

Repetition in Old Norse Eddic Poetry: Poetic Style, Voice, and Desire

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I, Peter Benedict Sandberg, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

## Abstract

This thesis examines the use of repetition as a poetic device in Old Norse Eddic verse from a primarily stylistic point of view. Previous studies have noted the prominence of repetition as a feature of Eddic poetry, but without engaging in an in-depth analysis of the use and significance of Eddic repetition as this thesis does. The analysis begins at the level of syntax in the Eddic strophe, establishing in the first place the syntactic formulae that constitute the most basic building blocks of repetition in Eddic poetry, focusing closely on individual lines and strophes from a broad range of texts. From there the analysis follows the increasing complexity of Eddic repetition, moving from pure syntax to the use of deictic markers in dialogic repetition, as well as the distinct yet clearly related style of repetition of individual words in Eddic poems. These strands of analysis are finally synthesized in the examination of the sophisticated programs of repetition in certain individual poems, particularly *Skírnismál* and *Völundarkviða*. Through an analysis of the stylistic structure of repetition in these texts, a completely new reading and fresh understanding of them is possible. The methodological basis of the thesis is close reading and linguistic and stylistic analysis, with extensive reference to a wide range of linguistic, literary, and critical theory.

Methodological sources have been selected on the basis of their usefulness to the task at hand rather than the validation of a wider methodological program, and the results provide a productive interrogation both of existing scholarship on Eddic poetry and of the assumptions of the methodological sources. The result is a new understanding of the source material as well as a valuable addition to the study of verbal art in general.

## Acknowledgments

Alone with our madness and favorite flower,  
We see that there really is nothing left to write about.  
Or rather, it is necessary to write about the same old things  
In the same way, repeating the same things over and over,  
For love to continue and be gradually different.<sup>1</sup>

To say that I have Dr. Erin Goeres, my principal supervisor, to thank seems by no means an adequate way of putting it. I feel so lucky to have benefited from your insight, patience, dedication, attention to detail, and fairness. You are the model of a mentor and colleague that I will always seek to emulate. Dr. Haki Antonsson has been a source of support for me for many years and was the one to originally encourage me to undertake a PhD; this thesis would surely not have come about without that encouragement and guidance.

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Professor Chris Abram was the first to teach me Old Norse and his influence has profoundly shaped the direction of my research. Dr. Richard Cole has been not only my friend but a constant source of inspiration to me – I merely follow where he leads the way.

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<sup>1</sup> Ashbery, John (1979): "Late Echo", *As We Know*, New York: Penguin

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## 1. Introduction

This study examines stylistic structures and strategies in Old Norse Eddic poetry. Already there is a problem with this sentence, in that the scope of the term “Eddic poetry” is by no means a given. We will begin this introductory chapter by examining definitions of the term “Eddic” and delineating the history of study of the subject, thereby establishing some of the parameters for the present study. The heterogeneous and anonymously composed nature of Eddic verse, we shall see, will come to be a major factor in the method of these analyses and in the nature of the conclusions. “Stylistics” is perhaps a less debatable term, yet one that encompasses a wide range of verbal phenomena as well as methods of study. We will examine the history of the study of Eddic style as well as theories of verbal art in general, by way of beginning to establish the methodology to be used in this study. The primary target of analysis here is the use of repetition in Eddic verse, or rather, as we shall see, a number of distinct but related uses of repetition displayed in Eddic poems which together suggest a certain aesthetic of repetition. As we delve deeper into these stylistic phenomena, we will see the entanglement of voice with repetition, and along with it matters of personality and desire.

The first level of analysis is that of syntax: in the second chapter we bring together a number of distinct syntactic figures which on the one hand rely on the conventional formal aspects of both Eddic metre and Old Norse grammar, but which on the other hand turn these forms toward an expressive end. We will then move on to larger structures of

repetition in the third chapter, examining uses of repetition coupled with deixis and taking as our primary object of study the structure of repetition in the dialogic poem *Skírnismál*. From here the analysis moves on to the repetition of individual words in the fourth chapter, with particular reference to figures of metaphor. Here we examine appearances of words across multiple texts and, indeed, even in different media, delving into the realm of runic inscriptions, before returning our focus to the use of the word *munr* (“desire”) in *Skírnismál*. The results of this analysis indicate an altogether unique figure of the word, cryptic and subtly different from metaphor proper. Having examined all these forms of repetition in Eddic poetry and noted the contiguity of their style, a sufficient analytic apparatus will have been developed to map out the overall stylistic structure of a single poem, *Völundarkviða*, which as we shall see in the fifth chapter combines all the figures of repetition previously identified in this study in a coherent and sophisticated manner. This view of the stylistic structure of *Völundarkviða* makes possible a new reading of the poem, offering a significant challenge to the established understanding of it and of Eddic verse in general.

As well as bringing to light newly discovered features of Eddic verse and providing a new close reading of certain texts, this study addresses the nature of repetition as an abstract concept, the nature of Eddic poetry as verbal art, and the relation of Eddic stylistics to theories of poetry in general. From the outset the concept of repetition strikes at the question of how language can be “poetic,” and even proposes its own question: is there really such a thing as a repetition? Is the concept itself not perhaps a paradox? These questions will arise as we investigate the text, and in this sense it is better to view them first in context rather than delineating a specific approach to repetition at the outset. We will

see that the Eddic stylistic structures both accord with and challenge general views on repetition and voice in language, and in identifying new uses of these concepts this study adds to the overall discussion of repetition and voice. The particular figures that we identify here will allow us to consider some more general theoretical approaches to repetition and voice in the concluding chapter.

### 1.1 Studying Eddic Poetry

The greatest difficulty in approaching Eddic poetry at all may be the problem of context. The largest body of this type of poetry is preserved in only a single manuscript, the thirteenth-century 45-leaf Codex Regius (GKS 2365 4°).<sup>1</sup> Even that manuscript appears to the modern reader imperfectly, with a lacuna of eight leaves. It is a wonder that we have any knowledge at all of many of these poems, and we know little for certain about the circumstances of the manuscript's production, or even anything at all about its whereabouts prior to the seventeenth century. Little remains in the way of contextual evidence for the nature of Eddic poetry and its place in the society that produced it, as we will discuss in more detail below. This leaves the modern reader with a number of questions, none with easy answers: who originally produced Eddic poetry, and when was it originally produced? In what context was it originally consumed? How was it circulated or preserved, by whom, and why? Why was it considered worth preserving in written form, and who were the intended readers? The vast majority of scholarship on Eddic poetry aims

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<sup>1</sup> One should note that these designations are modern; whether the manuscript bore any title at all originally remains unknown.

at answering this group of questions, and so we must consider the history of this scholarship en route to a delineation of the aims of the present study.

### 1.1.1 A Brief Genealogy of Eddic Scholarship

These questions of origin have traditionally provided much of the impulse for scholarship related to Eddic poetry, though accepted models of origination have changed over time. This fact highlights the way in which readings of this poetry depend upon the purpose or *telos* with which (or by which, or through which) they are read. The history of Eddic scholarship, going back to its very beginning, can largely be seen as a history of the paradigms to which scholars have anchored Eddic poetry. Somewhat problematically, the dawn of Eddic scholarship has already begun by the time of the literature's earliest available compilation. Our first Eddic scholar is none other than Snorri Sturluson, who among other exploits appears across the centuries to modern readers as a towering figure of thirteenth-century Old Norse antiquarianism and historiography. Indeed, the compilers of Codex Regius themselves seem to have presented the collection primarily as a work of antiquarianism, with short prose commentaries and a coherent arrangement of the text by subject.<sup>2</sup> In Snorri's own work, which has come to be known as *Snorra Edda* or the "Prose Edda," and in particular in the introduction to the *Gylfaginning* section, he gives us the first stab at situating the content of Eddic poetry in an established scholarly context (described

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<sup>2</sup> As Margaret Clunies Ross discusses: Clunies Ross, Margaret (2016): "The transmission and preservation of eddic poetry", *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry: Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia*, ed. Carolyne Larrington, Judy Quinn, Brittany Schorn, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 22-25.

in Anthony Faulkes' introduction to *Gylfaginning* as "surprisingly rational").<sup>3</sup> Snorri's context is that of a learned medieval western Christian, what Faulkes calls a "European context,"<sup>4</sup> and his theory of the origination of the mythic material preserved in Eddic poetry is, for his time, safely euhemeristic: according to Snorri's model, cults arose from the veneration of dead political leaders and gradually developed into a religious system focused on various gods.<sup>5</sup> Though it is unclear exactly what Latin sources Snorri might have relied on in formulating this theory, it would probably not have been considered particularly controversial in his context,<sup>6</sup> but rather an appropriate contextualization of the content of the text according to contemporary conventions (and indeed, the euhemeristic theory of *Gylfaginning* is invoked almost verbatim in Óláfr Hvítaskáld's Third Grammatical Treatise<sup>7</sup>). Though it is easy to see the euhemeristic attitude of Snorri's theory as a fossilized product of its time, it is nonetheless the case that in his analysis Snorri initiated concepts and

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<sup>3</sup> Faulkes, Anthony ed. (2005): *Edda: prologue and Gylfaginning*, London: Viking Society for Northern Research, University College London, p. xi.

<sup>4</sup> Faulkes 2005 p. xxv.

<sup>5</sup> On the subject of Snorri's euhemerism and ambiguous attitude toward the religion of his ancestors, see (in addition to Faulkes' introduction to *prologue and Gylfaginning*): Clunies Ross, Margaret (2000): "The Conservation and Reinterpretation of Myth in Medieval Icelandic Writings", *Old Icelandic Literature and Society* 5, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 116–39; Wanner, Kevin J. (2008): *Snorri Sturluson and the Edda - The Conversion of Cultural Capital in Medieval Scandinavia*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp. 154-155; Abram, Christopher (2009): "Gylfaginning and Early Medieval Conversion Theory", *Saga-Book* 33 (2009), pp. 5-24 , pp. 5-24; Hobson, Jacob (2017): "Euhemerism and the Veiling of History in Early Scandinavian Literature", *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, Volume 116, Number 1, January 2017, pp. 24-44.

<sup>6</sup> On Snorri's relation to Latin sources see Dronke, Ursula & Peter Dronke (1977): "The Prologue of the Prose Edda: Explorations of a Latin Background", *Sjötíu ritgerðir helgaðar Jakobi Benediktssyni 20. júlí 1977*, ed. Einar G. Pétursson and Jónas Kristjánsson, pp. 153–76; Weber, Gerd Wolfgang (1993): "Snorri Sturlusons Verhältnis zu seinen Quellen und sein Mythos Begriff", *Snorri Sturluson: Kolloquium anlässlich der 750. Wiederkehr seines Todestages*, ed. Alois Wolf, Script-Oralia 51, Tübingen: Gunter Narr, pp. 193–244.

<sup>7</sup> Björn Magnus Ólsen & Thomas Krömmelbein ed. (1998): *Dritte grammatische Abhandlung: der isländische Text nach den Handschriften AM748 I, 4(0 und Codex Wormianus / Óláfr Thórdarson Hvítaskáld ; herausgegeben von Björn Magnus Ólsen; übersetzt, kommentiert und herausgegeben von Thomas Krömmelbein*, Oslo: Novus Forlag, p. 97: "er oðinn ok aðrir asiameñ flvttv norðr higat i norðr halfv heimsins" ("when Óðinn and other Asians moved hence into the northern half of the world").

attitudes toward Eddic poetry which have had a shaping effect on subsequent scholarship several centuries down the line, and which have proven difficult to shake off even today. These are primarily the use of Eddic poetry as a supporting source for a broad view of early medieval Scandinavian culture, and the concept of systematic pre-Christian religion in Scandinavia reflected in Eddic poetry. This is most of all evident when one considers that *Snorra Edda*, on the whole, is primarily a treatise on poetics. However, it is a treatise primarily on the poetics of what we now call “skaldic” verse as opposed to “Eddic” (we will return to this generic distinction in section 1.2 below), and therefore treats the skaldic material as primarily artistic and the Eddic material as primarily a non-artistic source for mythological knowledge.

The view of Eddic poetry as a source for these twin aims continues to condition Eddic scholarship as it is instituted anew in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, with the work of various Scandinavian and German linguists, philologists, historians, and textual scholars. Although there had been a significant amount of scholarly attention given to Eddic mythology in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries,<sup>8</sup> this had largely been limited to the mythology given in *Snorra Edda* in lieu of any widely accessible editions of the poems contained in Codex Regius.<sup>9</sup> The new context Eddic poetry had to be brought into in this period was that of the swiftly advancing field of comparative Germanic

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<sup>8</sup> Fidjestøl, Bjarne (1999): *The Dating of Eddic Poetry: A Historical Survey and Methodological Investigation*, Bibliotheca Arnemagnæana XLI, Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzels Forlag, pp. 10-28.

<sup>9</sup> Fidjestøl 1999 p. 29; on the reception of Eddic poetry in this period and its influence on the following Romantic period see also O’Donoghue, Heather (2016): “The reception of eddic poetry”, *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry: Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia*, ed. Carolyne Larrington, Judy Quinn, Brittany Schorn, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 349-365.

and Indo-European linguistics and mythography, a fusion of two burgeoning intellectual currents of the time: the advancement of what was coming to be considered the scientific method, and the spirit of Romanticism. The Romantic notion of a “national epic” had been inaugurated by the popularity of James MacPherson’s *Ossian* poems,<sup>10</sup> and scholars carried along by this Romantic current (in spite of the controversy that ensued over the authenticity of the *Ossian* poems, which were largely the original work of MacPherson himself)<sup>11</sup> were keen to see something similar in Eddic poetry, as a “national” cycle of epic poetry for Iceland, for the Nordic countries in general, or even for Germanic language-speakers in general.<sup>12</sup> In the early nineteenth century, perhaps no scholar worked more tirelessly to promote this concept of the place of Eddic poetry in the national consciousness of the Nordic and Germanic countries than Finnur Magnússon, whose work cemented both his conception of the place of Eddic poetry and mythology in the context of the Indo-European comparative framework, and his own reputation as an authority on Eddic mythology.<sup>13</sup> The concept of Eddic poetry as “national epic” is one that has stuck in both academic discourse

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<sup>10</sup> Campbell, Hugh ed. (1822): *The poems of Ossian: translated by James Macpherson, Esq.; authenticated, illustrated, & explained, by Hugh Campbell, Esq.*, London: Sir Richard Phillips & co.; on the contemporary reception of MacPherson’s work in Scandinavia, see for example Harwell Celenza, Anna (1998): “*Efterklange af Ossian: The Reception of James Macpherson's "Poems of Ossian" in Denmark's Literature, Art, and Music*”, *Scandinavian Studies* 70, No. 3 (Fall 1998), pp. 359-396.

<sup>11</sup> See Gaskill, Howard ed. (2004): *The reception of Ossian in Europe: edited by Howard Gaskill*, London: Thoemmes Continuum; Gaskill, Howard ed. (1991): *Ossian revisited: edited by Howard Gaskill*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press; Curley, Thomas M. (2009): “An introductory survey of scholarship on Ossian: why literary truth matters”, *Samuel Johnson, the Fraud, and the Celtic Revival in Great Britain and Ireland*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1-21.

<sup>12</sup> As in the pan-Germanic framework developed most famously by Jacob Grimm (Grimm, Jacob (1875-1878): *Deutsche Mythologie*, 4. Aufl.: besorgt von Elard Hugo Meyer, Berlin: Dümmler).

<sup>13</sup> Finnur Magnússon (1820): *Bidrag til nordisk Archæologie medeelte i Forelæsninger* Copenhagen: Bernhard Schlesinger; Finnur Magnússon (1824-1826): *Eddalæren og dens Oprindelse*. 4 vols. Copenhagen: Gyldendal; Finnur Magnússon ed. (1787-1828): *Edda Saemundar hinns Fróða. Edda rhythmica seu antiquior*. 3 vols, Copenhagen: Arnamagnæan Commission.

and public perception; however, Finnur's own career appears to modern eyes as a somewhat tragic microcosm of the Romantic tendency in nineteenth-century philology. Having thrust Eddic poetry into the public consciousness with his vigorous style of argumentation, Finnur went on to become involved in a controversy that seriously compromised his academic reputation when he insisted on his ability to decipher as legible skaldic verse certain markings on a rock face in Runamo, Sweden, which other scholars in subsequent examinations found to be merely natural weathering.<sup>14</sup>

The following generation of Icelandic philologists turned away somewhat from Finnur Magnússon's lyrically nationalistic style. The work of Finnur Jónsson in particular is well known for his pointedly down-to-earth approach.<sup>15</sup> The period from the latter half of the nineteenth century to the first half of the twentieth certainly saw a shift from the unabashed romanticism of Finnur Magnússon to the more critical philological approach that laid much of the groundwork for Old Norse scholarship that exists today. The primary concern of this school of philology was in rendering Old Norse material coherent and legible in a contemporary context, a *telos* which required a robust scholarly program: the texts needed to be edited, discrepancies and illegible items clarified or deleted, and a proper chronology of the texts had to be established. Thus the two concerns of manuscript interpretation on the one hand, and dating and chronological order on the other, came to dominate the way in which Old Norse texts were read. Eddic poetry – cryptic and obscure in

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<sup>14</sup> Finnur's career (including the Runamo controversy) and reputation are summed up most succinctly in Halink, Simon (2015): "A Tainted Legacy", *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 40:2 pp. 239-270.

