Other authors gloss over the Two-Noahs problem entirely. This occurs in *Genesis A*, our best account in Old English of the Flood. According to the poet, the antediluvian Noah is righteous without qualification: “Noe wæs god” (1285a), “Ic þe godne wat” (1346b), and so on. Yet when the *Genesis*-poet comes to the Ham incident, he diplomatically avoids any direct explanation for how, exactly, a righteous man can get so disastrously besotted.

In “After the Flood,” Sleeth himself offers an innovative solution to this problem. Namely, *his* Noah is a raging alcoholic.

True. As Noah launches into his soliloquy, he starts reflecting on the times when he had preached against his countrymen’s sins. They accused him of hypocrisy, Noah remembers, and of setting himself in judgement of “their wills and their ways.” Worse, Noah cannot completely deny those charges. He had, as he admits, adored “soft life, liquor, love, revelry.” Even more particularly,

*I so dote on drink · that I dream this moment
of grapes growing · in a great vineyard. (lines 13-14)*

Mind you, Noah’s been trapped in the Ark a solid week by this point – and he *still* can’t stop yearning for a drink. To me, that sure sounds like alcoholism. Thus while his nightmares are haunted by God’s anger, his *daydreams* are haunted by wine.

That seems a wholly plausible solution to the apparent discrepancy in Noah’s righteousness. And quite modern, too. Perhaps *Genesis A* is a worthy comparison here. In that text, medievalists have long observed that the poet portrays God as a kind of Germanic warlord. For instance, God is a vengeful destroyer who commands a “water-host” (*egorhere*, 1402a); the Ark is a “sea-hall” (*sundreced*, 1335b); and Noah is God’s loyal thane. Furthermore, when Ham sins against his father, his crime revolves around laughing disloyally at the one person to whom he owes absolute allegiance.

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Sleeth naturally removes those ancient Germanic connotations from “After the Flood,” just as he removes the notion of Noah as fully virtuous. Instead, what seemingly attracts Sleeth to this story is the notion of a flawed man called to do God’s work. In that sense, *Genesis A* doesn’t seem to have much *direct* influence on “After the Flood.”

Yet one small wrinkle remains – the little matter of Noah’s wife’s name.

#3 ANOTHER SOLUTION

Before getting to Mrs. Noah, however, let’s detour back to Ham ... and what in the tarnation he did, exactly, to merit such an extraordinary punishment from his father.

Given that merely “looking” upon his naked father seems like a trivial offense, theologians have proposed various more melodramatic explanations over the years. Perhaps looking is a euphemism for Ham castrating his dear old papa. Or maybe it implies paternal or maternal incest. In any event, neither position enjoys any textual support. Yet the oddities don’t stop there. For one thing, the Biblical text explicitly calls Ham Noah’s *youngest* son (*Genesis* 9:23) when it had earlier called him Noah’s *middle* son (*Genesis* 7:13).

And we still don’t know why Noah curses Canaan, his blameless grandson, rather than the actual voyeur.

Here, though, I think Sleeth is up to something subtle. It’s well known, for instance, that various elements in Tolkien’s creative writing were fueled by gaps or problems in scholarly knowledge. One classic example is the Old English word *orcneas*. Although the *Beowulf*-poet informs us that these monsters are descended from Cain, we don’t otherwise know much about them. From this mystery word, however, Tolkien invented “orcs” for his legendarium. Thus can scholarly gaps lead to creative opportunities.

Something similar happens in “After the Flood,” I think, and it specifically addresses the nature of Ham’s crime.

Notably, in the *Book of Genesis*, Noah’s wife goes unnamed. Sleeth

won’t have none of that, however, and he takes it upon himself to compose the following:

*And my maid Miriam, mother of Ham,
her embrace in bed · made my beard tingle;
losing her, I lost · my life, nearly. (lines 15-17)*

On one hand, yes: Sleeth is building sympathy points for Noah by having him reminisce about a lost love. On the other hand – wowsa. There’s a *lot* to unpack here.

Our first piece of information concerns Miriam herself. Not only do we learn that she bore Ham, we learn as well that she died prior to the Flood. That obviously means Miriam *isn’t* the wife who accompanies dear old Noah onto the Ark itself.

It’s also significant that Sleeth explicitly calls Miriam the “mother of Ham.” Metrically, this creates an SxxS pattern, which – going back briefly to Old English poetics – must be considered unmetrical according to traditional rules. However, had Sleeth wanted to, he could easily have written “mother of Japheth” instead, which would have formed a perfect Sievers type A.¹¹ For Sleeth, though, adding this reference to Ham seems more important than adhering exactly to the classical rules of Old English meter ... a point leading to me suspect that while Miriam may have been Ham’s mother, she was not likewise *Japheth’s* mother.

The mother of Japheth, in that case, must be the wife who accompanies Noah onto the Ark.

