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…But they are, so you say, like the wine god's holy priests
Who wandered from land to land in holy night.[1]

Literary journals are proliferating. In the English language alone, counting only those that publish poetry, there are well over three thousand active, of which around two hundred have started up in the last six months.[2] They are also dying like mayflies. Since 2005, more than four thousand have ceased publication. It's not for want of poems. The boom in writing programmes has been a lucrative business for university arts faculties, churning out far too many graduates for the ability or will of the world to sustain professional writers, let alone poets.[3] Meanwhile, the readership for poetry continues to dwindle: it is a weary commonplace that more people like to write poetry than to read it.[4]

Why add to the glut? It's certainly not good enough to reply, in the airy words of a journal that launched last year, *why not?* It's incumbent on us to give some reason, or at least an excuse, for adding yet one more to the overpopulated, under-subscribed world of poetry journals. Given the unpropitious ratio of journals to readers, it's hard to avoid the conclusion that a new publication with no other purpose than simply to publish poetry (however qualified with adjectives, usually more-or-less reducible to 'good'[5]) is redundant, a compounding of the problem: yet another tiny venture competing for—and thus diluting—the limited demand of a saturated market. This introduction is part apologia. But first, the larger problem: how can we characterise the state in which poetry finds itself today?

For the Lithuanian-Polish poet Czesław Miłosz, the tone of modern poetry is inflected by a flattening out of hope. He contrasts Walt Whitman's quintessentially American optimism with a creeping pessimism that Miłosz finds in such distinct inheritors of Whitman's legacy as T. S. Eliot[6] and Allen Ginsberg.[7] He is struck by the fact that the mood of poetry darkened during 'a century of utopian hope', the culmination of a process in which the 'vertical orientation, when man raised his eyes toward Heaven, has gradually been replaced…with a horizontal longing'.[8] *Above* was replaced by *ahead*; the promise of the kingdom of heaven was exchanged for the promise of the Enlightenment: a self-sufficient humanity, striding forward into a future of progress, peace and self-mastery. But the uto-

1 Friedrich Hölderlin, 'Bread and Wine' in *Selected Poems*, trans. by David Constantine (Newcastle: Bloodaxe Books, 1996), 36-40.

2 Statistics from the online database Duotrope <http://duotrope.com/>, accessed 16 February 2014.

3 For a witty and acerbic analysis of the effect of writing programmes on literature, see Elif Batuman, 'Get a Real Degree', *London Review of Books*, 32 (2010), 3-8.

4 'Supply is decoupled from demand... no one is reading all this newly produced literature—not even the writers themselves.' Ted Genoways, 'The Death of Fiction?', *Mother Jones*, 15 January 2010 <http://motherjones.com/media/2010/01/death-of-literary-fiction-magazines-journals>, accessed 17 January 2014. See also Rjurik Davidson, 'Liberated zone or pure commodification?', *Overland* 200 (2010), 103-109.

5 An anonymised sample of exhortations from the submissions pages of fledgling poetry journals: 'contemporary poetry crafted with thoughtfulness and care'; 'ambition, boldness, and attention to craft are paramount'; 'make peoples eyes open wider and their minds race with excitement as they feast on your words'; 'we care only about excellence'. Oddly enough, none of the journals we looked up were looking for bad, dull, inept or mediocre poems.

6 'It is difficult to find any tomorrow in The Waste Land, and where there is no tomorrow, moralizing makes its entrance.' Czesław Miłosz, *The Witness of Poetry* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 14.

7 'Though quite differently - I would say inversely - motivated, Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* crowns the history of Whitmanesque verse which once served to sing of the open road ahead. Instead we now have despair at the imprisonment of man in an evil civilisation, in a trap without release.' *Ibid.*, p. 15.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

pias of the twentieth century were betrayed: communism by the crushing oppression carried out by an overbearing and hypocritical State; liberal democracy by vast disparities of wealth, ecological devastation and the spiritual vacuum of consumer culture. Poetry became disillusioned with the 'open road ahead' not *despite* utopia, but *because* of its betrayal.

Isn't this loss of hope, though, merely a response (one might even say, the only authentic response) to the unravelling of one grand narrative after another: the death of God, the obstinate failure of humanity to perfect itself, the hollowing-out of the ideal of progress? Perhaps; but in the process of that withdrawal, according to Miłosz, something fundamental was lost. Poetry ceased to speak to the people. It has become thoroughly colonised by academia, a hermetically sealed elite discourse in which 'both the authors and the readers of poetry come from university campuses'[9] and from which the common reader is shut out.

How did this happen? A populist answer is simply that poetry became opaque, as impenetrable to the uninitiated as a painting by Georges Mathieu or one of Harry Partch's bizarre atonal compositions. Innovations by successive movements brought about a metamorphosis of poetry's formal structure so radical as to render it unrecognisable to the ordinary reader. To appreciate the novelty of, say, the 'Language poetry' of Lyn Hejinian and Charles Bernstein, one must be familiar with modernist and 'objectivist' movements that preceded them: earlier innovators whose work had become a norm against which the Language poets defined themselves. A couple of decades later, a so-called 'post-Language' poem needed to distinguish itself again, and so the process goes, rupture layered upon rupture until the reading of poetry becomes an arcane and specialised skill. The world war of a hundred years ago produced not only the horror of trench warfare, but a blossoming of poems that memorialised the experience for the generation who lived

9 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

through it, and the succeeding ones too. Not so the next war. Barbaric or not, people have continued to need what poetry has traditionally offered; but they have met that need not through poetry, but the increasing sophistication of popular song lyrics. The people's poet of the nineteen-sixties was not Ted Hughes, but Bob Dylan. The popular song is what impinges on the traditional territory of the poem, forcing it to deform itself to justify its existence, much as the photograph did to painting, film to theatre, or science to philosophy. As the interloper takes over the older art form's traditional function, the latter must redefine its *raison d'être*, for territorial as much as for aesthetic reasons;[10] and in doing so, it aligns itself with an audience of a sophisticated taste that appreciates qualities unique to the art form proper. In other words, it abandons the public at the moment when it realises it is being abandoned.

This populist argument is not without merit. But it only describes *what* happened; it does not touch on *why* it happened, which is the essential question to be answered if a way is to be found out of the impasse. According to Miłosz, the stylistic obscurantism of the contemporary poem, the kernel of despair it carries within itself, and its marginalisation to the outer periphery of the public sphere are but three aspects—form, content, context—of a single phenomenon: a retreat from the domain of the commons to the domain of the individual.[11] As the poem's subject contracts from a common to an individuated *Lebenswelt*, the poet writes in a mode that speaks to herself rather than to the world; as the poem's frame of reference shrinks from shared experience to interiority, solitude

10 '…when, with the advent of the first truly revolutionary means of reproduction, namely photography…art felt a crisis approaching that after a further century became unmistakable, it reacted with the theory of "*l'art pour l'art*", which constitutes a theology of art.' Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, trans. by J. A. Underwood (London: Penguin, 2008), p. 11.

11 '[Poetry] withdrew from the domain common to all people into the closed circle of subjectivism.' Miłosz, p. 26.

and its concomitants—helplessness, alienation, loss—become its dismal motifs; and as the poem abjures the concerns of the outside world, this gesture is increasingly reciprocated by an indifferent public. If the poet wishes to cloak himself in the romantic mantle of the outsider, the world shrugs its shoulders: let his wish be granted. The aesthetics of individualism is both cause and effect of this vicious cycle.

The decline of poetry as a medium that resonates beyond its rarified milieu is roughly coterminous with the rise of the novel, from a lowly and disreputable genre of about the same cachet as today's soap operas, to a form of uncontested scope and prestige, from the pinnacle of high culture to the mass market.[12] The poem cast aside its traditional trappings—a vast range of metres, structures and rhyme schemes—in favour of freedom, ignoring Goethe's dictum that mastery can only be attained by working within limits[13]. Whereas, alongside many experiments with form, the novel never discarded its essential mode: a more-or-less sequential prose narrative of fictional characters in a story. Yet the narrative mode of the novel is itself saturated with individualism.[14] The individual's relationship to society has been the novel's theme *par excellence* since Cervantes. To crystallise the difference in the way individualism exhibits itself through the novel and through the poem: the novel *stages* individualism, the poem *performs* it. The novelist creates and shows us Don Quixote; the poet's own art form has become intrinsically quixotic.

12 'It's the one literary genre in which certain convergences only possible after globalisation—between 'serious' and 'popular' culture, between theoretical or intellectual validation and free-market or material investment—take place.' Amit Chaudhuri, 'The Novel After Globalisation', *Meanjin*, 66 (2007), 97–113 (p. 98).

13 'None proves a master but by limitation / And only law can give us liberty.' ('*In der Beschränkung zeigt sich erst der Meister / Und das Gesetz nur kann uns Freiheit geben.*') Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 'Sonnet', trans. by Michael Hamburger, in *German Poetry from 1750 to 1900: Goethe, Hölderlin, Nietzsche and Others*, ed. by Robert Browning (London: Continuum, 1984), p. 59.

14 On the protagonist as misfit: 'What else allows Elizabeth Bennet, Pip, Jane Eyre, Maggie Tulliver, Michael Henchard, Dorian Gray, and Stephen Dedalus to represent the claims of unacknowledged individuality in general, if not the fact that they are first and foremost something more than the consequently obsolete place assigned them?' Nancy Armstrong, 'The Fiction of Bourgeois Morality and the Paradox of Individualism', in *The Novel, Volume 2: Forms and Themes,* ed. by Franco Moretti (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 349-387 (p. 349). For an intriguing—if somewhat tendentious—account threading a line from the politics of the Cold War to the hegemony of literary individualism via the CIA and the Iowa Writers' Workshop, cf. Eric Bennett, 'How Iowa Flattened Literature', *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 10 February 2014, <http://chronicle.com/article/How-Iowa-Flattened-Literature/144531/>, accessed 15 February 2014.

15 'Are we going to become—or go back to being—premodern? Do we have to resign ourselves to being antimodern? For lack of any better option, are we going to have to continue to be modern, but without conviction,

The poem and the Crowd

New Trad's wager is that this is not all poetry can be: that a poem can be more than the voice of a lone figure in a world that is both uncomprehending and incomprehensible. The journal is, of course, a mere pawn on the board, an obtuse and preposterous experiment with a high chance of total failure. For a small and entirely unknown 'little magazine' to attempt to grapple with these large issues, there is an obvious risk of absurd grandiosity, perhaps to invite accusations of messianic delusion. The risk is worth taking; and as for messianism, we plead extenuation to a John the Baptist complex: the best we can hope is that it might, with a combination of luck and bloody-mindedness, open a space for other kinds of poem to flourish, and that it might in some small way prepare the path for a poetry that is able to speak to the people.

How can this be accomplished? How can the poem rediscover its communal voice and function in our fragmented and atomised world? Or have we travelled a one-way journey to a modernity in which individualism is unavoidable and ubiquitous?[15] Let's pose some responses to this question: three

pessimistic, and finally a tentatively optimistic one.

A first pessimistic response is that it simply cannot be done. The organic authenticity of the ancient poets—Homer, Bragi Boddason, Valmiki—is no longer available to us, and any attempt to recapture it is destined to fail. The shift from recited song to written poem represents a fundamental rupture; these poets represent not the foundation of a literary tradition, but the last gasp of a much greater oral one; and (on this view) the story of literature is a long degeneration in which modernity is merely the most recent, as well as the most debased and confused, episode. If today's poems are trapped in solipsistic individualism, that's just because those are the only ones that can be written successfully in the kind of world in which we live.[16] With our loss of innocence (Galileo—Darwin—Freud—Einstein) a light has gone out of the world.[17] The malaise of poetry offers only a despairing answer to Hölderlin's question: 'What are poets for in a destitute time?'

The second pessimistic response is that even if it were possible, it would not be desirable. The aesthetics of social holism, on this view, are utterly incompatible with our globalised, multicultural world. Any attempt at invoking a lost spiritual organ-

in the twilight zone of the postmods?' Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. by Catherine Porter (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2012), p. 132.

16 For instance, Georg Lukács argues that the authenticity of literature derives from its 'historico-philosophical substratum', i.e. that the succession of literary of forms is conditioned by the dialectic of history, and not vice versa: 'Art can never be the agent of such a transformation: the great epic is a form bound to the historical moment, and any attempt to depict the utopian as existent can only end in destroying the form, not in creating reality.' *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. by Anna Bostock (London: Merlin Press, 1971), p. 152.

17 'The default of God forebodes something even grimmer, however. Not only have gods and the god fled, but the divine radiance has become extinguished in the world's history. The time of the world's night is the destitute time…it can no longer discern the default of God as a default.' Martin Heidegger, 'What Are Poets For?' in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. by Albert Hofstander (New York: HarperCollins, 1971), 87-140 (p. 89).

icism will at best lead to nostalgia, a yearning for the supposed simple verities of a past that, if it ever contained that sense of rootedness, cannot be regained.[18] At worst, it lends aesthetic cover to an ugly politics: a desire for cultural homogeneity, racist attitudes to the Other, an ideology of purity that indelibly stained the twentieth century with the horrors of fascism.[19] Liberal individualism may have its faults, but the alternatives (on this account) are immeasurably worse, and to attempt to step outside it is to flirt with the very worst aspects of human nature.

The third response is more subtle, but posits an equally intractable situation. The philosopher Alain Badiou takes issue with Miłosz's contention that poetry since Stéphane Mallarmé has turned its back on the world in favour of abstraction and hermeticism. For Badiou, the poem itself is the opposite of elitist: its addressee is everyone, the 'egalitarian crowd'.[20] The hermeticism Miłosz detects in western poetry is nothing intrinsic to the poem itself, but in the context of its reception: if western poetry seems to the Polish poet to suffer from a 'subjective excess', this is not (Badiou claims) due to a deficiency in the poems themselves, but in the individualised nature of western society, as compared to the communitarian society of Miłosz's

18 '…In [Heidegger's] over-emphatic identification with a familiar and immediate community—its woods, its hearth, its dialect—there was an implicit claim to a monopoly of authenticity, almost to an exclusive, patented trademark, as if his sincere attachment to his own soil allowed no room for the loyalties of other men towards other soils and other lands—to their log cabins, or their blocked-rent tenements, or their skyscrapers.' Claudio Magris, *Danube: A Sentimental Journey from the Source to the Black Sea,* trans. by Patrick Creagh (London: Harvill Press, 2011), p. 45.

19 'After post-structuralism, "nostalgia" became a dirty word; it pointed to a longing for hieratic, repressive totalities, a malaise that could affect, at once, the fascist, the humanist, and the member of the old Left.' Chaudhuri, p. 104.

20 'The poem is, in an exemplary way, destined to everyone.' Alain Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, trans. by Alberto Toscano (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 31.

Polish-Lithuanian background. He quotes Mallarmé:

> Mallarmé rigorously indicates that his epoch is without a present for reasons that come down to the absence of an egalitarian crowd: 'There is no Present, no, a present does not exist. Unless the Crowd declares itself.'[21]

By Badiou's account, then, the poem is already speaking to the world, or 'the Crowd' (*la Foule*); the problem is that the crowd isn't listening, precisely because it fails to constitute itself *as* the Crowd. In our contemporary individualistic socio-political environment, each reader encounters the poem alone, without a sense of solidarity that would enable her to experience the universality of great poetry. The poem is not at fault; it is we who do not have ears to hear it.

According to these answers, then, the project of transcending the individualist voice of the contemporary poem is, respectively: impossible, dangerous, redundant. These are different and contradictory propositions, but all deny any agency to poetry itself in transforming itself to beneficial effect. If we are to make a credible case for this journal's intent in the context of Miłosz's problematic, it is necessary to find some rejoinder to all of these answers.

First, Badiou's invocation of Mallarmé's absent Crowd. Mallarmé's role in setting the trajectory of modern poetry is, without doubt, highly significant. But he was far from simply a proponent of free verse at the expense of existing traditions.[22]

21 Badiou, p. 31 (Toscano's own translation). The original passage: '*Il n'est pas de Présent, non—un présent n'existe pas... Faute que se déclare la Foule, faute—de tout.*' Stephane Mallarmé, *Igitur - Divagations - Un Coup de dés* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), p. 258. For a thoughtful analysis of this passage's meaning and syntax, see Marc Froment-Meurice, *Solitudes: From Rimbaud to Heidegger,* trans. by Peter Walsh (New York: SUNY Press, 1995), pp. 10-12.

22 'Mallarmé's singularity lies in being a poet who simultaneously participates in the most audacious modernity and maintains in a strict fashion the essential character of regular meter.' Quentin Meillassoux, 'Badiou and Mallarmé: The Event and the Perhaps', trans. by Alley Edlebi, *Parrhesia*, 16 (2013), 35–47 (p. 41).

Mallarmé proposes a middle way between either side of the quarrel between *le vers libre* and *le vers officiel*, the extremes of which denied the legimitacy of the other.[23] Instead, he suggests a division of labour between the two:

> For me, classical verse—or, better, *formal verse*—is the great nave of the cathedral of French poetry; whereas free verse populates the aisles with attractions, mysteries, rare extravagances. Formal verse must remain, because it was born of the soul of the people, it springs from the ground of the past, and it flourishes with the most exquisite blooms. Free verse is also a fine achievement, rising up in revolt against the banality of convention; but, for the sake of its own existence, it must not set itself up as a dissident church, separate and in rivalry![24]

In this conception of poetry, a compromise is sought between the old and the new, between the stately beauty of the alexandrine and the wild charms of *le vers libre*, in which each has its place. It is clear, however, that the relationship between poetry and the people is through formal verse ('*il est né de l'âme populaire*'). In the century that followed, Mallarmé's Catholic

23 'The Parnassians, such as Lectonte de Lisle and Heredia, denied that free verse was verse at all,...just a prose poem whose lines are arbitrarily interrupted. Inversely, the most radical advocates of free verse, such as Gustave Kahn...refused all legitimacy to traditional metre, seeing in it only a constraint, an essentially political one—the inherited legacy of royal centralism and absolutism...' Quentin Meillassoux, *The Number and the Siren: A Decipherment of Mallarmé's Coup de Dés*, trans. by Robin Mackay (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2012), p. 22.

24 I must admit to sacrificing precision for fluidity in this loose translation. Original: '*Pour moi, le vers classique—que j'appellerais le vers officiel—est la grande nef de cette basilique «la Poésie française»; le vers libre, lui édifie les bas-côtés pleins d'attirances, de mystères, de somptuosités rares. Le vers officiel doit demeurer, car il est né de l'âme populaire, il jaillit du sol d'autrefois, il sut s'épanouir en sublimes efflorescences. Mais le vers libre est une belle conquête, il a surgi en révolte de l'Idée contre la banalité du «convenu»; seulement, pour être, qu'il ne s'érige pas en église dissidente, en chapelle solitaire et rivale!*' Stephane Mallarmé, 'Le Vers Libre et Les Poètes', interview in *Le Figaro. Supplément littéraire du dimanche*, 3 August 1895, p. 3 <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k272819v>, accessed 4 February 2014.

model for coexistence in a single 'church'[25] was not realised. Not only did free verse establish itself as a rival institution—a protestant church, if you will—but it supplanted formal poetry almost totally. According to Quentin Meillassoux:

> The complete or quasi-complete victory of free verse in the 20th century would have meant for him, if he had bore witness to it, a ruinous amputation of poetry.[26]

So if the poem in Mallarmé's time spoke to the Crowd—present or otherwise—then the 'ruinous amptutation' of that aspect of poetry, formal verse, that was 'born of the soul of the people', has ensured that this is no longer the case. In Mallarmé's own frame of reference, then, we can wrest back the terms of the problem as Miłosz envisages it from Badiou's argument.

To return, then, to the first pessimistic response: because of its fragmented social context, the poem cannot transcend the confines of individualism. It is, perhaps, a little easier to test the veracity of this claim, as it admits to empirical verification. Even a single counter-example of an aesthetically successful contemporary poem that meets our criteria would falsify it.

First, then, we need to determine what such a poem would look like—and then try to find one.

Voice of the people

To begin with, the question of voice. The poignant intensity of the contemporary poem derives its power in large part from the singularity and interiority of the voice, and startling,

25 This is more than a casual metaphor. The great task Mallarmé envisaged for poetry, and formal poetry in particular, was to replace the communion of faltering Christianity with a secular sacrament. '...[T]he vocation of Metric verse, according to Mallarmé, is precisely the re-foundation of the community after the collapse of Christianity. If this verse does not survive free verse, poetry will become exclusively an art of individuality...' Meillassoux, 'Badiou and Mallarmé', p. 43.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 41.

unexpected syntax that by its very freshness forces the reader to see its subject matter in a new light. We have already noted the tendency of novelty in form to escalate into an arms race between poets and literary movements that leaves the reader behind: today's new fashion becomes tomorrow's old hat.[27] It is the strongly personal voice of the contemporary poem, the unmistakeable character of a specific poet, that ties it to what Miłosz calls 'the progressing subjectivication that becomes manifest when we are imprisoned in the melancholy of our individual transience.'[28] Jan Mieslowski, writing on Hölderlin's 'Voice of the People', considers the self-abnegation required on the part of the poet to make the poem something more than the vehicle of a singular voice:

> What must the poetic voice sacrifice in order to be able to talk about (or 'give voice to') these other voices? Does giving voice to the voice of the people or the voice of God involve speaking on their behalf? […] If the lyric is to become a truly social text, it needs to escape its own voice so that something more than the expression of a singular individual is articulated.[29]

A social text. With that little phrase, the concerns of form, content and context can again be seen to be interdependent. The confessional mode of contemporary poetry, with its raw expressive power maximised at the expense of formal structure, and the consequent disorientation of the reader, who must peddle hard to keep up; all this must be sacrificed.