<sup>15</sup> A reputation summarized most succinctly and thoroughly in Fjalldal, Magnús (2011): "Greatness and Limitations: The Scholarly Legacy of Finnur Jónsson," *Neophilologus*, 2011, Vol. 95(2), pp. 329-339.



diction, anonymous and of uncertain provenance, and providing little if anything in the way of manuscript comparison due to largely being confined to the single Codex Regius manuscript – might be expected to be something of a stumbling-block to this aim. Yet on the contrary, and perhaps partly due to the scope provided by the mysteries of the Eddic material, the critical study of the dating and provenance of Eddic poetry produced a large volume of important philological work, culminating in the studies on that subject by Sophus Bugge,<sup>16</sup> the aforementioned Finnur Jónsson,<sup>17</sup> Guðbrandur Vigfússon,<sup>18</sup> Gustav Neckel,<sup>19</sup> Andreas Heusler,<sup>20</sup> and perhaps finally for this period Jan de Vries,<sup>21</sup> among various other Nordic and continental scholars.<sup>22</sup>

This turn toward a seemingly more scientific approach to the study of Eddic poetry represented a general turn away from the previous generation’s romanticism: a turn from, to use Fidjestøl’s terms, “internal” to “external” arguments.<sup>23</sup> However, the final death knell for any trace of romanticism in Eddic scholarship seems to have been the end of the Second World War, for reasons that are perhaps obvious and yet are rarely made explicit in

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<sup>16</sup> Starting with Bugge’s edition of Eddic poems: Bugge, Sophus ed. (1867): *Norraæn Fornkvæði: Islandsk Samling af folkelige Oldtidsdigte om Nordens Guder og Heroer almindelig kaldet Sæmundar Edda hins Fróða*, Oslo: P.T. Malling; also including Bugge, Sophus (1881-1889): *Studier over de nordiske Gude- og Heltesagns Oprindelse*, Christiania: P.T. Malling).

<sup>17</sup> Finnur Jónsson (1920-1924): *Den oldnorske og oldislandske litteraturs historie*, 3 vols, Copenhagen: G.E.C. Gad; Finnur Jónsson (1931): *Lexicon poeticum antiquae linguae septentrionalis*, Copenhagen: S.L. Møllers Bogtrykkeri.

<sup>18</sup> Gudbrand Vigfusson & F. York Powell (1888): *Corpus poeticum boreale: The Poetry of the Old Northern Tongue from the Earliest Times to the Thirteenth Century*, ed., Vol. I-II, New York: Russell & Russell.

<sup>19</sup> Neckel, Gustav (1908): *Beiträge zur Eddaforschung*, Dortmund: F.W. Ruhfus.

<sup>20</sup> Heusler, Andreas (1943): *Die altgermanische Dichtung*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Potsdam: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft Athenaion.

<sup>21</sup> de Vries, Jan (1957): *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Berlin & Leipzig: de Gruyter; de Vries, Jan (1964-1967): *Altnordische Literaturgeschichte*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Vols. I-II, Berlin & Leipzig: de Gruyter.

<sup>22</sup> This period is most thoroughly summed up in the fourth through sixth chapters of Fidjestøl’s work: Fidjestøl 1999 pp. 47-167.

<sup>23</sup> Fidjestøl 1999 pp. 44-45.

subsequent academic writing on the subject. In the introduction to the widely used Oxford Edition translation of the *Poetic Edda*, Carolyne Larrington simply gives 1945 as a turning point past which Eddic scholarship opened up to various theoretical and literary-critical approaches which became popular in academia in the decades following the war, with no further comment on the particular significance of that point in time.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps no further explanation is needed: the historical trajectory of nineteenth-century European Romanticism toward twentieth-century Fascism and Nazism is a widely accepted notion of political history.<sup>25</sup> And while it is easy to disown the uses to which Nazi ideologues such as Alfred Rosenberg put the Indo-Europeanist approach to mythology as having little connection to any serious or legitimate scholarship, and while one might rightly question the influence any of those ideas had on any actual NSDAP policy, the uncomfortable fact of the prominent use of imagery inspired by Eddic mythology by the NSDAP remains. Indeed, one might note in light of the overall character of Eddic scholarship we have established thus far, that Heather O'Donoghue points out that "it was not so much the actual substance of the *Poetic Edda* which attracted racists and anti-Semites, but its supposed origins", that is, in a mythic Indo-European past.<sup>26</sup> The German Gustav Neckel and Swiss Andreas Heusler both showed sympathy for ideas of the pan-Germanic that would come to be viewed as

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<sup>24</sup> Larrington, Carolyne ed. (2014): *The poetic Edda: translated with an introduction and notes by Carolyne Larrington*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. xxv.

<sup>25</sup> As pointed out in a general sense by, for example, Payne, Stanley (2003): "Fascism and racism", *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Political Thought*, ed. Terence Ball & Richard Bellamy, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 124-125.

<sup>26</sup> O'Donoghue 2016 p. 362; on the trajectory of Old Norse mythology into and beyond Nazism, see also O'Donoghue, Heather (2007): "From Runic Inscriptions to Runic Gymnastics", *Old Norse Made New: Essays on the Post-Medieval Reception of Old Norse Literature and Culture*, ed. David Clark & Carl Phelpstead, London: Viking Society for Northern Research, pp. 101-118.

politically unsavoury after 1945,<sup>27</sup> while Jan de Vries himself was successfully tried and convicted for collaboration with the National Socialist occupation of the Netherlands during the war, having been a member of the pseudoscientific SS *Ahnenerbe* institute as well as the *Nederlandsche Kultuurkamer*, a Nazi censorship body in the occupied Netherlands.<sup>28</sup> This uncomfortable association lives on outside the academy in the form of fringe neo-Pagan groups influenced by Fascist ideology, which largely base their reconstructivist religious ideas on Eddic mythology.<sup>29</sup>

After the war, however, the history of Eddic scholarship does indeed become more difficult to characterize. Fidjestøl ends his own overview (published posthumously in 1999) with de Vries in 1967, concluding that “it is prudent not to attempt a historical evaluation of one’s own age.”<sup>30</sup> Nearly two decades on from this assessment, we are perhaps no closer to any recognisable shift in the character of Eddic studies, as most of the same scholars who were active then are active now. If anything we might characterise (especially Anglophone) Eddic scholarship today as being primarily concerned with the themes (as opposed primarily to *form*) of the poetry and the relation of that theme to the society that produced it. This paradigm relies largely on the important philological groundwork laid in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; the basis for reading Eddic poetry has been laid, and we are now free to use the text without succumbing to the sort of philological pitfalls that we can

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<sup>27</sup> von Schnurbein, Stefanie (2015): “Tales of reconstruction: Intertwining Germanic neo-Paganism and Old Norse scholarship,” *Critical Research on Religion*, 2015, Vol.3(2), p. 152.

<sup>28</sup> de Vries’ involvement with Nazism is largely summed up by Würth; Stefanie (2012): “Vorwort zum Nachdruck”, Jan de Vries, *Altnordische Literaturgeschichte*, 3. unveränd. Aufl. in einem Bd 1998. Reprint 2012, Berlin: de Gruyter, pp. xiii-xlv.

<sup>29</sup> von Schnurbein 2015.

<sup>30</sup> Fidjestøl 1999 p. 7.

so clearly see hindering scholars of previous ages, limited as they were not only by the ideology of their time but also by the lack of a rigorous critical apparatus with which to approach the text. And yet, the scope of Eddic scholarship in the last half-century or so clearly shows the influence of previous agendas. We have inherited a paradigm in which Eddic poetry exists primarily as a source, not a direct source for purely historical matters perhaps, but rather as a source for pre-Christian mythology, or more broadly for medieval Scandinavian societal tendencies.<sup>31</sup> In this broad and rather porous range of scholarship – given that the focus on society is rarely the sole pursuit of any one scholar – we could include for example much of the work of Margaret Clunies Ross.<sup>32</sup> Recently collected essays by John McKinnell on Eddic poetry frequently invoke formal or philological arguments but tend to focus on mythological and social matters. For example, *The Paradox of Vafþrúðnismál* deals with both the provenance and the formal structure of the poem in question, but culminates in an insight gained into “the ideology of this poet’s point of view.”<sup>33</sup> David Clark has explored both the literary connections between Eddic poetry and

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<sup>31</sup> Preben Meulengracht Sørensen provides a succinct consideration of the role of Eddic poetry as source, in his case particularly as a source for study of pre-Christian religion in Scandinavia: “For litteraturhistorikeren er det digtet some helhed – teksten – der er objektet. For religionshistorikeren og historikeren er det dets indhold, dets oplysninger om førkristne forhold. Disse to synsvinkler kan ikke helt adskilles. Man er nødt til at danne sig et litterært begreb om digtet som tekst, inden man kan bruge det som kilde.” (Meulengracht Sørensen, Preben (1991): “Om eddadigtenes alder”, *Nordisk Hedendom: Et symposium*, ed. Gro Steinsland, Ulf Drobin, Juha Pentikänen, Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, Odense: Odense University Press, p. 218): “For the literary historian it is the poem as a whole – the text – that is the object [of study]. For the historian, and the historian of religion, it is its content, its insights into the pre-Christian situation. These two points of view can never be entirely separated. It is necessary to develop a literary concept of the poem as a text before one can use it as a source.”

<sup>32</sup> Clunies Ross, Margaret (1994, 1998): *Prolonged echoes: Old Norse myths in medieval Northern society*, Odense: Odense University Press; the two volumes of this series could indeed be said to deal with these two concerns of mythology and society, respectively. Also: Margaret Clunies Ross, “The Conservation and Reinterpretation of Myth in Medieval Icelandic Writings”, *Old Icelandic Literature and Society* 5, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2000), pp. 116–39.

<sup>33</sup> McKinnell, John ([1994] 2014): “The Paradox of *Vafþrúðnismál*”, *Essays on Eddic Poetry*, ed. Donata Kick and John D. Shafer, University of Toronto Press, p. 167.

Old Norse saga prose and the social implications for issues of gender represented in that intersection;<sup>34</sup> in chapters 3-4 of this study we will also refer to Carolyne Larrington's thoughts on gender in the poem *Skírnismál*.<sup>35</sup> The aims of what could be called "pure" mythography have also lived on through the late twentieth century and beyond with scholars such as Jens Peter Schjødt,<sup>36</sup> and Gro Steinsland.<sup>37</sup>

McKinnell's work in particular shows another tendency in Eddic scholarship in the last half-century that it has inherited from a previous generation: even when the primary object of study is some facet of Old Norse-speaking society, it is nonetheless tied to an argument concerning the date and provenance of the text being examined.<sup>38</sup> This is something of a necessity: how can one extract a general point about the society that produced the text when such divergent scholarly opinions exist regarding the time and place of the poems' origin? Though, as we have seen, the generations leading up to the middle of the twentieth century produced much of the essential critical apparatus we use in examining Eddic poetry today, the question of dating the poetry in general or the individual poems in particular has never been satisfactorily put to rest, and it almost certainly never will be: Bernt Øyvind Thorvaldsen has recently summed up the conclusions of the late-nineteenth to early-twentieth-century work devoted to the prehistory of the Eddic texts as

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<sup>34</sup> Clark, David (2012): *Gender, violence, and the past in Edda and Saga*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>35</sup> Larrington, Carolyne (1992): "'What Does Woman Want?' Mær und munr in *Skírnismál*" *Alvíssmál* 1 (1992 [1993]), pp. 3–16.

<sup>36</sup> Schjødt, Jens Peter (2008): *Initiation between two worlds: structure and symbolism in pre-Christian Scandinavian religion*, trans. Victor Hansen, Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark.

<sup>37</sup> Steinsland, Gro (1991): *Det hellige bryllup og norrøn kongeideologi: en analyse av hierogami-myten: skírnismál, Ynglingatal, Háleygjatal og Hyndluljóð*, Oslo: Solum Forlag.

<sup>38</sup> To take the example at hand, seven of the twelve essays in McKinnell's 2014 collection contain arguments about the dating and provenance of the texts they examine.

being “mostly unconvincing, since the conclusions differed significantly from scholar to scholar despite their detailed studies.”<sup>39</sup> Though we may have enough contextual information to cast doubt on various theories of dating and provenance, we simply do not have enough to completely eliminate competing theories in every instance. Because of this, an argument about the societal significance of some aspect of an Eddic poem tends to be only as strong as the argument it also makes (or relies on) about the dating and provenance of that poem. Thus we see the tendency of Eddic scholarship frequently coming, in a way, full circle: we must inevitably return to the philological and literary-historical debates of previous generations, which have not been fully resolved and most likely will remain open questions, though that is not by any means to say that such discussions cannot continue to produce fruitful and relevant critical work.

Throughout the history of Eddic scholarship, we see various *teloi* arise, and yet none of them seem to have truly faded away. Rather, we have inherited them all, and they have shaped the current practice of Eddic studies. In the moment of Eddic scholarship that frames the present study, therefore, we have inherited a discipline shaped by the ideologies and debates of previous generations, and many of those debates remain unresolved. We have inherited a monumental critical/philological apparatus with which to read the text. Finally, we have inherited the texts themselves; they appear to us somewhat improbably and imperfectly, impaired by physical corruption, cut out from whatever context produced them, cut off from us by the distance of over seven centuries, yet uncannily present and, in

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<sup>39</sup> Thorvaldsen, Bernt Øyvind (2016): “The dating of eddic poetry”, *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry: Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia*, ed. Carolyn Larrington, Judy Quinn, Brittany Schorn, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 73.

a way, accessible. They are not only present as bare text, but also as cultural effect: Old Norse mythology as it reaches us primarily through Eddic poetry has a deep and abiding presence in the Western cultural imaginary.<sup>40</sup> In light of these competing factors, agendas, and theories of Eddic poetry, how should we approach the text and why? That is, why should we approach the text in a certain way, but also, why are we approaching it at all, in this case?

### 1.1.2 The Context of the Present Study

The following analyses of certain aspects of Eddic poetry are primarily concerned with matters of form, style, and poetics; these matters are distinctive primarily as opposed to those of content or theme. However, we shall see that matters of theme do frequently figure in the following analyses, being as they are inseparable from matters of form (as I shall argue in the following section), and vice versa. Historically, arguments of form in Eddic poetry have been either part of or firmly rooted in the concerns of the philological efforts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, focused on the clarification or edition of the difficult-to-read Eddic texts. One could presume that concerns of aesthetic or artistic value in this literature would have seemed somewhat inappropriate to academic discussion to a scholar of the Finnur Jónsson mould. As we have seen above, this is not without reason: the precedent for arguing for literary value in Eddic poetry is rooted primarily in the

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<sup>40</sup> On the more recent history of Eddic reception into the present period, see O'Donoghue 2016 pp. 361-364.

passionate early nationalism of Romantics such as Finnur Magnússon. We are reminded of Bjarne Fidjestøl's distinction between "external" and "internal" arguments; Fidjestøl's subject here is nineteenth-century scholarship and in particular the Grimms' arguments against Friedrich Rühls and in favour of the authenticity and value of Eddic poetry, and he is borrowing these terms directly from Wilhelm Grimm.<sup>41</sup> Fidjestøl himself characterizes the "internal" argument as potentially being capable of producing great insights, but as being ultimately unscientific,<sup>42</sup> a view that seems to largely reflect the attitude of the generation of scholars that preceded him.

Though a focus on the artistic elements of Eddic poetry might seem on the surface to correspond more to the Grimms' "internal" arguments, the approach of this study is of an altogether different kind. For the Grimms, their scholarly opponents treating Eddic poetry "not as religion but as poetry ... implied a substantial depreciation of the Edda."<sup>43</sup> It was indeed the intention of Friedrich Rühls and Johann Christoph Adelung before him to call into question what they saw as the undue value being attached to Eddic poetry, with the Grimms appealing to the "internal" argument to defend that value. "Value," as such, is not our primary concern here. That Eddic poetry has value is both arguably a subjective judgment and also largely demonstrated by its continued cultural presence and the endurance of scholarship related to it. The present study rather reverses the Grimm-Frühls argument: here we are looking at Eddic poetry "as poetry," and the "value" to be found in it

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<sup>41</sup> "Innere" and "aussere Beweiss"; Grimm, Wilhelm (1811): "Schriften über die nordische Mythologie", *Heidelbergische Jahrbücher der Literatur* 4, pp. 789-793.

<sup>42</sup> Fidjestøl 1999 p. 45.

<sup>43</sup> Fidjestøl 1999 p. 33.



through the current methodology lies primarily in its relevance to the broader theories of poetry to which we will refer throughout. Additionally, for reasons outlined below, our concern here is not primarily with purpose or intent on the part of a purported poet as with what might be called “pure” form. We shall see that this emphasis is not arbitrary but rather a product of the circumstances of Eddic texts and our access to them. There are, however, reasonable objections to such an emphasis, and to the methodological approach in general, which will be anticipated below, and returned to in the concluding chapter. In order to establish the approach it is necessary first to examine Eddic poetry from, as it were, first principles. The question of what exactly Eddic poetry *is* will be one we shall have cause to return to throughout this study. However, it is first necessary to establish some key terms and parameters.

## 1.2 What is Eddic Poetry?

There is no attestation in Old Norse literature of a named genre analogous to the use of the term “Eddic” in modern scholarship. The use of the word *Edda* as a generic marker for a type of poetry is the descendant of an early scholarly misapprehension concerning the provenance of the manuscript now known as Codex Regius. Upon its discovery in 1643 by Brynjólfur Sveinsson, then Bishop of Skálholt, it was deduced by him firstly that it must have been the work of Sæmundr Sigfússon (1056-1133), and secondly that it must have been a precedent used by Snorri Sturluson in his own work, called *Edda*, a

word of uncertain meaning.<sup>44</sup> Thus the idea of a “Prose” or “Younger Edda” following a “Poetic” or “Elder Edda” was born, though modern scholars have found nothing in particular to support Brynjólfur’s theory, and the manuscript has since been more reliably dated to the 1270s.<sup>45</sup> The use not only of the word “Edda” but of the “Elder” or “Poetic” distinction to describe the body of poetry preserved primarily in Codex Regius has persisted to the time of this study, as shown by the use of those terms in all three of the most recent English translations of Eddic poetry.<sup>46</sup> As such, the primary definition of “Eddic” poetry might be summed up as “poems preserved in Codex Regius, and similar or related verse.” As Terry Gunnell writes, “the works in question can hardly be considered as belonging to a single genre.”<sup>47</sup> However, whereas Gunnell’s statement leads on to a discussion of the subdivisions of Eddic poetry, it is also the case that simply establishing which texts should be included under the heading of *Eddic* presents a problem for scholars.

