



SAGA-BOOK

VOL. XLVI

VIKING SOCIETY FOR NORTHERN RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON

2022

DUAL IDENTITIES AND DOUBLE SCENES.
TRANSFORMATIONS OF PHYSICAL SPACE AND MENTAL
STATE IN PERFORMANCES OF EDDIC POETRY

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Veiztu, ef þú vin átt,
þann er þú vel trúir,
ok vill þú af honum gott geta,
geði skaltu við þann blanda
ok gjöfum skipta,
fara at finna opt.

(*Eddukvæði* 2014, I 330)

You know, if you have a friend—one whom you trust well and whom you wish to get good by—you must mix your mind with that one and exchange gifts. Go to visit him often.

THIS ADVICE, GIVEN IN THE EDDIC POEM *Hávamál* (*Eddukvæði* 2014, I 322–55), presents a model of society based on reciprocity and interaction. The cultural capital to be exchanged is not only material (*gjafar* ‘gifts’), but also cognitive (*geð* ‘mind’). In this article, I will consider how far a similar process of physical and mental exchange can be envisioned in performances of Eddic poetry. It is now commonly accepted that a great many Eddic poems would have been orally performed before they were copied down into manuscripts in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (see e.g. Clunies Ross 2016, 12–21; Quinn 2000). That stage in the transmission of Eddic poetry is, however, no longer accessible, and there is no way of knowing how closely the surviving Eddic poems, such as those found in GKS 2365 4to (otherwise known as the Codex Regius of the *Poetic Edda*, composed c.1270), resemble texts that would originally have been ‘oral’. Responses to this issue are likely to vary from poem to poem. Some poems have been characterised as more ‘dramatic’ than others (e.g. Phillpotts 1920, 47), whilst it is also likely that the transition of individual poems from oral to written form would not have been linear. Certain poems may, for example, have been written for oral performance. The complexity of the situation is compounded by the fact that scholars’ estimates for the respective dates of composition between poems have often varied widely (e.g. Thorvaldsen 2016). Some

poems are thought to have been composed before standardised writing practices were introduced in Scandinavia in the tenth and eleventh centuries, whilst others are viewed as originating at a time relatively close to their manuscript witnesses (Quinn 2000, 43–44; see e.g. the debate regarding *Vǫluspá*'s date of composition, summarised in Gísli Sigurðsson 2013). Overall, these factors produce an accurate impression of the Eddic corpus as being highly heterogeneous. Concordantly, and as I aim to demonstrate in the proceeding discussion, a conceptualisation of the performance of any Eddic poem must consider both the text's distinctive features and literature history, as well as those aspects that draw it into relation with other works.

Controversial for much of the twentieth century (see e.g. Magerøy 1981, xvii), the subject of 'Eddic performance' has attracted more attention in the last thirty years, as evinced in the research of Terry Gunnell (1995; 2008; 2011; 2016), Joseph Harris (1983; 2003) and Simon Nygaard (2019), to name but three scholars.¹ Eddic performance continues to prove a vital, albeit complex, issue, as Harris (1983, 97) acknowledged just under thirty years ago: 'performance . . . is, more than composition or transmission, probably agreed to be the single most important stage in the life of oral poetry'. The triennial 'Old Norse Poetry in Performance' conference, the first two iterations of which were held in Oxford in 2016 and 2019, represents a burgeoning interest in the subject area, and has resulted most recently in a collection of essays edited by Brian McMahon and Annemari Ferreira (2022). The contributions to this work encompass both Eddic and skaldic performance traditions, demonstrating the progress being made within the field via a selection of current research methods. These range from analyses of the vocality and soundscapes implicit within the Eddic poems (López 2022; Nygaard 2022), to considerations of long-standing questions, such as the anonymity of Eddic composers (McKinnell 2022). Amongst the diverse approaches found within the collection, an interest emerges in modern theories of performance and how these can be brought to bear on Eddic poetry (cf. Gunnell 2018). Since there are no historical accounts of, and limited evidence from other sources about, Eddic performances (cf. Harris and Reichl 2012, 155–57), this approach, as I show primarily in my discussion of Eddic performers and audiences, helps to negotiate the aspects of the subject area that are speculative by necessity.

¹ See further contributions by Bernt Øyvind Thorvaldsen (2008), Benjamin Bagby (2005), Einar Haugen (1985).

In this article I treat the Eddic poems as ‘oral texts’ (Foley 2002) to consider how they may have been performed, but I also analyse literary accounts of Eddic performance from the sagas. Although such accounts have featured relatively infrequently in scholarship on Eddic performance, they provide insight into how later medieval writers conceptualised the social functions and implications of Eddic poetry. In both literary accounts and modern hypotheses, Eddic performance, I demonstrate, is conceptualised as a process of doubling, implicating both the physical space of the performance and the mental states of its participants. Following Gunnell (2016) and Nygaard (2019), the Eddic poems I focus on primarily are those composed in *ljóðaháttir* ‘song metre’, such as *Vafþrúðnismál*, *Grímnismál* and *Lokasenna* (Eddukvæði 2014, I 356–66, 367–79, 408–21). The other primary Eddic metres are *fornyrðislag* ‘old story metre’ (e.g. *Völuspá*, *Hymiskviða* and *Brymskviða*; Eddukvæði 2014, I 291–307, 399–407, 422–27) and *málaháttir* ‘speech metre’ (e.g. *Atlamál*; Eddukvæði 2014, II 383–401). One of the factors distinguishing *ljóðaháttir* from these metres is the fact that it is used almost exclusively for direct speech (cf. Quinn 1992, 100; on ‘Eddic metre’ more broadly, see Fulk 2016). Regarding oral performance, this quality of *ljóðaháttir* verse has long been considered to make it especially suitable for rituals and/or oral performances (see e.g. Phillpotts 1920; Nygaard 2019, 59), since it forces performers to become the characters in the narrative, whose events, in turn, are presented as occurring in the present. Although my research builds on these ideas, I acknowledge that this characterisation of *ljóðaháttir* poetry can and should be refined in light of the textual evidence. Many *ljóðaháttir* poems, for example, are not composed exclusively in that metre; *Hávamál* is mostly in *ljóðaháttir* but also includes verses in *fornyrðislag* and *málaháttir*, whilst *Grímnismál* and *Lokasenna*, reflecting the make-up of many poems in the Codex Regius, include passages of prose both before and between their verses. Some scholars have been inclined to argue that the prosimetric or mixed-metre forms of certain Eddic poems represent the influence of editors or multiple composers (e.g. Gunnell 1995, 223–35), whilst, as Judy Quinn (1992, 109) argues, very often ‘the varied metrical texture of Eddic verse can be shown to have its own rationale’, such as modulation in the vocalic register of the speaker. Either way, and in the context of the investigation, these debates affirm, again, the need for conceptualisations of Eddic performance to be sensitive to the poems’ individual contexts of transmission and preservation.

Irrespective of the metrical forms involved, all types of Eddic performance can be envisioned as conforming to the fundamental nature of

drama to produce a ‘second reality’ (Schechner 2002, 45). This effect is intensified when performances offer little in the way of framing narrative (such as a narratorial voice), causing their events to appear as if they were occurring ‘here and now’ rather than ‘there and then’. Gunnell (2016, 98) envisions this dynamic as being strongest in *ljóðahátttr* poetry, given that it is mostly in the form of direct speech. At their most effective, performances in this mode can be envisioned as creating ‘double scenes’, a term coined by Lars Lönnroth (2011; see further Lönnroth 1978). In Lönnroth’s words, a double scene is ‘something that occurs in the course of an oral performance whenever the narrative appears to be enacted by the performer or his audience on the very spot where the entertainment takes place’ (2011, 244). In other words, such performances draw parallels between the real dramatic space and the fictional place being enacted to the extent that, in the perception of the performance participants, they become homologous, or at least similar enough for the participants to temporarily suspend their disbelief in the separateness of the two spaces. The double scene, then, does not simply create a ‘second reality’, but also blurs the borderline between the fictional and the real. In this way, the transformation of the dramatic space also implicates the participants within it, including the audience. To further elucidate the process, and as Luke John Murphy (2016, 159) highlights, a typical double scene can be theorised as part of a hall-based performance of *Grimnismál*. During the performance, the real hall adopts the identity of the hall of King Geirrøðr, in which the poem is set, whilst the primary performer takes on the role of Óðinn, who is the poem’s sole speaker. Encapsulated within the performance space, the audience also becomes involved in its transformative potential, temporarily assuming the identities of the retainers inhabiting Geirrøðr’s hall.