A social text; is the poem, then, to try to encroach on the territory of the novel? No, for two reasons. One is that the position is already filled; the novel does a much better job of being itself than the poem can. The other is that the modern novel is

27 'If syntax means anything, it is that the offbeat or the atypical soon becomes the norm.' Jan Mieszkowski, *Labour of Imagination: Aesthetics and Political Economy from Kant to Althusser* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), p. 77.

28 Miłosz, p. 115.

29 Mieszkowski, p. 88.

itself another vehicle of individualism.[30] A social text not only speaks *to* the people but speaks in the voice of the people—not merely that of individuals within it.

A quasi-political objection arises immediately: would this not be a regressive step, to attempt to give the Crowd a singular voice? Would such a poetry not replicate the imperialistic tendencies of the epic, as theorised by Mikhail Bakhtin—to discard polyphony and heteroglossia, and revert to an authoritarian, oppressive single voice that brooks no oppositionality?[31] Does this attempt not invite those very fascistic tendencies warned against by the second pessimistic answer to our question 'how can it be done'?

Some empirical observations are in order. First, polyphony is not *a priori* a guarantee of an emancipatory political dimension in literature. The opposite tendency can be found in the *Cantos* of Ezra Pound, in which a multiplicity of voices, presented using the modernist techniques of fragmentation, decontextualisation and aesthetic irony, serve not to give voice to the people but to reinforce an authoritarian worldview informed by the poet's own fascist sympathies.[32]

Pound's preference for presentation, for showing over telling, mimesis over diegesis, follows an aesthetic choice shared by the contemporary novel (in contrast with, for instance, the editorialising narrator of George Eliot's fiction). Though this is not a new phenomenon—it dates back to Aristotle[33]—it is one of the hallmarks of modern fiction. But the erasure of the individual voice of the poet (speaking *as* the poet) required to create a social text, does not automatically imply an erasure of poetic voice altogether. On the contrary, the task of the social text is to *give* voice to the multitude.

We can find an exemplary instance of the social text in Derek Walcott's great poem *Omeros*. In common with the other late epics of the twentieth century, it alludes deliberately to the foundational epics of western poetry, in particular the *Iliad*. However, it bucks the modern trend for pure presentation, in favour of a representational mode of narrativity[34] that does not shrink from evaluating and commenting on the events described, a practise that found little favour among New York critics, for whom ambiguity and semantic multiplicity are an important element enriching literary texts (and also, perhaps—less charitably—make their own efforts in hermeneutics a necessary service!). It is this mode of telling, rather than showing—highly unfashionable in the individualist aesthetic climate of our times—that makes *Omeros* a truly social text.[35]

In *Omeros*, Walcott gives voice to many individual characters. But the poem as a whole chiefly speaks in the narrator's voice.[36] To whom does this voice belong, properly? Not to the poet as individual.[37] Walcott himself insists that his proper task

30 '[Defoe's] total subordination of the plot to the pattern of the autobiographical memoir is as defiant an assertion of the primacy of individual experience in the novel as Descartes's cogito ergo sum was in philosophy.' Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), p. 14.

31 'The epic world is an utterly finished thing…it is impossible to change, to re-think, to re-evaluate anything in it. It is completed, conclusive and immutable, as a fact, an idea and a value.' Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Epic and Novel: Towards a Methodology for the Study of the Novel' in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 3-40 (p. 17).

32 '…in the case of Pound, however, anti-democratic discourse is not formulated in the explicit monologic diegesis of the authoritative rhapsode but in the infinite voices of interrupted conversations and under the guise of parody, irony and prejudice.' Line Henriksen, *Ambition and Anxiety: Ezra Pound's Cantos and Derek Walcott's Omeros as Twentieth-Century Epics* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), p. 158.

33 Cf. Aristotle *Poetics* 1460a5-11.

34 'In contrast to Pound's bid for an epic of presentation, Omeros makes the genre revert to representational verse and a narrative combination of mimesis and diegesis.' Henriksen, p. 252.

35 'This explicitness represents a return to the narrative stance of 'telling' discarded by Imagist and modernist poetics. Within the epic genre, Walcott's move also becomes a return to the all-embracing diegesis of the oral rhapsode.' *Ibid.*, p. 297.

36 'Dialogue is the exception in Omeros; the larger parts of the long poem are made up of the narrator's diegesis.' *Ibid.*, p. 246.

37 In Walcott's own words: 'I would never lay claim to hearing my own

as a poet is to speak for his people, the people of St Lucia:

> I have felt from my boyhood that I had one function and that was somehow to articulate, not my own experience, but what I saw around me…That's what I felt my job was. It's something that other writers have said in their own way, even if it sounds arrogant. Yeats has said it; Joyce has said it. It's amazing Joyce could say that he wants to write for his race, meaning the Irish. You'd think that Joyce would have a larger, more continental kind of mind, but Joyce continued insisting on his provinciality at the same time he had the most universal mind since Shakespeare. What we can do as poets in terms of our honesty is simply to write within the immediate perimeter of not more than twenty miles really.[38]

With the example of *Omeros*, we can counter the claim that the contemporary poem is incapable of transcending the individual voice to become a social text. It is also, obviously, not an avatar of imperial authoritarianism. Is this because of its specific provenance as a postcolonial text, or, as one study dubs it, an 'epic of the dispossessed'? To some extent, perhaps; but to emphasise its postcolonial origin to the exclusion of its specificity as a work of literature would be to reduce it to a political cipher, an expression *of* postcoloniality and nothing more. The key, rather, to its success as a social text in terms of its context lies in Walcott's geographical expression: 'to write within the immediate perimeter of not more than twenty miles'.

Twenty miles....A little hyperbolic, perhaps; but Walcott identifies a vital fact about the social text: the identification between the milieu that the poet knows by direct experience and the people on whose behalf he speaks. If Walcott's identity as a St Lucian gives him an advantage in making his poem a

voice in my work. If I knew what it was, what infinite boredom and repetition would lie ahead, I would fall asleep at its sound.' Leif Sjöberg, 'An Interview with Derek Walcott', in *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, ed. by Derek Walcott and William Baer (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996), 79-85 (p. 83).

38 Edward Hirsch, 'The Art of Poetry No. 37: Derek Walcott.' *Paris Review* 101 (1986): 197-230.

social text, it is in the relative smallness of the island, not in any identatarian valorisation of the periphery in the global world-system. The poet can speak for a smaller group with much greater authority—because he knows it—than for a larger one, which can only be captured in general terms that tend toward the simplistic even if they manage to escape the stereotypical. This is what makes the task of national laureate such an onerous and artificial one, and renders most of the poems written in that capacity poor examples of the poet's talent: the nation-state, in most cases, is far too vast to be known, personally, by a single poet. (We might, perhaps, denote Joyce's 'provincialism' more narrowly than Walcott does, as a writer of Dublin, rather than of Ireland as a whole.)

Thus, the difficulties facing the contemporary poet—as contrasted with her ancient counterpart—attempting to speak for and to the multitude, can be seen as different not in kind but simply in scale: the ancient *polis*, or the tribe or clan to which a bard belonged, was of sufficiently small size for the poet to know it intimately. A vital step, then, in recovering the potential of poetry to become a social text is to reject the false choice between representing the vast abstraction of society as a whole (for which the attempt to speak tends towards an aesthetic reinforcement of political sovereignty) and the expression of purely individual feeling, and rather to aim for somewhere in between: a community on a human scale, be that a town, a village, a borough, a disapora or immigrant community within a metropolis, or any other crowd small enough to warrant that term literally, rather than the forbidding abstraction of Mallarmé's Crowd.

It is this focus on the poet's locality that sets the agenda for *New Trad*'s themed second issue: to give voice to communities, without slipping into the pathos of individualism or the inhuman scale of nationalism (interested poets and scholars should consult the call for submissions on page 142).

A home for hypotheticals

But what of the poetic form of *Omeros*? It is surely no accident that this expemplary social text alludes so strongly to the epic tradition: not only in its narrative structure and the naming of characters, but in its near-consistent use of the Homeric hexametre, and tercets with a rhyme scheme that (while looser than Dante's) is modelled upon the *terza rima* of the Divine Comedy. Something is at work of greater significance than the magpie-like hybridisation and pastiche of postmodernism.

The predicament of contemporary poetry, as described at the outset, is its rampaging self-cannibalisation, its impatience with metrical form and structure, its destruction of the ground on which poetry has traditionally stood. How can today's poets renew poetry, when the last century has been a blur of novelty-seeking?

The conviction of *New Trad*—and it is, I will freely admit, more of an intuition than a fully conceived hypothesis—is that the future will only be won by reference to the past. This is, after all, more the rule than the exception. The Renaissance is the obvious example: the great aesthetic advances of that time were engendered not by a desire for novelty, but from a desire to reconnect with a lost tradition. T. S. Eliot is an unlikely model, given that it is the wreckage of modernism that has buried poetry in its own obscurity; but it is notable that Eliot justified modernism by a reference to the 'metaphysical' poets of the seventeenth century, wondering what might have happened if poetry had never turned, under the influence of Milton and Dryden, from the path trodden by Donne and Marvell.[39] He thus grounds the project of modernism in English poetry not

39 'In the seventeenth century, a dissociation of sensibility set in, from which we have never recovered.... We may ask, what would have been the fate of the "metaphysical" had the current of poetry descended in a direct line from them, as it descended in a direct line to them?' T. S. Eliot, 'The Metaphysical Poets', in *Selected Essays* (London: Faber & Faber, 1924), 281-291 (p. 288).

as a straightforward break from tradition, but as a continuation of an older tradition, in a kind of hypothetical: *what if we had never stopped writing in this way?* How would poetry in this mode have developed in the meantime?

The purpose of *New Trad* is to be a home for many such hypotheticals. Our emphasis is not on the recent pre-modernist past. There are several venues already in existence for the rhyming, metrical poetry that immediately preceded the onslaught of free verse and has been maintained by the likes of Robert Frost;[40] we have no desire to replicate them. Rather, we seek to revitalise ancient forms and traditions so long fallen out of use as to be become mere objects of scholarly study. What if we still wrote like the ancient Norse skalds? What if we had never stopped writing spells and invocations in the manner of the Akkadians? What if the Sapphic lyric or Horatian ode were still with us...what would they have become, for us—what can we make of it in our own era?

A scattershot approach, we have to admit, and one that may take us up many dead ends; still, who's counting, if even one of those paths turns out to lead onward? It may also seem a perverse response to the problem as posed by Miłosz—for whom the retreat of poetry from the public sphere is reinforced by its excessive proximity to academia—to specialise in poetic forms mostly familiar only to literary scholars. Indeed, a majority of the contributors to this issue are connected to a university in one way or another. Against this contradiction we can only plead a more modest mission than the broadening of poetry's contemporary readership (a grand task entirely out of our reach): to incubate and foster new possibilities—albeit via archaic traditions—for poetry. Another objection is that the journal only publishes work in modern English; how can it possibly hope to engage meaningfully with the vast and various

40 Examples: *Measure* ('a review of formal poetry'), *Mezzo Cammin* ('an online journal of formalist poetry by women'), *The Lyric* ('the oldest magazine in North America in continuous publication devoted to traditional poetry'), *Able Muse* ('predominantly publishes metrical poetry').

array of archaic poetic traditions in the world?

Time will tell. *New Trad* is an experiment—a roll of the dice, in other words. But the chill wind of individualism and its formal concomitant, free verse, has blasted poetry for too long. We are encouraged by the enthusiasm surrounding recent experimental forums for archaic poetic form such as the 'Modern Poets on Viking Poetry' project, which last year brought together skaldic scholars and contemporary poets, under the auspices of the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic at Cambridge University, in a series of workshops that culminated in the publication of some fascinating work[41], as well as the remarkable work of individual poets making use of ancient forms, such as Bev Braune's epic poem 'Skulváði Úlfr' (an extract of which appears in this volume) and Glaswegian poet Ian Crockatt's excellent and varied collection *Skald*.[42] This might—just perhaps—be an idea whose time has come.

17 February 2014

41 *An Anthology of Responses to Skaldic Poetry*, ed. by Debbie Potts (Cambridge: Modern Poets on Viking Poetry, 2013), <http://www.asnc.cam.ac.uk/resources/mpvp/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/An-Anthology-of-Responses-to-Skaldic-Poetry.pdf>, accessed 13 February 2014.

42 Ian Crockatt, *Skald* (Aberdeen: Koo Press, 2009).

Ross Wilson, 'The Sun Poet' (1997)
Portrait of Derek Walcott
@ National Portrait Gallery, London

Charlotte Innes

Charlotte Innes came to poetry after a career in journalism. A Classics graduate, her grounding in and love of the history and literature of the ancient world reveals itself through the frequent appearance of myths and classical allusions in her work, which often revolves around the themes of love, death, family and social injustice.

She has two chapbooks published by Finishing Line Press, and her poems have appeared in journals such as *The Hudson Review* and *The Sewanee Review*.

Notes on form:

On 'Actaeon': 'The hexameter lines (many of them strongly trochaic) and the use of space mimic the fragments of Sappho's hexameter poems.'

On 'The Man from Ithaca': 'My form in this poem is similar to Derek Walcott's attempt to engage with the ancient epic tradition through the use of the fairly modern terza rima form (invented by Dante in the Middle Ages, and subsequently used Chaucer).

'My attempt through eight-line, rhymed tetrameter stanzas—one of the oldest forms in the English language and one of the measures of Greek tragedy (the trochaic tetrameter)—is to re-tell a Homeric story (from the voyage of Odysseus) through the eyes of a woman, Calypso, blending both ancient and modern cultures.

'The eight-line stanza also has a long history in poetry (including epic) in various cultures. It is also a common form for the story-telling ballad.'

Actaeon

4 o' clock and your red necklace thrown for the night
chokes you sun to your knees your blood draining away
to invisible mirrors green with what you're not Today
you gave me red-tipped stamens filled my mind with green
words what were you thinking I burned and burned and now
my branches supplicant black My hair's lank and dogs
snap at my ribs When I call my name they barely hear
this cracked and broken howling They tear my arms my face
In a crimson mist I climb again and again the broken
stairway up to your green and red unopened door—

The Man from Ithaca

O I could wreathe the hills with fog
and haul lost sheep from deep ravines,
weave a lovely woolen frock
beaten soft with stones from streams,
shine my curls to glossy brown
with dripping seaweed on the beach,
delay the sun from going down—
for I was lovely to the gods.

But now, here's what I need to say,
the truth—Zeus strike me if I lie—
I loved a man, a different way,
a shipwrecked man whom I found crying,
salt-encrusted, on the beach,
that O this wasn't home nor I
his wife. What made me want to please
this man of tears—and make him stay?

For I could summon nymphs from trees,
who'd dance and drink and laugh till they
in fumy stupor lay with me,
or even Zeus for half a day—
he's fun, a bit aggressive, blowing
in and making love (he'd pray
that Hera was asleep) then going.
The Ithacan… was much more sweet.

O—when I had bathed and dressed him,
served him food, he gently touched
my breasts, and watching me, as if
I might say no, he gave me such
a kiss I could not stop my hands.
He loved me (yes he did) but much
to my chagrin, he couldn't stand
my island, said the fog depressed him.

Though he could kill a sheep and spear
a fish, he mostly sobbed on rocks
for Ithaca. At first, his clear
blue eyes, though filled with tears, got
to me. But this went on for seven
years! And now that he is not
with me, I feel relieved, if lessened—
though every now and then his dear

old shade (he's long since dead) will seep
into my dreams or sometimes loom
through fog. But times have changed. People
crowd my island now. No room
for sheep. Instead, I round up men
who buy me clothes that stem my gloom
a bit. They drink and sleep and often
stay for days—and never weep.

Oz Hardwick

Oz Hardwick is a professor of English at Leeds Trinity University, as well as a writer, photographer, and occasional musician. Winner of the 2014 Sentinel Annual Poetry Prize and the author of four collections, his poetry has been published and performed throughout Europe and the United States. He has also published widely on art and literary history. His latest collcetion is *An Eschatological Bestiary* (Dog Horn, 2013).

Notes on form:

'Whilst avoiding pastiche, I wanted to keep an echo of the four-stress alliterative line of early medieval verse. The fact that it also alludes to the sonnet is, perhaps, sheer perversity on my part, but I have been exploring the possibilities of sonnets for a while now, and the poem naturally fell into three quatrains and a concluding couplet.'

Reckoning

I speak the tide, my ebb and flow
gently rocking the ship of state
on waves of words, my soft susurration
belying my steady, implacable pull.

Sails billow, steersmen strive,
their courses plotted by chart and star,
but my merest murmur casts chaos,
forces flight to unknown coves.

Waves rage, skies hang dark,
boil the colour of blood, until
my one word cuts the cloud,
stills the storm, bestows calm.

But never forget: mine is the voice
of the deep, and I always claim my price.

Jan D. Hodge

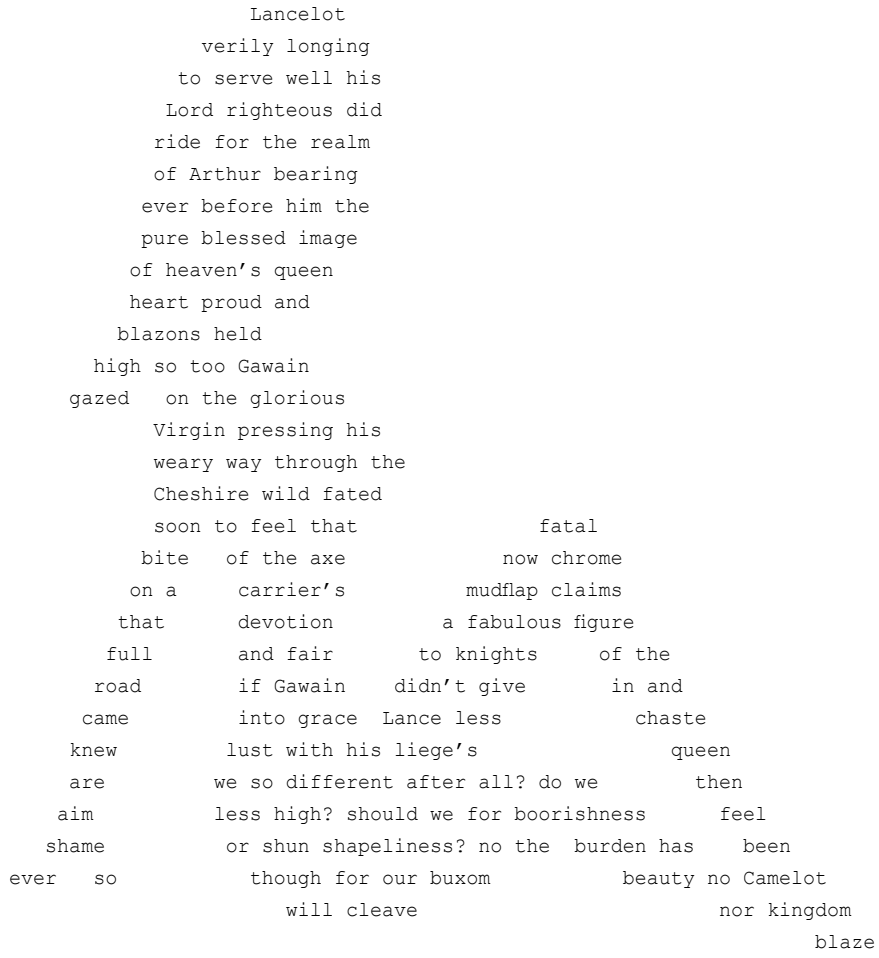
Having written a dissertation on Dickens and taught for 32 years in Illinois and Iowa, Jan Hodge is now blissfully retired, writing—among other things—*carmina figurata* (shaped poems) and double dactyl adaptations of tales from the Arabian Nights. His essay "Taking Shape: The Art of Carmina Figurata" appeared in *An Exaltation of Forms*.

Notes on form:

'The *carmen figuratum* has roots in classical Greece as well as many other cultures, and has been practiced in English notably in the English Renaissance and by such modern poets as Marianne Moore and especially John Hollander, though in these latter cases versification is neither rhymed nor metrical.

'While "Icon" is a *carmen figuratum*, it metrically reflects the tradition of the four stress alliterative line of Anglo-Saxon and medieval English poetry, thus merging visual and aural elements.'

Icon



Kate Wise

Born and raised in rural Cheshire, Kate Wise studied Classics at university, and now works in London as a solicitor. We are delighted to be publishing 'Plot 721a', her first poem in print.