A common definition of Eddic poetry is a negative one: it is Old Norse verse that is not skaldic. However, the converse argument – that the term “skaldic” covers all vernacular Old Norse poetry that is not Eddic – has also been used to define skaldic poetry as a genre.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, arguments along these lines in either direction quickly become circular and unhelpful. The question of how the two terms should be divided has been considered by

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<sup>44</sup> For a (largely inconclusive) discussion of possible meanings of this word, see for example Faulkes 2005 pp. xvii-xviii.

<sup>45</sup> Lindblad, Gustaf (1980): “Poetiska Eddans förhistoria och skrivsckicket i Codex regius”, *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 95 (1980), pp. 142-167.

<sup>46</sup> Crawford, Jackson ed. (2015): *The Poetic Edda: Stories of the Norse Gods and Heroes*, Cambridge MA: Hackett; Larrington 2014; Orchard, Andy ed. (2011): *The Elder Edda: a book of Viking lore*, London: Penguin.

<sup>47</sup> Gunnell, Terry (1994): *The origins of drama in Scandinavia*, Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, p. 185.

<sup>48</sup> Clunies Ross, Margaret (2005): *A history of old Norse poetry and poetics*, Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, p. 16.

several scholars.<sup>49</sup> Margaret Clunies Ross, in a consideration of the types of Old Norse poetry, sums up the differences in terms with which I will generally be inclined to agree in the course of the present study:

Skaldic-type poetry can be contrasted with eddic verse in several ways: in respect of its location in manuscript corpora, in its subject matter, in terms of authorship, with regard to certain illocutionary features and in terms of style and verse form.

However ... no single one of these criteria is sufficient to define a poem or verse as skaldic rather than eddic, and my own preference would be to abandon these two words as contrastive and exclusive terms.<sup>50</sup>

Clunies Ross' view, as we can see, is that the Eddic/skaldic division is at best a matter of convenience; we will continue to use the term "Eddic" in this study primarily out of convenience. In the concluding chapter we will return to this question briefly, since the extent to which the figures we identify here in Eddic verse may also be found in some form in skaldic poetry bears future research.

Without becoming frozen in the ultimately indeterminate discussion of what absolutely differentiates Eddic from skaldic poetry, it is nonetheless possible to identify a number of traits common to poems considered Eddic, some of which will be examined in more detail in this study. Perhaps the most immediately significant formal feature of Eddic poetry is that it is composed primarily in one of three alliterative syllable-counting metres:

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<sup>49</sup> von See, Klaus (1980): *Skaldendichtung: Eine Einführung*, Munich and Zurich: Artemis; Frank, Roberta (1985): "Skaldic Poetry", *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*, ed. Carol Clover & John Lindow, *Islandica* 45, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, pp. 157-196; Fidjestøl, Bjarne (1993): "Skaldic Poetry", *Medieval Scandinavia: an Encyclopedia*, ed. Phillip Pulsiano & Kirsten Wolf, New York & London: Garland, pp. 592-594.

<sup>50</sup> Clunies Ross 2005 p. 14.

*fornyrðislag* (“ancient words metre”, by far the most common of Eddic metres), *málaháttr* (“speech metre”), and *ljóðaháttr* (“song” or perhaps “chant metre”).<sup>51</sup> *Fornyrðislag* in particular places Eddic poetry much closer to other kinds of old Germanic alliterative verse than is the more characteristically skaldic *dróttkvætt* metre, being composed of short lines consisting primarily of two stressed syllables each. Unlike most other Germanic alliterative verse, however, these metres are organized into distinct stanzas or strophes:<sup>52</sup> the majority of the poems are in *fornyrðislag*, which tends to consist of eight-line strophes, while *ljóðaháttr* tends to consist of six-line strophes. *Málaháttr* may be considered a variant of *fornyrðislag* which permits longer lines, though its actual use as the primary metre of an Old Norse poem is restricted to *Atlamál*, with only sporadic appearances in individual strophes of other poems. Eddic metres present short, concise, terse lines that follow the stress patterns of spoken language,<sup>53</sup> arranged in couplets or “long lines” in the case of *fornyrðislag* that tend strongly to be discrete syntactic units. The metrical character of Eddic poetry therefore presents verse remarkable for its terseness and verbal brevity, bound by rules of alliteration, stress, and syntax. A notable difference between the quintessentially

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<sup>51</sup> For a recent summary of Eddic metre see Fulk, R.D. (2016): “Eddic metres”, *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry: Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia*, ed. Carolyne Larrington, Judy Quinn, Brittany Schorn, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 262-263.

<sup>52</sup> Clunies Ross 2005 p. 22; Hallberg, Peter (1993): “Eddic Poetry”, *Medieval Scandinavia: an Encyclopedia*, ed. Phillip Pulsiano & Kirsten Wolf, New York & London: Garland, p. 150. The use of “strophe” rather than “stanza” must be seen as somewhat arbitrary. I choose “strophe” in this study simply because, strictly speaking, the length of the Eddic verse-unit is not fixed. However, as we note here, there is a strong tendency for each metre to be structured in units of a given number of lines. One could argue that Eddic verse is, therefore, “stanzaic with infrequent irregularities,” rather than more generally strophic.

<sup>53</sup> Though identifying the system according to which these metres follow the stress patterns of Old Norse has been the subject of differing scholarly interpretations; see Sievers, Eduard (1893): *Altgermanische Metrik*, Halle: Niemeyer; Neckel 1908; Pope, Richard C. (1966): *The Rhythm of Beowulf*, Revised edition, New Haven: Yale University Press; Taylor, Paul Beekman (1971): “The Rhythm of Völuspá”, *Neophilologus* 55 (1971), pp. 45-57; von See, Klaus (1967): *Germanische Verskunst*, Stuttgart: Metzler.

Eddic *fornyrðislag* metre and the quintessentially skaldic *dróttkvætt* metre is that the latter allows for (and indeed prizes) creative and artificial arrangement of word order, whereas the former tends to follow relatively simple and formulaic patterns.<sup>54</sup> This has led to a view of Eddic poetry as being closer to the language and grammar of Old Norse prose,<sup>55</sup> though in the following chapter we will see that the apparent syntactic simplicity of Eddic poetry can be deceptively complex.

In addition to purely formal aspects, Eddic poems generally share tendencies in broader stylistic and thematic terms. In his introduction to the 1937 folio facsimile edition of Codex Regius, Andreas Heusler observes of Eddic poems in general that they are “objective; there is no personal work, no occasional or topical poetry.”<sup>56</sup> This reflects the fact that Eddic poems are almost exclusively narrative and/or dialogic in character. We include the “and/or” here because these two modes, the narrative and the dialogue, are distinct from one another and yet frequently appear side by side within the same poem, and there are few that utterly exclude either aspect. To invoke the contrast with skaldic poetry once again, it could broadly be said that skaldic poetry tends to refer to the actual composer of the poem and to be spoken in his or her voice (“subjective” poetry, to extend Heusler’s terms). Conversely, Eddic poetry tends to feature either a neutral narrator speaking primarily in the third person, or a first-person narrator that is a legendary figure or

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<sup>54</sup> See Clunies Ross, Margaret, et al (2012): “General Introduction”, *Poetry from the Kings’ Sagas 1: From Mythical Times to c. 1035*, Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 1, Turnhout: Brepols, pp. lx-lxiii.

<sup>55</sup> Held by for example Heusler (Heusler, Andreas (1937): “Introduction”, *Corpus Codicum Islandicorum Medii Ævi ed. Ejnar Munksgaard vol. 10: Codex Regius of the Elder Edda / MS No. 2365 4<sup>to</sup> in the old Royal collection in the Royal Library of Copenhagen, with an introduction by Andreas Heusler*, Copenhagen: Levin & Munksgaard, p. 13).

<sup>56</sup> Heusler 1937 p. 12.

supernatural being, a character contained within the diegesis rather than the poet or the reciter. Ideas of speech are of crucial importance to the conceptualisation of Eddic poetry; Eddic narratives tend to revolve around speech acts, and this is reflected in the fact that their given titles all denote some form of speech act.<sup>57</sup> Margaret Clunies Ross goes as far as to identify the different endings in the titles of Old Norse poems as denoting subgeneric distinctions according to the given “speech act,” using the term coined by J.L. Austin.<sup>58</sup> Whether or not such a systematic Old Norse nomenclature was used, the importance of concepts of speech to Eddic poetry is clear.

In addition to themes of speech, there are two thematic concerns shared by most poetry considered Eddic that should be noted: the aforementioned tendency toward narrative, and the notion of ancientness, which to some extent are conceptually linked. Eddic poetry is strongly associated with prior ages in the Old Norse literary imagination, as shown by its frequent use in the *fornaldarsögur* or “ancient sagas,” which concern events purported to have happened in the legendary past and which include many of the same supernatural themes found in Eddic poetry. This is in contrast to those sagas set closer to the time of their writing down, which tend to use skaldic verse in an analogous manner. Eddic narratives tend to be set in a similarly legendary past, reflected in the formulaic opening line “*Ár var alda*,” literally “the age was early.”<sup>59</sup> They seem to have been

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<sup>57</sup> Clunies Ross 2005 pp. 29-30.

<sup>58</sup> Austin, J.L. (1975): *How to do things with words*, Oxford: Clarendon.

<sup>59</sup> This formula is found at the start of *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* as well as *Völuspá* 3:1; consider also the related “*Ár var, þatz*” (“It was early [i.e. long ago], when”) that begins *Guðrúnarkviða I* and *Sigurðarkviða in skamma*.

considered genuinely ancient by medieval antiquarians such as Snorri,<sup>60</sup> and perhaps in their apparently deliberate archaisms and cryptically allusive style these poems intentionally purported ancientness. This firm association with the past is closely linked with the narrative character of Eddic poems: there is no purely descriptive Eddic poetry, because it treats subjects at a considerable distance both chronologically and, often, geographically. Skaldic poetry, by contrast, is often descriptive or occasional and includes some notable pieces of ekphrasis, a concept which would seem out of place in the more strictly narrative Eddic poetry.<sup>61</sup> Eddic poems frequently present a narrative taking place over a progression in time, given primarily by an omniscient third-person narrator. There does, however, seem to be something of a distinction between Eddic poems that deal with narratives (such as *Atlakviða*, the *Helgi* poems, *Völundarkviða*, and *Völuspá*), and those in which the third person presents a fixed scene and dialogue predominates (such as *Grímnismál*, *Alvíssmál*, and *Guðrúnarkviða I*). Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, in fact, divides Eddic poetry into nine categories based primarily on the function of speech in each poem.<sup>62</sup> These are, however, like the term “Eddic” itself, entirely modern scholarly designations, there being no attested notion of generic or subgeneric categorization of poetry in Old Norse literature. It is notable, however, that the majority of poems with a distinctly dialogic focus are composed in *ljóðaháttur* as opposed to the more common *fornyrðislag*.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Clunies Ross 2005 p. 10.

<sup>61</sup> On Old Norse ekphrasis see for example Olsen, Carl (2009): *Ekphrasis and the Old Norse shield poem*, PhD Thesis, University of California at Berkeley.

<sup>62</sup> Einar Ólafur Sveinsson (1962): *Íslenzkar bókmenntir í fornöld I*, Reykjavík: Almenna bókafélagið, pp. 200-202.

<sup>63</sup> Gunnell 1994 p. 190.

This concept of age in Eddic poetry brings us to the question of origins, of dating and of the circumstances of composition. However, this may seem to be a reversal of the logical progression of ideas: how can we understand a cultural product such as Eddic poetry at all without a prior theory of the conditions of its production, of its specific context, of the intentionality underlying its production? These are important questions, and yet in tracing the genealogy of scholarly thought on Eddic poetry we have seen the murk of irresolution surrounding the question of dating the texts, which hints at a troublesome lack of context which we have briefly noted. Heusler insists that “the texts of the Regius are not ruins”,<sup>64</sup> in the sense that they are sufficiently intact that some sense can be made of them.<sup>65</sup> His choice of word is telling, however, for these poems have something of the haunting quality of the ruin in their relation to scholarly attention. They exist materially, they are accessible and navigable, but they have been excised from their original context. This missing context has haunted Eddic scholarship, which could be characterised by a pervasive and profound sense of loss, from the beginning. Whatever theory of origin one subscribes to, one is forced to speak of it as something absent. Thus Terry Gunnell speaks of what the “reader” has “lost,” and the experience of being a “reader” of Eddic poetry as being “similar to that of a blind person listening to a film.”<sup>66</sup>

Gunnell’s comments come in the course of an argument for the origin of Eddic poems as drama, an idea inspired primarily by the speech-oriented nature of much of the

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<sup>64</sup> Heusler 1937 p. 23.

<sup>65</sup> Heusler 1937 p. 23.

<sup>66</sup> Gunnell 1994 p. 183.



poetry.<sup>67</sup> Underlying this theory is the widely held assumption that Eddic poetry has a significant prehistory as orally composed and transmitted material prior to its appearance in compilation, in the form that reaches us from no earlier than the late thirteenth century.<sup>68</sup> It is precisely this theory of oral origination of Eddic poetry that forms the great absence at the heart of Eddic scholarship. It would be fruitless to speculate that the compiled Eddic poems we have access to are original compositions on the part of their compilers,<sup>69</sup> but it is equally impossible to firmly establish the possible condition of oral composition, tied as this concept is to the problematically essentialist ideas of the Romantics. This problem is compounded by another notable feature of Eddic poetry, which is its anonymity or lack of attribution. Once again the comparison with skaldic poetry reappears: in the case of skaldic poetry it is often possible to convincingly trace at least a part of the text's oral prehistory, as individual poems are usually attributed to named persons who frequently have a sufficient historical presence that they appear in sources beyond the poem itself. Eddic poems, by

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<sup>67</sup> Gunnell 1994; following related arguments put forward by Bertha Phillpotts (Phillpotts, Bertha (1920): *The Elder Edda and Ancient Scandinavian Drama*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

<sup>68</sup> This is a view that generally informs Eddic scholarship, but for specific discussions of theories of orality in Eddic poetry see in particular: Harris, Joseph (1983): "Eddic Poetry as Oral Poetry: The Evidence of Parallel Passages in the Helgi Poems for Questions of Composition and Performance", *Edda: A Collection of Essays*, ed. R.J. Glendinning et al., Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, pp. 210-242; Lönnroth, Lars (1971): "Hjálmar's death song and the delivery of Eddic poetry", *Speculum* 46 (1971), pp. 1-20; Kellogg, Robert (1990): "The prehistory of Eddic poetry", *Poetry in the Scandinavian Middle Ages*, Atti del 12o Congresso internazionale di studi sull'alto medioevo, Spoleto 4-10 settembre 1988, Spoleto: Presso la Sede del Centro Studi, pp. 187-199; Gísli Sigurðsson (1990): "On the classification of Eddic heroic poetry in view of oral theory", *Poetry in the Scandinavian Middle Ages*, Atti del 12o Congresso internazionale di studi sull'alto medioevo, Spoleto 4-10 settembre 1988, Spoleto: Presso la Sede del Centro Studi, pp. 245-55; Gunnell 1994; Acker, Paul (1998): *Revising Oral Theory: Formulaic Composition in Old English and Old Icelandic Verse*, New York and London: Garland; Mellor, Scott (2008): *Analyzing Ten Poems from The Poetic Edda: Oral Formula and Mythic Patterns*, Lewiston: Edwin Mellen.

<sup>69</sup> Though some scholars have identified individual poems (*Gripisspá* in particular, and to a lesser extent *Lokasenna*) as possibly having been composed "pen in hand:" see Einar Ólafur Sveinsson 1962 p. 195; Finnur Jónsson 1920-1924 p. 268; Söderberg, Barbro (1986): "Formelgods och Eddakronologi," *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 101 (1986), p. 79.

contrast, are set up (at the very latest stage by their compilers) to appear out of a hazy, cryptic, anonymous origin, seeming to bear an invisible history; as Joseph Harris puts it, they are seen as “reifications of their poetic history”, rather than as poems in themselves.<sup>70</sup>

We can see, then, that the decontextualized and uncanny aspect of Eddic poetry is partly a consequence of the condition in which we receive it, and partly a consequence of its formal character. For the purposes of this study, which will examine Eddic poetry from a primarily formal point of view, it is therefore necessary to work from an attitude toward the text that proceeds from what is most epistemologically sound in it: the fact of the text, and the condition in which we receive it. In our approach we must on the other hand treat what is most dependent on interpretation and informed conjecture – the conditions of the text’s origin – as a matter of somewhat secondary importance, or at least as being of a more provisional nature. One might reasonably object to this approach on the grounds that we are proceeding in the manner of Gunnell’s “blind person,” producing analyses that ignore factors on which the text is contingent, and that are therefore – if we follow this argument to its logical extreme – meaningless. However, some amount of blindness to context is inherent in any encounter with the products of cultures of the past, even when the product in question is not as difficult as Eddic poetry. Furthermore, though Gunnell makes this analogy in the interests of enhancing our understanding of Eddic poetry and rescuing it from “blindness,” could it not also be argued that he has simply provided an honest description of the experience of Eddic scholarship, or more generally for reading Eddic

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<sup>70</sup> Harris, Joseph (2016): “Traditions of Eddic Scholarship”, *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry: Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia*, ed. Carolyne Larrington, Judy Quinn, Brittany Schorn, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 41.

poetry in a modern context? Are we less blind for being told that we are blind? And to take the analogy further, might we not be surprised by what the blind can tell us about the film?

