



# ALLITERATIVE VERSE

EDITED BY  
ERNST BETZ

alliteration.” Standing in the doorway, Rudolf Steiner looked at the wall and saw a fly crawling about. “Tell me why the fly does not fall off.” I studied the fly and after a while, I said, “It’s because the fly has little suckers on its feet.” “Just so,” said the doctor, “and with alliteration, that is how you have to tread, sucking yourself on to the earth (meaning: stamping is unnecessary)”. (In: *Das 9./10. Lebensjahr. Der Stabreim*, See Introduction.)

The mountain farmer emits consonants, in his struggle with the environment. And thus alliteration comes into being. A study of how Rudolf Steiner characterizes the consonants, in particular in connection with eurythmy, is a useful guide to pronouncing the consonants.

It will be possible to pronounce the consonants in the correct way and to practise the right way of walking, if we consider these two reports, particularly the first one, from Nora von Baditz. If we then take to heart the way Rudolf Steiner describes this special age (9/10), we will be able to put this advice into practice in our teaching.

How are we supposed to tread? We may progress a little further beyond that which the pictures teach us, if we examine what Rudolf Steiner has to say about eurythmy. The very first tips given to Lory Maier-Smits, a young girl who was the first eurythmist, concerned the way to walk for alliterative verse (published in *GA 277a*, 1998 edition)! Lory Maier-Smits tells how Rudolf Steiner gave her mother the following practical exercise:

“Tell your daughter to walk alliterations; take a step which is firm, to stamp as it were, on the alliterative syllables, and to make a pleasing movement of the arms on that [stressed] syllable (or those syllables), where the [alliterating] consonant is missing. .... She should however think about the fact that originally alliteration only appeared in northern countries, where storm, cliffs, and the crashing and roaring of the waves join in one grand harmony of all the elements. She ought to imagine herself as one of the old bards, walking at the coast, upright through the storm, a lyre on her arm. ...” (p.13).

Soon she receives further directions as to how this way of walking ought to be:

... Then Rudolf Steiner opened a book and pointed to a figure which looked very Egyptian. It was Apollo, or the Youth of Tenea, from the early archaic period but strongly influenced by an older, Egyptian view of things. Quite Egyptian, particularly in the placement of the feet, something which Rudolf Steiner emphasised as being essential: bodyweight evenly distributed on both feet, earthbound. ... Rudolf Steiner showed us a second figure, this one wholly Greek. It was Apollo Sauroctonos by Praxiteles, the lizard killer. He pointed out that a completely different impulse had taken over this figure, that by “rebellious against being earthbound”, the back foot had freed itself from gravity, in that the weight of the body had been transferred to the other foot, thus enabling the back foot to move freely. ...

And then I was supposed to learn to write with my feet. Legibly, holding a pencil or a piece of chalk between my toes, so that you could later look at what I had written, ... But the left foot was to write mirror writing, ... I was to practise this, “in order to establish a real, differentiated relationship to the earth, in order to master sensitive inner foot movements” (p. 14). Lory Maier-Smits adds: Rudolf Steiner wanted me, in a fruitful process, to act out and feel “the difference between being earthbound, as the archaic Egyptian was, and being earth-related in a voluntary and meticulous way, by feeling what it means to write with the feet.” (p. 154).

At a performance, Rudolf Steiner said, “Lory walks in the right way! She walks as would a tightrope walker or a savage in the jungle.” (p. 46).

On the programme for the first eurythmy performance on the 28th of August, 1913, the first item was “threefold walking”! (p. 49).

And Lory Maier-Smits writes: The explanation which together we found for “walking like a tightrope walker” was exactly the same one which can be read about in the course for tone eurythmy 1924. (p. 154).

alliterating stresses should come out clearly, strongly and regularly, with pauses between half-lines. A poem that was meant to be said aloud invites dramatic interpretation. The beginner should not be shy about experimenting, so long as he sees clearly where the stresses and the alliterations fall and how they mould the meaning of the sentences.

The examples from Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse texts (in a slightly simplified form, but ð and þ are left, the Modern English th) ought to provide a first impression of how the original language really was. For anyone wishing to read them out loud, the original texts and rules for pronunciation can be found in books (s. Further Studies, pp. 47).