Lönnroth’s double scene has become an influential concept in studies of Eddic performance (e.g. Bernt Øyvind Thorvaldsen 2006; Harris and Reichl 2011, 150; Gunnell 2022, 3), and its potential functions as part of the rituals of elite social groups have recently been considered by Nygaard (2019). There is more to be said, however, about the implications of double scenes for performance spaces and participants’ identities. These will be my focus in what follows. I begin by examining the settings of Eddic performances, drawing on archaeological and literary criticism to consider aspects of performance spaces that could have been utilised in the creation of double scenes. In my subsequent discussion of Eddic performers and audiences, I bring Lönnroth’s double scene and other studies of Eddic performance into dialogue with modern

performance theory, allowing me to hypothesise the importance of a ‘double consciousness’ within certain types of Eddic performance. This, I contend, is a state of mind evinced in both Old Norse literary accounts, and in several examples of Eddic poems envisioned theoretically as oral texts.

Settings of Eddic Performance

Before considering Eddic performers, audiences and the relationships between them, I will begin with the potential settings of Eddic performance. Several of the *ljóðaháttir* poems, such as *Vafþrúðnismál*, *Grímnismál* and *Lokasenna*, are set in halls, and it seems likely that performances of these poems would also have taken place in halls (cf. Gunnell 2006, 239). This tallies with accounts of other types of poetic performance in Old Norse texts. The *Íslendingasögur* and *konungasögur*, for example, give many descriptions of skaldic poetry being delivered in the courts of Scandinavian rulers, in which a skald recites or extemporises poetry and the ruler rewards it (e.g. *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu* 1938, 70–81). A familiar image, moreover, is that of the entertainer who delivers poetry in a hall as part of celebratory events. This is evident in the so-called ‘Finnsburh episode’ in *Beowulf*, in which a *scop* ‘poet’ tells a heroic story about a *Freswæle* ‘Frisian slaughter’ in Heorot (*Beowulf* 1953, 34–37). Whilst Harris (1983, 210) suggests caution when considering ‘the force of foreign analogues [which could] stand in the way of discovery of the special nature of the Eddic tradition’, this *scop* finds a Nordic parallel in Norna-Gestr, the eponymous storyteller of *Norna-Gests þáttir* (1943). Preserved in the late fourteenth-century Flateyjarbók, the *þáttir* is set in the tenth century, providing one of the few literary accounts of Eddic performances, in which Norna-Gestr recites *Helreið Brynhildar* and parts of *Reginismál* in the hall of King Óláfr Tryggvason (*Norna-Gests þáttir* 1943, 173–79, 183–84). The versions of these poems in the *þáttir* differ slightly from those in the Codex Regius in content but not in the metre of their verses; all the verses in *Helreið Brynhildar* are in *fornyrðislag*, whilst *Reginismál* has stanzas in both *fornyrðislag* and *ljóðaháttir* (*Eddukvæði* 2014, II 349–51; II 296–302). The story is fantastical, as is evident primarily in Norna-Gestr’s claim to have participated in the poems’ events, making him no less than three hundred years old (*Norna-Gests þáttir* 1943, 187). Norna-Gestr, then, cannot be easily described as an intermediary between the events in the narrative and the performance space. Instead, he emerges out of the old stories he tells, providing a direct link to the legendary

past.² Leaving further discussion of Norna-Gestr's performance for later, it illustrates, for now, that halls would have been appropriate settings for performances of Eddic poems, from a fourteenth-century perspective at least.

The next point of enquiry is to consider how hall settings could have functioned as part of Eddic performances and, particularly, double scenes. Three aspects of halls stand out as being particularly suited for homologising purposes: environmental situation and layout, internal structures, and decoration. Each element offers the potential for performers to invoke parallels between real spaces and mythological or legendary ones, the effects of which I will consider shortly. On the environmental situation of halls, Murphy (2016, 150) highlights that Iron-Age settlements across Scandinavia trended towards a model of centrality, in which 'human presence decreased radially along an axis from the farmhouse to the border of the settled land and the uncultivated wilderness' (see Figure 1). Such

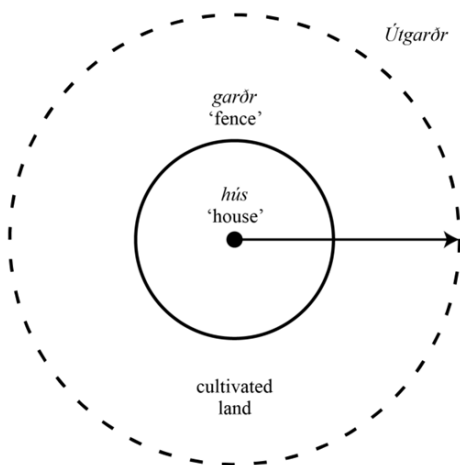


Figure 1. Based on Murphy 2016, 150.

² As a participant in the legendary events he relates, Norna-Gestr is paralleled by Widsith, the primary speaker of the Old English poem with the same name (*Widsith* 1936, 149–53). In the poem, Widsith surveys the rulers and peoples of the known world, many of whom he claims to have visited. The impossibility of his ever having done so is also in keeping with the supernaturally old Norna-Gestr. On this and other potential analogues to *Norna-Gests þáttur* in medieval Germanic literature, see Hill and Harris 1989, 107–12.

residential arrangements, it has been argued, reflect the cosmological map of Norse mythology: humans inhabited Miðgarðr, a central, civilised position, just as the gods inhabited Ásgarðr, and both were circumscribed by Útgarðr, inhabited by giants and non-humans (see e.g. Clunies Ross 1994–98, I 51). The structuralist nature of this model has been challenged (e.g. Vikstrand 2006), and, as Marianne Hem Eriksen (2019, 121–22) highlights, its implicit negative outlook on peripheral areas is questionable, since local economies depended on the resources these areas provided. There is evidence, moreover, of ritual spaces existing both beyond the limits of human settlements (Eriksen 2019, 122), and well within them (Murphy 2016, 151). The cosmological model, then, should not be taken as absolute, but rather as something that was ‘more fluid in people’s minds’, as Eriksen (2019, 122) suggests. It is precisely such fluidity, I would suggest, that afforded Eddic performers the potential to transform performance spaces at a symbolic level. The cosmological model’s basic dichotomy (humans and gods inside; the inhuman Other outside) implies that the hall was conceived as a symbol of civilisation akin to Ásgarðr, contrasting with the wild and dangerous space of Útgarðr. Although this conception may not have been fixed or continuous, it indicates one way in which performers could relocate their audiences to a mythological plane without ever needing to leave the hall.

The extant Eddic poems indicate several ways in which performers could have utilised this kind of microcosmic thinking, and the conceptions of centre and periphery therein. *Lokasenna*, for instance, demonstrates not only the interrelationship of civilised centres and subversive peripheries, but also the fragile borderline between the two. The poem is set in the hall of the giant Ægir, who is hosting a feast for the Æsir. Ægir’s hall is, in this way, reframed as a civilised centre, but this familiar space is disrupted when Loki re-enters the hall from outside and proceeds to insult each of the gods in turn (*Eddukvæði* 2014, I 409). Ultimately, however, civility resumes when Þórr returns and expels Loki from the hall (*Eddukvæði* 2014, I 419–21). In a performance of the poem, participants would be party to the power struggle between gods and inhuman Others that characterises so many of the mythological Eddic poems. If *Lokasenna* were to be performed at a hall-based event, the resulting double scene would make the participants even more implicit in the power struggle and, one can envision, even more relieved by the gods’ ultimate victory. A similar dynamic is evinced in *Vafþrúðnismál*, which takes place in another giant’s hall, that of the sage-like Vafþrúðnir. This hall, to which the audience is transported as

part of Óðinn's quest to test the giant's cosmic knowledge, is indefinite in its peripheral status. As Ármann Jakobsson (2008, 267) points out, the location of Vafþrúðnir's hall is never stated, despite Útgarðr being an abode of giants according to Snorri Sturluson's *Edda* (2005, 39). If the setting of the poem is surprisingly ambiguous, so too is the behaviour of its inhabitants. Apart from wagering his guest's head, Vafþrúðnir accommodates Óðinn according to human customs of hospitality. It is the god, in fact, who initiates hostilities when greeting the giant (*Eddukvæði* 2014, I 357). Although the audience might be expected to approve of Óðinn's victory over Vafþrúðnir at the end of their wisdom contest, the poem, overall, represents the relationship between the civilised centre, the periphery, and who represents which, as being indeterminate, if not arbitrary (Ármann Jakobsson 2008, 267–70). Taken together, then, both poems demonstrate the possibility of subverting audience expectations by homologising the real performance space with an unfamiliar mythological place. The resulting spatial transformation implicates the participants' cultural values too, which are destabilised and re-evaluated, if only for the duration of the performance.