All of this is by no means to say that there is no place for historical or social context in this study, or that we will be examining the text in an artificial vacuum. On the contrary, these are elements that will constantly resurface in the course of the following analyses; the missing origin of Eddic poetry will haunt us here too. However, we will consider a variety of approaches to the culture or cultures that may have produced this literature, both for the reasons outlined above concerning the problem of context, and because it is not within the scope of this study to produce a conclusion that unequivocally supports a specific interpretation of Old Norse literary culture. However, we will see that the results are in certain places highly suggestive of social, political, and economic phenomena.

Before proceeding to methodological concerns, let us briefly summarise this overview of the flexible terminology we will be using in this study to refer to the primary text. We are dealing with a group of texts linked loosely by various aspects, including metre, a group of related themes, and what we might broadly refer to as “style.” We acknowledge both the modernity and the inadequate parameters of the term “Eddic,” which we use here primarily out of convenience. We will not be referring to an Eddic “canon” or participating in a discussion of the authenticity or age of individual poems; what poems will be examined in this thesis will be chosen based on their relevance to the specific stylistic features we are analysing here, and we consider the question of the boundaries of the Eddic genre to be far from closed. Finally, we are dealing with texts of uncertain age and provenance, known to us primarily in manuscript form dating to the late thirteenth century. We will neither use a

specific theory of the origin of Eddic poems nor will the conclusions reached below aim to support one, but we will have cause to refer extensively to various of such theories throughout this study. We must acknowledge that the condition of Eddic poetry means that it almost certainly bears the marks of many hands, rather than being based on a salvageable authentic kernel of poetry produced by a specific poet. This problem of authorship (or authority) is of central importance to the following analyses, which proceed from the stylistics of voice in Eddic poetry to notions of personality and mind.

### 1.2.1 Bugge, Heusler, and Neckel on Eddic Stylistics: A Case Study

Before moving on to more general questions of methodology, we will consider some previous studies dealing primarily with Eddic style. Each of these scholars' work on Eddic stylistics is firmly situated in the discussion of dating, chronology, and provenance, and yet each thoroughly investigates stylistic phenomena as the criteria for their arguments.

Bugge's is perhaps most famous, in that this was a major turning point in the discussion of dating Eddic poetry. With the identification of the so-called Proto-Norse language attested in a number of early runic inscriptions as a linguistic stage distinct from the Old Norse of Eddic and skaldic poetry, Bugge was able to combine this knowledge with that of the metrical rules of Eddic poetry to determine that no verse could have been composed in *ljóðaháttir* prior to the language shift around the ninth century.<sup>71</sup> As Harris puts it, at the

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<sup>71</sup> Bugge, Sophus (1879): "Nogle bidrag til det norrøne sprogs og den norrøne digtnings historie, hentet fra verslæren", Ludv. F. A. Wimmer (ed.), *Beretning om forhandlingerne på de første nordiske filologmøde i København den 18–21 juli 1879*, Copenhagen: Gyldendal, pp. 140–46.

time this was a “literary-historical bomb” being dropped: prior work which had suggested or assumed at times extremely early periods for the origin of Eddic poetry was definitively disproven.<sup>72</sup> This event could be seen as the inauguration, in some ways, of the new epoch of Eddic scholarship: unlike both the later studies concerned with mythological and societal themes and the earlier studies concerned with Romantic notions of character and spirit, Bugge here treats the text primarily as a formal entity.

Andreas Heusler’s writing on Eddic style, by contrast, attempts to recuperate some of the Romanticism of the previous generation while remaining focused on formal qualities situated in the context of textual chronology and provenance. This situatedness, however, primarily takes a negative form: in *Die altgermanische Dichtung*, Heusler defines his own concept of “*altgermanisch*” (“Old Germanic”) as “*ein Begriff ohne Jahresgrenzen*”: “a concept without chronological boundaries”.<sup>73</sup> As Fidjestøl puts it, Heusler’s achronological “*altgermanisch*” is “distinct from ‘Proto-Germanic’, and in terms of geography wider than ‘Common Germanic’”.<sup>74</sup> Instead of tying his arguments to a particular time and place of provenance for any of the texts, Heusler responded to the problem of the heterogeneous and non-fixed nature of the prehistory of Germanic oral poetry by rejecting the chronological approach altogether in favour of a more comparative formal approach, concluding that the orally transmitted poems would inevitably change in terms of form and content, but must retain a certain “*Lebewesen*” (“spirit”, or more literally “living-being”).<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Harris 2016 p. 40.

<sup>73</sup> Heusler 1943 p. 8.

<sup>74</sup> Fidjestøl 1999 p. 132.

<sup>75</sup> Heusler 1943 p. 23.

Thus, rather than a rigid chronology for each text, every “Old Germanic” poem for Heusler contains layers of the development of the form of that poetry, which he defined primarily according to the treatment of dialogue and voice in each poem. At its most abstract, Fidjestøl characterises this formal poetic evolution as proceeding in this direction: “Germanic epic lay – Scandinavian dramatical form – Icelandic lyric.”<sup>76</sup> Here the objectively narrative form gives rise over time to the purely dialogic form of poems such as *Skírnismál*, which in turn gradually leads to the development of the poetic voice we associate with skaldic poetry. This argument by appeal to essence and character seems unacceptably subjective and old-fashioned now, and yet it remains in its purely methodological aspect a thorough formal description of the textual material. Here and there in this study we will find echoes of Heusler’s (perhaps unwitting) use of abstraction to draw comparisons. Furthermore, our examination of voice parallels Heusler’s somewhat in the formal overlap we identify between texts that use dialogue in different ways, such as *Skírnismál* and *Völundarkviða*. In chapter 4 of this study in particular we will see an echo of the layers of textual history that Heusler sees in Germanic poetry as we survey the broad range across time and geography of a particular group of verbal collocations.

Gustav Neckel’s work on formal aspects of Eddic poetry shows a certain affinity with Heusler’s in that he too undertook what could be called an archaeological approach to Eddic form, using an analysis of syntax and strophe form to identify layers of textual prehistory in the poems. Neckel crucially noted in his study that Eddic verse-forms follow syntactic

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<sup>76</sup> Fidjestøl 1999 p. 136.

patterns very closely, but in a number of different ways. In particular, according to Neckel, there are three degrees of syntactic binding to Eddic lines, from long sentences showing a relatively high level of enjambment in the strophe to instances where individual short lines are relatively syntactically discrete.<sup>77</sup> In spite of this relative freedom, Eddic syntax tends very strongly to be bound by half-strophe (*helmingr*), in contrast to Germanic alliterative verse in other languages, which tends to flow continuously in a non-strophic form with considerable use of enjambment. Like Sievers before him, Neckel believed that there must be a chronological or evolutionary connection between these forms. However, whereas Sievers identified the non-stanzaic alliterative verse as the older form,<sup>78</sup> Neckel went in the opposite direction, identifying the strophic Eddic poetry as older,<sup>79</sup> and speculating that this form had its origin in a sung form of verse.<sup>80</sup> The forms of Eddic verse, for Neckel, show evidence of what Fidjestøl calls an “internal, relative chronology”.<sup>81</sup> In this sense, it is possible to identify both traditional or inherited formal aspects on the one hand, and creative original forms on the other. Like Heusler, however, Neckel used his criteria in a manner that one would have to consider completely subjective. The presence of multiple “layers” of textual prehistory in a poem, even if that can be established, cannot demonstrate the “direction of borrowing”.<sup>82</sup> Neckel himself acknowledges what Fidjestøl calls the “fundamental lack of symmetry in the argumentation for an early date and for a

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<sup>77</sup> Neckel 1908 pp. 27-40.

<sup>78</sup> Sievers 1893 p. 49.

<sup>79</sup> Neckel 1908 pp. 4-8, 20-21.

<sup>80</sup> Neckel 1908 p. 11.

<sup>81</sup> Fidjestøl 1999 p. 118.

<sup>82</sup> Fidjestøl 1999 p. 119.

later date”:<sup>83</sup> that an earlier date can never be conclusively demonstrated, only suggested, whereas evidence for a later date tends to be negative and therefore more conclusive.<sup>84</sup> Ultimately Neckel’s judgments concerning the direction of “internal chronology” are based, like Heusler’s, on subjective appeals to character and essence. However, a compelling question of an opposition within one text of the traditional or perhaps generic on the one hand, and the original or creative on the other, has been introduced by Neckel. We will come across echoes of this opposition as we look into particular stylistic aspects of Eddic poems. One could say that the fundamental difference between the present study and those of Neckel and Heusler is that where the latter two scholars look for what is general to Germanic poetry in order to construct a literary-historical argument with implications for the entire literature, here our focus is on what is particular, singular, and expressive in the text under examination. However, we will see that these distinct stylistic figures nonetheless suggest a common aesthetic in their various uses of repetition.

### 1.3 Methodology

We have now seen both that there are serious limitations to what we can in general reasonably claim to know about Eddic poetry, and precedents for the potential fruitfulness of formal examinations of the text. Given these, it is now possible to delineate the scope of

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<sup>83</sup> Fidjestøl 1999 p. 115.

<sup>84</sup> Neckel 1908 pp. 37, 49.



this study in terms of its methodology and focus. As we have briefly mentioned, and shall see more clearly in this section and in the analyses themselves, it is important to be as clear as possible about the nature of conclusions drawn from analyses of this sort.

This study does not take a specific theoretical approach as its basis for analysis. Rather, it could be seen as taking an eclectic approach, as we will have cause to refer to a broad variety of general scholarship on literary, linguistic, cultural, and psychological matters and methods, as they pertain to the subject at hand, in the course of the following analyses. The selection of methodological or theoretical sources should therefore be seen as contingent on the nature and concern of the analysis, rather than acting as the conceptual or methodological basis for the reading itself. The methodology used below could quite simply be summed up as “close reading.” However, this is not to say that it is an unprincipled “reading.” Rather, it is one informed by the parameters under which we must view Eddic poetry as mentioned above, and (as much as is possible) by known rather than conjectured context, or at least by acceptably generalised context rather than speculatively specific context. Therefore, this section on methodology should be seen as a broad overview of methodological concerns pertaining to this study rather than a commitment to an existing methodological program.

### 1.3.1 Poetics, Stylistics, Close Reading

As we have discussed above, the present disposition of Old Norse scholarship has its roots in philological work of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries which

frequently took the form of “close reading” of various kinds, including the purely formal studies we noted above of Heusler and Neckel. We have also seen, however, that the *telos* of such scholarship was one aimed primarily at historical matters, not stylistic ones. The aim of scholars of the Finnur Jónsson/Sophus Bugge cast was to establish a chronology for Old Norse texts, to identify their origins and establish their relationships. Questions of style and aesthetics, that is, of Old Norse poetry “as poetry,” would have been seen as unacceptably subjective concerns according to the stricter manifestations of this model of scholarship, though we have also seen that some scholars of this period appealed very much to “internal” criteria to justify their “external” arguments. To some extent, this attitude persists in a field that has largely turned to questions of cultural relevance. Margaret Clunies Ross’ *A History of Old Norse Poetry and Poetics* is a relatively recent major work that deals with Old Norse poetics, but this study too focuses firmly on the relevance of poetic forms to Old Norse literary culture (and, as the title implies, is structured primarily as a “history”). Clunies Ross is careful to define as the object of study “indigenous concepts” and the “native classification of poetry,”<sup>85</sup> the specific and the properly historicised rather than anything more general or comparative.

One might start to speak, then, of a distinction – by no means absolutely exclusive – between “poetics” on the one hand and “literary criticism” on the other, where the scholar whose aim is to make an argument about the context and relevance of a text is the “literary

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<sup>85</sup> Clunies Ross 2005 p. 3.

critic.” Daniel Abondolo provides a compelling case for this dichotomy, with which we shall be inclined to agree for the purposes of this study:

[T]he <sup>1</sup>*meaning* assigned to a text by virtue of its (cultural) context is analogous to the ‘meaning’ of a chemical element by virtue of its position in the periodic table: it is ‘meaning’ in the sense of valence, or value. On the other hand the <sup>2</sup>*meanings* which are ‘conditioned’ or ‘made possible’ by the formal structures of a text are more like the interpretations unfolding: they are fluid, ever-changing, dynamic mental processes, and although they are not random, the manner in which they arise is so varied and complex, from text to text and from individual to individual, that we can only assume a degree of chaos.<sup>86</sup>

This explanation shows both the validity of such a distinction and the complexity of the respective positions, especially that of poetics: that is, the distinction is clear, but the position of poetics is not reducible to a mere opposite of literary criticism (nor vice versa). This provides a good starting point for identifying what we are and are not examining in this study: poetics does not, in our practice, at least take place in a cultural vacuum, but its conclusions do not necessarily bear situated cultural “valences.” Abondolo goes on to say that the “aesthetic programme is a quest for the roots and flowers of beauty”.<sup>87</sup> Though the vegetable metaphor is perhaps appropriate, our primary concern here is not one of “beauty;” whether or not Eddic poetry is beautiful, I leave up to the reader to judge.

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<sup>86</sup> Abondolo, Daniel (2001): *A poetics handbook: verbal art in the European tradition*, Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, pp. 50-51, emphasis original.

<sup>87</sup> Abondolo 2001 p. 51.

However, elsewhere Abondolo frequently uses “verbal art” – very likely following the use of that term by Roman Jakobson, whose work we will return to below and refer to throughout this study – as a blanket term to designate the object of study, covering as it does not only poetry but what might be called the poetic effect in all forms of language use. This is a useful term to use here too, as one might clarify the previously used phrase “poetry as poetry” as “poetry as (verbal) art.”

How, then, should one view poetry as “art?” There are, potentially, many different answers to this question, but our answer here is that we will be examining it from a formal perspective, what could also be seen as a perspective of technique. Clunies Ross’ *History of Old Norse Poetry and Poetics* is also concerned primarily with poetic technique, but with an important difference to our present concerns. This emphasis is evident both in the examination of “technical terms” of Old Norse poetry,<sup>88</sup> and in the analysis of the pervasive and compelling comparison in Old Norse literature between poets and smiths or craftsmen,<sup>89</sup> an “analogy” which “expresses technological excellence and power.”<sup>90</sup> This is certainly an examination of the technique, in every sense of the word, of Old Norse poetry. However, it is an examination primarily of Old Norse poetics and relates to the poetics of writers in Old Norse on the subject of poetry in their native language, only examining the poetry itself in as far as the examples are metapoetic, that is, that their subject is poetry

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<sup>88</sup> Clunies Ross 2005 pp. 29-39.

<sup>89</sup> Clunies Ross 2005 pp. 84-91; see also Lie, Hallvard (1956): “Billedbeskrivende dikt” *Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk Middelalder I* pp. 542–5, Hines, John (2003): “Myth and Reality: The Contribution of Archaeology,” *Old Norse myths, literature and society*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross, Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark (2003), pp. 165-174.

<sup>90</sup> Clunies Ross 2005 p. 2.

itself (or that they demonstrate a “native” poetic concept in practice). What Clunies Ross is examining here is not technique in general but Old Norse concepts of technique, as held by the poets themselves and to a certain extent by later medieval writers. Our concern here is not Old Norse poetics but rather a poetics of Old Norse poetry, though naturally one cannot do without the former entirely when examining the latter. Here we should re-emphasise what was suggested above, that although Clunies Ross’ work takes poetics as its subject, it is primarily concerned with what we have here referred to as the “cultural valence” of poetic terms. By contrast, this study examines what I argue to be actual poetic figures in Eddic poetry, whether fully formed concepts of these figures existed in Old Norse literary culture or not. One could also contrast Clunies Ross’ study with a more recent overview of Eddic stylistics by Brittany Schorn: Schorn neatly identifies a number of Eddic stylistic features including various forms of diction, strophe structure, and poetic voice, yet there is no opportunity to corroborate the idea that these devices would have had any significance to an “original” Eddic audience.<sup>91</sup> The implication is that the existence and significance of these figures is demonstrated by their visibility (upon scrutiny) to the scholar, and in this sense we follow Schorn in this study. One of the attractive aspects of Clunies Ross’ focus over the present focus is that the former is an examination of something that requires little in the way of argument to support its existence; the poetic terms are there for anyone to see, and their relevance to the culture that produced them is largely demonstrated by their pervasive presence in the literature and by the conscious discourse surrounding their use.

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<sup>91</sup> Schorn, Brittany (2016b): “Eddic Style”, *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry: Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia*, ed. Carolyne Larrington, Judy Quinn, Brittany Schorn, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 271-287.

By contrast, our methodology requires an extra step. In the first place, an extra level of argumentation is required simply to demonstrate the fact of actual poetic figures in the text, when these figures have not been identified as such by the original composers or consumers of the text. I aim to demonstrate these figures not primarily by appeal to other facets of Old Norse culture as supports – though potential literary contexts of these texts will feature frequently in the following analyses – but by the coherence and apparent distinctiveness of these figures, and by the coherence of the study as a total argument.