Notes on form:

'My poem uses a (semi) Sapphic form—three lines of five feet, and a fourth of two feet, per stanza—but not strictly Sapphic metre; I chose instead to try to capture voice and feel over metrical restrictions.'

Plot 721a

The sky is louring today, the grey blue-gashed
through which a hand might stretch down. It doesn't come.
The starlings hiss and whistle their mobile-toned
impertinences

over yewed avenues, apologetic
chrysanths, which no one passes to visit me.
When we were young we marched steely Annions Lane
together against

such greys: half-frozen ditches, skeleton Ash,
lambs and primroses regretting their early
burst; warmed into the hard gloom by each other
and thermossed coffee.

I lie here cold on my pillow, your side still
empty, colder. Tell me: am I forgotten,
deserted for winter suns, replaced, betrayed –
perhaps just waiting?

Norman Ball

A poet, playwright, essayist and musician residing in Virginia. A featured poet on Prairie Home Companion, his poems and essays have appeared in *Light Quarterly*, *The Raintown Review*, *The Berkeley Poetry Review*, *Epicenter*, *Oxford Magazine*, *The Cumberland Poetry Review*, *14 by 14*, *Rattle*, *Liberty*, *The Hypertexts*, *Main Street Rag*, *The New Renaissance*, *The Scotsman* and *The Times* of London, among dozens of others.

His two essay collections, *How Can We Make Your Power More Comfortable?* (Del Sol Press, 2010) and *The Frantic Force* (Petroglyph Books, 2011) are both widely available. His recent play *SIDES: A Civil War Musical* is currently being produced for TV by Last Tango Productions.

Clink

there. in moments captured by glass too soon
emptied of night-time wine i saw your face
flung forward—glorious premonition, full swoon
out of class. epiphany leaks a trace
of fresh-squeezed, unsought stores of value not
readily prefigured by the store-bought.

clink. i mean that in your buzz when you laugh,
quenching this world of shelves, the first carafe
pours forth and souls will never offer that
for sale (supplies won't last) nor ratify
loose change. but you're my proletariat.
i fetishize the withheld, my war-cry—

count her revolutions. kick out the jams.
marry the wine press. embargo the drams.

Tegan Jane Schetrumpf

Tegan Jane Schetrumpf has been published in *Wet Ink*, *Swamp*, *Theory of Everything*, *Southerly*, *Meanjin* and *Antipodes*. She was shortlisted for the 2013 Cecily Jean Drake Brockman Poetry Prize and is currently undertaking postgraduate research into the 21st Century 'makers' movement and its effect on Australian poetry.

Notes on form

On 'Profound Theory': 'It is hard to mimic Chinese classical poetry structures in English, as the form is not so much about line length or rhyme but tends to be constructed on set approved themes, allusions and sounds. I have used "letter address" and "the marking of a particular event" themes, and have alluded to the legends of the "four great beauties" to typify events in the Tang Dynasty poet Yu Xuanji's life.

'There are also references to flower, fruit, season and animal symbolism which provide a dimension to the poems beyond the aesthetic. These subtexts are how Chinese poetry was able to engage with political or social issues without being censored. "Profound Theory" is one translation of Yu Xuanji's name.'

On 'Our Collossus': 'This poem is written is Sapphic stanza structure, an 11/11/11/5 line stanza with a pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables. It is based loosely on the structure of Fragment 31, and like that recovered poem, this is an enkomion – a poem of praise. It takes its title from Sylvia Plath's poem "Colossus".'

Profound Theory: The Four Great Beauties

for Yu Xuanji (844-869)

1. Xi Shi
On the Marriage of a Lesser Wife

The koi and golden carp are dazed
by your enchanting face and sink
below the ink-black water
choked with river-weed.
A spray of blushing apricot blossoms
arc over the boat. Your husband
stands as the bank approaches,
startling a brace of quails
whose cries
carried by the spring wind
make an uneasy portent.

2. Wang Zhaojun
Poem to a Fellow Courtesan

Apples nod their heavy-scented heads
to your sweet music, geese
are arrested in their arrowed flight.

Were not the Han and Hun united
by your gentle hand?
The possibilities for a woman versed
in the strings of the gǔqín,
the strategy of wéiqí
the poetry of shū
and the art of a straight line
are as varied and endless
as Autumn fields of chrysanthemum.

3. Yang Guifei
Donning the Apparel of a Taoist Nun

The chiming cicada song
from the bending summer peach
hums over the lacquer table.
In your hair you place the ivory pin,
the gossamer scarf, and the circlet
of your white-jade crown.
As you rise, the rustle of skirts,
dyed yellow with gardenia, and the jangle
of bronze amulets rouse the jealousy
of magnolias and peonies: the flowers
your face puts to shame.

4. Diaochen
To a Murderer Awaiting Execution

The pale moon hides her face
behind the snowy breasts of winter clouds.
The frost-encrusted boughs will not admit
green shoots. Plum blossoms fall
to the unresponsive ground.
From your maid's window-sill
a mantis inspects his jagged foreleg
and your face. I can't resolve
your bloodless beauty
with the rumour.

Our Colossus

for Sappho (612-570 BC)

I see you, sweet statue, feet striding harbours
arm reaching from your island's opal fires.
Step up among the hai mousai and sing our
history again.

Of hungry tides, wild orchids, quiet houses,
of longing, constant as the marsh frog calling,
of winters, of autumnal feasts, of sighing
by some man's hearth-side.

Of how a whore is painted, many brushes
touching up the polychrome. Yet your name down
the stone-cut mountain echoes. Your open mouth
still makes them tremble.

Body scattered, I see your fragments glimmer
under-water. Safflower, saffron, sapphire.
We wear your stone lips pressed to ours: a prayer
to Aphrodite.

Sing to your daughters: return to the water…

Charles August Mengin, 'Sappho' (1877)

Philip Quinlan

Philip Quinlan has a chapbook, *Head Lands* (White Violet Press, 2012) and a privately-circulated ebook, *Time Was*. He received nominations in 2011 for both *The Best of the Net* and *Pushcart*. His work has appeared in many journals in print and online. He is also co-editor, with Ann Drysdale, of *Angle Journal of Poetry in English*. He lives in the UK.

Notes on form:

'The poem is an antiphon based on the call and response of birds at the dawn chorus.'

Listen

Listen,
it is the morning singing:
making sure of others,
making others sure of I.

How shall I find you in this place of echoes?
How will you know me in this place of shade?

Speak, then,
as if in confirmation:
we are so singular
yet like unto alike.

How shall I hear you in the midst of many?
How will you guide me to the place you made?

Hear me,
in this polyphony,
for only I am as I am
and know the tune I know.

How can I tell you of the dark and distance?
How shall I come, then, to the sunlit glade?

Cry out
in anxious repetition:
the need to know each day
that I am not alone.

How shall I gather the strength for such singing?
How can I bear that every day must fade?

Travis Biddick

Born, raised, and planted for good in Oklahoma, Travis works as a librarian at the University of Central Oklahoma and lives in Oklahoma City with his wife and child. His latest poetry will appear in the forthcoming issue of *Dappled Things*.

Notes on form:

'Like the Pindaric Ode, "Sense and Matter" is tripartite in structure, the rhyme scheme is complex, and the meter varies from line to line. Unlike the Pindaric Ode, however, the rhyming and metrical pattern of the strophe is not replicated in the antistrophe. All three parts—strophe, antistrophe, and epode—maintain distinct rhyme schemes and meter.

'While the poem departs from the Pindaric Ode with respect to this repitition of form in the strophe and antistrophe, it maintains the most fundamental principles of its character: strong imagery, a serious and exuberant tone, and a subject inspired by occasion.'

Sense and Matter

Within the limits of sight
in the midday glare
a liquid flash
of possible light
shot out and shivered in midair,
its knotty material unraveling
without a splash,
scattering to nothing in its descent
from the pediment
of an unmoved bird bath's basin.

Just then some thrumming ring,
having its place in
no apparent cause or instrument,
sounded and tolled all alone
as sourceless and as stagnant
as an algal pool of water on a stone.

What's hard enough to ring true,
in a liquid way?
For if water fell,
there was wind that blew
and wind chimes are hanging, which it could play—
or if not this, a corner sign
supplied the knell
with a strafing jet of water shot

at its permanent spot
in a sprinkler head's wagging line.

My imagination trains
on harmonies,
till reason opens on wider plains
of probabilities
conspiring to prevent
naïve conclusions, self-willed in ignorance.

But if reason insists on nature unadorned
as picayune coincidence
and lets it pass its glinting instances
dimly perceived and thus unmourned
by human comprehension,
matter in all of its substances,
in all its instantiations
will still regard itself asquint
in infinite attention:
the winds leap out at water overpoured,
the water rings at windy fluctuations,
in the world's common chord,
the herald of its own event.

Isaac Levitan, 'Fountain' (1886)

Phillip A. Ellis

A Sydney University graduate, Philip Ellis lives in Tweed Heads, New South Wales. An eclectic and prolific poet, he has written over five hundred published poems since 1997. His work includes *The Flayed Man, Symptoms Positive and Negative* and *Arkham Monologues*, and has forthcoming collections from both Diminuendo Press and Hippocampus Press. He edits *Melaleuca* and the SpeedPoets zine. His website is:

http://www.phillipaellis.com/

Note on form

'The form used, the glyconic, is a Hellenic form used in antiquity. The tension between freedom and discipline of writing in an unrhymed metrical form stimulates me; one challenge that a glyconic—and other non-iambic metres—presents is the demand to reconcile the metre with the rhythm of the host language. To do so successfully, while employing as full a repertoire of poetic effects, is one of my aims as a poet.'

Glyconics

I have turned from the thought the stars
may be dead as I watch them burn--
certain images make me wish
I'd found power to travel space,
passing quickly from world to world,
star to star in a ship of steel,
thoughtful voyager passing, eyes
that will witness the stars as suns,
stars as beautiful, fair of face,
destinations perhaps, or halts,
brief waystations from earth to death.

How I wish I could travel, pass
among worlds, with the stars still bright.

Annette Volfing

Annette Volfing is a professor of Medieval German at Oriel College, Oxford, with particular interest in later medieval religious, mystical and allegorical writing. Her poems have appeared in *Other Poetry*, *The Interpreter's House*, *Magma*, *Smiths Knoll*, *Snakeskin* and the *Oxford Magazine*.

Note on form

'This love-poem is a rubaiyat. It engages with the form—and the orientalism—of FitzGerald's version of Omar Khayyam.'

Bahariya Oasis

The sun retreats; the evening calls for fire
as desert winds sweep in to fan desire.
You wear three sweaters as we eat our *fûl*.
The kindling in our room could light a pyre.

The slender moon hangs frozen like a jewel,
but deigns to dip her image in the pool.
We shiver by its side and nurse a beer.
Beyond the garden wall we hear a mule.

Beside the bed they've lit a fire to sear
our sand-scoured eyes and cheeks. The flames are near
enough to scorch—and yet the air stays cold.
A second lovelorn mule calls loud and clear.

The embers smoke all night. These blankets hold
our song of love—although we aren't so bold
as to remove our clothes. We just lie rolled
up in a single scroll that won't unfold.

John Grey

John Grey works as a financial systems analyst. Recently published in *International Poetry Review*, *Chrysalis* and the science fiction anthology *Futuredaze*, he has work upcoming in *Potomac Review*, *Sanskrit* and *Fox Cry Review*.

Note on form

'I chose the old English ballad form as a vehicle for "For Gorric" because of the way the style isn't afraid to emphasise rhythm and rhyme, suggestive of the form's commonality with the English folk song.'

For Gorric

I went about these silver plains,
Wind's cannon in the trees.
My shield oak is the reeds of rain,
My shoulder slakes the breeze
That runs around these weary hills
Stump rock bed and the loam;
Ah, summer's sequence slyly stills
The beggar's idlesse home.

I have a room, one light-house high
And bordered to an ash-
I wake to plump and beet-root sky.
The strange set wood sounds slash
Across a hearth of flower beds
The birds they do fly south.
My wishes tied across their heads,
My message in each mouth.

I count the petals, dripping skates,
I circulate the seeds,
What streaks of sun necessitates
Each blade of groundswell needs;
The sorrels push their way between
The narrow cracks of earth,
And in the wildness, willow green,
The creels of flowers give birth.

I do not borrow from the sky,
The soil cares for its own,
The sails through fields of fellow fly,
A wilderness is grown-
I am a minstrel for the past
As seen through future eyes,
The thing we thought would never last
Is that which never dies.

John Constable, 'Country road' (1826)

Susan McLean

Susan McLean is a professor of English at Southwest Minnesota State University in Marshall, Minnesota. A formalist poet, she has a particular love of the song-like qualities of French repeating forms. Her first full-length poetry collection, *The Best Disguise*, won the 2009 Richard Wilbur Award.

Note on form

'The rondelet is a French repeating form, originally intended to sung. It is rarely used these days because the short lines bring the rhymes close to one another, running the risk of sounding singsong, and the poem is so brief that it is hard to make it anything other than a decorative trifle. I thought that if I made the content surprisingly rude and enjambed frequently, I could turn the bauble into a pithy satire.'

What Goes

You were the one
who always taught me what to do.
You were the one
who said I ought to buy a gun.
So when you said that we were through,
one of us had to go. I knew
you were the one.

Michael Buhagiar

Michael Buhagiar received his PhD in English literature from Sydney University in 2012. Before beginning his PhD he self-published full-length books on Shakespeare (2003) and *Don Quixote* (2008). His published papers may be viewed at: https://sydney.academia.edu/MichaelBuhagiar

The Dochmiac: A Rhythm For All Time[1]

The Greek metrical element known as the dochmiac or dochmius first appeared in the plays of Aeschylus, and he may well have invented it, although, given the paucity of surviving manuscripts from the pre-Aeschylaean era, we cannot be sure of this. It next reappeared, as we shall see, in Shakespeare (which is not surprising, given the substantial, in fact foundational, influence of the Greek tradition on these plays, *pace* Ben Jonson); and then, in the nineteenth century, in Swinburne, Hopkins (in a transmuted way), Arthur Symons, and the Australian poet Christopher Brennan. Classicism of course was everywhere in the nineteenth century, but there was nothing stereotypically Classical (with its emphasis on order, reason, and sunlit vision) or even Victorian about three of these poets (the exception being Hopkins, a special case), to whom the description that might best be applied is perhaps Nietzsche's 'human, all too human.' I have characterised the dochmiac as representing the 'heartbeat of Lilith,' where Lilith is the underworld goddess of the Hebrews. Given the centrality of this kind of goddess to human experience, and indeed to the human psyche, as author after author has described, it is not at all surprising that the metrical power of the dochmiac should have been perceived by poets of such widely separate eras – Classical, Elizabethan and Victorian – over a span of thirteen centuries.

1 This paper includes a quantity of new research, especially on Swinburne and Hopkins, and also material which first appeared in my thesis and two scholarly papers: 'Christopher Brennan and the Greeks: The Quest of Poems 1913' (PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 2012); 'The Alpha and Omega of Brennan's The Wanderer', *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature* 11:2 (2012), 'A Greek lyric metre as vector of the self in the poetry of Arthur Symons and Christopher Brennan', *Victoriographies* 2 (2012), 163-180.

The dochmiac is an element of Greek lyrical metre, appearing in the sung passages of the plays of Aeschylus, as well as in the plays of (in chronological order) Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes, but it made its first and most powerful appearance in Aeschylus; and, if Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* is to be believed, after Sophocles the decline set in. Aeschylus employed three broad types of metre: a primarily iambic metre, for the great speeches of the nobles (this was plausibly the inspiration for Elizabethan blank verse); an anapestic metre, which was chanted by the chorus and some other characters at their entries and exits; and the lyric metres of the odes, which were sung to the accompaniment of an off-stage band, chief among the instruments of which was the flute-like *aulos*. The dochmiac is a metron (a rhythmic element) which appears in the last of these at moments of great passion or pain or some other form of heightened emotion; so, for example, the scene of Cassandra's frenzied premonition of the murder of Agamemnon in Aeschylus' eponymous play is rich in dochmiacs. The essence of the dochmiac lies in its conjunct long or stressed syllables. Conjunct stresses of course can occur in Anglophone poetry, but not to the extent or in the intentional pattern of the dochmiac. The basic form is short-long/long-short-long, but there are several commonly used variations as follows, some of which incorporate a conjunction of several stresses, to give the effect of a series of Beethovian hammer-blows at the end or (less commonly) beginning of a line:

/ ˘ – / – ˘ –
/ ˘ ˘˘/ – ˘ –
/ ˘ – / – ˘ –
/ – ˘˘/ – ˘ –
/ ˘ ˘˘/ ˘˘ ˘ –
/ ˘ ˘˘/ ˘˘ ˘ ˘˘

/ – ˘˘ / – – –
/ – – / – ˘ –

These variations derive from the techniques of resolution, where a long is split into two shorts, and of drag, where a short becomes a long. Less commonly—but more powerfully—a dochmiac may consist entirely of longs, or a line may be composed entirely of two dochmiacs. An especially powerful instance of a single dochmial line occurs in line 147 of Christopher Brennan's *The Wanderer*[2]:

ăs hĕ fōllōws/ thĕ rīdge ăbōve/ thĕ wātērs/ shūddēr/ĭng tŏwārds nīght,

Here, the run of stresses in a bacchius (thĕ wātērs) followed by a dochmiac (shūddēr/ĭng tŏwārds nīght) powerfully evokes the action of the waters. This dochmiac is of the form long-long/long-long-long, where the long in the third position is resolved into two shorts. An even stronger instance is the remarkable double-dochmial line which brings Brennan's 224 line poem to a close:

ănd ă clēar/ dūsk sēttlē,/ sōmewhēre,/ fār īn mē.

This line incorporates ten longs, in two dochmiacs of the form long-long/long-long-long, where the long in position 1 of the line is resolved, and the second syllable of 'settle' lengthened by *syllaba brevis in elemento longo* (or simply *brevis in longo*), where a naturally short syllable is lengthened by a following punctuation mark (here a comma).

These two examples are extreme forms. An instance toward the other end of the scale is line 23 of *The Wanderer*:

2 Christopher Brennan, *Poems 1913*, ed. by G. A. Wilkes (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1972).

ānd thĕ pēoplĕ/ crōwdĭng tō thĕir/ rāil, glād/ ōf thĕ shōre:

Here, the closing dochmiac of the form long-long/long-short-long expresses the simple emotion of the passengers. The first two metra of this line are trochaic dipods (long-short-long-short), where the long is in the first position of the foot, unlike the iambic dipod (short-long-short-long). The word "trochaic" comes from the Greek verb *trechein*, 'to run,' and Brennan has employed the trochaics here to portray the motion of the passengers toward the rail. I have shown (see below) this combination of trochaic and dochmiac to express motion and its underlying emotion to be also a feature of Swinburne's poem 'Itylus' (1866) which, so far as I am aware, is the first example of the use of this metron in Victorian literature, and may well have been Brennan's inspiration for his own use of it some thirty-six years later. Swinburne's use of the dochmiac in this poem has wide ramifications into Victorian literature generally, as we shall see.

The dochmiac, often appearing in shorter, more irregular lines as the spasmodic emotional ejaculations of the common people, serves as a conduit for the most deeply felt impulses of the soul. In the plays of Aeschylus, it is strictly confined to the choric odes, and never appears in the more measured and controlled twelve-beat iambic lines of the nobles. The Victorian era was deeply influenced by Classicism, as the expanding British Empire looked towards the empire-builders of the Graeco-Roman age for example and inspiration. This was the golden age of Aeschylean criticism, when editions from such scholars as Jebb, Paley, Verrall, Badham, and many others, rolled off the presses to supply the want felt in schools and universities throughout the country. It was inevitable, therefore, that the dualism expressed in the Aeschylean drama between reason and emotion should also be a feature of wider society. The nineteenth century in England was rich and varied in its culture, and its world-view is too easily subsumed under the heading of 'Victorianism,' yet this notion of nobility of reason

and the corresponding ignobility of emotion—which might also be expressed in Jungian terms as ego and non-ego—undoubtedly contributed to the very real phenomenon which we recognise as the typical 'Victorian' personality, as is beautifully caught in Gosse's observation on the 1860s: 'It was the epoch of the crinoline and the pointed shawl, when not merely could a spade never be called a spade in the most restricted circles, but the existence of that or any other such domestic utensil was strenuously denied.'[3] The use of the dochmiac by Swinburne, Symons and Brennan was intended to supply the want: to reaffirm, in a thoroughly modernistic way, the nobility of the non-rational self, and celebrate it as an entity worthy of study and esteem.

Swinburne and the dochmiac

It was into that idyllic yet deluded mid-Victorian milieu that Swinburne exploded in 1866 with his *Poems and Ballads*. The horrified censure of it in polite circles was expressed, for example, in the *Saturday Review*, the most powerful organ of literary opinion at the time, which called Swinburne an 'unclean fiery imp from the pit' and 'the libidinous laureate of a pack of satyrs'.[4] With poems like 'Dolores,' the theme of which is sadomasochistic sex, of which Swinburne was an enthusiastic devotee at the time, it is little wonder:

O lips full of lust and of laughter,
    Curled snakes that are fed from my breast,
Bite hard, lest remembrance come after
    And press with new lips where you pressed.
For my heart too springs up at the pressure,

3 Edmund Gosse, *The Life of Algernon Charles Swinburne* (London: Macmillan, 1917), p. 135.
4 *Ibid.*, p. 152.

Mine eyelids too moisten and burn;

Ah, feed me and fill me with pleasure,

Ere pain come in turn.