The cosmological thinking envisioned in settlements' layouts also extends into the hall, and examples of internal structures suggest more ways in which the hall was conceived as 'a symbolic pagan microcosmos' (Gunnell 2001; cf. Lindgren-Hertz 1997, 48). This is exemplified in the *hof* 'temple' hall type, which seems to have been a central farmhouse intended for communal activities, including the performance of legal and religious practices (Brink 1996; Orri Vésteinsson 2007). Gunnell (2001, 21) highlights that, in *hof*, the small blocks of wood used to hold up the main beam of the roof were called *dvergar* 'dwarves' and were, therefore, equated to the four mythological dwarves, Norðri, Suðri, Austri and Vestri, that hold up the sky (see further Snorri Sturluson 2005, 12). Looking upwards in such halls, Gunnell suggests, people would see 'symbolic parallels between the roof of the hall . . . and the sky or heavens' (2001, 21). The earliest surviving reference to *dvergar* in relation to hall architecture comes from the twelfth-century *Íslensk homiljubók* (1993, 150), although there is evidence to suggest that the term was employed in earlier times (Gunnell 2001, 21). These conclusions, based on archaeological evidence and socio-historical texts, point to the fact that people viewed halls as multi-dimensional spaces, functional and familiar but also charged with mythological parallels.

Evidence for doubling in halls can also be found in accounts of internal decoration, some of which, like the *dvergar*, is associated with

mythological meaning. Several literary sources describe furnishings inscribed with images of gods, including a chair in *Fóstbræðra saga* (1943, 245) and *öndvegissúlur* ‘high seat pillars’ in *Eyrbyggja saga* (1935, 7) and *Landnámabók* (1968, 124–25), each of which is said to depict Þórr. Other instances of hall decoration are more closely related to poetic performance. In *Kormáks saga* (1939, 210), for example, Kormákr Ögmundarson delivers the following *dróttkvætt* stanza, describing one of his first interactions with Steingerðr Þorkelsdóttir in a hall at Gnúpsdalr:

Hófat lind, né ek leynda,
líðs, hyrjar því stríði,
bands mank beiði Rindi,
baugsoem af mér augu,
þás húnknarrar hjarra
happþægi-Bil krapta
helsisœm á halsi
Hagbarðs á mik starði.

The ring-decorated linden of ale [WOMAN = Steingerðr] did not raise her eyes from me, nor could I conceal my thoughts of strife. I remember the yearning Rindr of ribbon [WOMAN = Steingerðr] when she, the necklace-decorated lucky Bil of board games [WOMAN = Steingerðr], stared at me, halting, from the hinge-post of Hagbarðr [i.e., post depicting Hagbarðr, a legendary sea king].

Kormákr’s allusion to Hagbarðr is ambiguous, but most translators take it to be describing a carved image on a post or partition (e.g. Whaley 2002, 270). The implications of this image have not been considered at length, but it indicates that hall decorations pertaining to mythological or legendary figures not only existed, but were actively used in poetic composition. Kormákr’s *lausavísa* is primarily concerned with vision, involving both the significance of Steingerðr’s gaze and the skald’s ability to re-envision and reproduce the scene as poetry. The resulting description comprises an array of domestic items—rings, necklaces, ribbons, ale and board games—with the image of Hagbarðr completing the kaleidoscopic impression of hall-based life. Even though Kormákr’s poetic vision is intent on Steingerðr—indeed, he dedicates three kennings to her here—the stanza is founded on a much broader awareness of hall space. The description of Hagbarðr, in particular, could be viewed as a ‘striking image’, which, as Pernille Hermann (2015, 335) articulates, ‘facilitate[s] memory storage and trigger[s] associations’. Just as Kormákr is lovestruck by Steingerðr’s gaze, the image of Hagbarðr appears, simultaneously, to have stuck in the poet’s mind, allowing him to build the imagery of his verse retrospectively.

Kormákr's verse finds a counterpoint in Úlfr Uggason's *Húsdrápa* (2017, 402–24), a piece of skaldic ekphrasis (on which, see further Clunies Ross 2006) describing the images depicted on the walls of Óláfr pái's hall at Hjarðarholt. *Húsdrápa* survives partially in Snorri's *Edda*, from which we learn that the poem—and, hence, Óláfr's hall—featured mythological scenes such as Baldr's funeral and Þórr's fishing trip with Hymir.³ The hall itself is described in *Laxdæla saga* (1934, 79), in which it is also said that Úlfr recited *Húsdrápa* at a wedding feast there. In the saga, the implication is that Úlfr delivers the poem whilst being surrounded by the decorations he is describing, construing the hall as an active part of his performance. The immediacy the saga author affords the performance is also in keeping with Úlfr's use of the present tense, which features primarily in the poet's description of Baldr's funeral (Úlfr Uggason 2017, e.g. 417–19). In this section of the poem (sts 7–11), Úlfr creates the impression that he is looking at, and, indeed, reanimating, the mythological scene as he recites. The effect, I would suggest, might be compared to this description of decorations on the hippodrome in Constantinople in *Morkinskinna* (2011, II 97):

Eu skrifuð margs konar forn tíðendi, Æsir ok Vølsungar ok Gjúkungar, gort af kopar ok málmí með svá miklum hagleik at þat þykkir kvikt vera. Ok með þessi umbúð þykkir mǫnnum sem þeir sé í leiknum.

Ancient events of many kinds are depicted there—Æsir, the Vølsungs and the Gjúkungs—made from copper and metal with such great craftsmanship that they seem to be alive. And with this arrangement it seems to people as though they are in the games.

The likelihood of figures from Old Norse myth and legend having featured on the walls of a Byzantine hippodrome may be slim, but this passage illustrates the importance that internal decorations could hold for saga writers. Like the scene in *Laxdæla saga*, the decorations on the hippodrome are presented as mediating the audience's experience to the extent that the depicted figures are not simply animate, but actively involved in the physical feats being performed. Given that the decorations cited above, and especially Óláfr pái's, would have been expensive and uncommon, such accounts need to be approached tentatively. Overall, however, I would suggest that they give us reason to refine the conception of the hall as a space of storytelling. The saga-writers and quasi-historians of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries represent halls as spaces in which stories could

³ For the stanzas of *Húsdrápa* in Snorri's *Edda*, see Snorri Sturluson 1998, I 8, 14, 19, 39, 54, 55, 56, 63, 64, 210, 242, 303.

be told as much by the buildings themselves as by their inhabitants (cf. Hermann 2017, 207–10). Doubling between reality, fiction and myth, then, can be envisaged in the hall's context, its internal architecture and even its decorations. The core values of Lönnroth's double scene are, therefore, applicable to the settings in which Eddic performances are assumed to have taken place, even when those performances were not occurring. When performances did take place, however, halls were evidently appropriate participants, imbued with cultural markers that could be identified and intensified.

Eddic Performers

Having set the scene of the Eddic performance, I will now consider the dynamics of participation within it, beginning with the performer. This figure, as I will show below, not only plays a significant part in creating double scenes, but must also embrace a doubled, or even pluralised, identity during performances. Scholars have modelled the Eddic performer in various ways, a common analytic frame being Parry and Lord's oral-formulaic theory, which was particularly prevalent in Old Norse studies at the peak of its influence in the mid- to late-twentieth century (Lord 1960). In this period, studies by Lönnroth (1971) and Harris (1983) produced valuable insights into how someone could have performed Eddic poetry through improvisation, memorisation, use of formulas, and so on. Now, studies such as Nygaard's (2019) are beginning to cast light on what being an Eddic performer would mean at both personal and social levels, which is my interest here.