The stuff of “verbal art,” that which fundamentally constitutes its medium, must be identified as language. Language is its medium not only in the sense that it is the site upon which poetry is enacted or the material from which it is sculpted, but could also be said to be the instrument by which it is made. Therefore, concepts from linguistics will play a significant role in these analyses. This reflects – and will partly revisit – the bedrock of scholarship on Old Norse subjects, which should properly be seen as “philological” in its marriage of literary history with more purely linguistic analysis. The following analyses, however, will not be purely linguistic. The difference between linguistics and poetics provides yet another complex dichotomy, largely predicated on the relation to what we are calling “verbal art.” Abondolo argues against a dichotomy suggested by Jonathan Culler between “poetics”, which is “modelled on linguistics,” and “hermeneutics”,<sup>92</sup> by way of illustrating his own dichotomy which we have quoted above.<sup>93</sup> Though he does not say as much there, we know that Culler’s view of this relationship between poetics and linguistics

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<sup>92</sup> Culler, Jonathan (1975): *Structuralist poetics: structuralism, linguistics and the study of literature*, London: Routledge, p. 61.

<sup>93</sup> Abondolo 2001 p. 51.

is based on that of Roman Jakobson. For Jakobson, “[p]oetics deals with problems of verbal structure, just as the analysis of painting is concerned with pictorial structure. Since linguistics is the global science of verbal structure, poetics may be regarded as an integral part of linguistics.”<sup>94</sup> This hierarchising formula shows the structuralist origin of Jakobson’s position, and Culler later presents a modified version of his position. Jakobson’s pure “grammatical analysis” is not an “interpretive method” for Culler: the “task of linguistics” is “not to tell us what sentences mean, but rather to explain how they have the meanings which speakers of a language give them.”<sup>95</sup> Though further interpretation is needed than a purely grammatical analysis, Culler still subordinates poetics as a concept to linguistics. This hierarchy is not necessarily one I will be subscribing to in this study: it is more the case that linguistic tools, drawn both from general linguistics and from Old Norse philology in particular, will be useful as instruments in analyses that are fundamentally poetic. However, the following chapter will deal especially with grammatical elements of Eddic poetry, and we will have cause to extensively revisit Jakobson’s thought on grammar in poetry.

Even if we have established the material under examination here as “language,” there is still an uncertainty regarding Eddic poetry as “literature.” Here we return to the presumed oral roots of Eddic poetry. It is true of Old Norse poetry in general that it is largely assumed (or explicitly stated in its recording) to have an ultimate origin as orally performed literature composed by non-literate poets. This is certainly the case with skaldic poetry, for which the context of composition tends to play an important role. In the case of Eddic

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<sup>94</sup> Jakobson, Roman ([1960] 1981): “Linguistics and Poetics”, *Selected Writings III*, The Hague: Mouton, p. 350.

<sup>95</sup> Culler 1975 pp. 73-74.

poetry, due to the anonymity of the composers and the cultural association of this poetry with antiquity, this literature could be seen as having an origin related more closely to what might be called “folk” literature. This view has its roots in the Romantic period of Eddic scholarship. The primary focus for the Grimms, for example, was with a literature that had a public or social origin rather than literature associated with an author or poet, literature that inherited themes they saw as primordial.<sup>96</sup> The concept of Eddic poetry as “folk” poetry or poetry that in some way has a folk origin has influenced approaches that incorporate folkloristic studies in examining aspects of Old Norse literature and mythology.<sup>97</sup> The approach we are taking here could, by contrast, be seen as very deeply “literary.” This is necessary for a variety of reasons, all relating to the condition in which we receive Eddic poetry that we have examined above. We are reading – and the use of this verb is important – Eddic poetry in a form that cuts us off from whatever the original conditions of its composition and consumption were; speculation on these conditions may be possible, but would not be appropriate for the following analyses. Additionally, it may be worth elaborating at this point on our present attitude toward the question of orality in Eddic poetry. For the purposes of the following analyses, it is important to remember both that we are reading Eddic poetry primarily as writing, in the medium in which it is transmitted to us in Codex Regius and other manuscripts, and that on the other hand the question of orality continually haunts the edges of analysis. We will invoke various ideas of oral

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<sup>96</sup> For Wilhelm Grimm, for example, “Poesie und Religion ist ursprünglich verbunden, denn alles trennt erst später der Mensch” (Grimm, Wilhelm ([1808] 1881-1887): “Über die Entstehung der altdeutschen Poesie und ihr Verhältniss zu der nordischen”, *Kleinere Schriften* vol. 1, ed. Gustav Hinrichs, Berlin: Gütersloh, p. 124): “Poetry and religion are originally united, then only later does man divide everything”.

<sup>97</sup> Consider Gunnell’s inclusion of a great deal of post-medieval folkloristic material in *Origins of Drama* (Gunnell 1994 pp. 93-181).



composition and performance without relying on any one. Reading Eddic poetry as writing, however, has its own effect on any poetic analysis. On the one hand, stylistic devices related to oral performance are absent; on the other, stylistic devices related specifically to written text must be taken into account. The written text does not take place over a period of time as does the oral performance, but is rather totally accessible at any point and without any specific relationship to time or duration: in Walter J. Ong's words, writing makes language "autonomous".<sup>98</sup> It is important to bear in mind the difference between this experience of reading and that of being an audience for orally performed poetry; it is likely that some of the conclusions we reach in a stylistic reading of Eddic poetry are only possible through the technology of reading. However, I would argue here that the validity of readings of Eddic poetry need not be dependent on subordinating its written condition to a conjectured oral origin. If we receive Eddic poetry as writing, it must be worthwhile to study it as such. This is true not only in a purely palaeographical sense, but also in the sense that this literature has been deliberately compiled by an scribe or series of scribes for the purpose of being read, which, in the end, is the only way we can approach it in any case. We will return to this question more or less continually throughout this study, and especially in terms of the representation of dialogue in Eddic poetry, we will see that the concept of oral speech resurfaces as much as does the autonomy of the written word.

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<sup>98</sup> Ong, Walter (2012): *Orality and literacy: the technologizing of the word, with additional chapters by John Hartley, 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition*, Abingdon: Routledge, p. 77.

### 1.3.2 Poetics, Psychology, and Old Norse Poetry

We have established a basis for approaching Eddic poetry from the point of view of “poetics:” viewing the text as “verbal art,” focusing on technique as it is manifest in the medium of poetry, language in (in this case) writing. An additional conceptual step can help to show the significance of the approach of poetics, and will also open the methodology deployed in this thesis up to a wider range of theoretical concerns: this is the identification of language with, in some way, thought. The relation of poetics to thought has been treated in a systematic way for the last few decades by the field of “cognitive poetics,” which has largely proceeded from a basis initiated by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s “conceptual metaphor.”<sup>99</sup> Peter Stockwell argues that cognitive poetics is “a discipline in its own right,”<sup>100</sup> but also situates it in relation to classical rhetoric going back to Aristotle: a tradition which, indeed, coined many terms still used in stylistics and poetics in general to this day.<sup>101</sup> The value of cognitive poetics, then, lies in its ability to demonstrate that stylistic figures are not arbitrary and are more than mere data. Rather, the technique of verbal art is both a product of and a stimulus for the mind. Though we are primarily viewing linguistic technique to the extent that it applies to the verbal art of Eddic poetry, it is also the case that this technique shares many features with – or, at times, could perhaps be said to have its root in – other forms of language use.<sup>102</sup> These general insights provide a useful starting

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<sup>99</sup> Lakoff, George & Mark Johnson (1980): *Metaphors We Live By*, Chicago, London: Chicago University Press; for more on the genealogy of cognitive poetics as a field of inquiry, see Steen, Gerard & Joanna Gavins (2003): “Contextualising cognitive poetics”, *Cognitive Poetics in Practice*, London: Routledge (2003), pp. 1-8.

<sup>100</sup> Stockwell, Peter (2009): *Texture: a cognitive aesthetics of reading*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, p. 2.

<sup>101</sup> Stockwell 2009 pp. 135-136.

<sup>102</sup> This notion is related to what Stockwell terms the “Generalisation” and “Continuity” principles in cognitive poetics (Stockwell 2009 pp. 2-4).

point for considering the relation of poetics to thought. In the following chapters on primarily grammatical features the relevance of the cognitive approach will be clear enough, and yet as we move toward a more abstractly psychological view in the later chapters we will move beyond this method.

The problem with applying a “cognitive” approach to the study of Eddic poetry lies partly in the problem of context we have noted above: whereas it would seem uncontroversial enough to apply this method to a modern novel, it is difficult to apply to a text in a dead language with a mysterious prehistory. From a cognitivist point of view, medieval documents must surely be records or artefacts of the same sort of interaction which cognitivists take as the basis of their analyses, the reader-text interaction. But in the first place, we do not have access to the context of the production and consumption of Eddic poetry beyond its compilation in manuscripts; and on the other hand, we have also seen that the concept of an “author” in Eddic poetry is deeply troubled. Whose mind(s) are we accounting for, and how many? Can we assume the mind of a particular poet behind what could equally be a succession of reciters and interpreters? What about the role of the scribe as an interpreter of Eddic poetry? Because of these problems, one might be inclined to avoid questions of psychology in Old Norse texts altogether. David Clark, discussing sexual themes in *Gísla saga*, provides a compelling perspective on this potential aversion to psychology, arguing that a “psychoanaly[ti]c” approach would “entail treating the characters as if they were real people, rather than semi-fictional constructs.”<sup>103</sup> It should be

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<sup>103</sup> Clark, David (2007): “Revisiting *Gísla saga*: Sexual Themes and the Heroic Past”, *JEGP. Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, Oct 2007, Vol. 106(4), p. 505.

made clear that Clark is here arguing not against reference to psychology in the study of Old Norse texts in general, but rather against a specifically Freudian analysis. However, the implication appears to be related to our present problem: it is a problem of “mind.” The scholar here cannot “psychoanalyse” the text without passing into it oneself, “treating the characters as if they were real people.” This is a problem of conceptual boundaries, of “text worlds” in cognitive-poetic terminology.<sup>104</sup> Clark’s predicament is partly one of the (a)historicity of the saga characters, but this is arguably analogous to our present problem of the context of Eddic poetry. We are constantly aware of the risk of making observations on a potentially inappropriate conceptual basis. It is therefore necessary that we remain, as much as is possible and appropriate, agnostic regarding the context of Eddic poetry. Yet, on the other hand, even with this agnostic attitude it is still possible and indeed necessary to see Eddic poetry as a mind-product. To argue that there is no analysable psychic or cognitive element in Old Norse literature is to argue either that these texts were produced by people devoid of psyche or by people with a psyche so different from ours as to be unreadable from a modern psychological point of view. The former view, even if held only provisionally for methodological purposes, tends toward the absurd in its implications, while the latter seems untenable for serious scholarship on these subjects. And yet, Clark’s admonition against passing too far into the text must be borne in mind; we will return to

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<sup>104</sup> On “text worlds,” see Werth, Paul (1999): *Text worlds: representing conceptual space in discourse*, Harlow: Longman; Gavins, Joanna (2000): “Text Worlds”, *Encyclopedia of Language & Linguistics*, Amsterdam: Elsevier, pp.628-630.

this concept in particular when reviewing previous scholarship on *Völundarkviða* in section 5.1 of this study.<sup>105</sup>

In spite of these problems with cognitive poetics as an approach to Old Norse literature, the methodology has begun to make some important inroads in the field. The most important work from a cognitive-poetic point of view on Old Norse subjects has been the work on skaldic poetry by Bergsveinn Birgisson,<sup>106</sup> and in a similar vein the work of Michael Schulte.<sup>107</sup> These scholars take the opportunity that cognitive poetics provides to analyse formal elements of skaldic poetry in a way that shows their coherence and significance without making or relying on an argument relating primarily to social context. It is perhaps not surprising that both Schulte and Bergsveinn choose as their subject that most strikingly skaldic of figures, the kenning. Schulte's analysis addresses purely formal concerns (specifically the grammatical structure of skaldic kennings), and in addition to its engagement with cognitivist ideas is well-situated in the context of the philological tradition of Old Norse scholarship. Bergsveinn's work is of considerable depth, arguing for the role of catachresis in particularly surreal or grotesque kennings as a mnemonic tool, and more generally relating this feature of kennings to theories of aesthetics.<sup>108</sup> It is this latter approach which is most relevant to this study. Bergsveinn begins here with the "general theoretical question" of the cognitive processing of metaphor; the focus on the kenning is

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<sup>105</sup> Section 5.1, pp. 217-229 of this thesis.

<sup>106</sup> Bergsveinn Birgisson (2008): *Inn í skaldens sinn: kognitive, estetiske og historiske skatter i den norrøne skaldediktingen*, Bergen: Universitetet i Bergen; Bergsveinn Birgisson (2012): "Skaldic Blends Out of Joint: Blending Theory and Aesthetic Conventions", *Metaphor and Symbol*, 01 October 2012, Vol. 27(4), p. 283-298.

<sup>107</sup> Schulte, Michael (2012): "Kenningkunst und kognitive Poetik: Zu einer kognitiven Stimmungsregel der Skaldik", *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur*, Vol. 134(4) (2012), pp. 479-511.

<sup>108</sup> Bergsveinn Birgisson (2009): "The Old Norse kenning as a mnemonic figure", *The making of memory in the Middle Ages*, ed. Lucie Doležalová, Leiden: Brill, pp. 199-214

that of a “case study.”<sup>109</sup> Though the conclusions reached do relate to the wide and interdisciplinary concerns of the cognitivist paradigm, they are arrived at through an analysis of certain aspects of the kenning that has a significant import for the study of Old Norse literature. Bergsveinn shows the manner in which the skaldic aesthetic prizes instances of incongruity, grotesqueness, and difficulty, and moreover that this aesthetic sensibility stands in stark contrast to the principles of metaphorical clarity expounded by classical aesthetics, especially Aristotle.<sup>110</sup> Though he does not say as much here, this concept has some important consequences: Bergsveinn is arguing for an alternate aesthetic paradigm to the one assumed in Western thought to be general or perhaps universal, most conspicuously by the previous generation of Old Norse philologists whose methodological roots lie primarily in Classical philology. This argument hints at the potentially problematic generalising tendency of the cognitivist approach, while still remaining fundamentally concerned with poetic style. Bergsveinn’s work therefore neatly encapsulates the potential significance of the approach of poetics tempered by the cognitive point of view, especially for Old Norse subjects, in an analysis that interrogates both the material at hand and the very methodological concepts used to approach that material. We will return to Bergsveinn’s discussion of the kenning in particular in section 4.1 of this study.

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<sup>109</sup> Bergsveinn Birgisson 2012 p. 283.

<sup>110</sup> We will return to view Bergsveinn’s and Aristotle’s views of poetics in greater depth in section 4.1 of this study (p. 147).

### 1.3.3 The Poetics of Voice in Eddic Poetry

It is perhaps not surprising that the most significant examples of cognitive-poetic approaches to Old Norse poetry should treat skaldic poetry as their subject matter; we have noted above that Snorri Sturluson himself inaugurates this tendency to view the skaldic as the more formal type of Old Norse poetry. Skaldic poetry offers more immediately obvious stylistic complexity to examine due to the generic features we have discussed above. As we have seen with the examples of Bergsveinn and Schulte, the stylistic figure of the kenning (which is not entirely absent in Eddic poetry, but reaches its pinnacle of complexity in skaldic poetry) provides a particularly fertile field for formal inquiry. Additionally, skaldic poetry tends toward the metapoetic; the voice of the poet is prominent in the poem, and the act of composing and reciting poetry is frequently the subject of allusion by that voice. We have seen above in the work of Margaret Clunies Ross that there is a considerable discourse of poetics in Old Norse literature, and much of it is actually contained in skaldic verse. Skaldic poetry, therefore, seems in particular to suggest itself as a subject of stylistic analysis. Eddic poetry, on the other hand, has a far more narrative character which does not necessarily draw attention to its own formal structure. Similarly, the figure of the poet is obscured in Eddic poetry, compared to the highly present and authoritative skaldic voice. These features may lead one in a similar position to our own (lacking access to much of the context of how these texts were produced and consumed) to regard Eddic poetry as being, in a way, *less poetic* than skaldic.