Poems and Ballads also contained 'Itylus,' which I have shown to be intensely dochmial in nature. The background to 'Itylus' is as follows. Swinburne scholars and the poet himself have confirmed the centrality of the Hellenic tradition to his creativity. Gosse believed that of the tragedians Aeschylus, especially, meant a great deal to him:

> His knowledge of the text of Aeschylus was extraordinarily close and sympathetic. His marvellous memory enabled him to carry practically the whole of the Oresteia in his mind, and there are those still living who recollect, as an astonishing feat, his ability to "spout" the plays of Aeschylus in Greek as long as any auditor had the patience to listen to him.[5]

Aeschylus' mention of the myth of Itylus occurs in the midst of Cassandra's frenzied premonition of the murder of Agamemnon in the eponymous play (ll. 1135-1147). Verrall translates:

> *Elder.* Thou art in some sort crazed by the god who hurries thy thoughts, and wailest thyself in a wild tune, like some brown nightingale, that with singing never sated laments, alas, heart-sore for Itys, Itys all her sorrow-filled days.
>
> *Cassandra.* Ah, the fate of the musical nightingale! For her the gods did clothe in a winged form, a sweet passage and a tearless, while I must be parted by the steel's sharp edge.[6]

This scene of 280 lines is rich in dochmiacs, which fulfil therein par excellence the purpose for which it was invented.

Here is a scansion of the lines of 'Itylus' in question (dochmiacs in my italics):

5 Gosse, p. 110.

6 Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, ed. and trans. by A. W. Verrall (London: Macmillan, 1889), p. 251.

Swāllōw, mў sīstēr, *Ŏ sīstēr swāllōw*, (1)

Ŏ swāllōw, sīstēr, Ŏ fāir swīft swāllōw, (7)

Sīstēr, mў sīstēr, *Ŏ flēet swēet swāllōw*, (13)

Ŏ swāllōw, sīstēr, Ŏ chāngĭng swāllōw, (20)

Sīstēr, mў sīstēr, *Ŏ sōft līght swāllōw*, (25)

Swāllōw, mў sīstēr, *Ŏ sīngīng swāllōw*, (31)

Ŏ swāllōw, sīstēr, Ŏ flēetĭng swāllōw, (37)

Ŏ swēet strāy sīstēr, Ŏ shīftĭng swāllōw, (43)

Ŏ swāllōw, sīstēr, Ŏ rāpĭd swāllōw, (49)

Ŏ sīstēr, sīstēr, thў fīrst bĕgōttēn, (55)

Thōu hăst fŏrgōttēn, *Ŏ sūmmēr swāllōw*, (59)

The Anglophone reader, tripping too lightly over the word 'swallow,' may indeed voice the second syllable as short; however, its stress becomes apparent when imaginative sympathy with the emotional content of the poem is brought into play. In any case, Swinburne has put the matter beyond doubt by following it in every case with a comma, to lengthen it by *brevis in longo*. By the same principles, 'sister' here invariably scans as two longs. There is one double-dochmial line (7), and variations between opening and closing dochmiacs. In lines 20, 37, 43 and 49, the line is concluded by a trochaic dipod (long-short-long-long), the metrical intention here being to suggest the motion of the swallow.

Hopkins and Shakespeare

It is a fascinating possibility that 'Itylus,' with its varied and inventive use of the dochmiac, may have been the immediate stimulus for Hopkins' 'sprung rhythm'. There would be ample scholarly support for such an influence. Overholser demon-

strates in detail[7] the origins of 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' and other poems in Hopkins' reading of Swinburne, as almost point-to-point ripostes to the latter's impassioned republican and anti-Catholic views. 'Ad Mariam' (1873), Hopkins' first Jesuit poem in English, is an explicit parody of the first chorus of *Atalanta in Calydon*, whereby a paean to Artemis is transformed into a paean to the Virgin. In 'Rosa Mystica,' Hopkins rescues the Virgin from Swinburne's 'Dolores' and restores her as the Rose of Sharon. Overholser details the many correspondences between 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' and Swinburne's contemporaneous work.

Here is how Hopkins described his reworking of the dochmiac to remove its depth dimension, transforming the Greek sprung rhythm into its establishment Christian counterpart:

> And though it is the virtue of sprung rhythm that it allows of 'dochmiac' or 'antipastic' effects or cadences, when the verse suddenly changes from a rising to a falling movement, and this too is strongly felt by the ear, yet no account is taken of it in scanning and no irregularity caused, but the scansion always treated, conventionally and for simplicity, as rising. Thus the line 'She had cóme from a crúise, tráining séamen' has a plain reversed rhythm [up in 'a cruise', down in 'training'], but the scanning is simply 'She had cóme from a crúise,/ tráin/ing séamen' that is rising throughout, having one monosyllabic foot and an overlapping syllable which is counted to the first part of the next line.[8] (qtd. in Pick 99)

However Hopkins may have wanted the syllables finally to be grouped, the dochmiac clearly appears several times to great effect in *The Wreck of the Deutschland*, in lines such as 'Wōrld's strānd,/ swāy ŏf thĕ sēa' (3), 'Wōrd lāst! Hŏw ă/ lūsh-kēpt,/ plūsh-cāpped slōe' (59), and 'Ănd frīght/fūl ă nīght/fāll fōldĕd/ rūefŭl ă dāy' (117).

7 Renée V. Overholser, '"Our king back, Oh, upon English souls!": Swinburne, Hopkins and Politics of Religion', *Religion and the Arts*, 5: 1-2 (2001), 81-107.

8 Quoted in *A Hopkins Reader*, ed. by John Pick (Oxford: OUP, 1953), p. 99.

Schneider examines the rhythmic influence of Swinburne on 'The Wreck of the Deutschland,' without, however, referring to 'Itylus'.[9] She concludes that, 'If Hopkins's new measure was in any sense ... an evolution from current versification and not either an altogether novel invention or an Anglo-Saxon revival, then this writing of Swinburne's is an important link.'[10] I would argue that the 'new measure' indeed evolved from the poetic milieu of the time, but that it is also partook of a 'revival' of a Greek form, albeit transmuted for Hopkins' purpose. Schneider identifies a defining characteristic of 'sprung' as against standard rhythm as its capacity to juxtapose two stressed syllables without a loss of force of either. This is also a characteristic of the dochmiac, and it resides in the deeply emotional content of the line which the metre supports.

Interestingly, Schneider refers to a letter from Hopkins to Robert Bridges of 1868, concerning the rhythms of some lines of Shakespeare's, which Hopkins had employed in his revisions of some early poems. This was evidently Hopkins' first excursion into new rhythmic territory. The lines in question (Shakespeare's) are 'Whý should thís désert bé?' and 'Thóu for whóm Jóve would sweár.' The last five syllables of these lines are typical dochmiacs, with shorts in positions one and four. One could extend the analysis and say that the lines *in toto* are examples of the kaibelianus, a six-syllable variant of the dochmiac which includes a short or long in position one, followed by a regular dochmiac. *Pace* Ben Jonson, the Greek influence in Shakespeare is profound, and it should not surprise if Hopkins did in fact identify therein a deliberately employed Greek rhythm.

Shakespeare, then, should be added to the melting-pot that produced in 1875-6 'The Wreck of the Deutschland'. Hopkins may or may not have been aware of Swinburne's 'Itylus'

9 Elizabeth W. Schneider, *The Dragon in the Gate: Studies in the Poetry of G. M. Hopkins* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), 48-57.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 51.

in 1868, the year of the revisions. However, it is apparent that Hopkins' shifting of the frame of the dochmiac in 'The Wreck of the Deutschland,' so that its *raison d'être* became not the dive but the return to the surface, in an entirely Christian way, was a rhythmic expression of his ideological opposition to the republicanism and pre-Christian idolatry he found in Swinburne. Perhaps then not the original – this may have been Shakespeare – but the immediate inspiration for his new rhythm was the intensely dochmial 'Itylus'.

Spasmodic poetry and the dochmiac

The dochmiac embodies in itself the key ideals of the Spasmodic school of poetry; and, in so far as Swinburne's book Poems and Ballads (1866) was influenced by the Spasmodic school, as Kirstie Blair (2006) has argued,[11] 'Itylus' might stand as an example of this concordance. The Spasmodic school of poetry flourished for about a decade from the late 1840s, and included poets such as George Gilfillan, Sydney Dobell, Philip Bailey, Alexander Smith and others. It often took the form of a verse drama in which the protagonist was a poet, which was characterised by passages of intense, inward-looking emotion intermitting the more measured verse with which the age was familiar.

I have noted the dochmiac's association with depth of emotion at a sub-rational level; its feminine character; and its feel of a heartbeat. All of these are also characteristics of the rhythms of Spasmodic poetry, which has through them, and the emotional content they intensify, the power to get 'under your skin'.[12] Blair observes that:

> Jerky muscular movements or nervous twitches, erratic heartbeats, quickened breathing, and so forth were all features of so-called spasmodic disease. These unwilled responses were often associated with particularly feminine illnesses, as the lack of agency involved seemed to suggest a lack of male determination and power; hence spasmodic writers were often troped as effeminate or ... in some sense bisexual.[13]

Jason Rudy quotes Sydney Dobell that, 'whatever is to live on paper must have lived in flesh and blood'.[14] Dobell emphasised in particular the heart, the systole and diastole of which may be a metaphor for life itself. This cardial aspect of Spasmodism hearkens back to troubadour poetry, and the profoundly universalising spirit of Sufism which informed it.

There is plausibly a causal relationship between the rise of Spasmodic poetry in the 1840s and 1850s and the dominance of the 'serene and classical' Greek at this time: the incarnation of Apollo himself, incarnate in the measured and rational rhythms of Aeschylus' noble speeches, even as the unruly citizens – most often women – are quarantined with their irregular emotions and rhythms in the lyric odes. The infiltration of the dochmiac into a speech of, say, Agamemnon, would have been as unthinkable to Aeschylus as Spasmodic poetry was to a certain class of readers at that time, of whose kind Rudy observes, 'Many critics simply did not know how to read rhythmically irregular poetry, and they did not trust, or want to trust, their intuition.'[15]

The Spasmodic school, and the Swinburne of *Poems and Ballads*, may be read as prosecuting a mission to heal the schism inherent in the Aeschylean drama, and by extension in contemporary society, between noble and commoner; between, if you like, ego and non-ego, male and female, reason and emotion, day and night, body and soul. Blair concludes that:

> For the spasmodic poets, the concentration on physical motions shared

11 Kirstie Blair, 'Swinburne's spasms: *Poems and Ballads* and the "Spasmodic School"', *Yearbook of English Studies,* 36. 2 (2006), 180-196.
12 Kathy Psomiades, *Beauty's Body: Feminitiy and Representation in British Aestheticism* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997), p. 76.
13 Blair, p. 5.
14 Jason Rudy, 'Rhythmic Intimacy, Spasmodic Epistemology', *Victorian Poetry* 42:4 (2004), 451-472 (p. 452).
15 *Ibid.*, p. 451-2.

> by poet and reader in both form and content can be read as profoundly democratizing, suggesting a universal humanity linked by sympathetic affect, equality on the level of bodily responses.[16]

Christopher Brennan captured in poem 5 of Poems 1913 the existential solitariness of the Apollinist as he had been in his youth:

> Where star-cold and dread of space
> in icy silence bind the main,
> I feel but vastness on my face,
> I sit, a mere incurious brain,
> under some outcast satellite,
> some Thule of the universe,
> upon the utter verge of night,
> frozen by some forgotten curse.

—And elsewhere (poem 66) the sense of unity he felt at the conclusion of his quest for the wisdom of Lilith, which had been motivated by the emotional crisis of his Apollinism:

> Ay, surely near—the hour consents to bless!—
> and nearer yet, all ways of night converge
> in that delicious dark between her breasts
> whom night and bloom and wayward blood confess,
> where all the world's desire is wild to merge
> its multitude of single, suffering nests.

'Shudder' is a key word of Spasmodism, and Brennan's use of it in one his most powerful dochmial lines (*The Wanderer*, poem 95) illustrates the aptness of this metron to express

16 Blair, p. 9.

the Spasmodic sensibility: 'ăs hĕ fōllōws/ thĕ rīdge ăbōve/ thĕ wātērs/ shūddēr/īng tŏwārds nīght' (where the third syllable of 'shuddering' and the first of 'towards' are the two shorts of a resolved long in position three).

A key trait of modernism is its willingness to put the ego, with its fixed mental models, to the question, to shatter and rebuild it if necessary, in a perhaps painful but finally profoundly humanising process, by testing it against the reality of the non-ego. Dobell argued for a similar process in the rhythms of Spasmodic poetry, as Rudy describes: 'the body experiences the "lower data" of poetic rhythm as a physical force, which is converted by the brain into "higher data," thoughts and ideas'.[17] Spasmodic poetry, Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads*, and also the poetry of Symons and Brennan, with their integration of the dochmiac into the activity of the reasoning ego, in this way may all be considered to have anticipated modernism, of which there was no more insightful spokesperson than A. N. Whitehead:

> I hold that philosophy is the criticism of abstractions. Its function is the double one, first of harmonising them by assigning to them their right relative status as abstractions, and secondly of completing them by direct comparison with more concrete intuitions of the universe ... It is in respect to this comparison that the testimony of the great poets is of such importance.[18]

Spasmodic poetry, with its habitual expression of emotional states in the language of abstraction, was a living example of this ideal process of Whitehead's in action.

Arthur Symons and Christopher Brennan

In the poetry of Arthur Symons and Christopher Brennan,

17 Rudy, p. 456.

18 A. N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York: The Free Press, 1967), p. 87.

who wrote at their peak during the decades of transition from the nineteenth century to modernism, the dochmiac became a tool for the ennobling of the Self (in Jungian terms, ego + non-ego). Jung and Freud, Thomas Mann and Hermann Hesse, and James Joyce, are renowned as pioneers of modernism in its treatment of the non-ego as an entity worthy of respect and study; but I would argue that Symons and Brennan, writing in the 1890s and 1900s, anticipated them.

The story of Arthur Symons's catalytic role in the genesis of modernism is well enough known.[19] As a poet and critic, and editor of the short-lived but highly influential journal the *Savoy* (1896), Symons inspired and helped many rising artists, including Yeats, Joyce, Pound, and T. S. Eliot. Yeats considered him to be 'the best critic of his generation'.[20] His *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, which Eliot thought was a 'revelation',[21] remains even now a key sourcebook in this field. Poems, plays, reviews and criticism poured from his pen over two decades. However, while travelling in Italy in 1908 he suffered a severe breakdown from which he evidently never fully recovered: 'After that year, he was a wreck of a man, isolated from the mainstream of the literary world, struggling to resume a shattered career, and fearful of recurring madness'.[22] He would write and publish a great deal more until his death in 1945, but never to the same standard or with the same impact as before. Symons's psychology seems to have been closely akin to that of the Australian poet Christopher Brennan (1871-1932), whose work he deeply influenced; and I would argue that the expression of their psychologies in their poetry represented a crystallisation of the sense of the dignity and worth of

19 Especially by way of Karl Beckson's biography: *Arthur Symons: A Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), which presents a far more complete picture than its only predecessor: Roger Lhombreaud, *Arthur Symons: A Critical Biography* (London: Macmillian, 1963).

20 Quoted in Beckson, p. 1.

21 Beckson, p. 2.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

the self in its wholeness that marked it as a bridge between the old century and modernism.

Stéphane Mallarmé's confidence to Brennan that '*il y a entre vous et moi une parentée de songe*',[23] and Brennan's notable contribution to the poetry of the period (the bulk of it was written by 1902), should have been enough to make him a figure of interest outside of the country of his birth. However, despite the efforts of such international scholars as Robert Arnaud,[24] Simone Kadi,[25] and Frank Kermode,[26] the sands of time and distance, as well as the undoubted obscurity of much of his work, have continued to restrict his appeal for the most part to a coterie of his countrymen and women.

Brennan's long (224 lines) poem *The Wanderer*, the third movement of his magnum opus *Poems 1913*, shows most deeply and extensively of all his oeuvre the influence of Symons. Brennan's former protégé Randolph Hughes proposed in his memoir, published two years after Brennan's death, that *The Wanderer* may be written in a metre of Aeschylus, arguably the greatest dramatist of the Classical era.[27] I have shown that this is indeed the case; and further, that this was an expression of a dramatic change in Brennan's inner life, when he returned to the Classical enthusiasms which he had abjured, driven by the imperative to restore his psyche to health, from 1894 to

23 See John Foulkes, 'Mallarmé and Brennan: Unpublished letters and documents from the Moran Collection in St John's College Cambridge', *French Studies* 32.1 (1978), 34-5.

24 Arnaud, a native of France, taught French in the twenties at Sydney University, where Brennan held an academic post from 1908 to 1925. See Robert Arnaud, 'Christopher Brennan, 1871-1932', trans. Joanne Wilkes, *Southerly* 40.1 (1980), 102-8. First appeared in the December 1934 number of the *Revue Anglo-Americaine*.

25 Simone Kadi, *Christopher Brennan, poète* (doctoral thesis, Université de Nanterre, 1994).

26 'Brennan will claim a distinguished place among poets writing in English between 1890 and the first world war.' *The Vital Decade*, ed. by Geoffrey Dutton and Max Harris (Melbourne: Sun Books, 1968), p. 14.

27 Randolphe Hughes, *C. J. Brennan: An Essay in Values* (Sydney: P. R. Stephenson & Co., 1934), p. 148.

approximately the turn of the century, in his quest, with the Gnostics, Blake, Mallarmé and others as mentors, for a more complete view of reality than the Classical tradition could offer.

Brennan found that the tone of his prospective poem, with its passionate yearning for re-engagement with the earth, with which he had lost contact in the transcendental flights of his Gnostic period, found its correspondence in some existing poems of Symons, with their intensity of longing for a lost love. And, further, he found in several of them the use of a lyric metre of Aeschylus, in which the dochmiac, a metrical unit the purpose of which is to convey passion or pain or joy or some other form of emotional intensity, is a prominent element.

Brennan would make extensive use of the dochmiac in *The Wanderer*, 122 of the 224 lines of which include at least one. Its rhythm is then primarily dochmial, and it is essentially a passionate song. I would argue that the employment in Symons and Brennan of the dochmiac, in support of deeply emotional content which it supports and intensifies, is an expression of the liberation of the Self (according to Jung's formula Self = ego + non-ego, where 'non-ego' includes the unconscious) which was a feature, albeit expressed somewhat chaotically, of the fin-de-siècle. Jung wrote: 'For the Self alone embraces the ego and the non-ego, the infernal regions, the viscera, the *imagines et lares* [figures of ancestors and deities], and the heavens'.[28] The 'infernal regions', particularly their contents of the will-to-eros, was clearly a problematic aspect of the psyches of both men; and the purpose of their use of the dochmiac in a longer, more regular and measured albeit still lyrical line, was plausibly to ennoble the Self in its wholeness as a subject worthy of respect, in a way that anticipated the Western school of depth psychology. In Symons's case this would seem to have had a primarily therapeutic purpose; whereas in Brennan's it was to celebrate a liberation that had already largely been achieved, although

28 C. J. Jung, Collected Works, 20 vols (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1966), 15, p. 125.

one suspects as well an element of prophylaxis against any future problems. W. B. Yeats wrote, in his memoir of the 'tragic generation' of the 1890s: 'Why should men ... live lives of such disorder and seek to rediscover in verse the syntax of impulsive common life?'.[29] The dochmial rhythm conveys par excellence this 'impulsive common life'; but I would propose that Symons's and Brennan's employment of it was not in the spirit of Decadence, but rather of modernism in its best constructive and integrative sense.

The Victorian Classical Background

The Victorians' conception of the Greeks had by the 1890s well and truly changed from that which had prevailed in the first half of the century. High-minded perfectionism had fallen to earth to acquire feet of clay; and both Symons and Brennan evidently felt the impact of its landing. This was an atmosphere conducive to the liberation of the dochmiac and the genuinely human emotion it conveys. Gilbert Murray wrote:

> The 'serene and classical' Greek of Winckelman and Goethe did good service to the world in his day, though we now feel him mainly to be a phantom. He has been succeeded, especially in the works of painters and poets, by an aesthetic and fleshly Greek in fine raiment, an abstract Pagan who lives to be contrasted with an equally abstract early Christian or Puritan, and to be glorified or mishandled according to the sentiments of his critic.[30]

There was now a greater tendency to focus on the late Classical period – its own Decadence – as Richard Jenkyns observes:

> An interest in 'decadent' writers may be simply literary: that respectable Scotsman J. W. Mackail ... was fascinated by the strange literature

29 W. B. Yeats, *The Autobiography of W. B. Yeats* (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1958), p. 202.

30 Gilbert Murray, *A History of Ancient Greek Literature* (New York: Appleton, 1897), p. xiv.

> of declining Rome; this was a natural reaction against the taste of the mid-century, which had fed so exclusively on so rich a diet: Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Thucidydes. It was a relief to come down from the heights for a while and breathe the more relaxing atmosphere of the valleys.[31]

We may interpret the choric dochmial rhythm as used by Symons and Brennan as an aspect of the 'more relaxing atmosphere of the valleys', where the value of chthonic female nature is acknowledged and even exalted, and one is more free simply to be one's self.