A simple yet significant issue is whether the Eddic poems could have been performed by one person or would have necessitated a larger cast. For the purposes of this discussion, I will entertain the idea of the solo Eddic performer, which has been the prevailing, but not unquestioned, scholarly view (see e.g. Lönnroth 1971, 6; for a counterargument, Gunnell 1995, 330–50). This is exemplified in the brief examinations made above of the Norse *skáld* and Old English *scop*, both figures that tend to deliver poetry without incursion from another performer, and in *Norna-Gests þáttr*, in which Norna-Gestr performs *Helreið Brynhildar* and *Reginmál* alone. One might also consider the accounts in *Óláfs saga helga* (Snorri Sturluson 1945, 361–62) and *Fóstbræðra saga* (1943, 261) of Þormóðr Bersason's solo performance of *Bjarkamál in fornu* (2017) before the battle of Stiklastaðir. The poetry depicted in these literary accounts encompasses all three of the major Eddic metres; *Helreið Brynhildar* and *Reginmál*, as noted above, involve both *fornyrðislag* and

ljóðaháttir stanzas, whilst *Bjarkamál* is in *málaháttir*. *Helreið Brynhildar* and *Reginismál*, moreover, both involve multiple speaking parts, which Norna-Gestr seems able to handle alone, although it is notable that he is depicted as identifying the speakers of verses before reciting them (e.g. *Norna-Gests þáttir* 1943, 175–76). This prompts consideration of whether Eddic performers would always signal their characters' identities so directly, and whether audiences could comprehend polyvocal poems without the aid of such signals. On the former issue, notation identifying speakers does occasionally appear either as marginalia or as integrated elements within the manuscript witnesses of the poems. This is the case, for example, with the texts of both *Helreið Brynhildar* and *Reginismál* in the Codex Regius, suggesting that the author of *Norna-Gests þáttir* may have been drawing more on written forms of those poems than on surviving or historical oral traditions. As Gunnell (1995, 206) notes, moreover, it is more frequent to see speaker notation dropped completely from long passages of dialogue in the manuscript versions of Eddic poems, as evinced, for example, in the text of *Alvissmál* (*Eddukvæði* 2014, I 438–43). Since speaker notation is deployed inconsistently in the manuscript witnesses, and the extant poems demonstrate various strategies for identifying speakers other than by announcing them directly, it is Gunnell's conclusion that the manuscripts' notation 'is primarily a silent reader's aid' rather than something that would have featured in oral performances (1995, 212).

Although I see no reason to rule out the possibility that some performers may have announced the identities of their speakers more directly (as, for example, one could envision in the oral performance of dialogues from the sagas), it is worth considering *Hávamál* as an example of a poem that lacks speaker notation in the source text, but still demonstrates the potential for multiple characters to have been performed by one person. The poem's title (literally 'Speech of Hávi') is attested in the Codex Regius and frames the text as a monologue delivered by Óðinn, one of whose names is Hávi (see *Óðins nafn* 2017, 741). This framing, however, seems to be a relatively late editorial intervention intended to give the poem a sense of unity that it otherwise fails to exhibit (McKinnell 2005b, 86). Beyond the superficial imposition of Óðinn as the designated speaker, in fact, *Hávamál* is evidently a composite piece, comprising several sections of varying mood and content. *Hávamál*'s composite nature has proven to be highly divisive among scholars, who have disputed areas of apparent harmony and discrepancy between the poem's sections (see e.g. the summary by Evans 1986,

1–38). One such discrepancy that is relevant to the present context is the voice of the speaker, which, despite the implications of the poem's title, continually seems to shift into various roles (these 'personae' are the subject of McKinnell 2013). A much-discussed example can be found in the poem's *Rúnatal* section (sts 138–45), whose verses are linked by a concern with rune lore. In stanza 138, which describes Óðinn's acquisition of runic knowledge, the first-person speaker seems to be the god (*Eddukvæði* 2014, I 350):

Veit ek, at ek hekk
vindga meiði á
nætr allar níu,
geiri undaðr
ok gefinn Óðni
siálfr siálfum mér.

I know that I hung on a windswept tree for nine whole nights, wounded by a spear and given to Óðinn, myself to myself.

In stanza 143, however, the voice changes as it names the originators of runes for the audience (*Eddukvæði* 2014, I 351):

Óðinn með ásum,
en fyr álfum Dáinn,
Dvalinn dvergum fyrir,
Ásviðr jötnum fyrir,
ek reist siálfr sumar.

Óðinn among the Æsir, and Dáinn for elves, Dvalinn for dwarves, Ásviðr for giants, I carved some myself.

The distinction implied in the latter stanza between Óðinn (st. 143.1) and *siálfr* (st. 143.5) might simply be the consequence of a rhetorical device. It may also, however, demonstrate a change of persona between the two stanzas, in which the performer finishes the latter with a bathetic punchline, stepping out of character to elevate themselves to mythological status. Despite the proximity of the stanzas, however, the voice-shift between them might also be explained by the internal irregularity of the *Rúnatal* section. Stanzas 138 to 141 appear to be a sequence describing Óðinn's mythological experience, but stanzas 142 to 145 are less concordant, both in metre (*fornyrðislag*, *málaháttir* and otherwise unattested forms all feature) and content (covering the origins of runes and information on both runic practice and human sacrifice). On this basis, McKinnell (2007, 101, 106) suggests that the latter set of stanzas represents fragments of oral folk poetry, added to the poem

as part of an encyclopaedic impulse to collect information, and at the expense of artistic unity.

If this calls into question the intentionality of the *Rúnatal* voice-shift, alternative examples can be sought in *Hávamál*'s first section (approximately sts 1–79), which comprises a sequence of gnomic advice. In this section, the speaking voice announces itself in the first-person singular recurrently (sts 13–14, 39, 47, 66–67, 70, 78), suggesting a single narrating persona. The first use of *ek* 'I' in stanza 13 identifies the speaker as Óðinn, since he describes himself as having been *ffjotraðr í garði Gunnlaðar* 'fettered in Gunnlǫð's dwelling' (*Eddukvæði* 2014, I 324). This is an allusion to the myth of the mead of poetry, part of which has Óðinn steal the mead from the giant Suttungr by seducing his daughter Gunnlǫð, who guards the precious liquid (see Snorri Sturluson 1998, I 4–5).⁴ The instance of *ek* at stanza 13 has been used to support the argument that Óðinn is the speaker of the whole poem (see e.g. Evans 1986, 21), but the other uses of the first person in the gnomic sequence do not support this interpretation. Nowhere else in this section can the speaker be clearly identified as Óðinn. Instead, the role of the narrator is more ambiguous and can only be described as embodying types of guest, who vary in their ability to ingratiate themselves advantageously in different environments. McKinnell (2013, 28–35) comprehensively accounts for these guest types, which, without going into great detail, exemplify a range of possible roles, from guests who are taciturn (st. 6), wary (st. 7) and level-headed (st. 10), to those who are foolish (st. 17), garrulous (st. 27) and gluttonous (sts 20–21). In this context, the *ek*-as-Óðinn at stanza 13 can simply be interpreted as one of the performer's guest types, exemplifying a guest who becomes drunk and loses their wits. This is McKinnell's perspective, which leads him to surmise that the poem's speaker is a 'shifting entity', representing different character-types through the performer's 'collection of ventriloquist voices' (2013, 30, 35, 41). The poem's voice shifts, which produce juxtaposition between frequently antithetical characters, are responsible for a great deal of its humour, as shown in the speaker's bathetic leap from the mundane to the mythological at stanza 143. This analysis also demonstrates, however, that the speaker's protean identity can be considered a salient feature of *Hávamál* despite the poem's composite nature. Although some of the

⁴ Óðinn's interaction with Gunnlǫð is recounted again later in *Hávamál* (sts 104–10), where it is framed as an example of the deceitfulness of men in sexual relationships.

voice shifts could be explained as originating in the interventions of an editor who brought together disparate material, as might be argued regarding the *Rúnatal* example, others can be detected in sections of the poem that exhibit a greater sense of internal unity, as exemplified in the gnomic sequence.