And yet, Eddic poetry stops short of being mere prose. This is not only the case due to the fact that Eddic language is organized according to metre; as we shall see, there are

other figures that distinguish Eddic poetry as a verbal art. We have noted above that one of the most prominent features of Eddic poetry is its use of voice, which distinguishes it especially from skaldic poetry and is reflected in many of the given titles of the poems. The two basic types of voice in Eddic poetry are the neutral voice of a purportedly impartial narrator, and the voice of a character contained within the diegesis, which does not only appear as dialogue but can also be the narrative voice, as in *Völuspá*. This use of voice not only brings the focus away from poetry as such: in occluding, obscuring, and otherwise troubling the role of a composer or reciter of this text, Eddic poetry presents a more problematic style of mind than skaldic verse. When we consider the psychological or cognitive import of such voices, we run the risk of incurring Clark's paradox and letting the conceptual boundaries of the text envelope us. Indeed, as Stockwell would argue, this is what the text wants us to do: "[t]here is no difference in the basic mechanics that we use to interact with other people in our world compared with fictional people."<sup>111</sup>

We are approaching the use of voice in Eddic poetry, then, fundamentally as a *problem*. The problem of the Eddic voice is deeply suggestive of the even more irresolvable problem of Eddic context, and this is partly why we shall have so much cause to refer to the question of context without ever quite accepting or positing a solution to that problem. Nor is it exactly our intention to solve the problem of Eddic voice; these analyses will not so much provide solutions as they will explorations. Our primary solution to the problem posed by Clark, however, should be specified as an attitude toward the text that regards it

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<sup>111</sup> Stockwell 2009 p. 131.



as a totality, both cognitively and stylistically. It is true that we cannot reasonably consider individual voices in Eddic texts as representing individual, discrete minds; but this observation provides an impetus for our overall examination of this aspect of Eddic poetics. Though, as we have noted above, it would be difficult to argue for a specific composer or author for any Eddic poem, it is nonetheless true that they are cognitive products as much as any other text. They therefore bear the imprint of what we must assume to be a series of minds, or, put another way, of mind in general. What these voices are doing in Eddic poetry, and how they are doing it, are, then, what we shall take as our focus here when dealing with voice. In the conclusion to this study we will be able to more fully outline a certain diagram of voice in Eddic poetry.<sup>112</sup>

#### 1.3.4 Note on Translations

As this study involves a close reading of Eddic poetry, frequently at the level of syntax and grammar in addition to the meanings of individual words, an essentially word-for-word translation of each passage is necessary. However, due to the differences between Old Norse and modern English – especially in terms of grammatical morphology and syntax – a neat translation for each word into English is not always possible. Additionally, a translation that gives a sense for each word in Old Norse will frequently be insufficient for understanding the idiomatic sense of the passage as a whole. Therefore, each passage of Old Norse verse will have two translations. The first translation for each passage will follow

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<sup>112</sup> Section 6.1.1, pp. 282-289 of this thesis.

the enjambment of the original verse and will be as close to word-for-word as is feasible. Due to the heavily grammaticalised nature of Old Norse in comparison to modern English, grammatical English words must frequently be inserted (the first translation of *Atlakviða* 11 in which we give the grammatical status of each individual word in a superscript is a special case). Where it is appropriate to attach the new word in English to the word it modifies, this will be done by hyphenating the two words together. Where this is not appropriate, a word will be added in square brackets. Articles will be inserted where appropriate in modern English although Old Norse tends to avoid the use of articles altogether. In certain cases the word order will be altered in the English translation, much as I seek to avoid this; this is only necessary in cases where modern English would rely on word order to impart a specific meaning. The second translation will consist of a non-enjambed idiomatic translation of the overall sense of the passage. In the second translation, reasonable liberties are taken to render the text as readable as possible in plain English. It should be stressed, therefore, that this second translation is *not* to be read as a word-for-word translation of the Old Norse text. In certain short passages where the text in Old Norse is sufficiently close to the word order and diction one could use in modern English and the more idiomatic translation would simply be redundant, it will be omitted. All references to the primary text of the Eddic material are to the third edition of Gustav Neckel and Hans Kuhn, unless otherwise noted.<sup>113</sup> All translations from primary text are my own unless otherwise noted.

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<sup>113</sup> Neckel, Gustav & Hans Kuhn (1962-1968): *Edda: die Lieder des Codex regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*, ed. Gustav Neckel & Hans Kuhn, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Heidelberg: Winter.

## 2. Syntax, Time, Repetition, Parallel

We begin with an analysis of certain grammatical figures in Eddic poetry, figures at the level of syntax. On the surface, the most obvious formal constraint on Eddic poetry is that of metre. Language as arranged in the form of Eddic poetry is reducible to certain basic components as dictated by metrical constraints; *fornyrðislag*, for example, consists typically of strophes of four long lines or eight short lines each, with each short line typically containing four or five syllables.<sup>1</sup> In the sense of purely phonological form, Eddic poetry, like other forms of Germanic poetry, can be said to be held together structurally by rules of stress and alliteration. That the structural importance of these phonological rules is of conscious importance in the Old Norse literary mind can be illustrated by Óláfr Þórðarson's comparison of metrical structure to the structure of a clinker-built hull in the *Third Grammatical Treatise*.<sup>2</sup> But the lack of enjambment and strong tendency toward syntactic soundness suggests that syntax is important to Eddic poetry, despite the lack of any known syntactic *rules* for this verse. Additionally, in spite of the encouragement of word order transgression for aesthetic effect in *dróttkvætt* poetry, the *dróttkvætt* verse still strongly

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<sup>1</sup> Eddic metres are not strictly syllable-counting, but, as we have noted above, count stresses and unstressed syllables (Sievers 1893). There are many notable irregularities in the verse as given in the manuscript, including possible errors or anacrusis. On this see Pipping, Hugo (1903): *Bidrag til Eddametriken*, Helsingfors: Tidnings- & Tryckeri-Aktiebolagets tryck.; Gering, Hugo (1924): "Das fornyrðislag in der Lieder-Edda: Eine statistische Übersicht", *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 40, pp. 1-50, 176-221; Finnur Jónsson ([1921] 1933): "Sagnformen i helteidigtene i codex regius", *seks afhandlingar om eddadigtene*, Copenhagen: G.E.C. Gad, pp. 78-169; Suzuki, Seiichi (2010): "Anacrusis in Eddic Meters Fornyrðislag and Málahátt: Reevaluation and Reinvigoration", *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Deutschen Sprache und Literatur*, 2010, Vol. 132(2), pp. 159-176; Haukur Þorgeirsson (2012): "The Origin of Anacrusis in Fornyrðislag", *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Deutschen Sprache und Literatur*, 2012, Vol. 134(1), pp. 25-38.

<sup>2</sup> Björn Magnus Ólsen & Krömmelbein ed. 1998 p. 187.

tends to consist of two self-contained syntactic units.<sup>3</sup> One can assume that although word order can be the subject of acceptable artistic transgression in Old Norse poetry, grammatical soundness cannot; transgression of grammatical rules, it seems, would rather have simply been read as nonsense. The grammatical structure of the Old Norse sentence, therefore, has an important relation to the structure of Old Norse poetry; indeed, one could say that the Old Norse sentence is the medium of the Old Norse poet. A complete, finite sentence in Old Norse could be defined at its most basic as a group of words conditioned by a verb in one of the two finite tenses, present or preterite.<sup>4</sup> The importance of the finite verb will be especially significant in the analysis of a strophe in *Atlakviða* which follows. Due to the highly inflected nature of the language, however, the dependence of each word on another increases as words proliferate in an Old Norse sentence. In this sense, the co-dependent structure of the Old Norse sentence reflects the nature of Old Norse verbal artistic structure. Yet the structural importance of syntax in Eddic poetry does not seem to be the subject of conscious syntactic rules, as it were, followed by Old Norse poets. If we cannot discern rules, however, it is still possible to discern figures. In the following chapter we will examine not only patterns but also singularities of Eddic syntax; our aim here is to establish building blocks upon which larger stylistic figures in Eddic poetry are constructed.

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<sup>3</sup> Note that verse in *kviðuháttr* frequently violates the syntactic discreteness of the *helmingr*; see Gade, Kari Ellen (2005): "The Syntax of Old Norse *Kviðuháttr* Meter", *Journal of Germanic Linguistics*, 2005, Vol. 17(3), pp. 155-181

<sup>4</sup> As does Jan Terje Faarlund: Faarlund, Jan Terje (2004): *The syntax of Old Norse with a survey of the inflectional morphology and a complete bibliography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 189.

## 2.1 Grammatical Fictions: Syntax and Eddic Time

The evocative, yet cryptic eleventh strophe of *Atlakviða* presents not only a particularly striking example of Eddic syntactic strategy but also a number of significant interpretative problems. Apart from the problem of how the sentence it comprises should be read grammatically, which we shall deal with in detail here, there are problems of semantics in the form of obscure and perhaps archaic diction. Additionally, this strophe has a certain thematic obscurity which has considerable relevance to the formal structure we are examining here. This is the second part of a two-strophe episode of direct speech given by the character Gunnarr, in which he determines to accept the invitation of his brother-in-law Atli in spite of suspicions and warnings of a trap which turn out to be entirely accurate. In this second strophe, Gunnarr seems to have a borderline-prophetic vision of his own doom, which he is nonetheless willing to accept. He prophesies, using evocative animal imagery, not only the possibility that he will not return from this visit, but also that his enemies will be unsuccessful in getting their hands on the Niflung treasure-hoard (again, a prediction that is borne out later in the poem), and perhaps additionally that his kingdom will fall into ruin after his death.<sup>5</sup> This is given in a way that could also be read more simply as a sort of elaborate boast: if Gunnarr can't have the treasure, no one can. The strophe is

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<sup>5</sup> It has also been suggested that the animal figures evoked in this strophe are allegorical figures representing Atli and the Gjúkung brothers, though we will not be exploring this possibility here. See Bugge, Sophus (1909): "Die Heimat der altnordischen Lieder von den Welsungen und den Nibelungen", *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 35 (1909), p. 244f; Dronke, Ursula ed. (1969): *The Poetic Edda, Vol. I: Heroic Poems*, Oxford: Clarendon, pp. 24-26; McMahon, James V. (1991): "Atli the Dog in the *Atlakviða*", *Scandinavian Studies*, 1 April 1991, Vol. 63(2), p. 189.

almost an aside; it seems to be addressed to no one in particular, and Gunnarr even distances himself from the prophecy somewhat, referring to himself by his own name as if to a third person. A complex sense of distance is conveyed, distance in person but also in time. The events Gunnar describes take place in the future, but in a conditional future, a prophecy with a qualification. Here we shall consider the way in which this prophecy is constructed grammatically.

*Atlakviða* 11 may be given a word-by-word translation reflecting the grammatical position of each word as follows:

11. <i>Úlfr mun ráða</i>	<i>arfi Niflunga,</i>
<i>gamlir granverðir</i>	<i>ef Gunnars missir</i>
<i>birnir blacfiallir</i>	<i>bíta þreftǫnnom,</i>
<i>gamna greystóði</i>	<i>ef Gunnar né kǫmrað.</i>

11. Wolf<sup>nominative singular</sup> shall<sup>finite verb</sup> rule<sup>non-finite verb</sup> inheritance<sup>dative singular</sup> Niflungs'<sup>genitive plural</sup>

old<sup>nominative plural</sup> ??<sup>nominative plural</sup>6 if<sup>conjunction</sup> Gunnarr<sup>genitive singular</sup> lacks<sup>indicative verb</sup>

bears<sup>nominative plural</sup> inkfurred<sup>nominative plural</sup> bite<sup>non-finite verb</sup> graspteeth[?]<sup>dative plural</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The meanings of the obscure words *granverðir* and *þreftǫnnom* are practically unrecoverable. Various interpretations have been proposed, however. See Sveinbjörn Egilsson (1860): *Lexicon poëticum antiquæ linguæ septentrionalis*, Hafniæ: Societas Regia Antiquariorum Septentrionalium, p. 266; Grundtvig, Svend ed. (1874): *Sæmundar Edda hins fróða: den ældre Edda / kritisk håndudg. ved Svend Grundtvig*, p. 244; Boer, R.C. (1922): *Die Edda mit historisch-kritischem Commentar, Band 2: Commentar*, Haarlem: H.D. Tjeenk Willink & zoon, p. 294; Dronke 1969 p. 53; von See, Klaus, Beatrice la Farge, Eve Picard, & Katja Schulz (2012): *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda, Band 7: Heldenlieder*, Heidelberg: Winter, pp. 233-235, 240-243.

entertain<sup>non-finite verb</sup> hound-stud<sup>nominative singular</sup> if<sup>conjunction</sup> Gunnarr<sup>nominative singular</sup>  
nor<sup>conjunction</sup> comes-not<sup>indicative verb</sup>.

11. The wolf shall rule the inheritance of the Niflungs, the old [?], if Gunnarr dies,  
ink-furred bears bite the grasptoothed[?], give sport to hounds, if Gunnarr does not  
return.

This strophe arguably presents one complete sentence, entirely self-contained, if complex and unusual. A sense of parallelism is immediately created by the repetition of the conditional *ef* clauses at the end of the second and fourth short lines, which subsequently has the effect of dividing the strophe into two conceptual as well as formal halves. In fact, upon first scan, the first long line of this strophe could be taken for a complete sentence on its own; however, the insertion of the nominative noun group *gamlir granverðir* disrupts this sense of closure, and the feeling that the sentence has not ended is confirmed by the conditional *ef* clause. The second long line, lacking a verb, must be understood as an extension of the sentence begun in the first, in which *gamlir granverðir* is simply (in purely grammatical terms) a repetition of the nominative position also occupied by *úlfr*.

But does the sentence end there? A reading that divides the strophe into two sentences bound to the two *helmingar* is possible, but I argue that this is not the case. The beginning of the third long line with a nominative noun group ("*birnir blaðfjallir*") and the ending of the fourth long line with a conditional *ef* clause not only mirrors the grammatical construction of the first half of the strophe, but also suggests a separate complete sentence. However, the two verbs in the second half of the strophe, *bíta* ("bite") and

*gamna* (“entertain”), appear to be non-finite (though these endings could equally denote the third-person plural present). If this is the case, then *birnir blacfiallir* (“ink-furred bears”) must be a third repetition of the original nominative position of this clause (“*Úlfr*”, “wolf”); it has been stretched out considerably from what seemed like a conventional way of constructing an Old Norse sentence. The strophe could be divided into two markedly different grammatical sections based on the mood of its verbs: the unreal section in which the verbs are non-finite (and therefore, in this case, non-real), triggered by *mun*; and the conditional section in which the verbs are indicative, triggered by *ef*. A reading of this strophe in which the two halves form two discrete sentences would read the verbs we have read here as non-finite rather as merely agreeing with the third-person plural noun groups, which results in the same ending as that of a non-finite verb in Old Norse.<sup>7</sup> There is nothing that completely invalidates this reading, but there are various aspects of the strophe that indicate the reading I am arguing for here is more appropriate. First of all, the presence of the single finite verb *mun* strongly suggests that the *-a* verbs are all conditioned by it. Furthermore, we have already identified a sense of grammatical repetition in, at the very least, the first half of the strophe between the two nominative noun groups, and the repetition of the non-finite verb position (*ráða* being undeniably non-finite) would accord with this sense of repetition. In this case, the repetition is extended throughout the strophe, and the resulting grammatical structure seems too neat to ignore. A switch halfway through the strophe from speaking of the future using a conventional auxiliary verb in the first half

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<sup>7</sup> Heusler, Andreas (1950): *Altisländisches Elementarbuch*, Heidelberg: Winter, pp. 134-135; Noreen, Adolf (1923): *Altisländische und altnorwegische Grammatik (Laut- und Flexionslehre) unter Berücksichtigung des Urnordischen*, Halle: Niemeyer, pp. 354-355.



to speaking of the future simply in the present tense would moreover be grammatically incongruous.

The repetition of grammatical positions across this strophe produces a number of simultaneous effects. Time stops, one cannot move forward to the sentence's conclusion while the nominatives persist and the non-finite verbs lead nowhere. Yet on the other hand, Gunnarr is speaking of phenomena in the future, in an unrealised time. Then again, we are in the end finally grounded in the narrative moment by the *ef* clauses which stipulate the condition under which this prophecy will come about. All of these states co-exist in the sentence, overlapping with one another. *Ef* returns the strophe's deictic frame to its proper place, but *mun* takes it on an excursion the irreal nature of which is reflected in the cryptic and bizarre animal imagery it contains. Ronald Langacker illustrates "reality" in terms of tense diagrammatically as "a 'growing' cylinder, continually being extended through new occurrences."<sup>8</sup> For the "conceptualizer," the modal verb "places it [the conceptualizer, represented as the "face" of the cylinder] outside conceived reality, in a region we can refer to as **irreality**."<sup>9</sup> The spatial diagram (or is it a metaphor?) is somewhat unclear here, since in the diagram itself the future is represented by a dashed forward-pointing arrow proceeding from the face of the cylinder; presumably the "conceptualizer" is *looking* into the future as into a distance. Furthermore, the "process grounded by a modal, hence not accepted by C [the conceptualizer] as real, is said to be **unreal**."<sup>10</sup> By this we should

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<sup>8</sup> Langacker, Ronald (2008): *Cognitive Grammar: A Basic Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 301; fig. 9.15.

<sup>9</sup> Langacker 2008 p. 302, emphasis original.

<sup>10</sup> Langacker 2008 p. 302, emphasis original.

understand that the “conceptualizer” is in the state of “irreality,” and the actions (in our case, the actions profiled by the non-finite verbs of *Atlakviða* 11) are in a yet more epistemologically distal state of “unreality.” Langacker’s concept of reality in terms of tense should be seen as an abstraction of linguistics. In the material of the text, it is less clear who should be designated as the “conceptualiser.” Langacker’s abstraction imagines a *natural* linguistic expression, in which a “conceptualiser” simply conceptualises and that is the end of it. In our case, this “conceptualiser” is Gunnarr, himself a non-real character from the point of view of anyone consuming the text in any medium. This adds a layer of complexity for which Langacker’s abstraction cannot account, making the status of time and reality in this construction rather less clear than the simple transaction Langacker imagines.