Jenkyns also describes the great popularity amongst the late Victorians of the myth of Pygmalion and Galatea, wherein the statue famously comes alive under the sculptor's hands.[32] I would argue that this is finally also an expression of the same principle of the liberation of the non-ego, and so the Self, from the strictures of Apollo. Just so does a young woman often accompany the Wise Old Man in myth and legend, Simon Magus' Helena being a fine example. There is further quote from Jung's *Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious* of great relevance here:

> The anima is conservative and clings in the most exasperating fashion to the ways of earlier humanity. She likes to appear in historic dress, with a predilection for Greece and Egypt … The Renaissance dream known as the Hypnerotomachia of Poliphilo, and Goethe's Faust, likewise reach deep into antiquity in order to find 'le vrai mot' for the situation.[33]

That is, Symons's and Brennan's plunge into the past to retrieve a metre for their poems of yearning may be characterised as per se, in the broadest terms, an anima quest; albeit the Greeks were by no means uniformly sympathetic to the female principle, as we have seen.

31 Richard Jenkins, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), p. 295.
32 *Ibid.*, pp. 141-6.
33 Jung, *Works* 9.1, p. 28.

An example of Symons's influence on Brennan

Here is an example of Symons's metrical-thematic influence on Brennan, with 'An Ending' from *Images of Good and Evil* first, and then the second of the fourteen poems (poem 87 of *Poems 1913*) of *The Wanderer*:

I will go my ways from the city and then, maybe,
My heart shall forget one woman's voice, and her lips;
I will arise, and set my face to the sea,
Among stranger-folk and in the wandering ships.
The world is great, and the bounds of it who shall set?
It may be I shall find, somewhere in the world I shall find,
A land that my feet may abide in; then I shall forget
The woman I loved, and the years that are left behind.
But, if the ends of the world are not wide enough
To out-weary my heart, and to find for my heart some fold,
I will go back to the city, and her I love,
And look on her face, and remember the days of old.
Each day I see the long ships coming into port
and the people crowding to their rail, glad of the shore:
because to have been alone with the sea, and not have known
of anything happening in any crowded way,
and to have heard no other voice but the crooning sea's
has charmed away the old rancours, and the great winds
have search'd and swept their hearts of the old irksome thoughts:
so, to their freshen'd gaze, each land smiles a good home.
Why envy I, seeing them made so gay to greet the shore?
Surely I do not foolishly desire to go
hither and thither upon the earth, and grow weary

with seeing many lands and peoples and the sea:
but if I might, some day, landing I reck not where,
have heart to find a welcome and perchance a rest,
I would spread the sail to any wandering wind of the air
this night, when waves are hard and rain blots out the land.

Here we see how Brennan has taken the theme of the lost love, the wandering to forget her, and the return; albeit it is the earth that bears, for him, the burden of femaleness. And both of these poems scan in the Aeschylean way.

Ĕach dāy Ĭ sēe/ thĕ lōng shĭps cōm/ĭng ĭntŏ pōrt
ānd thĕ pēoplĕ/ crōwdĭng tō thĕir/ rāil, glād/ ōf thĕ shōre.

We have examined the scansion of the second of these lines, with its closing dochmiac, above. The remainder of the poem also scans in the Greek lyric way, with three more instances of the dochmiac (lines 13,14,15 above) and three of the hypodochmius, a variant of it (lines 3, 4, 9).

I propose that Symons 'An Ending' is also in the Aeschylean metre. Here, for example, is the second verse:

Thĕ wōrld ĭs grēat,/ ănd thĕ bōunds ŏf/ ĭt whō shăll sēt?
Ĭt māy bĕ Ī/ shăll fĭnd, sōme/whēre ĭn thĕ/ wōrld Ĭ shăll fĭnd,
Ă/ lānd thăt mў fēet/ măy ăbīde īn;/ thĕn Ī/ shāll fŏrgēt
Thĕ wōmān/ Ĭ lōved, ănd thĕ/ yēars thăt ăre/ lēft bĕhīnd.

The scansion being:

[iambic—minor ionic—iambic
iambic—bacchius—dochmiac
anacrusis—choriamb—minor ionic—dochmiac
bacchius—bacchius—dochmiac]

The other metrical units ('metra') named here are staples of Greek lyric metre.[34] In the dochmiac in line 2, the short in position one has been subject to drag, the long in position two has been resolved, and the short in position four has been subject to drag and then resolution. The dochmiac in line 3 is of the standard form. In the dochmiac in line 4, the short in position one has been subject to drag, while the long in position two has been resolved.

How can we be confident of this scenario? Such a scheme must be both externally and internally consistent with the known facts. Symons had studied Greek and Latin during his three years at The High Street Classical and Mathematical School, conducted by Mr. W. J. Jeffrey in Bideford. 'An Ending' was clearly an inspiration for Brennan in terms of its content and imagery, so it would not be surprising if it were a model in its scansion as well. Internally, Symons's 'Wanderer's Song' and 'Wind on the Sea' (both from *Images of Good and Evil*) display explicitly the technique, a staple of Greek tragedy, of choric responsion; and implicitly, so I would argue, a Greek lyric scansion. One might also note that a line may often have too many syllables for the comfort of Anglophone iambic verse; that the lines are expressive of intensity of emotion, for the support of which the dochmiac was specifically intended; and that the lines read, in the suggested scansion, in an indefectibly smooth and eurhythmic way.

Symons and Brennan differed in the acuteness of their insights into their own conditions. A possible (by no means the principal) reason for this may be the difference in their educations, with Symons leaving school immediately to immerse himself in London literary life, and Brennan in contrast gaining a Master of Arts in philosophy with the university medal from Sydney University, and then a travelling scholarship to Berlin. A university education is no guarantee of self-knowledge, but

34 Further information is available in, for example, D. S. Raven, *Greek Metre* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1998).

it can give you time and space to grow, if you're inclined to. Symons memorably wrote of his life that it had been 'an existence, indeed, so inexplicable even to myself, that I cannot fathom it'.[35]

Brennan on the other hand was able to write in 1897, midway through the term of his quest for the Lilith wisdom, and five years before the composition of *The Wanderer*, in a poem he was to place as the penultimate (poem 104) in *Poems 1913*:

> The gift of self is self's most sacred right:
>
> only where none hath trod,
>
> only upon my secret starry height
>
> I abdicate to God.

And in an address given to the Sydney University Philosophical Society in 1903, he said:

> Man the wanderer is on the way to himself. If on the one hand we go on shaping the world to harmony with our thought and permeating every corner of it with humanity and meaning, we are, on the other, no less busy with ourselves. That vast region of the unconscious or subconscious must also be in process of becoming conscious: the very fact that we can now take cognizance of it and to some extent explore it is proof and earnest thereof. A goal lies before us then—the state wherein man shall have taken up into himself that is outside him, and the whole world that is within: being intellectually above error, morally above the need for morality, and free from all discord: a state consequently of competed harmony.[36]

For all the differences in their responses to it, the Self in its wholeness, escaping from its icy Apollonian prison, budded forth in the poetry of both Symons and Brennan in the form of the dochmial rhythm, and the deeply emotional content which

35 Beckson, p. 332.

36 *The Prose of Christopher Brennan*, eds. A. R. Chisholm and J. J. Quinn (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1962), pp. 45-6.

it supported and vivified. The Self did not appear therein as a weed to be spurned and downtrodden as in the high Hellenic culture, or left to run amok as in the Decadence, but as a feature in itself, in an extensive yet bordered show. It only abided now Joyce, Thomas Mann, Jung and their kin, for the apotheosis of this particular flower of evil to be complete.

I am not aware of the dochmiac being present in any post-World War I poetry—although I have not particularly searched for it. It may be that the opportunities for it have declined along with the use of form in poetry. Perhaps the unqualified liberation of the Self in modernism, which the dithyrambic passages in Spasmodic poetry may have anticipated, has rendered it superfluous. Yet traditional verse forms have never wholly disappeared, and there are enough poets employing them to make a fertile ground for the dochmiac, if only they were aware of it. The aim should be, as ever, to develop Nietzsche's ideal of the 'music-making Socrates.'

Bev Braune

Born in Kingston, Jamaica, Bev Braune studied at the University of the West Indies, Mona, before moving to Australia in 1983. Her poetry collection *Camouflage* was published by Bloodaxe in 1998. She has read her work as an invitee to the Jamaica Festival and the sixth annual conference of the European Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies in Germany, and as a guest of the Queensland Poetry Festival, the Brisbane Writers Festival and the Melbourne Festival of Poetry.

Part 1 (Books I—VII) of her epic poem 'Skulváði Úlfr' was written as the creative component of her research at Wollongong University. Portions of it have been published in literary magazines such as *Salt*, *Four-W*, *Writing Ulster*, *Sulfur*, *Cordite*, *Boxkite*, *Chain*, *The Manhattan Review*, and on the cover of *Antipodes*.

Dr Braune's contribution to New Trad, 'Oþýla's Lays', forms Book III of 'Skulváði Úlfr'.

Measures of Skáldic Poetry: What Does Metre Mean?

I found myself drawn to Norse-Icelandic poetry by the ways into it as a modern writer in English, through controversies surrounding gaps in the history of skaldic poetry, its criticism and translations into English, as much as by the innate complexity of the poetic form in its extant verses, best known for their use of kennings or periphrases. The area of measuring what can be agreed upon regarding structure and meaning in skaldic poetry is a contentious one, best summed up by Roberta Frank: 'Skaldicists today are relatively skeptical about their chances of getting anything right'; 'we find ourselves in a condition of intellectual instability, unable to make valid distinctions between acceptable and unacceptable interpretations, still less to define the kenning or date the verse'.[1]

Norse-Icelandic poetry is placed as having originated in Western Scandinavia, Iceland or Greenland. Scholars of Old Norse literature concur that the often highly structured poems written in *dróttkvætt* or court metre, but not the loosely structured ones that pre-date those, the Eddic (or eddaic) poems, are attributable to named poets.[2] The reason for this may be tied to the dating of the manuscripts and the lack of the evidence of the original writings. All of the extant Eddic poetry manuscripts identified as 'mythological' are written in the third-person voice. However, Eddic poems written after Christian conversion in Viking Scandinavia, such as *Sólarljóð* (Songs of the Sun), now only preserved in seventeenth-century

1 Roberta Frank, 'Skaldic Poetry', in *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*, ed. by Carol J. Clover and John Lindow (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985), 157-96 (pp. 157-8).

2 Jónas Kristjánsson, *Eddas and Sagas, Iceland's Medieval Literature*, trans. by Peter Foote (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1988), p. 29.

manuscripts, used a combination not only of metres but of voices. It is generally agreed that Eddic poetry originated in Norway and is mostly preserved in Iceland; but the nature of those origins remain obscure, confounding attempts to classify the body of work called the *Elder* or *Poetic Edda*. What evidence there is, from both Sweden and Denmark, of 'ancient alliterative poetry,' Peter Hallberg notes, 'is known only from runic inscriptions.'[3]

The discourse concerning critical approaches to the literary texts, their technique, language, historical and mythological references highlights the problems of fixing the poetry to points of reference such as place, time and author, and purpose of the work. Ursula Dronke focuses on the role of mythology and religion in order to place the poems of the *Elder Edda*, offering insightful ideas provided by a study of Eddic poetry as a source for the history of Germanic religion.[4] John Lindow, for instance, raises the interesting point that 'if the skald's narratives are not religious, neither is their use of mythological kennings, despite the curious, almost symbiotic relationship between kennings and myth'.[5] Meanwhile, Margaret Clunies-Ross proposes a cross-disciplinary approach where she would compare 'individual notations in individual works… with other notations and relating these literary levels of expression to what the historians and anthropologists can tell us of the society as a whole'.[6] With regard to the third quarter of *Rag-*

3 Peter Hallberg, *Old Icelandic Poetry—Eddic Lay and Skaldic Verse,* trans. by Paul Schach and Sonja Lindgrenson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975), p. 15.

4 Ursula Dronke, *Myth and fiction in early Norse lands* (Brookfield: Variorum, 1996).

5 John Lindow, 'Mythology and Mythography', in *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature*, ed. by Clover and Lindow.

6 Margaret Clunies Ross, 'Medieval Norse Mythological Texts and Modern Readers', in *Treasures of the Elder Tongue, Fifty Years of Old Norse in Melbourne—The Proceedings of the Symposium to Celebrate the Golden Jubilee of Old Norse at the University of Melbourne 14th May 1994*, ed. by Katrina Burge, gen. ed. John Stanley Martin (Melbourne: University of Melbourne, 1995), p. 19.

narsdrápa (Elegy to Ragnar [Lóðbrók]) for example, Turville-Petre acknowledges that 'no satisfactory interpretation of the first half-strophe has been given, and this one is no more than a series of guesses'—his aim, to discover the 'subject' of each set of images conveyed.[7] *Ragnarsdrápa* exists in fragments in Snorri's *Edda*. The four narratives of trickery and revenge given in *Ragnarsdrápa* are about Gefiun and Swedish king Gylfi, Þórr and the giant Hymir, the death of Queen Gudrun's sons (Hamðir and Sorli), and the battle of the Hiaðnings. The order of the stanzas as we now have them are attributed to Gísli Brynjólfsson (1860). The story of Þórr and Hymir is also found in work by tenth-century poets Úlf Uggason (*Húsdrápa*) and Gamli's and Eysteinn Valdason's poems, and eleventh-century *Hymiskviða*, parts of which are in the *Elder Edda* and in Snorri's *Edda*.

At the heart of questions of provenance, translation and interpretation lies the uniqueness of the metres. Skáldic poetry is not only accentual but also syllabic – the syllabic form being the distinguishing feature of Viking alliterative poetry over Celtic, Anglo-Saxon and Germanic alliterative poetry. The accentual-syllabic form is in fact the source of its complexity, and consequent difficulty in interpretation, even when we know what individual words and phrases mean. The identification of style can be crucial to interpreting the content and meaning of whole stanzas. Viking alliteration may include vowel-sounds or internal sounds. Snorri said it better: verse-form is defined by 'distinction of meaning and distinction of sound', 'all meaning is distinguished by spelling, but sound is distinguished by having syllables long or short, hard or soft, and there is a rule of distinctions of sound that we call rhymes' [syllabic alliteration].[8]

7 E. O. G. Turville-Petre, *Scaldic Poetry* (London: Oxford UP-Clarendon, 1976), pp. 2-3.

8 Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, trans. Anthony Faulkes (London: Dent, 1987), p. 165.

Composing 'Skulváði Úlfr'

In my writing of accentual stress and syllabic poetry in Modern English, I found it best to think of patterns of sound and, of the objects sounds describe, as groups of syllables, with a systematic use of alliteration, variations of stresses, and quick and slow or short and long syllables. The means and meaning of the sum of the work lie in the ability of the composer to capture the tone of measure. Writing as a skáld (I imagine) means not so much writing according to a generational style, as occurs in modern poetry; it means writing according to one's individual style, according to one's vision of the pictures of one's generations (these extending as near or as far as one wishes and in any direction).

What brought me to the question of meaning and metre did not begin as a linguistic exercise. When I began putting the epic to paper seriously in 1996, it developed not from characterization, a language for a speaking part (though the Books' authors developed along these lines, that is, as speaking parts). It began, as it were, as a found voice. As such, the histories and legends of 'Skulváði Úlfr' have their basis in the hypodiegetic text *The Books of Gíld-rac Manuscript* and require the reader to imagine that that *Manuscript* came into the possession of Gwen Terrane (the fictional sixteenth-century translator, a character in the framing narrative) as a gift from Sir Walter Raleigh, after he seized the (fictional) Spanish galleon *El Duende* south-west of Portugal in 1582 and took prisoner a priest known only as 'Almordozar'. The reader is encouraged to follow the fiction and believe that Almordozar claimed to be from the Spanish colony of Jamaigua of the Antilhas del Rey de Castella or New Spain, shown on the Cantino World Map (1502). Its ancient inhabitants, recently re-written as 'Tainos' and not 'Arawaks', called the island Ximayaca.[9] It was Almordozar's plea for his life on

9 Ken Jones, 'No Arawak lived here', *The Gleaner Online*, 10 March 1997, Internet, Info Exchange, 9 April 1998.

the ransom of the Manuscript which brought the document to the English captain's attention. What was not (supposedly) lost in the fray at sea during the seizure of *El Duende* has been restored here in English translation by Gwen Terrane who added to the lengthy Manuscript subtitles and annotations. The framing narrator, fictional publisher Rinaldi Da Giacomo (through whose voice readers learn of the background to the history and geography of the *Manuscript*), credits Gwen Terrane with giving the epic its title: 'Skulváði Úlfr: The Epic Poem of The History of the Kingdom of Kerrigarðr' based on the name of the last and most formidable rule of the kingdom, Skulváði Úlfr. Part 1 relates the multi-authored histories between the eleventh and fifteen centuries, part 2 draws on legends of Skulváði Úlfr based on those and other supposedly unknown histories, and part 3 investigates her legacy.

To understand the role of that construct in conjunction with the importance of skáldic poetry's composition on *sound*, it is best to bear in mind always that alliteration in skáldic poetry is made up of repetitions of syllable-emphases—first syllable, middle-of-the-line syllable, and varying end-of-the-line syllable—and, of these latter, falling, extended, echoing or full repeated rhymes or 'alliterations'. If anything is striking about Viking Age use of sound, it is that it invites a sense of song and chant; I would add 'whispers,' if not singing. Kari Ellen Gade disagrees in regard to the later stages of the form, arguing that 'phonetic realization' and metre suggest that skáldic poetry was neither chanted nor sung.[10] Perhaps, the often anatural syntax created by adherence to a specific pattern encouraged performers to make extra effort to pronounce, as in the case of the early twentieth-century Icelandic *Kvæamaur* or Sound-pronouncer, and produced the sound of chanting or a halting reading style at least. Whatever outer garment for the structure of lines is used, certain fundamental levels of terrain, as it were, oper-

10 Kari Ellen Gade, *The Structure of Old Norse 'Dróttkvætt' Poetry* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1995).

ate in all stages of skáldic poetry. Although end-rhyme, internal rhyme, full- and half-rhymes are a distinctive feature, they may appear on rare instances in the early (Eddic) poems; the regularity of the use of these rhymes less so, though, in the earliest examples. There seems to be no historical reason for this; simply that it appears to be the case. Like contemporary poets, skálds had improvisations that may have resembled poetry-slams where poets made greater and greater effort to outdo each other, creating more complicated memorable schemes. If rhyming helped the oral dissemination of the poetry and if we accept that literacy was low among Vikings, the lack of more memory-friendly poems (assuming that rhyming would assist Viking memorising) in the early work is a puzzle; we might expect more rhyme-use in the earlier work.

Whether in embracing distinctions or ignoring them, the question 'Who is the author, who is the reader and what is the poetic form?' (or, in other words, *What does the metre mean?*) remains at the heart of the enquiry brought even more so into focus when the figure of the translator is introduced. The basic measure of tenth-century and later skálds was *dróttkvætt* (*dróttkvætt háttr*) or court metre, each stanza composed of eight six-syllabic lines. In practice, court metre is based on emphases on rhyme, changes to the number of syllables and lines, the linking of the syntax of sections of the poem, elision, repetition, and alliterative pairing in conjunction with meaning. Icelandic historian Snorri Sturluson offered over ninety variations from examples existing (or created by him) at the time he wrote his *Edda* in the thirteenth century. Their identification covers ideas of movement, rhythm-and-beat, speaker's place, 'falls,' echoes, turns, curtailments, extensions, 'abutted,' wedged or pared lines, or concluded late. They may be in couplets, two-sentenced, even sixteen-sentenced. Styles may be 'rocking', 'inlaid', 'shivering', 'stammering', 'bundled', 'ghost-rhymed', 'flowing,' 'formless' for example. They work from 'normal' to 'superlatives', even within a varied form, compounded by intertwining images that act as folded maps with their legends in

tact. And, then, only selected lines may be varied. The foundation of any stage and any style lies in maintaining stresses to support the existence of alliterating syllables that draw emphasis to themselves and are meant to be read so, even if that gives rise to an 'anatural syntax.' Generally, however, strong is present on names (including pronouns), adjectives, participles and infinitives. Secondary or weak stresses may be on verbs (in the indicative, subjunctive and imperative).

A sixteen-sentenced *dróttkvætt* (*sextánmaeltr*) from 'Skulváði Úlfr' Book IX, about a game of mánculo:

> They faced the cups. They sowed.
> They winnowed. Four cards moved.
> They tilled. Amulets danced.
> Hunter drew. The Wolf dodged.
> Less is more. More too much.
> Eyes faced north. Eyes faced south.
> Flat stones shimmied. Stacks skipped
> Still cups yawned. Stocks grew deep.