It is clear, as McKinnell (2013, 27) argues, that *Hávamál*'s original poet (or, at least, the composer of the version that survives in the Codex Regius) intended it to be considered an oral performance, for its final stanza acknowledges that the preceding text has been *kveðin* 'spoken' to *þeirs hlýddu* 'those who listened' (*Eddukvæði* 2014, I 355). Whether, in fact, the extant version of the poem accurately reflects its potential oral prehistory must remain uncertain, although Evans (1986, 7) comments on how difficult all 164 surviving stanzas would have been to recite 'without suffering a good deal of involuntary rearrangement and disruption'. A compromise, on the basis of this argument, is to envision a stage in the oral transmission of the poem when some of its sections would have been performed independently of one another. Even supposing this to be the case, the analysis conducted above demonstrates that voice shifts could not be ruled out as a significant feature of performances of the text(s) at that stage. Overall, then, the sections of *Hávamál*, recited either independently or as a whole, demonstrate that an Eddic performer must have been an adept shape-changer, able to convey rapid changes in role even when reciting a single text.

If a performer had to play multiple roles in *Hávamál*, it is likely that they would also have done so in dialogic poems like *Vafþrúðnismál*, or even the polyvocal *Lokasenna*, in which there are no fewer than sixteen speaking parts. This would necessitate a high degree of dramatic competency and, indeed, Gunnell (2011, 25) argues that *Lokasenna* may have necessitated group performance. Equally, however, one can imagine that certain aids would have been available to solo performers to help them effect identity changes while maintaining the comprehension of their audiences. On this subject, the most secure evidence is provided by the poems themselves, several of which make use of formulaic expressions assigned to specific characters. In *Lokasenna*, for instance, the phrase *þegi þú* 'be silent!' is initially associated with Loki, who uses it twelve times at the beginning of his speeches (e.g. sts 17, 20, 22), before it is appropriated and employed a further four times by Þórr (sts 57, 59, 61, 63). Whilst the phrase is used to dramatise the poem's shifting power dynamics, it is also a mnemonic cue, signalling the identity of the speaker for the audience and providing a base structure for the performer to work around (cf. *Vafþrúðnismál*, sts

11, 13, 15, 17). Several poems also suggest that performers' positioning could have been used to identify them. In *Vafþrúðnismál*, for example, the location of the speakers within Vafþrúðnir's hall is stressed on several occasions; Vafþrúðnir repeatedly points out that Óðinn (who calls himself Gagnráðr) is speaking *af* or *á gólfi* 'from' or 'on the floor' (*Eddukvæði* 2014, I 357–58), a low-status position, before inviting him to continue the exchange *á bekk jötuns* 'on the giant's bench' (*Eddukvæði* 2014, I 359), which represents an elevation of Gagnráðr's power within the wisdom contest.

Beyond the evidence of the texts themselves, the potential exists that props may also have been used to facilitate Eddic performances. In recent years, discussion has taken place on whether masks could have been used in this way, with particular interest arising from the discovery of a helmet-mask at Sutton Hoo, which appears to have been constructed to highlight one of the wearer's eyes in specific settings (Price and Mortimer 2014). One such setting, Neil Price and Paul Mortimer (2014, 528) propose, could have been the firelit interior of a hall, which features as the setting for Óðinn's monologue in *Grímnismál*. Óðinn is, of course, famous for being one-eyed, and Grímr 'Masked One' is the first of the Óðinn-names the god lists in stanzas 46 to 50 in *Grímnismál* (*Eddukvæði* 2014, I 377–78). The possibility, then, that masks like the Sutton Hoo one could have been used in this and similar performance contexts is enticing (see further Gunnell 2013), and is supported by other archaeological and literary evidence for mask-wearing in medieval Scandinavian rituals (see Gunnell 1995, 80–87). Indeed, disguises feature recurrently in Eddic poetry, and some of these could be interpreted as alluding to changes in costume. Several of Óðinn's disguises and self-revelations could be seen in this light (see e.g. his roles as Gagnráðr in *Vafþrúðnismál*, Grímnir in *Grímnismál* and Hárbarðr in *Hárbarðsljóð*; *Eddukvæði* 2014, I 357, 368, 390), whilst other examples include male characters dressing as women in *Prymskviða* and *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* (*Eddukvæði* 2014, I 425, II 270), and several instances in which characters adopt clothing that enables them to fly (e.g. *Prymskviða* and *Völundarkviða*; *Eddukvæði* 2014, I 422–23, 428, 436). On this latter costume type, it is interesting to note that a Scandinavian example has been discovered in Uppåkra, Skåne, Sweden, in the form of a gilded bronze brooch, which depicts a man wearing tied-on wings and bird-tail (see further McKinnell 2018, 215). As this example demonstrates, however, regarding props and costumes, connections between literary evidence and the archaeological record are often tenuous, if they can be discovered at all. Although props

can be envisioned as functioning in manifold ways, their importance can become overstated relative to performers' abilities to effect a shift in identity simply via a change in voice, tone or gesture, as seems to be implied by the rapid changes between *Hávamál*'s guest types. It is possible, also, that audiences would simply have been accustomed to polyvocal poems, trained to detect modulations in the actors' performance and, hence, to follow the story. Even supposing this to be the case, however, Eddic performance would still necessitate a great deal of malleability on the performer's part. Not only must they speak in the voice of their character, but that voice may also modulate rapidly between the performer's own and their different roles.

Underlying this discussion of dramatic practicality is the broader but more complex issue of the relationship between performers and their characters. Direct speech, when it is used in Eddic poetry, 'forces the performer to take on the role(s) of the characters in question' and, hence, to become that character (Gunnell 2008, 301). This dynamic, constituting an interplay of self and other, is central to all kinds of performance, and has been discussed in light of masked performance by John Emigh (1996, xvii–xviii): 'For the actor, the otherness of the mask becomes both the obstacle and the goal. He or she must redefine the sense of self in order to wear the other's face and be true to it in spirit, thought, and action.' Even in this kind of performance, then, in which one might expect the mask to provide a more concrete externalisation of a character, a performer's relationship with their role is necessarily intimate at a psychological level. As noted above, scholars have proposed the involvement of masks in Eddic performance too, although the performance of supernatural figures, using masks or otherwise, is hardly unique to the Eddic tradition.⁵ Before arguing for the distinctiveness of Eddic performance in this regard, certain fundamental questions require further attention. Taken together, Gunnell and Emigh's propositions suggest the following points of departure: what was an Eddic performer's relationship with the roles they enacted? What, concordantly, was their state of being during a performance?

Judging by the identity fluctuations in *Hávamál*, it seems that certain Eddic performances had the potential to demand extreme changes of

⁵ Emigh (1996), for example, explores performance traditions in Papua New Guinea, Orissa, India and Bali, and one could also consider Noh, a form of classical Japanese drama in which supernatural beings are portrayed by masked performers. See further Noboru 2021.

self. The extent of these changes, and their potential religious or spiritual significance, can only be considered theoretically, and performance theory offers one way of doing so, as I will demonstrate shortly. Drawing on studies of religion, Gunnell (2016, 98–99) has suggested that the performance of mythological *ljóðaháttir* poems would have created *uppvakning* ‘exhortation’, a religious sacred time ‘in which the gods manifest themselves among, or in front of, the audience’ (see further Eliade 1958, 388–403). Gunnell uses the term *uppvakning* primarily for its conceptual connotations, implying the ‘summoning up’ of supernatural beings into a performance space, rather than for its historical significance, since, so far as I can tell, the word is not attested in Old Norse sources.⁶ No historical evidence exists to support this proposition, although the summoning of supernatural beings through poetic performance is not unknown in Old Norse literature. In *Hervarar saga* (1943, 200–03), for example, Hervör famously awakens her father, Angantýr, from the dead and engages him in an exchange of *fornyrðislag* verses. Consider, also, this passage from *Eiríks saga rauða* (1935, 207–08), describing a performance of *seiðr*:⁷

Slógu þá konur hring um hjallinn, en Þorbjörg sat á uppi. Kvað Guðríðr þá kvæðit svá fagrt ok vel, at engi þóttist heyrt hafa með fegri rödd kvæði kveðit, sá er þar var hjá. Spákonan þakkar henni kvæðit ok kvað margar þær náttúrur nú til hafa sótt ok þykkja fagrt at heyra, er kvæðit var svá vel flutt, ‘er áðr vildu við oss skiljast ok enga hlýðni oss veita.’