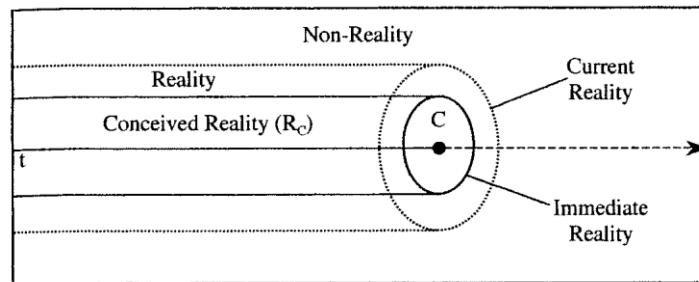


Figure 1: Langacker's tense-cylinder (2008 p. 301, fig. 9.15)

Langacker furthermore views the modal construction as a whole all at once, out of time. The graphic diagram of the growing cylinder is especially indicative of this: Langacker transposes a linguistic image into a graphical image, which necessarily causes new aspects to arise, one of them being that the construction is viewed, as it were, all at once. This is not so with *Atlakviða* 11, which we have seen is constructed in distinct sections which consequently have distinct (though related) relations to time and reality. Langacker’s states of irreality and unreality are nonetheless “grounded” in reality; the “grounding” is an

inextricable component of the diagram.<sup>11</sup> Langacker's argument in favour of the groundedness of *Atlakviða* 11 would be that the conditional *ef* clauses provide us with this grounding by relating the prophetic content to what can otherwise be identified as the immediate reality of the narrative, with *mun* acting as the "clausal head."<sup>12</sup> If the construction were in modern English, a language with relatively little grammatical inflection, this might be more straightforwardly the case. In Old Norse, however, grammar is very much present in every inflected word, causing the separateness of the grammatical sections of this sentence to be very much marked. The sentence as a whole may be "grounded" in a base reality when regarded as a potentially factual proposition, which is the way Langacker is approaching the linguistic utterances he examines as examples.<sup>13</sup>

Whether or not Gunnarr intends his prophecy to be understood as a potentially true proposition – or rather, as we should remember, whether the poet intends the audience to conceive that Gunnarr understands his prophecy as a potentially true proposition – is unclear, and seems beside the point. We could say that the emphasis here is not on the "ground," but on whatever the opposite of the ground is: the state of irreality or unreality. Langacker's abstraction would have us see the action profiled by the non-finite verbs as being straightforwardly in the future, but this is not necessarily the case. In their discussion of their concept of "becoming," Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari note that "the verb in the

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<sup>11</sup> The entire discussion of tense and modality is part of Langacker's section on the concept of "grounding," Langacker 2008 pp. 259-309.

<sup>12</sup> Langacker 2008 124-126.

<sup>13</sup> Though Langacker initially designates "function" as the structuring agent of language (2008 p. 7), by the time we arrive at tense and modality the question has become entirely one of the relationship between an utterance and a given reality, that is, its "ground" (2008 p. 259).

infinitive is in no way indeterminate with respect to time; it expresses the floating, nonpulsed time proper to Aeon, in other words, the time of the pure event or of becoming".<sup>14</sup> The "pure event" seems a more appropriate designation for the temporal nature of Gunnarr's prophecy. It is this disruptive time of becoming that takes centre stage in *Atlakviða* 11, whereas the grounding conditional *ef* clauses come almost as an apology; indeed, they are de-emphasised by being confined to the two short lines. The strophe presents us, therefore, with an eruption of prophetic time and non-human imagery into the flow of the human narrative. The sense that the animal-actions in this strophe all occupy the same conceptual space is reinforced by the repetition of the sentence's nominative position and non-finite verbs, creating a parallel structure of equivalence-but-difference. The greatest grammatical difference between the two halves of the strophe is the presence of *mun* in the first half, and its standing alone as the only finite verb among all these grammatical repetitions confirms its coordinating role as Langacker's "clausal head." It is not so much a symmetrical or asymmetrical construction as what Roman Jakobson might call an "antisymmetry."<sup>15</sup> The single finite verb of the first half cataphorically indicates the

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<sup>14</sup> Deleuze, Gilles & Félix Guattari ([1980] 2013): *A thousand plateaus: capitalism and schizophrenia / Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari; translation and foreword by Brian Massumi*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, p. 263. For the sake of clarity, we should note that Deleuze and Guattari are speaking here of the French "infinitive," which on the one hand has a more specific use than does what we are referring to as the Old Norse "non-finite" verb, and also a different use from the one we are examining here, since French has a future tense that does not rely on auxiliary constructions as do Germanic languages. However, I would maintain that there is an equivalence between Deleuze and Guattari's infinitive and the Old Norse non-finite verb as we are viewing them here: on its own, the Old Norse non-finite verb does not indicate a future tense, but only the non-finite time that Deleuze and Guattari are describing.

<sup>15</sup> Jakobson uses this term frequently in discussions of poetry, but consider especially his use in Jakobson, Roman ([1968] 1981): "The Poetry of Grammar and the Grammar of Poetry", *Selected Writings III*, the Hague: Mouton, pp. 92-93: "Any unbiased, attentive, exhaustive, total description of the selection, distribution and interrelation of diverse morphological classes and syntactic constructions in a given poem surprises the examiner himself by unexpected, striking symmetries and antisymmetries, balanced structures, efficient accumulation of equivalent forms and salient contrasts, finally by rigid restrictions in the repertory of

grammatical equivalence of the nominative noun groups and non-finite verbs in the second half.

The arrangement of syntax in *Atlakviða* 11, then, is not arbitrary or coincidental. Additionally, on the other hand, it does not have as its goal a sense of clarity or truthfulness. Rather, in Jakobson's terms it is a "linguistic fiction", in this case a grammatical fiction.<sup>16</sup> This is not merely to say that we are dealing with fiction writing in general. The grammatical fiction is not only or necessarily fictional in its theme, its discursive content, but also in purely grammatical, "relational" terms.<sup>17</sup> It is, in our case, a poetic construction with a poetic aim. With "linguistic fiction," Jakobson is borrowing a term from Jeremy Bentham:

Linguistic fictions should neither be "mistaken for realities" nor be ascribed to the creative fancy of linguists: they "owe their existence" actually "to language alone" and particularly to the "grammatical form of the discourse," in Bentham's terms.<sup>18</sup>

For Jakobson, the root of these grammatical fictions lies not in a purely formal creativity of the poet, but in familiarity with language through everyday use. Poetry, then, is not separable from other discourses; in addition to (and perhaps apart from) whatever discursive content it may contain itself, poetry mines discourse for its raw material, its artistic medium. This reflects the assumption underpinning cognitive linguistics, that the

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morphological and syntactic constituents used in the poem, eliminations which, on the other hand, permit us to follow the masterly interplay of the actualized constituents."

<sup>16</sup> Jakobson (1968) 1981 pp. 88-89.

<sup>17</sup> To borrow Sapir's terms (Sapir, Edward (1921): *Language: an introduction to the study of speech*, New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., p. 89) via Jakobson ((1968) 1981 p. 87).

<sup>18</sup> Jakobson (1968) 1981 p. 88, quoting Jeremy Bentham (Ogden, C.K. (1932): *Bentham's theory of fictions*, London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., pp. 38, 15, 12).

schemata of language are not separable from other cognitive processes or abilities, but that these processes influence and borrow from one another in a complex interaction.<sup>19</sup> Though for Jakobson and Sapir grammar is “relational” rather than “material,” for Langacker the grammatical unit is a “symbol,” a “pairing between a semantic structure and a phonological structure,” while “lexicon and grammar form a gradation consisting solely in assemblies of symbolic structures.”<sup>20</sup> The position we are taking here with regard specifically to grammatical constructions in Eddic poetry could be seen as mediating between these two points of view: grammar is surely “relational” in the way that it coheres internally in the sentence and in the way that it refers to (or in our case, perhaps, obscures) something outside itself (the “ground”), but that does not necessarily mean it is “nonmaterial.” How grammar might function as “symbol” in Old Norse is somewhat beyond our scope here, but the relevance of a “symbolic structure” in addition to a “relational” one is clearly relevant to the above example of *Atlakviða* 11. This discussion of the symbolic will gain added significance when we move on to our examination of repetitions of individual words in chapter 4.

It is in this way, then, as “grammatical fiction,” that we shall understand grammatical formations in Eddic poetry. The above example is rather singular among Eddic verse and should not be seen as representing a codified stylistic trope; indeed, the identification of such tropes is not our primary aim here. Rather, the above example shows that singularity rather than generality is itself a productive subject of investigation, and

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<sup>19</sup> Langacker 2008 pp. 5-9.

<sup>20</sup> Langacker 2008 p. 5.

though there may be more obviously codified and repeatedly used stylistic tropes among Eddic poems, there are also trends of poetic conceptualisation that can be discerned through analysis of specific stylistic figures, as they actually manifest in the text in particular rather than as generality. This is why we are not proceeding in the manner of much work in linguistics, modelled on the methods of natural sciences, in which a prediction is posited and evidence is sought in support of it. Indeed, one could say that it is more appropriate to proceed in an archaeological fashion when dealing with a dead language. Therefore, it is worth examining strophes from other Eddic poems which show similar syntactic strategies that nonetheless are not identical, nor shall we be arguing for a genetic relation between them. It is more the case that a common conceptual or aesthetic trend underlies these stylistic figures in their syntactic strategies, and this relates to the way in which they all use the raw material of the Old Norse sentence, not in a general or generic manner but in their singularity and linguistic creativity.

By way of comparison, one might productively consider a strophe of *Vǫluspá* (one of the relatively few Eddic poems preserved in multiple manuscripts, in considerably different forms in Codex Regius and Hauksbók (AM 544 4to)), a poem far more obviously prophetic in its tone than the strophe of *Atlakviða* we have examined above. *Vǫluspá* as a whole looks both backward and forward in time; there is also a present in the text, but it is less clearly demarcated than the more unreal times. *Vǫluspá*'s seeress narrator describes both the creation of the cosmos and its ultimate fate: to be torn apart by a cataclysmic conflict of gods, giants, and monstrous beings, and then to be reborn in a new paradisaic form. A good portion of the text of *Vǫluspá* concerns this apocalyptic process, roughly strophes 40 to 58.

*Völuspá* is also a text that makes conspicuous use of refrains, with the appearance of different refrains marking different thematic sections of the poem.<sup>21</sup> The uniformity of the refrains is assumed by the scribe of Codex Regius to such an extent that each of the three refrains is only written out in full once, and thereafter given as an abbreviation consisting of the initial letters of each word,<sup>22</sup> while both the scribe of Codex Regius and that of Hauksbók partially abbreviate one of the refrains, the one which we are looking at more closely below.<sup>23</sup> This is the refrain that marks the section of the text concerned with *ragnarøk*, the cataclysm that will mark the end of the current world:

As rendered in Neckel and Kuhn:

44. <i>Geyr Garmr miqc</i>	<i>fyr Gniphelli</i>
<i>festr mun slitna</i>	<i>enn frekki renna;</i>
44. Bays Garmr much	before Gniphellir
bonds will break	and wolf run.

44. Garmr bays much before Gniphellir – the bonds will break and the wolf will run free.

As in Codex Regius:

*Geyr garmr mioc f. gnipa helli festr mun slitna en freki rena*<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> As Dronke points out: Dronke, Ursula ed. (1997): *The Poetic Edda, Vol. II: Mythological Poems*, Oxford: Clarendon, pp. 26-27.

<sup>22</sup> Such abbreviations occur on 1:19; 2:16; 2:25; 2:28; 3:8; 3:10; 3:17; 4:30; 4:31.

<sup>23</sup> In Codex Regius, the abbreviation appears as “Geyr nu g.” on 4:4 and “Geyr n.” on 4:22.

<sup>24</sup> Codex Regius 3.



As in Hauksbók in the later strophe 42:

*Geyr nu Garmr miðk fyri Gnipa helli f. m.*<sup>25</sup>

There are some notable thematic similarities between this refrain and *Atlakviða* 11 that are immediately apparent, one being the presence of wolves in both prophecies. In *Völuspá* there are two: the otherwise unattested Garmr, and the more widely known Fenrir, the latter of which is not named in this strophe but is clearly referred to in the second half of the refrain. The breaking loose of Fenrir from his bonds is a conventional sign of the apocalypse referred to in other Old Norse texts in a similar manner.<sup>26</sup> In both cases, the presence of wolves and dogs roaming free where they presumably should not paints an evocative picture of the coming or possible decay or ruination of a human society.

In terms of grammar, there are both noticeable similarities and important differences between *Atlakviða* 11 and the *Garmr* refrain in *Völuspá*. *Völuspá* consists of a complex and often obscure structure in terms of tense and person.<sup>27</sup> Throughout *Völuspá*, the prophetic narrative voice describes the action primarily in the form of visions she is “seeing.” This frame already lends considerable complexity to the nature of *Völuspá*’s narrative content as well as its stylistic strategy; an elaborate grammatical fiction is required to convey this idea. The first forty-two strophes are given in the past tense, except for a few

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<sup>25</sup> Hauksbók 20v: Eiríkur Jónsson & Finnur Jónsson ed. (1892-96): *Hauksbók: udg. efter de Arnamagnæanske håndskrifter no. 371, 544 og 675, 4<sup>to</sup>, samt forskellige papirshåndskrifter af det Kongelige nordiske oldskriftselskab*, Copenhagen: Thieles bogtr., p. 190.

<sup>26</sup> A similar allusion is made in *Hákonarmál* 20 (Whaley, Diana ed. (2012): *Poetry from the Kings’ Sagas 1: From Mythical Times to c. 1035*, Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 1, Turnhout: Brepols, p. 192).

<sup>27</sup> As noted by Dronke 1997 pp. 27-30, 99-100; Vésteinn Ólasson (2013): “*Völuspá* and Time”, *The Nordic Apocalypse: Approaches to Völuspá and Nordic Days of Judgement*, ed. Terry Gunnell & Annette Lassen, Turnhout: Brepols, pp. 25-44.

instances which are almost all cases where the narrative voice refers to itself.<sup>28</sup> First in strophe 36 and then more prominently in the refrain beginning with 44, the vision is related in a way not previously used by the narrative voice: as present tense, directly, without a mediating *ek/hon sá* (“I/she saw”) or *ek/hon man* (“I/she remembers”). Much as *Atlakviða* 11 shifts into the prophetic mode abruptly and with little signalling to indicate how we should interpret Gunnarr’s utterance, strophe 44 of *Völuspá* is an abrupt change of tense, bringing the action contained in *Völuspá*’s complex frame far closer to the reader or listener than it had previously been. The further repetitions of the refrain even include the word *nú*, bringing the vision as close as possible to the present at the centre of the text; what is happening is happening, in some sense, “now.”<sup>29</sup>

This sudden shift into the present is then followed by the first use in *Völuspá* of a construction indicating the future, equally jarring in its suddenness.<sup>30</sup> From this point in the text onward, *mun*-constructions will come to dominate the deictic frame of the narrative. The *mun*-construction here is a far more conventional one than that of *Atlakviða* 11, though it is grammatically similar. *Slitna* (“break”) and *renna* (“run”) occupy the same position or

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<sup>28</sup> 1, “*Hljóðs bið ec,*” 2, “*Ec man iotna,*” 19, “*Asc veit ec standa,*” 21, “*þat man hon fólcvíg,*” 27 “*Veit hon Heimdalar / hlióð um folgit,*” R 36, “*Á fellr austan / um eitrdala.*”

<sup>29</sup> Note a slightly different sense of *nú*, however, as “the point in the narrative we have now reached”; this sense is equally disrupted by the insistent repetition of this refrain.

<sup>30</sup> It may be noted, however, that this is not the first strophe of *Völuspá* to mix two tenses. Vésteinn Ólason points out that strophe 35 contains both the past-tense “*Hapt sá hon liggja*” and the present “*þar sitr Sigyn*” (Vésteinn Ólason 2013 p. 30). However, this must be distinguished from the mixture of tense we are examining here in multiple ways. One might especially note that the shift from past to present tense is a conventional feature of saga prose. Furthermore, the mix of past and present actually persists throughout the poem, reflecting the tension between the text’s frame and its narrative events. Vésteinn’s analysis takes *Völuspá* on its own terms, as it were – that is, in terms of the narrative it presents – and comes to conclusions about the chronology in which the narrative events take place. This ignores the problematic conceptual position (as we have noted above) in which the text’s subtle framing device places these narrative events; they are not actual events taking place in the diegesis but merely *visions*, reported to us by the narrator, who seems free to choose how she wishes to present them to her audience.

category in the sentence in the same way that *Atlakviða* 11's non-finite verbs all occupied repetitions of the same part of the sentence, with *mun* once again acting as the "clausal head" and ultimate conditioner of the sentence, but this time there are only two clauses and they are more conventionally linked using the conjunction *en*. While we have seen that the grammatical figure of *Atlakviða* 11 creates an unreal time that is nonetheless grounded in the flow of the narrative actions through the *ef* clauses, the *Garmr* refrain in *Völuspá* mixes time in a much more strident way by introducing the jarring present and immediately following with the future. The figure of this refrain therefore creates its own its own unreal time not by following an elaborate sentence structure but by closely juxtaposing two distinct tenses and implying some amount of equivalence between them. It is perhaps not coincidental, therefore, that the first instance of this refrain is part of a larger strophe which includes one of the most puzzling parts of *Völuspá* (especially as it is given in Codex Regius):

44:5-8. *Fiqlð veit hon fræða, fram sé ec lengra*

*um ragna rǫc, rǫmm, sigtýva.*

44:5-8. A multitude knows she [of] knowledge, forward see I further

about heaven's judgment, powerful, of-victorygods.

44:5-8. She has a multitude of wisdom; I see further forward, concerning the judgment of heaven (*ragnarǫk*), tumultuous, of the victory-gods.

Here the mix of the first and third person within the single line featuring *hon* and *ek* is particularly striking. It should be noted that the version in Hauksbók (Hauksbók 36) only

uses first-person pronouns in this strophe. However, the version in Codex Regius reflects an overall stylistic strategy of shifting between the first and third person while seeming to continually indicate the same character, the narrative voice, speaking of herself. In particular one might note that in both Codex Regius and Hauksbók the first line of the poem uses the first person while the last line uses the third person, and there is little doubt that the same character is referred to by (and speaking in) both lines. While it is possible that the appearance of the third person in Codex Regius is merely an inexplicable scribal error, it is equally possible that the normalized use of the first person in Hauksbók 36 represents a hypercorrection made somewhere along the chain of reception leading to the text's compilation that manuscript. This shift between first and third person throughout the poem is also not marked by the clear grammatical differences and thematic context that make other Eddic texts so clearly dialogic, even in the case of a fully dialogic poem such as *Skírnismál*. What one should understand in terms of context or meaning from this shift of person is unclear;<sup>31</sup> however, the stylistic structure is still highly unique and striking,<sup>32</sup> even grotesque,<sup>33</sup> and in light of its particular complexity it is unlikely to be completely unintentional or erroneous.