Stammering (*stamhenðr*) form from 'Skulváði Úlfr' Book XI with a varied (extended beyond six syllables) third line in the second quarter:

> 'Poems sit in—inlaid—
> inside the lacquered locks.
> Linden skis ring Ringhorn;
> ropes of sisal girth him.
> Drenched with sun, sundry
> sumptious nooks to rest in.
> Along the frames, bolts bolster
> Bobbins' heavy labour.

Monster form (*flagdháttr*) also from Book XI – second and fourth lines varied (by extending a word 'to the superlative degree' lengthening the line by one syllable to six instead of the normal five in standard court metre (*dróttkvætt*) form):

On that day trolls' masks
reddened the finest Keep,
that hooves, boots and blood
filled Kalmar's driest moat,
The Colonel faced The Queen
with his deepest of bows;
much lower, he should
kiss his most glorious horse.

Those maps are to support the sound-patterns. Each map of images according to their sounds follow specific alliterative and relational patterns often coincident with meanings (as in proverbial style, for example), implicit or explicit, as appointed by the author or speaker of the poem. While the naming of the metres may offer the closest clues to their meaning, this too is a controversial issue with regard to Eddic forms. But, to understand how that can happen, it would be best to look a little more closely first at how the identification of the forms that comprise the system of metres, at least, point to the fact that the poetry and the names of the forms are fundamentally about the distribution of *stafur* or staves – posts or props – of sound. In other words, posts of sound prop up or hold up meaning.

To sum up, the metric pattern of court metre (*dróttkvætt*) is composed in quarter-stanzas (four sets of lines in each eight-lined stanza). Each line has a fixed number of syllables (according to style, varying from about five to eight, rarely as little as three). There are always only two stresses or syllable-emphases per skáldic line (per half-line, in Eddic metres written with cæ-

sura). In each quarter of basic court metre, the first-syllable emphasis (not necessarily the first letter of the first word, in terms of spelling) must be repeated (with accent or emphasis) in that first line, and at least once in the following line to complete the quarter. The most important emphasis for the whole stanza is the opening sound of each quarter. Therefore, the foundation of the basic accentual-syllabic arrangement of court metre is the main stave (*höfuðstafr*) or first syllable emphasis in the opening line, as in these examples (translations from Snorri's Edda in square brackets are Anthony Faulkes'). In the first example, the staves comprise consonant sounds—**st**; in the second, vowel sounds—**ó**, **ey**, **e**: (staves in bold; main stave, bold underlined). The practice in translations seems to be, normally, prosaic: the challenge will be to reflect the linguistic as well as poetic language simultaneously in the future. From Snorri's *Edda*:

Stinn sár thróask **st**órum,
[Severe wounds increase greatly]

Óðarda spyr **e**k **e**yda
Egg fullhvötum s**e**ggium.
[I hear that the mighty hard edge destroys very brave men.]

Parts of 'Skulváði Úlfr' Book I, written in the hand of the foundational character, 'Dagazar,' is composed in *dróttkvætt* with some of its licence in variations. In contemporaneity of style and subject-matter, this section of poems would be historically consistent with the erotic poems of skálds such as the tenth-century Icelander, Kormák Ögmundarson, son of a Norwegian chieftain from Oslo. Like Ögmundarson's poems, these would not have been influenced by chivalry which was yet to be established in Europe, but by the elemental, the humanly particular and a belief in fate.

He'yeya's lem-gold lips
lures me to Bragi's bed.
With soft wolverine chants
as warm as winter's mead,
she claims my fired halls
with Grove-haunts dipped in dew.
Where tainted tastes once lay,
I tongue her honeyed skin.

It is in the variations of court metre and the introduction to the various rhyme or syllabic-emphasis schemes that writing in these verse-forms gets really exciting. Here is an example of a variation, below (again, staves in bold; main stave, bold underlined). In Egil's rocking (*riðent*) form, movement is from the end of the first to the second line, and third to fourth and so on, so we seem to rock from the line above to the line below (from Snorri's *Edda*):

Hverr ali **b**lódi **b**rysta
bens raudsylgium ylgi
nema svá at **g**ramr of **g**ildi
grád dag margan vargi?

In 'Skulváði Úlfr' Book XI, for example, my rocking (*riðent*) variation:

Poets and **p**layers **pl**ayed
plain songs for the boy's road.
Some preferred to b**o**w and w**ai**t,
k**ee**p vigil at the rocks.
The **D**eep-trenched **d**irge-wailers
dived into the cold seas,

bearing the **s**ongsters' **s**ongs
soaking up the storm-sea.

A praise refrain from 'Skulváði Úlfr' Book II:

'Live long stout Seiðskratti
steel-wielder of the gorge;
long live giant slinger
who saved us from the borg.
Live long supple Hero.
Now we sip gilded mead.
Sing Viglid's victory —
his Skrymir-clenchèd deed.'

Kennings and pictures

It is, however, the existence of kennings (such as the simple or literal 'Deep-trenched dirge-wailers' to complex 'Skrymir-clenchèd deed') the most distinctive form of the poetry that sets it apart from all other forms of poetry. The highly dramatic effects of Viking poems are built on these multi-tiered periphrases, on substitution poetic names and on entire series of pictures built up from nominal adjectives and the music of alliteration. In other cultures where kennings were used, such as in Celtic poetry, it has been found that complete kennings are a rarity. Substitution-word systems, names and their referents are also important to the context of the poems. Within their historical context, the poems use substitution-names (*ókennt heiti* or *ókennt nafn*), pronouns (*fornöfn*) and their subcategories (*viðrkenningar* and *sannkenningar*), and periphrases (*kenningar*). In *viðrkenningar* a person is described by a second element (another person) giving an accurate or true description of the person being identified. In a *heiti viðrkenningar*, an inanimate object is used to convey the same accuracy about a

person. *Sannkenningar* perform the same function except to heighten the descriptive qualities alluded to by drawing on emotive qualities normally using an adjectival phrase, noun or adverb to do this.

Kenningar are extended wild-cards where oppositional elements may be combined to convey true or ironic descriptions based on entire narratives/mythologies of either the things or persons being described or the object being used to describe them. The density and wild-card quality provided by the kenning seems to afford it the capacity to draw the most distant and the closest intuitive images into one *space*. *Heiti* and *fornöfn* appear to function in the same manner according to Snorri. Specialised list-poems of substitution-words or *þulur* were created in the twelfth century as a resource for poets and comprise a greater part of Snorri's *Edda*; we now have the twenty-first century equivalent meant for Norse-Icelandic language scholars in Tarrin Wills' database, 'The Skaldic Project'.[11] The kennings can be one- or up to four-layered. The *heiti* is usually a single-word substitution-name, e.g. *dís* or 'bride' to mean 'woman' (the complex and untranslatable *dís* also meaning 'woman with supernatural powers'), 'riders' to mean 'seafarers,' 'hail' to mean 'arrows;' but rarely used in Eddic poems.

These are examples of *heitir* from 'Skulváði Úlfr': Kerrigarðr is 'The Garth'; King Kerrigan Iron Hand is 'The Fearless,' Skulváði is 'The Wolf' or 'The Flame-Haired.' It is a *simple* or literal kenning to call Skulváði 'Frieda's Daughter' or 'The Varg of Hoods' and to call Kerrigan 'The Troll-Slayer.' The distinctions, 'simple,' 'double' and 'extended' kenning, are taken from Turville-Petre. He also distinguishes between half-kennings, complete and incomplete or 'abbreviated' kennings; complete kennings having 'a basic word and a determinant,' while abbreviated kennings are shortened forms, for example 'hand' or 'arm' to mean 'woman' or 'wife.' A *double* kenning is to refer to

11 'The Skaldic Project, An international project to edit the corpus of medieval Norse-Icelandic skaldic', database ed. by Tarrin Wills. https://www.abdn.ac.uk/skaldic/db.php, 7 January 2014.

the forests called The Moving Wood 'The Disirs' Howe,' and to the glassy eye of a corpse 'Hæglid's mirror' which draws the reader back into Dagazar's story in the earliest part of in the epic poem. An *extended* kenning in my poem is to refer to The Strangers Clan as 'Skuld's War Tooth,' to Skulváði as 'Kvasir's Cup of Kerrigan's Treasures' or 'Stave-Pool's Weaver' and to say that Kerrigan is 'Grimmðokk's Steed-flyer' or 'Modorr's Wave-book,' or that the lake-home of water giants is the 'Xima-shadow of Viglid's prize.' When I refer to the net of vines in which Hæglid was found strangled as 'Hæglid's Shrimp-home's Vest' the following pictures are *folded* into that name: the person Hæglid, the actions that led to his death, the history of the Sinking Lakes in which his body was found. In the story of Nadlan The Rus' in Book V, the culminating four-tiered kenning, 'Togrul Beg's Flight-bright Slayer' refers to Nadlan's defeat of Togrul Beg's guards through her talent as an archer or 'whizzer-stormer.' To substantiate this supposed historical background on her, Nadlan is also called 'Gusir's Terror' and 'Turkoman-feller' in that sequence.

If the context of *pictures* lies behind the meaning to the metre, we might find this in the earliest skáldic poems, the mythological and heroic poems held to have been inspired by the pictures on ceremonial military shields given as gifts to the skálds. I am referring to the fragments of *Ragnarsdrápa* (Elegy to Ragnar [Lóðbrók]) attributed to Bragi the Old Boddason and to Þjóðólfr Hvinir's *Haustlong* (Autumn-long). Their poems were organised into four sections, or quarters, to reflect the four painted quarters on the shields. However, neither the complete original poems of ninth-century Bragi the Old Boddason or Þjóðólfr Hvinir nor the shields to which they refer have survived (nor proof that the shields ever existed at all). If we take the examples of these two shield-poems as our earliest evidence of skáldic poetry, it may be that skáldic reading was not directly related to pictorial images but to *ways* the contours of image-sets on contoured shields encouraged the viewer to read them. Attempts to translate the skálds' shield-poems are

rife with considerations of what might be the grammatically correct way to read them. And while I include pictorial elements in the epic poem, such as that of Oþýla's illustration of Hræsvelg's first four warriors, it is always the lines of sight and of sound that rule the territory of the *Manuscript*.

The same rules hold true for the loose-seeming Eddic as for the complex later skáldic metres and subject to their own unanswered questions about origin, purpose and meaning. Kristjánsson writes: 'we know nothing about the creators of eddaic poetry, and there has been much discussion – and controversy – about when and where the poets lived…. The oldest recording we have are fragments quoted in Snorri's *Edda* from the 1220s.'[12] Hallberg argues that the use of stanzas in Scandinavian Eddic verse is influenced first by skáldic eight-line stanzas but that, ultimately, stanza structure is only secondary to Eddic forms, where the lays may vary in the number of lines in each stanza within one work such as *Atlakviða*. He also notes:

> It is not known how Eddic poetry was presented to an audience, that is, whether it was spoken or possibly sung or chanted. The poems themselves reveal scarcely any clues in that respect....[m]ost of them have been classified either as *mál* or *kviða*. The latter noun is related to the verb *kveða*, which, to be sure, may sometimes refer to some kind of song, but usually means 'to tell', 'to recite (a poem or stanza)', or simply 'to say'. It is not possible to come to a definite conclusion on the basis of this word.[13]

Eddic poems such as *Völuspá* have been considered exemplary in form as well as in terms of a style that reflects an order beyond that of its literary form – that of historical order as set out by its author through the composition of the poem. As Régis Bayer put it: 'This is tantamount to saying that the plan adopted for the composition of the poem is of fundamental importance for understanding its meaning.'[14] As well, '[t]

12 Kristjánsson, p. 83.

13 Hallberg, p. 17.

14 Régis Bayer, 'On the Composition of Völuspá', in *Edda: A collection of essays*, ed. by Robert J. Glendinning and Haraldur Bessason (Manitoba: U of Manitoba P, 1983).

he two most vexed problems of eddic scholarship have from the earliest times remained dating and the provenance of the poems,' explains Joseph Harris.[15] And some scholars continue to define Eddic poetry by listing its qualities by its characteristics that are not found in skáldic poetry and vice versa.[16] It is difficult to fix the form in which Eddic poems may have come to those who wrote them down in the thirteenth century onwards. Why transcribers of the poems added prose introductions, for instance, to most of the older heroic poems in the Codex Regius is unclear since the poems were already largely narrative in structure – or perhaps it is because of this that they lent themselves to narrative extensions. The prose may also have been part of the original work. Kristjánsson suggests that the addition of prose introductions was to account for the poems being regarded as remnants of lost verse, hence inviting the addition of continuity links, or perhaps this was due to the dissolution of the verse-form in favour of the growth of preferred prose forms at the time.

Even so, there is agreement that there are three main traditional forms of identifiable Eddic metre. The first is *fornyrðislag* or epic metre also called old story and old lore metre – the continuous story. Epic metre consists of eight half-lines stanzas composed of four to five syllables per half-line or line with *caesura*. The half-lines have been shown in publications such as Hans Kuhn's,[17] and I have written in this style; or presented as sitting above each other (as if two separate lines), as in Faulkes' translation from Snorri's *Edda*. The second main Eddic metrical

15 Joseph Harris, 'Eddic Poetry', in *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature*, ed. by Clover and Lindow, 68-156 (p. 93).

16 For example, see Turville-Petre: 'Since I cannot define scaldic poetry precisely, I must content myself with mentioning some of the characteristics which it does not share with Eddaic poetry. These characteristics are both in subject and in form.' *Scaldic Poetry* p. xvi.

17 Hans Kuhn, *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*. Kurzes Wörterbuch (Heidelberg: Winter, Vol I. 1962; Vol II, 1968)

style is *malaháttr* or speech metre, with a first-person narrator (used by Dagazar in the opening lines of Book I 'Skulváði Úlfr'), a type that Heinz Klingenberg might categorise as 'didactic'.[18] The third is *ljoðaháttr* or song metre also called magic or chant metre – the non-epic style. Song metre normally has two symmetrical half-lines of epic metre; each half-line followed by two full-lines; full-lines being those without *cæsura* and without any definite accentual or syllabic structure. It is also found with one full-line following the first or the last set of half-lines. There are other forms explored in the epic poem, in conjunction with epic metre, such as, *tæglag* or *tægdrápulag* (used in Book II) for the very reason that it is a type which is called into question regarding categorisation by form and meaning. Even its title is regarded by Turville-Petre as 'a name of uncertain form and meaning' and its earliest dating and provenance remain in question, demonstrated by his illustration of the form showing that it seems to have little to do with 'journeying' at least in a literal sense.[19] It is described in Snorri's *Edda* as 'journey-poem metre'.[20] Perhaps *tægdrápulag* refers to 'journeying in the mind' as conjured up by the speaker of the lines as an invitation for listeners to journey with the speaker.

Flowing form (*hryniandi*) court metre style and Eddic song metre are the forms I use most in my epic poem; song metre, described by Turville-Petre as 'the most irregular of Norse measures,' where 'nothing comparable to this is known from other Germanic poetry, and its origins are altogether obscure.' It may be varied by the addition of a repetitive full line to create *galðralag* or incantation metre. It may also be varied by the inclusion of a 'long' form (praise poems to honour someone) and 'short' forms the *flokkr* regarded by R. I. Page[21] as one of

18 Heinz Klingenberg, 'Types of Eddic Mythological Poetry' in *Edda: A Collection of Essays*, ed. Robert J. Glendinning and Haraldur Bessason (Manitoba: U of Manitoba P, 1983), 134-64.

19 Turville-Petre, pp. xxxv-xxxvi.

20 Snorri, pp. 205-207.

21 R. I. Page, *Chronicles of the Vikings: Records, Memorials and Myths* (London: British Museum, 1995), p 162.

a style of plain-speaking poems (*Bersøglisvísur*) telling a simple chronological story, another among the use of ornate rhymes to distinguish authorial styles including short fragments, shorter refrains such as honour verses without refrain (*rímurflokkra*), plain-speaking poems and those preceded by the poet's own words (*mansöngur*) when reciting someone else's work. In identifying *ljoðaháttr*, the common ground seems to be that we refer to it as 'song metre' or 'magic metre.' However, Hallberg called *ljoðaháttr* 'song' or 'chant' metre, while he classifies *galðralag* as 'magic song' from *galðr* meaning 'sorcery,' 'magic formula.' Faulkes translated Snorri Sturluson's reference as 'incantation metre.' I refer to *ljoðaháttr* as song metre and *galðralag* as incantation metre, although I find that I fall into similar difficulty with classification where 'song metre' and 'incantation metre' overlap in my long poem. It is clear, however, that certain characters usually interrupt in incantation metre. A song metre example from Book IV of 'Skulváði Úlfr':

Amidst angry shouts and pounding boots
Skulváði shielded her voice
so that only Kerrigan would hear her:
'Another king would wring his hands
or punish those who crossed his rule.
You must give them gifts to stiffen the pain
to break the tide of wound-counting.'

Devising metre

Given the extraordinary balance that seems struck between form and variation in skáldic poetry, I tried my hand at varying existing forms to develop three new forms in 'Skulváði Úlfr': *Kerrigan's reminder, Týr-ring song metre* and *treasure metre*.

Kerrigan's reminder bears resemblance to a skáldic metre called *greppaminni* (poets' reminder) where interrogatives normally fall in the latter half of the stanza, sometimes only as rhetorical phrases, in contrast to that used in *greppaminni* (from Snorri's *Edda*; English translation below, Faulkes'):

Hverr fremr hildi barra?
Hverr er mælingum ferri?
Hverr gerir höpp at stærri?
Hverr kann aud at thverra?
Veldr hertogi hialdri,
hann er first blikurmanni,
hann á höpp at sýnni,
han vélir blik spannar.

Who wages harsh war? Who is far from niggardly? Who achieves greater success? Who knows how to diminish wealth [be generous with gold]? The duke brings about war, he is furthest from being a miser, he has clearer success, he cheats the light of the palm [gives away gold].

Kerrigan's reminder uses longer sentences at the beginning of each stanza and shorter ones to conclude it. This 'reversal' of the traditional *greppaminni* emphasises the difficulty posed by the questioning, giving more weight, as it were, to the complexity of his questions. From Book V of 'Skulváði Úlfr':

Of a king stalled on strident kingdoms,
victory wearied and burdened with crowns,
what do you say Dragonþing Stone?
Why do your sígils stand exalted before my pall?

Týring-song is an unusual and specialised form related to the Song of Grótti (*Gróttasöngr*), an ancient lay telling a story with the theme of poetic justice with far-reaching natural consequences. *Týring-song* is developed from *kviðuháttr* (story

metre, believed to be a skáldic style developed from the Eddic form *fornyðislag* or epic metre). Axel Olrik noted that the first reference to the Grottasong occurs in Norwegian poet, Eyvind skaldaspillir's *Hákonarmál* dated c. 960.[22] It appears to defy strict skáldic definition, as difficult to fix as that can be. It does not use the basic strict eight-lined, six-syllabic line of court metre that normally identifies skáldic verse, and it tells a story. It is held that, strictly speaking, skáldic poetry does not tell a narrative in the contemporary sense, giving details of events, but alludes to them. The events alluded to have been generally regarded as mythological. However, if the audience knows the hidden features of the story held in the imagery of a skáldic allusion, it seems that this might not preclude consideration of the form as narrative. Surely, it tells a story but of a denser nature. This type of lay takes its name from the millstone in the story called 'Grótti' that could grind out whatever its grinder ordered it to do. My *grottasöngr* was not constructed consciously from story metre, but from imagining the voice of Síswyo and as that of my 'stranger' guiding me through the Hísrita scene. I followed the pattern that developed, revising and editing for consistency within the new form as it emerged, and comparing it in its final draft first to *grottasöngr* and then to story metre. In the Týring-song, the nature of the world is changed but not immediately. In 'Skulváði's Lay of Síswyo's Grottasong of The Hísrita & Týringar', the epic metre pair occurs in the odd lines, affecting the first half only of the second odd line (in roman below). The second half of that second half-line and fourth half-line are the only double-stressed three-syllabic lines (underlined text). The three-syllabic pairs are in the even lines (in bold). In addition, the single-stressed syllabic count affects the first half-line of the first even line and both half-lines of the second even line. There are two full-stresses per line and every pair is joined by alliteration. The quick-moving and breathless

22 Axel Olrik, *The Heroic Legends of Denmark*, trans. by Lee M. Hollander, Scandinavian Monographs Vol. IV. (Millwood: Kraus Reprint, 1976), p. 8.

effect is possible because of the use of syntax-and-syllabic stress punctuated by cæsura. (The numbers following each half-line indicate the number of syllables in that half-line.) From Book VII 'Skulváði Úlfr':

Hísrita hurry,[5] hastening spells,[4]
bright-bead dressed,[3] **sparkling light.**[3]
The Spider Clan walks, [5] drawn by gems — [3]
tri-corn caped,[3] **trinket ringed.**[3]

Treasure metre opens 'The Treasures of Cebanex' comprising part 2 of 'Oþýla's Lays' (written primarily in the most variable metre, song metre (*ljoðaháttr*). 'The Treasures of Cebanex' focuses on Oþýla's mentor, Cebanex (who often speaks in incantation metre when relating a myth). 'The Treasures of Cebanex' sub-section '*Kataxha Takatsi*' is composed in four-lined stanzas comprising two opening and closing lines of speech metre. The speech metre lines enclose two full-lines of varying length where at least one syllabic stress alliterates to pair each set of full-lines. It may even be seen to hold some of the skáldic *haðarlag* measure (the meaning of its title unknown) with internal rhymes and half-rhymes (in the opening and speech metre closing lines) sometimes ending in a trochee as Turville-Petre's analysis shows in the example of its use in *Eyrbyggja Saga* XLIV. 'The origin of the name is not known, but the first known example dates from the early eleventh century. It was used by Þormóðr Trefilsson in the poem *Hrafnsmál* (Words of the Raven)…' The way to read this measure is still under consideration: 'with two full stresses and one subsidiary stress, or with three full stresses' and varying per line? Such doubts about the reading of this form are important in reading the following: how does Oþýla read the landscape, 'Ximaca,' of her mentor Cebanex which is so different from her own familiar territory, 'Kerrigarðr' (in fact, part of the same larger landscape seen from two different points of view). She is at least aware that, in Cebanex's local territory, sounds are under a control

which is peculiar to Cebanex and the fauna of the surrounding hills. (Short syllabic emphases are underlined; long emphases, in bold.)