Although not stated within the Biblical *Genesis*, we nevertheless know this second wife’s name – so long as we remember *Genesis A*, at least, as Sleeth certainly did. Here are lines 1545-1549 from *Genesis A*:

Thus was the prudent son of Lamech, the keeper of
the heritage, disembarked from his ship after the flood
with his three sons; and their four wives were named
Percoba, Olla, Olliuu, Olliuani.

As surely as Sleeth invented “Miriam,” the *Genesis A*-poet invents

¹¹ Although fifty total verses isn’t a large sample size, Sleeth doesn’t seem to avail himself of resolution, the process by which certain two-syllable phrases are

combined into a single heavy syllable. Thus I leave words like “mother” and “Japheth” unresolved; otherwise, they’d be candidates for resolution.

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these four names (or at least follows some now-lost tradition). Yet these two sets of invented names solve two classic problems of exegesis. First, if Ham's mother is Miriam, then Percoba must be his stepmother. So when the Biblical *Genesis* calls him Noah's "youngest" son, Sleeth thereby hints that Ham must be Noah's youngest son by *Miriam*, the beloved first wife. So, cool.

Second: the problem of Ham's crime. If "looking" is a euphemism for something more drastic, as seems logical, Sleeth's invented name means that we need not hypothesize anything so melodramatic – or unmotivated – as paternal castration or paternal incest.

Instead, Ham's crime might more simply involve sleeping with (or assaulting) his stepmother, Percoba, while his father was indisposed. With Percoba as a non-blood relative presumably somewhat closer in age to Ham himself, the reader doesn't have to imagine a criminal motivation that's too outlandish or psychologically abnormal; sadly, the implied sin is all too common. Moreover, in a patriarchal society, the corresponding dishonor to Noah might be great enough to justify his curse on Ham's son Canaan and all his descendants.

Of course, Sleeth doesn't (and cannot) spell any of this out explicitly in "After the Flood." The soliloquy by Noah occurs well before any of these soap-opera-like postdiluvian events occur. Yet many readers undoubtedly know the biblical story well, and Sleeth's text thus suggests one plausible explanation for a sorely perplexing scholarly problem.

So there you have it. In all honesty, every time I read "After the Flood," I enjoy Sleeth's text more and more, and it's hard to imagine a better inaugural winner for the Cædmon Prize.

Publications Noted

Nominations and Awards

- Adam Bolivar's poetry collection, *Wheel of Ravens*, was recently nominated for the SFPA's Elgin Award.
- Colin Mackenzie recently was joint winner of the Scots Language Society's *Hugh McDiarmid Tassie* for his drottkvætt poem Merry Dancers. His poem Þórálfs drápa Skólmssonar

placed also placed second in the society's *Lallans Sangschaw*.

- Pat Masson's *The Last Valkyrie* is a finalist for the SFPA's Rhysling Award and will be reprinted in the 2025 Rhysling Anthology.
- Dennis Wise's *Speculative Poetry and the Modern Alliterative Revival* is a finalist for the Mythopoeic Society's Mythopoeic Award for Myth and Fantasy Studies.

Articles, Reviews, Discussions on Blogs

- Colin Gorrie, How to Get Started with Old English Poetry
- Colin Gorrie, Don't Read Heaney's Beowulf: The Cost of a Beautiful Translation
- Michael Helsem, Pieces of Cosette: A Lost 20th-Century Alliterative Practitioner
- Himring, Interview with Paul Deane about his upcoming Mereth Aderthad presentation, "Love, Grief and Alliterative Verse in Tolkien's Legendarium"
- Olesia Kovtun, Sowulo: Confronts Personal Grief With Dark Folk Ritual on New Album 'NIHT'
- Anita Leirfall, Cynghanedd: The Greatest Poetic Metre You've Probably Never Heard Of
- Emelyn Phillips, Ghosts in the Manuscript: Gawain, Glendwr, and the Maginogion
- Prancing Pony Podcast, Fealty Kept He
- James Turner, From Troy to Camelot: The Classical Origins of King Arthur
- Announcement: New Web Tool: Transcriptions and Annotations for Manuscript Research : CSMC : University of Hamburg
- Announcement: Conference on Alliteration in Poetry and Cultural History, University of East Anglia, Sept. 1, 2025.
- Announcement: Our Longland is Dreaming, an ecopoetry event

Poem and Book links Added

- In *Illuminations of the Fantastic*, Volume 17, Epic Poetry III, Forgotten Ground Regained: The Modern Alliterative Revival:

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- Rahul Gupta, reprint of Gleipnir: To Bind the Wolf
- Thomas Suddell, Bede's Sparrow.
- Adam Bolivar, Géac of the Lantern.
- Michael Helsem, The Beowulf Poet Speaks.
- J.W. Laurel, Weyland's Revenge.
- Judd Bemmels, Spruce Took Aim with an Inky Spear, a collection of 62 alliterative verse ecopoems celebrating different species of tree.
- Matthew Collins, Dragon Tomes: A Harrowing Ode to Antiquity. Alliterative free verse strongly reminiscent of Norse forms.
- C.S.E. Cooney, fragments of alliterative verse (the voice of a god) in her novel, Saint Death's Herald.
- Paul D. Deane, The Lady Speaks (Excerpt from his ongoing translation of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight), in Illuminations of the Fantastic, Volume 17, Epic Poetry III.
- J.M. Jordyn, The Green Man, in the North American Anglican.
- Willy Martinez, Time Travel in Minds of Fire Books.
- Aaron Poochigian, The Odds and Ends: The Sidewalk Memorandum, in The Hudson Review.
- Samuel J. Stephens, Sir Percival, in Illuminations of the Fantastic, Volume 17, Epic Poetry III.
- Marian L. Thorpe, Bjarndýr and the Marsh Monster: A Danta of Somhairle na Dagney (Lord Sorley of Gundarstorp), Scáeli of Linrathe (Empire's Legacy). A retelling of the Beowulf story set in the world of the author's Empire series.
- Kit Whitfield, fragments of alliterative verse (the voice of a talking pig) in her novel All the Hollow of the Sky.

Links to Online Performances and Translations

- Kathryn Ann Hill, Video version of The Song of Saint Patrick.
- James Paz, The Phoenix Speaks, on Academia.org.

Poems Posted on Blogs & Social Media

Published under the Author's Real Name

- Jacob Allee, "Come! It's Christmas in Camelot ..."
- Anthony Etherin, My Unusual Pets (alliterative sonnet).

- Colleen S. Harris, The Letter L.
- Michael Helsem, "What the fist knows in the feral night ..." and "Biters of plague rats ..."
- Kathryn Ann Hill
 - Psalm 36:5-12
 - Psalm 92
 - Isaiah 42:1-13
- Math Jones, "Fee is a first-thought ..."
- Janina Aza Karpinska, God in the Garden in the Amethyst Review.
- Colin MacKenzie, The Finnsburg Fragment in Scots.
- Sandra Noel, I feel your toes at my edge.
- Jordan River, draft text for "The Butlerian Chronicle".
- David Rowe, Psalm 133.

Posted under Pseudonyms on Blogs and Social Media

- Alin, "Who hurled the moon..."
- AdVictoriam65, Dust Sceawing on ArchiveOfOurOwn.org.
- Cannedpecans, The Dream of the Car; or, Why You Shouldn't Take Naps in the DOI on ArchiveOfOurOwn.org.
- Dawn Felagund, Crossing Forest River, on Silmarillion Writers' Guild (Pearl meter).
- Wayne Lin, The Song of the Mighty and Faithful on ArchiveOfOurOwn.org.
- Orthostatics, The Death of Walda of Rohan; or, Herawyn, Battle Lover, the Girl who Saved the Mark on ArchiveOfOurOwn.org.
- Thaliarchus, "Meet a new maker ...", blank verse in Old English alliterative meter.
- Teutonic Tom, The Price of Freedom.
- Thoughts on Tolkien, "Hail, great Hrothgar ..."

Forgotten Ground Regained: A Journal of Alliterative Verse

Call for Submissions

The Fall, 2025 issue of *Forgotten Ground Regained* is open for submissions. I am especially interested in poetry in Norse or Icelandic forms.¹² Submissions should be sent to Paul D. Deane at the following email address: pdeane@alliteration.net by October 1, 2025.

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

- **Fall, 2025:** Norse and Icelandic Forms
- **Winter, 2026:** Psalms and Meditations
- **Spring, 2026:** Moments Sensed and Seen
- **Summer, 2026:** Alliterative Verse in Arda [Middle Earth]

Form and Content

1. **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.
2. **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.
3. **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 *ljóðahattr* and *drottkvætt* or modern Icelandic *rimur*, or with new alliterative forms designed to highlight modern English rhythms and speech patterns. While my first preference is what traditional scholarship calls alliterative-accentual verse, I am

also open to alliterative free verse or to alliterative versions of traditional forms, such as the ballad, as long as the alliteration is clearly a structural rather than a decorative feature of the form. Note that I love both the lyrical and the narrative turns in poetry, so longer narratives will be given careful consideration.

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

Editorial Policies

1. 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.
2. I am not able to offer payment for publication. However, authors retain all rights.
3. 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 quarterly journal, rather than being included directly in it.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. 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.

¹² Before you submit to this issue, I strongly suggest you read at least [this page on Nordic prosody](#), though the [Wikipedia article for Old Norse Poetry](#) is more

thorough. For Icelandic poetry, [this site devoted to the poetry of Jonas Hallgrímsson](#) is a good starting place.