*Stone bearing runes  
and cross. C11th  
A.D.  
(Visby, Museum)*

# Poems

Translations available lay emphasis on reproducing the content, on style and on good readability for the modern reader. We have used them gratefully, but we have had to modify them for school purposes (with the exception of *Beowulf* and *The Lay of Thrym*, where only a few lines were simplified). Especially we had to maintain the strict form of the original in alliterative verse. Furthermore we have endeavoured to use language which not only corresponds to Anglo-Saxon, but is also accessible to children. For the same reason we have also undertaken a few slight changes in the content.

## Anglo-Saxon:

### **Beowulf**

The only national [Anglo-Saxon] epic which has been preserved in its entirety is *Beowulf*. Here is a summary of the story:

The poem opens with a few verses in praise of the Danish Kings, especially Scild, the son of Scaef. His death is related, and his descendants briefly traced down to Hroðgar, who elated with his prosperity and success in war, builds a magnificent hall, which he calls Heorot. In this hall, Hroðgar and his retainers live in joy and festivity, until a malignant fiend, called Grendel, jealous of their happiness, carries off by night thirty of Hroðgar's men, and devours them in his moorland retreat. These ravages go on for twelve years.

Beowulf, a thane of Hygelac, King of the Goths, hearing of Hroðgar's predicament, sails from Sweden with fourteen warriors to help him. They reach the Danish coast in safety and after an animated parley with Hroðgar's coastguard, who at first takes them for pirates, they are allowed to proceed to the royal hall, where they are well received by Hroðgar. A banquet ensues, during which Beowulf is taunted by the envious Hunferhð about

I have no brothers nor friends whom I need to help me.

Little he dreams that drinks life's pleasure,  
How utterly weary oft I wintered on open seas.

Night fell black, from the north it snowed  
Frost froze the land, hail fell on earth then,  
The coldest of corn.

...

O hefty my heart  
Beats in my bosom and bids me to try  
The tumble and surge of salty waves  
Breeze and storm and the breaker's roar.

Day in and day out drives me my spirit  
That I fare forth, foreign countries to see.

There lives no man so large in his soul,  
So gracious in giving, so gay in his youth,  
in deeds so daring, so dear to his lord,  
That ever no sorrow he has of sea-faring  
Whither the Lord shall lead him in the end.

He has no mind for the harp nor for the having of rings,  
No woman can win him, nor the world's delight.  
Nothing does please him but the plunging waves;  
Ever he longs who is lured by the sea.

Woods are abloom, the world breaks into life  
Gay are the mansions, the meadows most fair;  
This heartens him only to haste on his journey  
Him whose heart is hungry to taste  
The perils and pleasures of the pathless sea.

...

*(Heading and verse structure are modern)*



*Stone featuring maritime scene. C8th A.D. (Visby, Museum)*

## Old Norse

### Völuspa

#### (The Seeress' Vision)

On Odin's instructions, the seeress tells mankind about the fate of the gods, from the beginning (Hearing I ask ...) through into the distant future (I see earth rising ...): the creation of the world, Baldur's death, the twilight, downfall of the gods, a new age and earth. The poem consists of about 50 verses, with extraordinarily vivid, imaginative, sublime pictures, many of which admittedly are not easy to understand.

This work is at the beginning of the Poetic Edda, and is followed by the Havamal collection of sayings, The Words of the High One (Odin).

Hearing I ask from the holy folk,  
Both high and low of Heimdall's sons.  
Thou wilt, Valfather, that well I foretell.  
Old tales I remember of men long ago.

I tell of giants from times forgotten.  
Those who fed me in former days.  
Nine worlds I knew, nine roots of the tree.  
The wonderful ash, way under the ground.

Old was the age when Ymir lived  
*Ar var alda þat er Ymir bygði,*  
Was no sand or sea, no swelling waves.  
*Vara sandr ne sær ne svalar unnir;*  
Neither earth was there nor upper heaven,  
*Jörð fannsk æva ne upphimmin,*  
Just gaping space, and grass nowhere.  
*Gap var ginnunga, enn gras vergi.*



The sons of Bur then built up the land  
Moulded the mighty Middle-Earth.  
Sun stood in the south, shone on the stones of their hall,  
And green was the ground with growing leeks.

From the south the sun by the side of the moon,  
Heaved his right hand over heaven's rim.  
No knowledge he had where his home should be.  
The moon knew not what might was hers.  
The stars knew not what stead they held.