On the jagua-guarded **peak** of the Dread Black Hills
rose Kataxha Tkatsi —
Shining **Lake** of The Sun —
home of Xima's **casík**, Cebanex Grand **Chief**.

From **Skáði's** winding **trail** through the narrow **pass** —
spread the summit-home's **final** route.
Here the black-green **guarded**
forests of shrill-scream **beasts** that Cebanex **commanded**.

I named this new form *treasure metre* because the enclosed full-lines always describe a place or character which holds an aspect of something valuable that is hidden. In this sense, the name for the metric form takes its title from the poem in which it first appears and from its purpose as well as its structure of lines, as is the case of *Grottasöngr*.

I found it worthwhile to take Alex Olrik's insights into account in my writing of 'Skulváði Úlfr'. In research into Danish heroic legends, Olrik's preferred method of emphasising the location or 'geography' of narratives sought to eliminate gaps created by distinctions between classifications of the 'genuine' and the 'spurious' in the heroic stories, 'since both give us the legend as it lived in the mind of some one individual'.[23] I tried to think of skáldic metre-and-meaning as I might a drawn map, say, of the lands under the direct rule of Queen Skulváði Úlfr—that is, the areas that have been conquered—that are clearly labelled. However, those areas that are reported, by her confidants and mentors, exist or rather remain in-legend while

23 Olrik, p 8.

still in-map. These are the places which house signs of 'transparency,' tantalising invitations with discreet addresses. For, while the pictorial and mythic are undeniably entwined in the poems we call skáldic, it is their metre that makes them so unique. The relationships of the words in regard to the way they sound against and to each other – how sound is interpreted in skáldic poetry – may perhaps be the first key to understanding how they work. This has been my approach to composing in these measures.

The second key may be to consider the grammar-and-metre as a mapping grid. Such a view may be consistent with the idea that the first poems may have been constructed in response to the quarters of a shield, according to spatial relationships between intersecting images. Even if this was not really the case, it may still be a reasonable way to consider the working of skáldic metre. If we treat the whole process of the whole document entitled 'Skulváði Úlfr', for example, as an artefact or found object from the poetic imagination, it might be used to serve as a demonstration of the meaning of metre. The epic poem is a spatial reference point, where I plot a fiction and histories together as a map in a fixed time and place – as an artefact of the poetic imagination – a kind of world map kenningar or skjaldborg of shield-poems, missing pieces in tact; my underlying artistic aim of the whole enterprise being to query the function of poetic forms and objects as immutable objects in an aesthetic sense.

Oþýla's Lays

Book III of Skulváði Úlfr: The Epic Poem—The History of the Kingdom of Kerrigarðr

Aspiring swordsmith Oþýla Anzusdóttir is sent by King Logram The Red (r.1405-1420) on a mission to rescue her cousin Frieda from hills ruled by rebel Kerrigash led by Radnir The Black. Her undertaking has far-reaching effects for the ruling Houses of Kerrigarðr and Ximaca and, in particular, for Logram's successor, his son Kerrigan. Ancient rivals from the days of Náþros intercept her journey and try to make her their go-between with a gift for her and a message for Kerrigarðr. While Logram prepares for intrigues to allow him quick battles and a long peaceful reign, Oþýla's encounter with Náþros' notorious, aging Underlord, Hræsvelg, and her mentorship by Ximacan Chief Cebanex serve to fire her ambitions and rapidly lever Logram's son to power.

1. Hræsvelg and Hrögrmóat

The Legacy of the Dísabloð

Logram the Red, Son of the Rock,[1]
reigned for many years,
hunting glory and his father's fame.
But Logram had few enemies
on whom to field his falcon-perches.[2]

His rule was dull. Deals was his trade

1 the Rock – King Kerrigan the Rock (r.1370-1405) son of King Moðron Bare Head (r.1330-1370)

2 on whom to field his falcon-perches – with whom to engage in hand-to-hand combat; with whom to wrestle, duel

with Grand Chief Cebanex;[3]
his boredom eased by forging blades
for mock-duels to prove his mettle –
for copies of fire to fashion his spirit.

Logram Red-beard risked little to win
the return of Radnir's outliers.[4]
He spurned blood-oaths for the test of steel
upon men he could have moved
with his gift for words.

Caught between oaths and need for fire
Red-beard hoped to best outlaws
and draw reward to his name, 'The Red' –
from the spell of Loki's howe
carve his name above 'The Rock.'[5]

Quarrels grew thick between Red and Black[6]
over slow ship-building and mannbætr-laws.[7]
Radnir swore with blood on Úllr's destroyers[8]
to join the ranks of rivals –
the Ciguayo Clan.[9]

3 Cebanex – Grand Chief Cebanex, ruler of Ximaca in partnership Kerrigarðr against Karib invaders from south America
4 Radnir's outliers – warriors banded in an outcast clan led by Radnir The Black, a descendant of Olaf the Rus' who helped to found Kerrigarðr
5 carve his name above 'The Rock' – add his name above that of his father Kerrigan the Rock, i.e. be placed in higher standing than his father
6 Red and Black – the clans headed, respectively, by Logram The Red and Radnir The Black
7 mannbætr-laws – laws related to the compensation for injury inflicted
8 swore on Úllr's destroyers – took a Viking blood-oath
9 the Ciguayo Clan – a Ximacan House subverting the rule of Grand Chief Cebanex

For two long years Logram's ships had failed
to cleave the waves of Manatí Bay.[10]
None could set a boat to navigate the crests
where only turtles broke the spells
of the Ran's wretched skirts.[11]

All that figured from the fretful swell
were Karibs on the forest's edge,
riding the wings of wind-drawn Hræsvelg,[12]
set on a course for Kerrigarðr,
talons shadowing Logram's rule.

Defying The Thing and the mighty dread
of laws in stone[13]
The Black and Axe Arm and Þor Wolfen Hair
took to Útgarðr on stories
that north-east islands led to open seas.

Þórrsson[14] could not break Radnir's mail-ring.
This brought a heavier burden still:
Axe Arm seduced Cazabi The Weak,
eldest daughter of Cebanex –
split the Red's agreements with the Grand Casík.

10 Manatí Bay—bay northwest of the steep coastline of Útgarðr.
11 Ran's wretched skirts—steep waves and stormy seas
12 Hræsvelg—ON. meaning 'eater of corpses'; regarded as a giant shape-shifter taking the form of an eagle (associated with wind storms) that travels to and from the Hel caves, indicating, perhaps, Hræsvelg's modus operandi of attacking under the cover of bad or unpredictable weather
13 laws in stone—the Dragonþing law stating: 'No warrior hold arms from those of his blood to break the circle or bend the steed-wall' (Book I: 'Dagazar's Dreams', part 4)
14 Þórrsson—Þórr's son i.e. Logram [Red Beard] because of his red beard and locks as the legendary Þórr was reputed to have had

With a devious plan to wield new treachery,
Axe Arm had abandoned his wife
and taken to bed Ciguayo's bride
in order to climb higher
than the one who would stand above Cebanex.

Black and Axe swore on knots[15] to cast their steel
for the Dwarf Commander's attack,[16]
for it was said in Dagazar's books
that Loki's sons would aid Skrælings
to topple those of Northmen.

They readied themselves for red-plained battles
between Útgarðr's cloaked hills
and Logram's Garth. Red-beard's fever
worked smiths, cutters and weavers
to lift his name to Þórr.

But Logram's longing for Radnir's launch
of warriors in open southern fields
was a hope in vain— his blood-fires[17] chilled.
Meantime, skirmishes with western trolls
kept Cebanex's warriors supple.

When the time came for Logram to forge
his aims with that of the Wyrd,[18]

15 knots—literally knots tied in ropes on which warriors swore allegiance to each other
16 Dwarf Commander—Ximacan Grand Chief Cebanex; dwarf, meaning 'miner' or those who live in mounds; mound-dwellers
17 blood-fires—weapons; desire for battle
18 The Wyrd—Fate

he found the means, or the means found him,
to bolster alliances with Skrælings[19]
and deepen rifts with outlawed men.

On the Wet Moons Eve Red-beard travelled west
to launch new plans against The Black
secured by the mantle called Útgarðr's Mount,
on a wind of claims upon Cebanex
for bargains of blood.

Cebanex

Cebanex ailed under time's weight,[20]
too many wives and foes of his own.
Xima's men[21] suffered from Karib trolls –
black Screechers in skin-boats,
strapped with steel-braced hearts.

As well, there were signs that rivals had plans
which favoured Ciguayo.
The two chiefs had clashed at the Wet Moons Feast
on what to do with trolls
and Bay-men[22] plotting in the woods.

Cebanex marvelled at Logram's strength—
his mighty shields and fine speeches.
To draw such a man would rid him of trolls

19 Skrælings—natives of Ximaca and their descendants who made no alliances with Northmen nor their descendants
20 Time's weight—old-age
21 Xima's men—the male warriors of Ximayaca's House and its clans
22 Bay-men—Vikings

in exchange for luring Radnir
from the north-western hills.

The Red King's[23] spirit, spurred on by the Chief
who had mastered the art
of bold rulership with two-sided wars,[24]
rejoiced in alliances
that gave him firm ground to fight.

The King and the Chief drank cassava wine
and agreed to besiege Útgarðr's hills.
Death-dressed warriors under night-cloaked skies
stormed the peak of the Giants' Mount
with beserkers promised booty and land.

Not open north-charge nor cloaked south-assault
brought Radnir breasted with a pike.
For twenty days they tested The Black
driving him deeper
into Náþros' barren hills.

The Black's men clung to their craggy hold,
leaving Logram's plan
faltered on the edge of banners flown
to celebrate the enemy's fall,
left the King waiting, as before.

Vagrant Verðanði,[25] spinning many threads,
spread nets about us,

23 Red King—Logram
24 two-sided wars—battles on two fronts
25 Verðanði – The Present; Norn or Fate representing present time

watched us fed well on bitter wine.
She set us dancing to areitos[26]
and kept Logram hidden from mighty deeds.

The Ring-maker's Task

The Red could not rest on battles not fought
while The Black was kept safe
by mountain forts, and he summoned me
on the coldest night in Kerrigarðr
when Hel howled loudest for Loki's wounds:

'You are my finest with pike and skeggox.
No one knows these hills
better than you, Oþýla Ring-maker.[27]
Your name circles weddings feasts,
but you will neither marry, mend nor sew.

'I call you now to use your gift
with metal and fire
to bind our futures to the Giants' Hills.
You must make a mountain journey
west of Naastrand and Weighted Rock.

'Your kinswoman, Frieda the Bold,
wed Ciguayo with a child's eye.
Before the next moon she will give birth
while Ciguayo takes another bride
to counter Axe Arm's exploits.

26 arietos – a circular dance practised by the Ximacans after a harvest
27 Ring-maker – jeweller and smith

'You can go safely to Ciguayo's camp
without fear of quarrels,
the outliers' code not finding in you
the threat of duels marked,[28]
their kind honoured by men's blood.

'You are the best at braving those hills.
Should you come upon outsiders,
Axe Arm's loyalty to your brother's death
will spare your breast
of marks made for men.

'Besides, I shall see that you fold your grip
to duty if not worthy fighters.
You grow weary of warriors here.
Duels no longer test your spirit
and no one wants to fight you.

'Kingdoms poised on battle need children for Skuld,[29]
need tempers that race before us.
Bring Frieda home. You share with her
the blood of He'yeya and Dagazar.[30]
Map your journey well.'

28 duels marked – square of ground (the area roughly covered by a spread cloak) marking the area on which a duel is to be fought

29 Skuld – The Future; debts to be paid for reconciliation with the Past

30 He'yeya and Dagazar – He'yeya of the Sherakí Wind Clan, initially a captive and later a translator and the wife of Dagazar Kerrigansson, Earl of Rogaland, also known as Dagazar 'The Strung,' Goði (Priest-ruler) in Kerrigarðr (c 1051-1090) was the founder of Kerrigarðr where he and his crew were shipwrecked in 1051 after sailing a year before from Iceland to Newfoundland and were caught in battle with Sherakí on the north American seaboard before being dragged by a storm to the Caribbean Sea..

Logram's challenge charted Hel's mask,[31]
the plains of old Modsognirsborg.
But those who say 'men's brazen words
break women's spirit,' do not know
our twin-faced ally, Silence.

I yearned for tasks that would take me
where tales were born,
as those of Kerrigan, heir and son of Logram.
Here, sewing would mend itself.
Afar, duels waited to taste my weave.[32]

Beyond the Garth, Heimðall[33] still challenged the prince –
the Great Bridge[34] to Forskarlar's Veil.
From there the giant Þjazi, was said to throw
to The Edge of The World
tired scouts who questioned his hulk.

I would have such wonders to win as my own –
Þjazi[35] sweeping men skyward,

31 Hel's mask – two-faced; in Norse myth one half of Hel's face was decayed and grotesque, the other half robust and beautiful

32 my weave – my sword (referring to the twisting patterns used in sword-smithing)

33 Heimðall – in Norse myth the son of nine mothers, watchman of the Æsir who would sound his horn Gjall if the giants advanced on Ásgarðr

34 The Great Bridge – Three Staves Path; The Edge of The World – A band of uncharted territory stretching along the southern borders of Muspell's island (Ximayaca) and spreading southward

35 Þjazi – Óþýla refers to the shadow or apparition of the giant, Þjazi, throwing death-walkers or the walking dead from The Moving Wood, indicating that no Kerrigash has yet survived a return journey from the Moving Wood; in Norse myth Þjazi is the giant who stole Ídunn and the golden apples that gave the Æsir deities immortality

their blood sent flying, their spirits set free –
but not this service set me
to fiddle with fragile deeds.

The Corpse-eater's Challenge

My journey took me five mornings north
of King Logram's longhouses
when a strange beacon brighter than the sun
beyond the break of my path
pulled men from ghost-shifted seas.

The odd light rested near level ground
a few paces from Dagazar's grave,[36]
for Dagazar swore with his sating breath
to rest where his fears rose:
beneath Útgarðr's belly.

The heat of the sun sat hard on my face,
sent me into a wyrding sleep
that drew Náþros[37] raised on a great wing-shadow
that gripped the hill,
the earth turned black.

It formed a huge bird of monstrous flight,
eagle-made, talons set to strike:

36 Dagazar's grave — the burial place of Dagazar Kerrigansson, Earl of Rogaland, buried in the foothills of Útgarðr, Home of Giants (Áztlan Vanir)
37 Náþros – it is unlikely that this is Náþros The Bear mentioned in Heyeoahkah's Tales (Book II) which place Náþros' during Prince Viglid's reign. The ref. here may indicate, rather, that Náþros' clans still held outposts on the island.

Hræsvelg—Corpse-eater[38] Hel-freed to the skies,
shape-shifting giant
drawn from the dragon mists.

'This is your desire!' he declared, forthright,
alighting on Dagazar's grave.
'But if I give you this gilt-worn gift,
how will you use it?
How will it shift your journey?

'Will you cover it with wishful claims,
decorate it with disease
that rises with storms on a journey's tail
to paint pleasure with regret?

'Perhaps your heart seeks the sinewed horses
of your ancient brothers[39]
or a laden knórr or wind-blessed sails,
or suns that never set
over Garmr's howl?

'I have taken pride in testing the ground,
to make each bone brilliant-white.
Each burial gift is well preserved.
Look closely. See how they lift
with shade and shallow light?'

38 Hræsvelg – ON. meaning 'eater of corpses'; regarded as a giant shape-shifter taking the form of an eagle (associated with wind storms) that travels to and from the Hel caves, indicating, perhaps, Hræsvelg's *modus operandi* of attacking under the cover of bad or unpredictable weather
39 ancient brothers – Vikings or perhaps, more specifically, Swedish Vikings or Varangians rather than Norwegians because of the reference to 'horses'

My hand, stone-heavy, froze to my shield,
my blade-and-tongue silenced by grave-rings.[40]
Hræsvelg's voice rose again, rasping through the void
of The Dread Black Hills –
of night-caved ground:

'You leave me no choice. You must meet the charge
of four forged for challenge.
Choose your weapon well as you may not choose
how to fight or to die –
how to chart the woodland's edge.[41]

'Now I will take you to what lies in wait
beneath the burning earth.
You shall see what lives, warms and feeds the bones
of Dagazar's dreadful dreams –
of adventure's fare.'

The Sixth Battle-stave

I had hoped to face fierce Radnir The Black
gone mad on the Mount,
biting at his shield, or Ciguayo's sons
sharpening their axes on seal's tooth –
any clay-borne beast of the Wood.

Better death's guises than meet Dagr's breath.
I braced my war-light and wounder

40 blade-and-tongue – sword; wit. grave-rings – solemnity [of being at the ring of grave stones]
41 the woodland's edge – recorded in the manuscript in conjunction with the unique sign drykkr ['the unknowable'?

when shadows, sprung windward, shrank back to the sun
and carved a cave before my eyes –
a hollowed darkness in-drawn.

The cave's mouth folded more fields of shade
than those raised by The Eagle's rasp.
Twelve steps plunged into bluffs of night –
an abyss born on Hræsvelg's back,
on the Corpse-eater's Hel-blown coat.

The steps spread a path – a way deep into nothing –
then rose to lights
twisting left of my gaze, while, to the wall ahead,
the path's shrinking width
blunted my view on either side.

At the far right end a landing seated
four battle-staves[42] to chairs –
fierce men with helms and plate-braced chests,
two short and stout, one medium-built;
the fourth stood tall.

They were richly armed with splendid weapons
blood-stained from pillage.
In their grips, double-beards;[43] on their belts, toothed-swords.44
Hræsvelg's sign[45] saddled their bosses –
the dragon's mark.[46]

42 Battle-staves – warriors.
43 double-beard – battle axe favoured by Varangians; 'bearded axe'
44 toothed-swords – the blades of swords notched from hacking in battle
45 Hræsvelg's sign – Hræsvelg's symbol [the dragon] was painted on shield bosses
46 dragon's mark – Áztlan-Vanir sign

Yet their dress told me they wore battle well:
their knee-boots tied high
with golden-spun leather layered with linen
edged with new skin,
wool and ribbons;

Their byrnie plates moulded to their chests,
polished cave-black;
their bare arms painted; their wrists and necks
hung with rolled gold
or bronze laid upon silver.

These were not Vikings – Dagr's bay-seekers.
Upon the tall one's war-shelterer[47]
straddled a sign that struck dread terror
through my heart and mind.
Hel's hole grew blacker than before.

Stamped on the shield, the Stair-maker's[48] bird –
blood-eagle dragon;
for the fallen warrior who dropped to this shield
his ribs would spread from his chest,
his lungs beat as red wings till he paled.

I paused at the sight of the dread sling-boar
when a fifth destroyer caught my eye –
his stinger raised, helm-point held,[49]
signalling a sixth
from the walls of the cave.

47 war-shelterer – shield
48 Stair-maker – Loki's daughter, Hel
49 sling-boar – shield. stinger – spear. helm-point – peak of his helmet.

The sixth battle-stave thrust into my hand
a lee-edge and buckler –
a disc two hands wide and fixed with no grip
to hold at bay Dragwandil
or flying corpse-flame.[50]

Now the fifth man lunged with his spear.
But the disc, losing it weight,
would not let me learn the line of its swing.
Náþros' kind held my stand
with the warrior's stare.

Courting the dark, his thrusts hooped the air.
The disc clung to my palm.
I blocked his strike, dislodged his spear.
I drew my war-net.
He shifted clean as shadow.

I kept him at bay by slipping on walls.
But he struck a soft-horned charge,
took my shadow ground. Though I was firm-set,
the platform slid from my soles.
My corselet slammed stone.[51]

The first four men rose from their seats
to finish me spreadeagled
on the cave-cold floor. The first reached behind,

50 lee-edge and buckler – shield. Dragwandil – draw-wand; sword drawn for attack. corpse-flame – sword swung for the kill.
51 slipping on walls – believed to be a Kerrigash military tactic. soft-horned – axe. took my shadow ground – made me lose my 'ground' [footing].

smooth-gripped his sax,[52]
his breath heavy on the lengthening blade.