Then the women formed a ring around the scaffolding, and Þorbjörg sat up on it. Then Guðríðr recited the poem so beautifully and well that no one who was near thought they had heard a poem spoken with a more beautiful voice. The prophetess thanked her for the poem and said, ‘It has charmed many spirits—and they thought it beautiful to hear, so well was the poem recited—which before wanted to part from us and would not give heed to us.’

Guðríðr’s *kvæði* is not quoted here, but it is presumably one of the *varðlokkur* ‘ward songs’ that the *völva* ‘prophetess’ Þorbjörg specifies that her ritual requires (*Eiríks saga rauða* 1935, 207). On the term *varðlokkur*,

⁶ At the time of writing, only one usage of *uppvakning* is listed in the University of Copenhagen’s Dictionary of Old Norse Prose, and this is from an early-sixteenth-century manuscript, available in Jón Þorkelsson’s edition in the tenth volume of *Diplomatarium Islandicum*. See further Jón Þorkelsson 1911–21, 209.

⁷ The word *seiðr* has no precise equivalent in English. It is, essentially, a type of ritualised sorcery, usually associated with women and shameful for men to perform. See further Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir 2009.

Clive Tolley (1995, 61) argues that the first element (*varð-*) is derived from *varðr* ‘warden, guard, look-out’, implying a kind of ‘guardian spirit’. The second element is spelled both *-lokkur* and *-lokur* in the *Eiríks saga* manuscripts (see e.g. Jansson 1944, 42), meaning that it is either the feminine plural form of *loka* ‘fastening’, or a feminine plural noun from the verb *lokka* ‘to entice’. On this basis, Tolley interprets *varðlo(k)kur* as being songs that either lock or entice guardian spirits into the space of the performer.

There is no immediate association between the unquoted *varðlokkur* in *Eiríks saga* and Eddic poetry, although one can be deduced by comparing the account with other Old Norse texts that involve *vǫlur*. Within the confines of saga literature, for example, *Qrvar-Odds saga* (1943, 286–9), *Hrólfs saga kraka* (1944, 9–11) and *Orms þátr Stórolfssonar* (Faulkes 2011, 64) all depict *vǫlur* expressing prophecies in the form of verse, and these are always in *fornyrðislag* (cf. McKinnell 2005a, 97).⁸ None of these accounts explicitly alludes to anything like the *náttúru* ‘spirits’ that reveal information to Þorbjörg in *Eiríks saga*, but *Qrvar-Odds saga* and *Hrólfs saga kraka* both state that the *vǫlur*’s versified prophecies form in their mouths involuntarily, suggesting that a similar kind of supernatural power is envisioned as acting upon, or through, them (see further Quinn 1998). Prophetesses also feature famously in the Eddic poems *Vǫluspá* and *Baldrs draumar* (Eddukvæði 2014, I 291–307, 446–48), both of which, as in the saga accounts, are in *fornyrðislag*. In *Baldrs draumar*, Óðinn is said to travel to the realm of the dead, where he summons a *vǫlva* using a *valgaldr* ‘corpse-reviving spell’ (Eddukvæði 2014, I 446). He proceeds to interrogate the *vǫlva* about the significance of Baldr’s bad dreams, which, she reveals, portend Baldr’s death. Óðinn and his *valgaldr* parallel the supernatural forces acting upon the *vǫlur* in saga literature in so far as they are external to the *vǫlva* and cause her to prophesy. Unlike the saga accounts, however, they do not appear to be the source of the *vǫlva*’s prophetic knowledge. This, it has been suggested, derives from her proximity to the world of the dead, or perhaps even to death itself (e.g. Quinn 2002, 257). Óðinn has also been envisioned as the primary recipient of *Vǫluspá*, since the speaker addresses him directly in stanza 28. He may also be the instigator of the *vǫlva*’s prophesying again here, as indicated in stanza 29 (Eddukvæði 2014, I 298):

⁸ The author of *Orms þátr* seems to have been informed by the equivalent scene in *Qrvar-Odds saga*. See further Faulkes 2011, 28.

Valði henni Herfǫðr
 hringa ok men,
 fekk spjöll spaklig
 ok spá ganda,
 sá hon vítt ok um vítt,
 of verǫld hverja.

Herfǫðr [= Óðinn] chose rings and necklaces, treasure, wise words, and the spirits of divination for her. She saw widely, and widely across every world.

Gifts as payment for *vǫlur*'s prophecies are also described in *Eiríks saga*, *Qrvar-Odds saga* and *Hrólfs saga*, whilst the *spá ganda* 'spirits of divination' might be seen as similar sources of knowledge to the *náttúrur* of *Eiríks saga*. Although there are some discrepancies between the sources, then, it is notable that they consistently represent *vǫlur*'s prophecies as being performed in *formyrðislag*, and that the act of prophesying is frequently facilitated by a supernatural force external to the *vǫlva*. Whether or not the accounts are based on real performance traditions, they affirm an association between prophetic modes of Eddic performance and exhortation in the period of saga writing.

If certain types of Eddic performance, such as those involving direct speech by supernatural beings, did constitute *uppvakning*, the implication is that the performer's mind was shareable with the entities being enacted. In these contexts, Lönnroth's doubling effect would, therefore, not be limited to the physical dramatic space, but would also extend to the mental states of the performance participants. In other words, the performer would invoke a kind of double consciousness, even as they worked within the double scene. This dynamic is evinced most obliquely in the literary accounts of trance-induced *vǫlur* discussed above, and further areas of comparison could be the ecstatic states of other shamanistic and religious practices, such as those of *berserkir* 'berserks', the frenzied warriors of Óðinn, who gained supernatural characteristics through ritual performance, including ecstatic 'dancing, singing, howling, and donning animal skins' (see further Wade 2016, 27; Heath and Cooper 2021). Price (2019, 171–72) provides a good summary of the debates on shamanistic states of mind, and concedes, regarding accounts of *seiðr* performances, that 'it is quite simply impossible to come to a firm conclusion as to the exact state of consciousness achieved by the *vǫlur* and other sorcerers'. Indeed, although the analysis conducted above would indicate that saga authors envisioned a connection between *seiðr* and Eddic poetry, it is difficult to imagine the majority of Eddic poems being performed in a kind of trance-like state or frenzy. Given that the available evidence is largely literary, the connections between

shamanistic practices and Eddic performance must remain uncertain, although the connections that can be deduced would recommend the idea of a double consciousness within both performance traditions. I would argue, however, that the Eddic double consciousness need not be envisaged as being so extreme in all cases. Indeed, given the heterogeneous nature of the Eddic corpus, and the fundamental fact that no two performances are ever identical (Foley 2002, 60), it is best envisioned as a dynamic highly contingent on the demands of individual performances. To return momentarily to *Eiríks saga*, for example, alongside Þorbjörg's communication with the *náttúrur*, a less extreme version of a dual performance persona could also be envisioned in Guðríðr's participation in the *seiðr*. Guðríðr is Christian and is, therefore, reluctant to recite the necessary *varðlokkur* because of their pagan content (*Eiríks saga rauða* 1935, 207). It is unclear whether her participation comes as a response to her father's wishes or from any personal desire to save her Greenlandic colony from starvation. Her decision to participate, however, represents a decisive ability to dissociate herself from her beliefs for the duration of the performance, adopting a persona that utilises pagan wisdom rather than Christian faith.

Although similar dynamics could be envisioned in many Eddic poems, an example from the beginning of *Vafþrúðnismál* will serve to elucidate the point further. In the following stanzas (the poem's fifth and sixth), the speaking voice makes a transition between narrator and character to set the scene for the ensuing wisdom contest (*Eddukvæði* 2014, I 357):

Fór þá Óðinn
at freista orðspeki
þess ins alsvinna jötuns;
at hǫllu hann kom
ok átti Íms faðir;
inn gekk Yggr þegar.

Then Óðinn went to test the word-wisdom of the extremely wise giant. He came to the hall, which Ímr's father owned; Yggr [i.e., Óðinn] went in immediately.