Then gathered together the Gods for counsel,  
The holy ones, in the hall of judgment.  
To night and to new moon names they gave,  
The morning they named and midday.  
Forenoon and evening to order the years.

*(In the last line the relation between the times of the day and the years is not clear; therefore some translate like this:*

Mid-winter, mid-summer to mark the years, *or:*  
Dawn and dusk to deal with the time *or:*  
Twilight and evening to tell the time).

...

The sun turns black earth sinks in the sea,  
The hot stars down from heaven are whirled,  
Fumes reek, into flames they burst,  
Till fire leaps high about heaven itself.

...

I see earth rising a second time,  
Out of the foam, fair and green;  
Down from the fells, fish to capture,  
Wings the eagle; waters flow.

...

Fruit ripens on fields unsown,  
Evil being abandoned, Baldur comes home.

...

Then Gestumblindi said:

*Þa mælti Gestumblindi:*

Four hang four go,  
*Fjorir hanga, fforir ganga*

Two watch the way, two drive off dogs  
*Tveir veg visa, tveir hundum varda,*

One dangles after, always dreadfully dirty.  
*Einn eptir drallar ok jafnan heldr saurugr.*

King Heidrek, can you guess my riddle?  
*Heiðrekr konungr, hyggðu at gatu?*

*Good riddle, Gestumblindi. I've got it: -  
Goð er gata þin, Gestumblindi, getit er þessar:  
It's the cow.  
Þat er kyr.*

[In this way King Heidrek answered thirty-six riddles.]

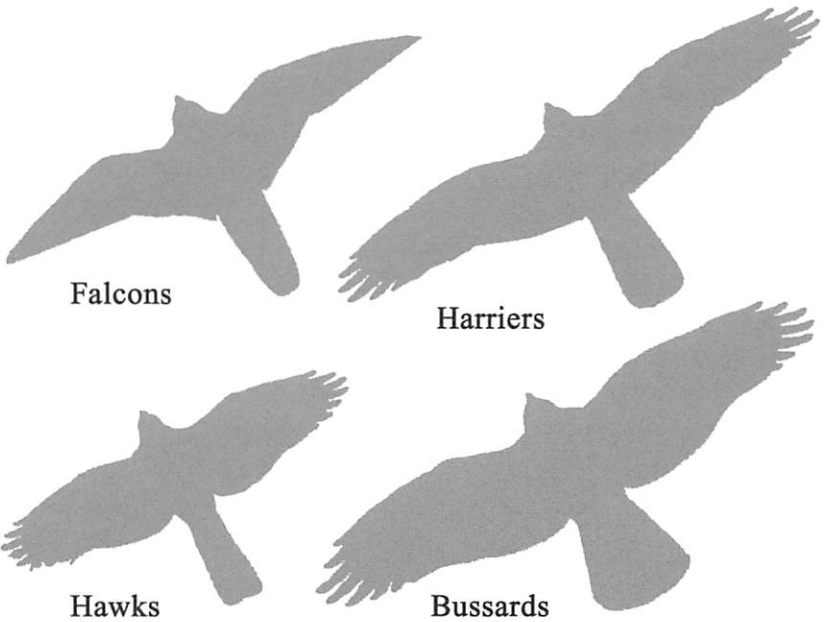
But then Gestumblindi said:

If the wisest you are, guess one riddle more:  
Which were Odin's words he whispered to Baldur  
Before he was placed on the pyre?

King Heidrek said: "Only you know that, Evil One." And then Heidrek drew Tyrfing and hacked at him, and Odin changed into the form of a buzzard and flew out through a window of the hall. But the king slashed after him and cut off his tail-feathers, and that's why, to this day, the buzzard has a stubby tail.

Odin said: "For that, King Heidrek, because you lunged at me and wanted to kill me, the lowest thralls shall be your slayers." After that they parted.

It is told that King Heidrek owned certain thralls [serf, bond-man], who he had taken on viking trips in the west. There were nine altogether. They came from great families and didn't think much of their captivity. One night, when Heidrek was lying in his bedroom, and few men with him, the thralls got hold of weapons and went to the king's lodging and first killed the outside guards. Next, they went and broke into the king's lodging and slew King Heidrek and all who were inside there. They took the sword Tyrfing and all the treasure that they could find and carried it off with them. And at first no-one knew who had done this or where vengeance should be sought.“



*Silhouettes of birds of prey.*