



Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize 2022
Written entries

Wayland's Song

Libretto for a Cantata

Night descends on this desolate place,
Ancient barrow, burial ground.
Sighing trees and standing stones,
A lonely haunt of long-lost dead.

From storm-filled skies, I fell to earth,
Ten centuries past, but pain-wracked still,
In anguished exile all that time.
O Allwiss, Allwiss!
A thousand years I've yearned for you.

I glimpsed you first by a frozen lake,
Swan-maid pure of proud Valhalla.
An age it seemed 'fore you sighted me,
Then swiftly did your swan heart melt.
I shifted shape to sharp-eyed hawk,
Together we took wing and soared
Towards Worldmaker's wondrous vault.

We sealed our love in sunset's fire,
My heart was yours and yours was mine
Our breath was one, our bodies joined.
Then later still when silver shield
Spread silver light o'er snow-capped peaks,
You took mortal form, and marriage-joined
Did wear the ring I wrought for you.

Blacksmith, goldsmith, maker of swords!
Born of magic and bloodline royal,
Once fair of face though fire-scarred now,
I could soar with hawks and speak with swans.

Blacksmith, goldsmith, warrior's friend!
My skill was craved by kings and earls.
Torcs and grails and glinting spears
Caressed my pride, brought pleasing fame.
But smithy craft, cruel and jealous
Demanded fealty, devoured time,
My swan grew sick from solitude.

Eight long years in earth-bound shape
Again for swan form Allwiss yearned.
Unfurling wings, she fled our home,
All that remained, the ring I made.
With wounded heart, and wounded pride
I pledged to win her back again -
She'd wear once more the wedlock ring.

In hawk form, far and wide I flew
Searching for some sight of her
Till savage fate did smite this hope.

Knowing my craft, and crazed with greed
The Swedish King, the cruel Niduth
Dispatched his carls to capture me.

With sinews sliced by spell-cast sword,
He robbed me of my magic powers,
Confined me to an island cave,
And forced my skills on stolen hoard.

The ring which Allwiss once did wear,
Sole keepsake of my squandered love,
He stole and gave his graceless child,
The Princess Beahild, proud and vain.

Revenge!
Desire for it devoured my soul,
Like wild and wrathful winter's gale.
Revenge!
Its craving made me cold and sly,
And swathed my heart with snow and ice.

Niduth's two sons to smithy cave
I lured, and blinded both with gold.
Off-guard and drunk with greed and wine,
I bound the pair and butchered them.
Then for the king I crafted gifts,
I drained their skulls for drinking cups.

But ere the sons were sorely missed
Their sister came to see me toil.
She wore the ring I'd wrought for love,
The band I'd sworn my swan would wear.

Revenge!
A bare-serk frenzy filled my blood,
And cursing rage did cloud my sight.

With wanton hate I held her down,
And robbed the maid of maidenhood.

That lustful deed unleashed again
The weirding arts I once possessed.
Transformed from man to fearless hawk,
I took to flight with feathers spread.

To cruel Niduth I now drew near
And boasted at his battlements
Of murdered sons and maid defiled.

Ice-minded king made no time
For sorrow's tears but sent up waves
Of arrows hot, a hornet cloud
Of iron fire that flamed my wings
And scorched my face as flight I took.
My only hope ahead I saw
Dark thunder clouds to quench the pain,
I plunged headlong, put out the flame.

For many days my damaged form
By storm-wind's might was swept along
Across cold sea to Celtic lands
Until at last I tumbled from
The cloudbank's clutch and crashed to earth
A hawk no more, all magic gone.

Wind-swept land and whispering trees,
On Wessex Down my wounds I soothed,
Until one day in waters still,
Lake's mirror showed to me the truth,
My monstrous face, fire-burnt and scarred.

Since that time have centuries passed
With ceaseless toil in smithy craft.
No longer blessed with beauty now
I serve it still in searing forge,
And work to find Worldmaker's song.

Listen, Allwiss, listen my love!
Hear the chink of chainmail made
For Grendel's slayer, great Beowulf.
Hear hammer note on hammer note
To forge the blade of brave Waldere.
For Arthur's keep, Excalibur,
That sword of deeds, destined for fame.
Its own true voice each treasure has,
And yet my heart hears not their song
My heart wants you and wants naught else.

O Allwiss, Allwiss!
A thousand years I've yearned for you.
Though you suppose me long since dead
I will return your ring one day,
For in this land, a legend says
The white chalk horse of Wessex Down
Shall wake one morn from magic spell
And serve the smith who shoes her first.

I swear I'll leap astride and storm
Valhalla's guards to give to you
A second time my tear-filled heart.

Till that day dawns, I dream alone
So far from love, from peace, from home.

Philip Greenacre