His three companions now lifted their shields
to tell me they had won,
for the sax-wielder would stake his claim
for the Eagle's Trophy –
my breast already his.

Gram was heavy but the disc was light,
my grip, its glove.
I found my feet, swung the Eagle's Gift,[53]
to catch a beam from a gap
at the mouth of the cave.

But the thick-set man, sharp-eyed and quick,
struck my ring-shirt,
cleaved its weld-rings with the blow of ten men.
I plunged into deeper blackness,
to Hræsvelg's face opening a rock.

Hræsvelg's Gifts

Take this back with you,' shouted Hræsvelg.
'Tell your clan, "Náþros-kin scorns
warring alfish slaves slaying their brothers
on the graves of his honoured
and wives and children." '

52 sax or scramarsax – single-edged curved slashing sword
53 the Eagle's Gift – the disc

Bruised from his war-games, I shouted back:
'Don't you count as the living do?
Why do you count "four" when I count "six"?
Or is this the Áztlan way –
to shift the rules of play?'

'You need no answers. You have them,' he said,
'The world is as wide as it is deep.
You fight well for a dwarf. Now you are ready
to touch the fighting piece
that was once Dagazar The Seer's.[54]

'No fool would face such Hel-armed men
weaponed by metal-shapers
who forge the vanes for Nagl-far –
full-sailed Ship of Nails –
with the moon in her fist.'

Hræsvelg then took me to where we first met
and pointed to Dagazar's grave.
The Corpse-Eater's work was very well done –
the bones of The Strung
white-dry from Úrðr's hand[55]

In the opened grave, lying beside his bones,
was Dagr's battle-dress –
by his hollow frame, his jewelled weapons,

54 Dagr The Seer – Náþros' reverence for Dagazar seems a political ploy. His wargames are both to test Oþýla's skills as a warrior and to draw her to Dagazar's grave. Perhaps Náþros intended to use Oþýla to raise an army to rid the area around his old mountain fort of the Viking outliers, but this remains unclear.
55 Úrdr's passing – the Past; time pasing

his tattered purple cloak
and tarnished helmet.

In his flesh-bare fist, Tár's dragon-tamer –
dread byrnie-biter –
its crossguard lace-dressed, layered with horn,
its pommel fixed with gems.
On the blade rode the name 'Hrögrmóat.'[56]

Lying with the blaze a skeggox of dust,[57]
a broadaxe, spear, dagger and shield –
all free of their hafts like the boned dead.
But Hrögrmóat, the Tamer,
sealed its grip to mine:

Its twin-edge sharp with years of waiting;
its deep-grooved belly
for valleys of tears; its twin-winged pommel,
saddles for wild boars
that flanked Týr-dragon's seat;

On the bearded axe, the words 'Skræling-Slayer,'
droopy-chinned;
the split-ash spear wearing Muspell's storms.[58]
But it was Hrögrmóat that ruled
the stave-well of dreams.

56 Hrögrmóat – ON. *hrögr* or *hörgr* 'natural sanctuary,' associated with small stone altars for the *dísar blót* or *dísablóð*; KER. *móat* (meaning unknown)

57 skeggox – bearded axe

58 Muspell – reference to lands ruled by 'fire-locked' Muspell. ON. Muspellsheimr in the Southern Hemisphere, where all things began and would end at Ragnarökkr according to ON myth. Muspell's Home was a land of thurses or hot giants who inhabit the nine regions of Muspell's under world (Hel). Surt ('black'), flame-dressed, is its giant guardian.

The dagger still clung to its clayed master
from his buckled baldric,
the belt double-sewn with silver studs.
As much as they raised the Goði's spells,
it was the glaive that stayed with me.

His wood-weary shield, an earth-tamed circle
weathered without its leather coat,
its boss red-stained with blood once flowing
in the veins of He Who Was Taught To See Nunne-hi.[59]
But the pale-maker's skin still breathed.

Not the darkest fear of wingèd Hræsvelg
could break the fix of my spirit;
my hand folded again upon Hrögrmóat's flesh
brought to breath by the Eagle of Mists.

Sax, spear and shield – dim; the axe – sham companion.
Hrögrmóat held the bow-string-Var[60]
To wield the weapon of Mighty Dagr
was to breathe the heat of one's own pyre.

Here I fell as bedsheets of Frigg and Oðinn
on their wedding night –
the fire of Hrögrmóat sweeping from the ashes
the unexpected wish.

59 Nunne-hi – SHERAKÍ (SH). fairies or little people; recorded by explorers as beings said by the Sherakí to inhabit a ridge below Yellow Hill near the Oconaluftee River in Swain County

60 Hrögrmóat held the bow-string-Var – suggesting that the face of the blade of the sword, Hrögrmóat, had captured [showed an image of] the defeated giant, Skáði [bow-string-Var]

So I set my path for Ximaca House,
for Þjazi thrusting fire-bolts;
the Eagle flown, Hel's pride snared,
Hrögrmóat of the Skræling-slayer
strapping my heart to my feet.[61]

2. The Treasures of Cebanex

Kataxha Tkatsi

On the jagua peak of the Dread Black Hills
rose Kataxha Tkatsi[62] –
Shining Lake of the Sun –
home of Xima's casík, Cebanex Grand Chief.

From Skáði's winding trail through the narrow pass –
spread the summit-home's final route.
Here the black-green guarded
forests of shrill-scream beasts that Cebanex commanded.

Three steps led to the seat of his richly decked longhouse,
a dwelling dressed for Viking kings
than for hiding Hel's hosts –
its steed-walls of latticed logs daubed with colour-shifting paint.

The entrance to his lodge was very small and plain –
a deception meant for the unwelcomed.

61 strapping my heart to my feet – literally 'linking desire to the physical journey' or 'giving courage'

62 Kataxha Tkatsi – Shining lake of the Sun. Related to: Ximacan/AR. kataxha 'shining water,' kataxi 'brilliant,' 'shining,' kata 'blazing,' katahiri 'star,' tkatsi 'the sun,' ON. Þjazi 'female giant'.

Inside, low steep-curved high-backed chairs
saved guests from presuming to raise themselves above a chief.

When to compliment my host I asked Cebanex-casík
how it was that he had made
the gilded plates on his walls,
he slowly sipped his wine, lifted his eyes and said:

'Take note of what you may earn from your enemies and friends.
If you cannot break their spirit
then you must bargain for what they will yield.'

I did not know what this meant until I saw the strange troll,
a black-eyed warrior held captive there,
brought that night from the foothills,
the Chief proudly displaying the foul-mouthed seafaring troll.

Ignoring his captive's shouts, Cebanex told stories
of how he crushed troll plots,
of how he could break the armies
of lesser warriors (without calling us the same).

Poised in his splendid cloak of feathers dyed in ochre,
he showed me his enemies' spears,
their cutting edge of iron
though they were roughly hewn – by troll-hands, not alfen skill.

I asked:
'Where does your captive find such deep-struck ore?'
(for Logram's armoury
was thin from his dipping often
among the broken blades of his store of glaives).

He replied:
'Far below the ground run not only rivers
that make Ximacans live a hundred years.
In the deepest streams
azure waters hide our cache that Karibs steal to head their spears.

'From the crystal rocks we make jewelled plates
that hang here for guests to see
and not for death-beasts
who would sooner eat our hearts and steal our warriors' limbs.'

I said:
'Will you take me, Cebanex, to this marvellous place
where crystals cry for moulding,
for planes and gouges to sail ships'
(my heart as set on swords as on tools to break waves).

Cebanex did not speak but spirited me quickly
to a valley hidden by the Peak
on which his longhouses stood.
Rising below the trees were a narrow house and hut.

The Grand Hall of Gleaming Tables

Cebanex led the way through a wide, sunny field
where no grass grew beneath our feet.
When we entered the large house, a heavy silence stretching
across its beams and rotting ceiling,
he paused to take off his great feathered coat.

It was then that I saw why he was still called
'Giant Commander of Dark Elves' –
his bare arms of polished oak, his eyes never paled by fear,
his stride never short on the battlefield,
one who knew his enemy as he knew Tkatsi's Lake.

We walked together to a winding hallway
emptied of songs for many years.
On shelves along its walls sat broken, tarnished ware –
from days when sumbls broke the night
with sounds of dance and song and smells of honeyed flesh.

Beyond this place grew worms that slid among white bowls
and pots of pitted earthenware.
A once grand room rose with the chill of graves,
with echoes of sharpened edges.
Yet it was a regal hove. Carved floors marked our steps.

A ceiling-high darkwood door opened on the gilded room
smelling of tobago that Cebanex smoked;
the room three times as high as Logram's Swording Hall,
its red-polished stone floors glittering,
cut neatly into squares so as to fit each other.

He led me through passages furnished with gleaming tables
and storage chests bulging with gems.
'I love this place, Cebanex, more than my own needs,'
I said – my heart full of what I saw –
and asked if I could return, revisit at his pleasure.

'It is my wish,' he said. 'This place now waits for your hand
so that you will visit again and again
and to melt metals and mould ornaments

that will please Logram The Red.'
(Though he too called me 'ring-maker', I still loved the man).

At dusk we returned to his summit home of lakes
where he summoned guards to take me
to Ciguayo's cliff-camp. There I waited all night
with Hrögrmóat loose on my belt
to test it on the first man who challenged my mission.

3. The Birth of Skulváði Úlfr

Frieda of Manatí

Frieda was sent to meet the courier
from Logram's camp
at a place arranged by the casík's clan,
stealing from me
beds to rest the glaive that the Eagle brought.

Frejya's dís[63] was weighed not by a sweat blaze[64]
but by the beads
that rose from her brow laden with the strain
of the child she carried.
At nightfall we camped in 'Katsi's shadow[65]

As Tkatsi climbed the clouds once more
Cebanex arrived with beds rolled'[66]

63 Freyja's dís – Frieda
64 sweat blaze – sword heavy with the blood of the conquered
65 'Katsi's shadow – a valley of the mountain Kataxha Tkatsi
66 beds rolled – hammocks; beds made of woven fibre that could be rolled up and carried under one's arm

for Frieda's rest would keep us there
for two more days,
her burden heavier as shadows shortened.

Xima's Chief brought food and said:
'Let her rest here while I show you
the cave below the ground
where four sacred beings live with Deminan
and walk the stars and skies
from Xima-yaca to the Karib Lands.

'Orphaned at birth, these sacred beings
wandered the winds,
calling on powers from ancient shaman
even wiser than they.

'The spirits' minds, like folded seeds
in guamo fruit,
grew to the size of giant gourds
to give the shaman sky-letters.

'This is what they wrote: "From gourd-fruit
oceans and fish;
from turtle, islands; from our children,
toads and snakes;

' "From snakes and toads, rain and water;
from clay and stars,
all men on two legs. From the manatee,
all women on two legs;

' "From the jobo tree, prayer statues
to honour the spirits' fruiting."

You will find these things at the heart of this cave
to protect Frieda of Manatí.'

A Door to the Foundry

With the Chief's caverns and Frieda's burden,
I came again to Logram's Halls,
sure to make my name on the Chief's esteem
of the Manatí-dís Frieda,
to win from Logram my ways to steel.

If I could show him that sword smithing
would bind his goals
to the Chief's table – where I am trusted
with maps to gem-caves –
he would grant me the title of Mistress.

But despite my tales to seduce the dreams
that he sought in duels,
I found no favour with the Red-beard King.
He worried his court
with Frieda The Bold and Radnir's wild band.

He complained of risks to the unborn child –
Frieda's long journey home
through the ragged plains where Radnir roamed.
So Logram drove me
to spend my days mending ringlet coats.

How could he know the smell of flame-brights
when their fire-heads
were drawn from the blaze, or the glaive's red tongue

before the cooling strike.
Men dreamed trailing-heat. Women needed flames.

My bond with the Chief broke that with Logram –
Ximacan caverns
opening my plans with cartloads of ore
brought from the deep
while Logram slept and dreamt of peace.

When the heat rose from the opal skies
by season's end,
I had set a foundry far of Logram's Halls
where the voice of my anvil
could grind and sing from the polished stone
that cloaked me from his eyes.

I would sit and bait the twisting gleam
to fold upon its form,
Þórr guarding me, guiding my hand
with the heating sense
so that forest sights sunk from my door.

On the harvest-eve Cebanex brought us news
of scouting trolls –
teeth on their necks and bone-scarred breasts.
These he could not fight,
not with medicines nor the God of Gourds,
and so summoned the aid of The Red.

Yet with all this need to call warriors to arms,
still King Logram ignored my wish
to join his forces to field our strength.
Instead of keys to swording
he gave me wounds to mend.

Logramsson-harðraði

My heart now set on seeking out
Logram's son, Kerrigan,
I would win the boy of twenty years.
(It was clear that Red-beard's crown
would yet lure him to an early death.)

Young Kerrigan yearned for that crown,
for a place to practise
what his father fingered with caution.
Already they called the prince
'Logramsson-harðraði,' 'Logram's iron hand.'

Prince Kerrigan could pit man 'gainst man,
plot and piece each man's need
into aims for both and yield to none,
that not a man could say
whose fist knotted first at his brother's face.

I went to the Prince on Valpurgsnight Feast[67]
when his heart was full of mead.[68]
We drank and sang warrior's songs
of Atli-tyr and Óðinn's charge.[69]
He spoke of his love for his blood-wand raised:

'Our kingdom is caught in the lazy stride
of my father's boot,' he said.

67 Valpurgsnight – ON. feast welcoming the end of another year
68 mead – here meaning 'poetry and songs'
69 Atli-tyr – Þórr or Atilla the Hun. Óðinn's charge – Óðinn's military assault technique.

Kerrigash men have become dwarfs
hunting riches and díses
where caves yield gems cold to the strike.

'What use is long life and not Valhöll's breath
to draw us from this death.
My clan multiplies in years and youth,
but our number
shrinks with each birth while Xima House grows.'

'If we are to grow with more years,' I said,
'nourished by the wells
that flow from Úrðar, it is Mimir's gift
and should not be scorned.'
(I could not show weak tongue nor heart
by agreeing too quickly with the Prince.)

'We are meant to raise mighty strikers,' I said.
'Surely this is a gift from the gods.
It signals new ways to plunder once more
as in Dagazar's days.
Radnir lies in wait for a proper fight.
I have seen the size of his force.'
My words struck home. Kerrigan whirled
with metal-struck sight.
He promised there and then to set me to anvils
by the bond of his word
to the task of toiling as Mistress of Swords.

It was so I found my making place,
and spared of weddings,
mending broken shirts and forging bride-rings.

Now I set to dented blades –
re-fashioned, re-made, re-newed with my stamp.[70]

My mighty slicers could score as no other
with backhand wields –
stiffened as they were, strengthened by twists
of two hundred turnings,
with thrice-patterned weave for the blade's fabric.

Even its cooling fired me the more.
As the last flaming followed –
fire that stamped me to its searing edge –
I hammered bronzed grooves
where I etched my sign 'Oðal, Steel-renderer.'[71]

The Lagoon where No Moon Rises

It was on the night of the Dísabloð,
while I polished Hrögrmóat
to show the Prince the Eagle's prize,
that Frieda called me
from my anvil's warmth with news of xiwuta.[72]

With heaving breath she held me close,
these words to my ear:
'Beyond the Veil of Waterfall Men,
grow black thorn-leaves
at the lagoon's edge where no moon rises.

70 stamp – the sword-smith's signature
71 Oðal [o] – last runic sign of the group of eight runes belonging to Týr, god of battle. Oðal signified inheritance and property
72 xiwuta – Ximacan/AR. for 'birth waters'; Frieda's birth waters had broken

'This is the plant that He'yeya picked
to birth her children.
You must brave beasts and bring it to me
before three days break
or Kerrigan's thunder will not leave these walls.'

With Hrögrmóat held high to meet its strike,
no troll nor black outlier
could stall my quest. We hacked our path
through vipers and vicious seeds
that streamed from trees high as Muspell's sky.

But my swift return could not hold the tail
of Tkatsi's third rise
like a dragon-wind held on the sky's lip.
When I turned for the low mounds,
shadows stood waiting[73] over Frieda's house.

Kerrigan's cape – a sheet of stone –
greeted me at Frieda's door.
No one could breach the mouth of her hearth
before the thorn-black leaf
was brought whole, then crushed, and placed on her groin.

She lay in silence while the sun rose high.
I said to her:
'Surely this task is not made for me –
to see you torn
by an unseen arm that is soft with blood.'

73 shadows stood waiting – as if time stood still for Oþýla's return at a predestined correct time

But still, Frieda would make no sound.
I said:
'The thrust of iron cuts a clean wound.
There is no secret pain
that wears its own face, then cries to be fed.'

But the Bold One met my eyes with masks
to hide her pain.
Then, her navel filled with thorn-leaf glue,
she bore down with a single scream
to bring the secret pain plunging into day.

The child was whole, with womanly shape,
with flaming hair
that masked her face, with He'yeya's mark
on her well-formed lips.
She branded me with her red-clay blood.

'You must cut the cord,' The Bold One whispered.
'with your warrior's line,
with the sword you hide from Logram The Red.
Gods chide the chosen
who wait for wind-blast but not stand with storms.

At once transfixed above the thorn's pool
of birthing blood,
my trembling hand was tricked by the gleam
of the silver-red cord.
But Hrögrmóat's blade found its rightful place.

The heat-shone blade scored the birthing cord,
sealed the severing
with snakes that writhed twisting my name.

Long-beard and worm-borer[74]
defied Dagagazar's dust for Bold-dóttir's life.[75]

The Pool's Hooded Wolf

It seemed little time that the child grew
with the warrior's tastes –
with eyes that saw as seasoned wolves
with flaming manes –
that she was called 'Skulváði Úlfr.'[76]

What joy she brought to Logram's son –
tables spread for two full moons.
When he stood to rule as Kerrigash King,
they say it was as one
not brought up for crowns, but born to them.

Skulváði Úlfr hardly left his side.
When she trailed scouts

74 Long-beard and worm-borer – the sword, Hrögrmóat
75 Bold-dóttir's life – Frieda The Bold's new-born daughter
76 Skulváði Úlfr – KER. meaning literally 'The Wolf of Future's Pool.' *Skulváði úlfr* 'the bond breaking wolf,' the wolf who (disturbs) breaks the wading pool. *Skuld-* 'debt, bond of the future,' *-váði* 'pool,' *Úlfr* 'the warrior wolf' together meaning 'the wolf born of future's pool.' *Skuplaðúlfr*, *Skupla-úlfr* 'hooded wolf'; also refers to those born with a veil over the face that allows you to see into the future. ON. *skupla* 'woman's hood' hiding her face; birth veil over the face. *skulda* 'bond,' *Skuld* 'Norn or Fate' representing the Future. *Skuldr* (G. *schuld*, *ursache*), *vaða* (öð) 'to move; wave-goat or ship'; *skuldingi* (G. *verwandter*) 'wanderer'; *váði* (G. *watstelle vor klippen*, *hávadi*, *hochmut*; *gefahr*, *unglück*) 'destruction, damage'; *valdr* 'sovereign'; *vald* 'power, authority'; *iða* 'eddy, whirlpool'; *vafra* (*óð*) 'to roam, hover about'; *vaðinn* 'wading'; *vaðr* 'measuring line' hence *Skulváðr* (See Book VII, and Book VI Part 3, detail of Hrimnir's Signs) 'the wanderer of the measuring line'.

to the Moving Wood to hide from chores,
he sank into sadness.
None could get audience with the waiting king.

And yet it was then that his heart was strong
and all would witness
his fever of feats that filled praises
in the pens of skálds.
So they would honour Kerrigarðr's rise
from the dust of Muspell's graves.

Detail from the Cantino planisphere (c. 1502)

Call for submissions

Poets and scholars are warmly invited to submit work to be considered for our second issue. The theme is 'locality'.

Poetry

As always, we seek original poems that make use of—or creatively engage with—traditional, especially ancient, poetic forms.

For this issue, we are especially interested in poems with a strong sense of place, as it relates to local community, rather than topography. Poets might tell the stories of their people, in the manner of a bard, griot or skald; or experiment with communal voice, like the chorus of ancient Greek drama. But we are hoping to be surprised; poets are encouraged to interpret the theme broadly.

Criticism, theory & literary history

Essays on the issue theme of locality in poetry are sought, as well as on New Trad's area of interest, the use of archaic poetic forms in contemporary poetry—or some combination of the two.

Possible topics (suggestions, rather than prescription): the social function of the poet in their community; communal voice and the poem as 'social text'; local dialect and slang in poetry; the responsibility of the poet in portrayal of local communities to insiders and outsiders; the reception outside its milieu of poetry with a strong local focus; the adaptation of poetic form as it travels to different cultural and linguistic contexts.

7000 word limit. Please submit abstracts in the first instance.

For more details, see the submissions page on our website:
http://newtradjournal.org/submissions