Óðinn kvað:
'Heill þú nú, Vafþrúðnir!
nú em ek í hǫll kominn
á þik sjálfan sjá;
hitt vil ek fyrsta vita,
ef þú fróðr sér
eða alsviðr, jötunn.'⁹

⁹ It should be noted that the speaker notation preceding this stanza ('Óðinn kvað') represents an expansion of marginalia in the poem's manuscript sources, in

Óðinn said: ‘Greetings, Vafþrúðnir! I have come to the hall now to see you yourself. I want to know this first: whether you are wise, or extremely wise, giant.’

As in the stanzas from *Hávamál*’s *Rúnatal* section, the speaker slides quickly in and out of character here, although the transition between the stanzas represents a change not only in the performer’s identity, but also in the identity of the dramatic space. Greeting Vafþrúðnir bombastically, the performer signals to the audience that he, and they with him, have entered a different physical space, which is emphasised by further uses of the words *holl* and *salr* ‘hall’ in the next two stanzas. Stanza 5, preceding this transition, is the only extant *ljóðaháttir* stanza in which the voice is purely narratorial, as Gunnell (1995, 277) points out. For the rest of the poem (sts 6–55), the voice alternates between utterances by Óðinn and Vafþrúðnir. The anomalous nature of stanza 5 potentially casts doubt on the integrity of the beginning of the poem (see further Machan 2008, 30–34), although it is notable that a similar moment of transition occurs in the same place, between stanzas 5 and 6, in *Lokasenna* (*Eddukvæði* 2014, I 409). In that poem, the transition marks Loki’s re-entry to Ægir’s hall, having been thrown out by the partying Æsir. His opening speech in stanza 6, in which he claims to have come to the hall *þyrstr* ‘thirty’, and *um langan veg* ‘over a long way’ (*Eddukvæði* 2014, I 409), also echoes Óðinn’s speech from stanza 8 of *Vafþrúðnismál*, indicating a potential connection between the two poems (McKinnell 2018, 178). Given that *Vafþrúðnismál* is broadly considered to be one of the oldest poems in the *Poetic Edda* (see e.g. Machan 2008, 2–12; McKinnell 2018, 154), it seems likely that *Lokasenna* is the recipient of influence here (cf. Söderberg 1985, 73–76). This strengthens the case for the integrity of *Vafþrúðnismál*’s fifth and sixth stanzas, which, in their current form, affirm the need for a performer to move quickly between their roles, including, in this case, a version of themselves as a performer. In stanza 6, the transition back into character is signalled not using names, but through the first-person declarative statements in the second and fourth lines, which must have been delivered in a mode synonymous with the character of Óðinn.¹⁰ To produce this transition and, indeed, to make the alternating voice throughout the poem convincing, the performer must have been highly familiar with the characters, to the extent that,

which the speaking character is frequently alluded to via a marking such as ‘v.q.’, i.e. ‘Vafþrúðnir [k]vað’. As noted earlier, Gunnell (1995, 206–12) suggests that performers would have been unlikely to vocalise such statements.

and to draw on Emigh's argument, they would invoke a double consciousness between self and other. This dynamic would, of course, be less extreme were *Vafþrúðnismál* to be enacted by two performers. Equally, however, the poem's use of formulas and its consistent call-and-response structure make it one of the simpler *ljóðaháttir* poems to fit within the parameters of solo performance (cf. Gunnell 1995, 275–80). If, furthermore, an important theme in *Vafþrúðnismál* is the proximity between familiar and unfamiliar, centre and periphery, as discussed above and as Ármann Jakobsson (2008) has argued, then a solo recitation would surely be an effective expression of this. Becoming human self, god and giant alternately, if not simultaneously, the performer shows, quite literally, the indistinct borderlines between these figures. One body and mind, *Vafþrúðnismál* demonstrates, can embody many identities.

Eddic Audiences

Fundamental to all types of performance is the co-presence of actors and spectators (McAuley 1999, 3), and so far I have neglected to consider the latter in my analysis. As I will show here, Gunnell's concept of *uppvakning* can be refined by considering audience participation in Eddic performance in light of performance theory. Audiences were clearly envisioned as important figures within performance spaces, a fact highlighted in several of the texts examined above. In the *seiðr* performance in *Eiríks saga rauða*, for example, Guðríðr is initially an audience member before being co-opted into the ceremony by Þorbjörg. After the *seiðr*, moreover, it is said that *gengu menn at vísendakonunni, ok frétti þá hverr þess, er mest forvitni var á at vita. Hon var ok góð af frásögnum* 'people went to the wise-woman and each asked that which they were most curious to know about. She was also generous in replies' (*Eiríks saga rauða* 1935, 208). In *Norna-Gests þáttur* too, performance is portrayed as involving active participation by both actor and spectators. In the first chapter, it is said that *Margra hluta spyr konung Gest, en hann leysti flest vel ok vitrliga* 'the king asked Gest many things, and he answered most well and wisely' (*Norna-Gests þáttur* 1943, 168). Subsequently, in chapter ten, Óláfr Tryggvason himself affirms Norna-Gestr's verbal dexterity: *Mörg tíðendi muntu segja kunna, ef vér viljum spyrja* 'You are able to tell much news, if we wish to ask for it' (*Norna-Gests þáttur* 1943, 185). Although the active involvement of audiences in these examples is reflected only infrequently in modern theatrical practices, in which audiences are usually distanced from the stage (see further Bennett 1997, 15), it accords with the cultures

in which Eddic poetry would have been enacted, and in which performers and spectators would probably have had pre-existing relationships within their social groups (cf. Wickham 1987, 4). Much as audiences may be less influential in theatres today, moreover, their importance continues to be highlighted in performance theory. For Erika Fischer-Lichte (2008, 38), the co-presence of actors and spectators constitutes a ‘feedback loop’, in which the actors act, the spectators respond, and the actors modulate their performance in turn.

Given the mutual importance of audiences in both Old Norse accounts and modern studies of performance, the natural corollary in the context of this investigation is to consider the nature of audience involvement in Eddic double scenes. As noted earlier, audiences within double scenes are more encapsulated by, and implicated within, the performance space. As Murphy (2016, 159) points out, audiences of poems like *Vafþrúðnismál*, *Grímnismál* and *Lokasenna* would be ‘at once both themselves and the inhabitants of the mythological hall in question’. Like the performer, then, the audience would be embroiled within a double consciousness of their own, aware of the duality between their own identity and the collective ‘part’ that the performance has forced them to enact. The potential function of such identity changes has been discussed most recently by Nygaard (2019) and, if one were to accept Gunnell’s concept of *uppvakning*, audience members could be envisioned as feeling this second identity as a spiritual presence. A more favourable conceptualisation of the process, I would argue, can be found in Fischer-Lichte’s performance theory. Common to all types of performance, Fischer-Lichte argues, is the ‘concept of presence’: ‘the spectators sense that the actor is present in an unusually intense way, granting them in turn an intense sensation of themselves as present’ (see Figure 2). In the most potent moments in the performer-audience feedback loop, she suggests, performance produces a ‘radical concept of presence’, which she defines as follows: ‘Through the performer’s presence, the spectator experiences the performer and himself as embodied mind in a constant process of becoming—he perceives the circulating energy as a transformative and vital energy’ (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 99). Given that our evidence for Eddic performance is largely literary, then, it does not seem necessary to surmise that audiences would literally share their minds. They would, however, be implicated in the performer’s ‘process of becoming’, conscious of their involvement in the transformation of the performance space and, concordantly, the transformation of their own identity at a cerebral level.

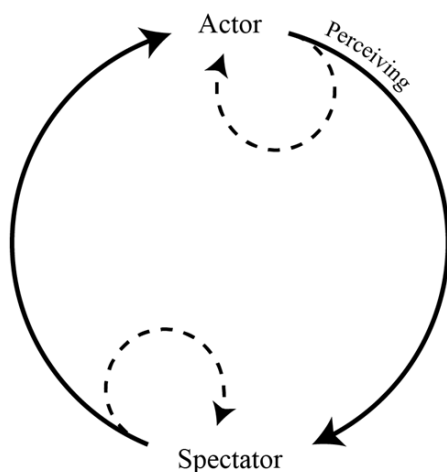


Figure 2. ‘Concept of presence’. Based on Fischer-Lichte 2008, 96–99.

This proposition is necessarily hypothetical, but it is interesting to note that the dynamics of identity change in Eddic performance also seem to have been acknowledged by saga authors. The accounts of Eddic performance in *Norna-Gests þáttur* and *Óláfs saga helga*, for example, both explore the performer’s ability to manipulate their audience’s double consciousness. In *Norna-Gests þáttur*, this is indicated by Norna-Gestr’s choice of passages from *Reginismál*. His performance largely comprises episodes that involve non-supernatural heroism at the expense of the poem’s mythological elements, such as the description of Reginn’s ancestors and their interaction with Óðinn, Hœnir and Loki (*Eddukvæði* 2014, II 296–302). In fact, Norna-Gestr even extrapolates from *Reginismál*, giving certain details about Hundingsr’s sons, their battle with Sigurðr and another battle between Sigurðr and Gandálfr’s sons (*Norna-Gests þáttur* 1943, I 173–80) that are found neither in the Codex Regius nor in the analogous narrative in *Völsunga saga* (1943, I 3–91). This, I would argue, is Fischer-Lichte’s feedback loop in practice. Norna-Gestr recognises the composition of his audience (i.e., the warriors of Óláfr Tryggvason) and modifies his performance in turn, stripping away mythological material and generating a heroic narrative that his immediate auditors can relate to. Although Norna-Gestr does not draw parallels between the environment of his performance and that of Sigurðr’s adventures, his rendition of *Reginismál* nonetheless invites his

audience to consider how they might embody the martial exploits of the legendary heroes. The *þátttr* author affirms the effectiveness of Norna-Gestr's performances at the end of his delivery of *Helreið Brynhildar*, which is described as receiving the following response (*Norna-Gests þátttr* 1943, I 184):

Þá sögðu hirðmenn konungs: 'Gaman er þetta, ok segðu enn fleira.' Konungur mælti: 'Eigi er nauðsyn at segja fleira frá því líkum hlutum.'

Then the king's retainers said: 'This is fun! Tell us some more.' The king said: 'There is no need to say anything more about such things.'

King Óláfr's intervention suggests that the subject matter of Norna-Gestr's performances has strayed too far into the pagan past, and it serves as a useful reminder that Eddic performers would potentially have been limited by circumstance, not least when a royal audience was involved. The fact that Óláfr feels it necessary to intervene, however, demonstrates that his retainers are completely engrossed in Norna-Gestr's performance, even though *Helreið Brynhildar*, which depicts the argument between Brynhildr and a giantess, represents a movement away from the androcentric Sigurðr stories told earlier.

An even more complete double scene is implied in the account of Þormóðr's recitation of *Bjarkamál* in *Óláfs saga helga*. Said to take place on the morning of the battle of Stiklastaðir, Þormóðr's performance draws a likeness between the contemporary situation (the imminent and final battle of King Óláfr helgi) and the original circumstances of *Bjarkamál*'s composition (the imminent and final battle of the legendary King Hrólfr kraki; see *Hrólfs saga kraka* 1944). Þormóðr's intention is to inspire Óláfr Haraldsson's troops, encouraging them to 'feel the obligation of being as staunch and unflinching in their loyalty as were the warriors of King Rolf', as Lönnroth (1971, 6–8) puts it. Represented here and in *Norna-Gests þátttr* is the broader trend in Old Norse literature to develop 'collective identity' via illustration of 'the memory of a common past', as Else Mundal (2010, 463) has suggested. In these narratives, however, whether Sigurðr's adventures or the battle described in *Bjarkamál* ever actually happened is unimportant; what matters is Norna-Gestr and Þormóðr's ability to show their audiences the commonality between their circumstances and those of legendary heroes. Þormóðr's double scene, then, is not formed through shared memory and, indeed, Snorri makes no suggestion that Óláfr or his troops have any pre-existing knowledge of *Bjarkamál* or the events described therein. That *Bjarkamál* stands as a pre-existing composition at all can only be implied

through the introduction to the quoted verses: *Hann kvað Bjarkamál in fornu, ok er þetta upphaf* ‘He [Þormóðr] recited “Bjarkamál in fornu”, and this is the beginning’ (Snorri Sturlusson 1945, 361). Both Þormóðr and Norna-Gestr create, then, military communities not through a common past, but common narratives, which seem to be no less effective in creating collective identity. Given that Þormóðr is otherwise known as a composer of skaldic poetry, one would be justified in asking whether his recitation of *Bjarkamál* is definitively an Eddic performance. The poem’s *málaháttir* form is, indeed, shared with stanzas in two other quasi-skaldic poems: the anonymous *Eiríksmál* (2012, 1003–13) and Eyvindr skáldaspillir Finnsson’s (2012, 171–93) *Hákonarmál*. Given that *Bjarkamál*’s metre and subject matter are otherwise in keeping with poetry traditionally categorised as Eddic, then, Þormóðr’s performance could be considered as one involving elements of Eddic style. As the similarities with the account in *Norna-Gests þáttir* would suggest, one such element may well be the significance of engagement between Eddic performers and audiences.

My intention in making these excursions into literary accounts is not to suggest that they necessarily relate to authentic histories of performance, Eddic or otherwise. Both the accounts involving Norna-Gestr and Þormóðr, in fact, seem to belong to broader literary traditions. The character of Norna-Gestr has analogues in several other texts in the Old Norse and wider Germanic literary corpuses (see note 2 above), whilst Þormóðr’s delivery of *Bjarkamál* has been compared to similar medieval accounts dealing with performances of verse before battles, one example being William of Malmesbury’s Anglo-Latin description of the recitation of the *Song of Roland* before the Battle of Hastings (see von See 1976; Harris and Reichl 2011, 156–57). Although it is plausible that saga authors would have been informed by the performance traditions of their time, the relationship between the saga accounts and the ‘original’ oral performances they purport to describe must remain unknown. Their value, in the context of this discussion, is to underscore the communicative potential of Eddic performance. In the case of Norna-Gestr and Þormóðr’s performances, the sagas corroborate what Nygaard (2019) has described as the establishment of ‘social and moral obligation’ through Eddic performance. This function is achieved by doubling, in which the performer transforms both physical space and mental state to manipulate the identities of the performance participants. Fischer-Lichte’s performance theory offers an effective model of this process, demonstrating the degree to which audiences may have been conscious of their involvement

in the double scene. The analysis conducted in this article not only affirms the military function envisioned by Nygaard, however, but also raises the possibility of other social functions of double scenes, especially given the heterogenous nature of the Eddic corpus. Further research into performances of poems like *Lokasenna*, for example, would undoubtedly be revealing for the potential purpose of doubling for other types of social group. Furthermore, although for reasons of scope the Eddic examples I have analysed have primarily been verses in *ljóðahátttr*, it would be revealing to consider how and whether the dynamics of doubling, and the inherent implications for dramatic spaces and mental states, are in accord with other modes of Eddic poetry.

Overall, and to return to the problem of a lack of evidence for Eddic performances, this article has demonstrated that there is much to be said about them despite their ambiguity. Scholars have long been concerned with the ways in which Eddic poems can be conceived as reflective of the culture(s) that produced them, Jacob Grimm (1854) being one of the earliest (see further e.g. Schjødtt 2016). Discussions of Eddic performance such as the one conducted here, however, have demonstrated that the Eddic poems can be treated equally productively as representations of sociality, not simply reflections of society. The stories told in the poems are a complex of communication, depicting different types of interaction and exchange between a range of social groups. In reading them, to borrow Óðinn's words quoted at the beginning of this article, one bears witness to 'mind-mixing' in many forms, from wisdom contests between gods and giants, to the urgings of a mother, willing her sons on to vengeance. Medieval audiences, as this article has demonstrated, would have been active participants in this arena of interactivity, mixing minds with the performer to develop a social consciousness. Whilst the oral medium of the Eddic poems and their relationship with religious practices remain matters of speculation, such social orientations of Eddic poetry are a demonstrably valuable area for study. Considering Eddic poetry in conjunction with evidence of other performance contexts and modern performance theory, this article has demonstrated that certain types of Eddic performance would produce not simply a double scene, but also a double consciousness, for their participants.

Note: I am grateful to the editors of *Saga-Book* for their suggestions towards refining this article, and David Ashurst, under whose supervision this research initially developed. I would also like to acknowledge the Wolfson Foundation for supporting this research.

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