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<sup>31</sup> Various explanations have been proposed for the mixture of first and third person in this text, particularly in relation to the nature of the narrator as a *vǫlva*. Einar Ól. Sveinsson argues that the pronouns reflect a fracturing of personality common in the practice of mediumship, though he does not cite any particular examples (Einar Ólafur Sveinsson 1962 p. 324). Ursula Dronke takes up this interpretation with the further argument that the *ek* represents a "living, teaching *vǫlva*" while *hon* is a "prophetic" one (Dronke 1997 pp. 27-30).

<sup>32</sup> In John McKinnell's words, the hypothetical *Vǫluspá* poet has "a tendency to combine words and motifs in new and striking ways." (McKinnell, John (2013); "Heathenism in *Vǫluspá*: A Preliminary Survey", *The Nordic Apocalypse: Approaches to Vǫluspá and Nordic Days of Judgement*, ed. Terry Gunnell & Annette Lassen, Turnhout: Brepols, p. 95).

<sup>33</sup> My use of this word should be understood in an aesthetic sense, and is related to its use in description of skaldic verse by Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir (1994): "Dáið þér Ynglinga? Gróteskar hneigðir Þjóðólfs úr Hvini",

The figure of irreal time in *Vǫluspá* which we have examined has a clear relation to the overall stylistic strategy of the poem; this comes somewhat in contrast to *Atlakviða* 11, which seems a bizarre eruption of time in the otherwise conventional narrative-and-dialogue structure of that poem. Both strophes, however, present striking figures of irreal grammatical time, even while they employ differently shaped grammatical fictions to do so. In *Atlakviða* 11 there is a stretching out of grammar and hence of time, a postponement of conclusion and an unusual repetition of grammatical positions. In the *Vǫluspá* refrain there is a jarring juxtaposition of tenses, a composite figure of time in which the present and the future, though due to the nature of Old Norse grammar the latter is still expressed in the present tense: lacking a simple future tense, as in other Germanic languages Old Norse must use present and past in various constructions to express other senses of time. These two figures point to the ambiguity of the relationship between tense and time itself, as well as the ambiguity of time as it is presented in prophetic form. Furthermore, they are both in a state of play with the overall conceptual structure of their respective texts, standing somewhat outside and seeming to subtly transgress their deictic frames. *Atlakviða* 11, as we have seen, creates a distinct time-space, as it were, in which beast replaces man, a strange daydream from which the narrative quickly recovers, with a sense of distance – or perhaps we should more properly say “distality” – from the centred frame of reference of the narrative. The *Vǫluspá* refrain interrupts the flow of what can only be considered a sort

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*Sagnþing helgað Jónasi Kristjánssyni, sjötugum 10. Apríl 1994*, ed. Gísli Sigurðsson, Guðrún Kvaran, and Sigurgeir Steingrímsson, Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 761–8; Bergsveinn Birgisson (Bergsveinn Birgisson 2008 pp. 208-224; Bergsveinn Birgisson 2012 291-292); Goeres, Erin (2016): *The Poetics of Commemoration: Skaldic Verse and Social Memory, c. 890–1070*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 32; ultimately this sense of the term could be seen to have originated with Bakhtin: Bakhtin, Mikhail (1968): *Rabelais and his world: translated from the Russian by Heâleñe Iswolsky*, Cambridge MA: MIT Press.

of indirect, quasi-narrative in the first place with an inappropriately proximal present tense, cutting through multiple layers of conceptualisation. Not only does it disrupt the flow of time in the events being described, it also shifts the focus to the deictic frame of the text as a whole, in which the *vǫlva* is addressing her audience, and Óðinn in particular. This deictic frame, in which a speaker addresses an audience in much the same way as an oral poet would address an audience, seems to have something to say about the nature of poetry itself.<sup>34</sup>

We have in passing touched on an important point which should be elaborated upon here, and again this is an issue with considerable importance for this study as a whole. This is the question of poetic or aesthetic intention. Above I argue that the strangeness of the overall structure of *Vǫluspá* is not a matter of mere error or historical accident, with the implication that it is the intention of a composer (or perhaps a succession of composers). While it is clear enough that the stylistic structure of *Vǫluspá* is not unintentional, there remains a certain difficulty in identifying what precisely the intention is, how intentional it is, and who intends it, especially given the problems of context that complicate any reading of this literature. With poetic figures as minute as those on the level of syntax and tense, can we say that a figure is consciously employed rather than subconsciously, and in any case what do either of these terms mean in relation to the composition of Eddic poetry? This

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<sup>34</sup> The similarity between the narrative frame of the poem and the act of oral performance is pointed out by, for example, Gunnell (Gunnell, Terry (2013): “Vǫluspá in Performance”, *The Nordic Apocalypse: Approaches to Vǫluspá and Nordic Days of Judgement*, ed. Terry Gunnell & Annette Lassen, Turnhout: Brepols, pp. 63-77). Gunnell here argues for a complete identification on the part of the audience (in the case of an actual oral performance of the poem) of the *vǫlva* (a prophetess, and in this case the narrator of the poem) with the performer (“The present performer (male or female) is the mythological *vǫlva*” (p. 73)), but the converse seems to be equally the case: that the *vǫlva* is in some way a figure standing in for the poet.

question is one on which Roman Jakobson places much importance, largely due to it being a common response to any stylistic reading close enough to be at the level of grammar.<sup>35</sup> In the case of Old Norse poetry in particular, one can imagine the objection being raised that people in the Middle Ages with no modern concept of linguistics and perhaps no formalised theory of grammar, only the knowledge of how to use Old Norse grammar gained through speaking it, would be unlikely to consciously employ stylistic strategies that make use of such seemingly arcane aspects of language. This is an important objection, and if we are to assume that the stylistic structures we are examining are not mere accidents, errors, or coincidences, we are led to the question: are these structures simply subliminal? Here we posit an interpretation of Jakobson's position that, indeed, poetic figures at the level of grammar are largely subliminal, but not entirely and by no means universally.<sup>36</sup> For Jakobson, "we cannot exclude the subliminal";<sup>37</sup> and even for those cases in which consciousness and deliberation may have produced the linguistic strategy, Jakobson raises the question of "whether in certain cases intuitive verbal latency does not precede and underlie such a conscious consideration."<sup>38</sup> What is important to consider here is the concept that some amount of subliminal verbal latency must underlie all verbal figures. There are two important implications to draw from this point: firstly, that considering the inescapable subliminality of language use we cannot speak of a sharp division between

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<sup>35</sup> Jakobson (1968) 1981 pp. 59-78.

<sup>36</sup> Jakobson, Roman ([1976] 1980): "On Poetic Intentions and Linguistic Devices in Poetry: A Discussion with Professors and Students at the University of Cologne", trans. Susan Kitron, *Poetics Today* Vol. 2, No. 1a, Roman Jakobson: Language and Poetry (Autumn, 1980), pp. 88-89; Jakobson, Roman ([1970] 1981): "Subliminal Verbal Patterning in Poetry", *Selected Writings III*, The Hague: Mouton, pp. 136-137.

<sup>37</sup> Jakobson, (1976) 1980 p. 71.

<sup>38</sup> Jakobson (1970) 1981 p. 136.

subliminal and conscious use but in this case must imagine a spectrum of intention; secondly, that subliminality even in the case of a lack of conscious intention in a poetic figure does not make it any less of a poetic figure. The intentionality of something like the shifting of tense and person in *Völuspá* is indeed difficult, perhaps impossible to ascertain, given the obscurity of the poem and the insufficient context we have for reading it. That does not mean, however, that it is not there or that it cannot be examined.

## 2.2 Repetition, Parallel, Ellipsis

A grammatical figure similar to that which we have examined above in *Atlakviða* occurs in two different versions in *Guðrúnarkviða I* 18 and *Guðrúnarkviða II* 2; additionally, a parallel version of this expression can be found in prose in *Völsunga saga*, the prose retelling of the overall narrative material dealt with in these two poems.<sup>39</sup> In all three of these cases the expression comes as a eulogy for the deceased Sigurðr Fáfnisbani, the husband of the speaker Guðrún Gjúkadóttir, praising his heroic and lordly qualities in life, but specifically praising him in comparison to Guðrún's own brothers (his rivals and, by proxy, slayers). The grammatical employment of this expression is not as unconventional or ambiguous as those we have examined above, but features a similar use of grammatical repetition and, like our previous examples, constitutes a detour from narrative into pure imagery. What is particularly enlightening about this expression in relation to the concept of

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<sup>39</sup> A version of this strophe also appears in a different narrative context in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* 38; however, we will be focusing here on the *Guðrúnarkviða* strophes because, as we will see below, they share a closer grammatical structure, and this particular structure is more relevant to our present discussion.



grammatical fiction we have discussed above is the opportunity to see how such fictions can vary even when forming what is essentially the same expression:

Guðrúnarkviða I 18

*Svá var minn Sigurðr            hiá sonom Giúca,*

*sem væri geirlaucr            ór grasi vaxinn,*

*eða væri biartr steinn        á band dreginn,*

*iarnasteinn                    yfir qðlingom!*

18. So was my Sigurðr        beside Gjúki's sons,

as were a garlic            out-of grass grown,

or were a bright stone        on-to a cord drawn,

a precious stone            over the chieftains!

18. So was my Sigurðr: as [if he] were a garlic grown tall out of the grass, or were a bright stone drawn on the cord; a precious stone over the princes!

Guðrúnarkviða II 2

*Svá var Sigurðr                uf sonom Giúca,*

*sem væri grænn laucr        ór grasi vaxinn,*

*eða hiqrtr hábeinn            um hvqssom dýrom,*

*eða gull glóðrautt            af grá silfri.*

2. So was Sigurðr                      over Gjúki's sons,  
as were a green leek                out-of grass grown,  
or a hart high-legged                among sharp animals,  
or gold ember-red                    over grey silver.

2. So was Sigurðr: as [if he] were a green leek grown tall out of the grass, or a high-legged hart among untamed animals, or ember-red gold over grey silver.

*Völsunga saga* chapter 34

*sva bar hann af avllum monnum sem gull af iarne. eða lavkr af adrum grausvm eda hiortr af avþrum dyrum.*<sup>40</sup>

“he so surpassed all other men as gold does iron; or the leek does other grasses; or the hart does other animals.”

The slight variation between these three instances in terms of the choice of image is striking; the difference in comparison between gold and iron rather than gold and silver or “green leeks” rather than “garlic” in comparison to other (shorter) grasses is perhaps not a particularly remarkable variation, but the difference between the *iarcnastein* and the long-legged hart is considerable. Contrast is the obvious point of this expression: each instance contains three comparisons that are being held up as analogies to the central comparison, that between Sigurðr and the Gjúkungs. Three different kinds of contrasts are juxtaposed

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<sup>40</sup> Grimstad, Kaaren ed. (2000): *Völsunga saga: The saga of the Volsungs: the Icelandic text according to MS Nks 1824 b, 4° / with an English translation, introduction and notes by Kaaren Grimstad*, Saarbrücken: AQ-Verlag, p. 198.

and related to the contrast of personal character: in the case of the grasses or plants, physical height is the comparison. In the case of the metals it is exchange or prestige value. The perceived difference between the hart and other beasts is more difficult to pinpoint, but presumably the hart here is either being held up as an animal of noble or majestic character, or alternately as a particularly prized game animal.<sup>41</sup> *Guðrúnarkviða I* takes this comparison of comparisons a step further by deliberately mixing the concrete comparison with the abstract, analogical comparison: Sigurðr was “a precious stone over the chieftains” (“*iarnasteinn / yfir qðlingom*”), a purely unreal image in which the comparison is to be understood as entirely metaphorical not only in the general relation of the precious stone to the princes, but also in the spatial relationship implied by the preposition *yfir*.

The way this rhetorical concept of contrasting imagery has been grammatically realised is essentially the same as the grammatical structure we have examined in *Atlakviða* 18: the strophe consists of one complete sentence, sustained by the repetition of syntactic positions. Here there is a more conventional use of prepositions and coordinating conjunctions which eliminates the particular grammatical ambiguity of *Atlakviða* 18. The meaning of the conjunction *eða* is relatively clear and it is used here to sustain and stretch out the sentence by linking its individual components in a clear and conventional way, albeit one that produces a sentence of unnatural length and repetitiveness. Indeed, the instance

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<sup>41</sup> Notably, *Völsunga saga* contains an earlier episode in which Guðrún has a prophetic dream in which Sigurðr is represented by a hart; and particularly, “[*hann*] *bar langht af audrum dyrum*” (“He greatly surpassed other animals”) (Grimstad 2000 p. 166), echoing the diction of Guðrún’s later panegyric of her deceased husband. Here the concept of *highness* has been retained from the Eddic material in relation to the hart, but it has been repurposed as a quality particular to the Sigurðr-dream-hart rather than a generic quality of harts in the abstract. (On the relationship between *Völsunga saga* and its verse source material, see Wieselgren, Per (1935): *Quellenstudien zur Völsungasaga*, Tartu: Acta et commentationes Universitatis Tartuensis (Dorpatensis).

of this expression in the prose context of *Vǫlsunga saga* comes across as borderline-metrical, showing the relationship between this prose work and the texts in verse which deal with the same material. The *Guðrúnarkviða* verses lack the specific relation to time that is so important to the grammatical figures we have examined above, denoting events that take place in a more easily designated past: Sigurðr has recently died in this point in the narrative, and this description given dialogically blends in easily with the narrative past tense. Here the comparisons evoked for figural purposes constitute the unreal aspect of the expression, which is clearly marked as such with the subjunctive *væri*, best understood here as “would” or “would be.” In contrast to *Atlakviða* 18, the two *Guðrúnarkviða* verses provide a neat binary pattern between half-lines: one half-line containing the first side of a contrast in the nominative (=Sigurðr: *geirlaukr/laukr/steinn/hiqrtr/gull*) is followed by a half-line containing the obverse side of that contrast in the dative triggered by a preposition (=sonom *Giúka: grasi/band<sup>42</sup>/qðlingom/dýrom/silfri*). As in *Atlakviða* 18, the repetition of these syntactic positions signals a conceptual equivalence between their thematic occupants. In this case the equivalence is clearly metaphorical even if the figurative tangent veers considerably from the reality of the narrative content, in contrast to the more ambiguous status of Gunnarr’s prophesied animals. In their regularity, the *Guðrúnarkviða* verses show a deft awareness of the constraints of metre and grammar and the relationship between those constraints. Moreover it is easy to see how this figurative use of grammar is

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<sup>42</sup> *Band* is the only word of this group in the accusative case, due to the specific use of *á* as meaning “on to,” with an implied movement rather than a static position.

lost when the expression is transposed into prose in *Völsunga saga*, or when it is reiterated in a less grammatically figurative form in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* 38.<sup>43</sup>

One might particularly contrast the *Guðrúnarkviða* strophes with *Atlakviða* 11 in terms of the use of prepositions. In the latter, none are used; the only coordinating parts of the sentence are the conjunctions *ef* and *né* and the single modal verb *mun*. In the *Guðrúnarkviða* strophes, on the other hand, prepositions proliferate and play an important role in the overall grammatical figure. Every second half-line begins with a preposition, and in both cases the profiling of these prepositions exploits their inherent ambiguity. Most of them denote relatively clear spatial relationships, especially in the context of the purely visual aspect of these contrasts. By metaphorical extension, however, they can also denote other conceptual relationships, in a manner confluent with the conceptual relationship being drawn between these abstract contrasts and the contrast at hand, that between Sigurðr and the Gjúkungs. In *Guðrúnarkviða I* 18 the prepositions are strictly spatial, following Sigurðr being compared “beside” (*hiá*) the Gjúkungs: the garlic grows “out of” (*ór*) the grass and the bright stone is drawn “on to” (*á*) the cord. The final contrast, as we have noted, is not realistic, and yet the spatiality of its preposition conforms to that of the other contrasts: though the “chieftains” (“*sonar Gjúka*”, “*ǫðlingar*”) are clearly equated with the “cord” (“*band*”) in contrast to the “bright stone” (“*bjartr steinn*”) drawn upon it, the stone

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<sup>43</sup> “*Svá bar Helgi / af hildingom / sem ítrskapaðr / askr af þyrni, / eða sá dýrkálfr, / döggo slunginn, / er ǫfri ferr / ǫllom dýrom, / ok horn glóa / við himin síálfan!*” (“Helgi so surpassed the chieftains as a beautifully shaped ash does brambles, or that deer-calf, covered in dew, which is superior to all other animals, and [whose] horns shine to the heavens themselves!”). Note the extent to which the particular grammatical structure of the *Guðrúnarkviða* strophes is abandoned from 38:6 onward. The final half-line, beginning with a preposition, retains some of the grammatical structure, but here it is not used in a comparative sense.

itself is not transformed in this instance but rather remains a “precious stone” (“*jarknasteinn*”). This both brings the conceptual flow from concept to concept back full circle to the original contrast, and mixes the purely figurative contrast with the “real” contrast.

In *Guðrúnarkviða II* 2 the prepositions are more ambiguous. In fact, although the position of the prepositions is identical in the two strophes, the only preposition they actually share is *ór*. *Af* and *um* are, by contrast, considerably more abstract and less purely spatial in the relationships they denote. It would perhaps be best to understand both these prepositions as meaning generally “in relation to,” or in the case of *um* with the connotation of “among.” *Af* in particular seems to have no specific meaning in this case other than in coordinating a contrast; silver and gold are given as generic substances rather than specific objects and therefore have no specific spatial relationship, while *uf* (which must be considered a variant spelling of the preposition *of*) bears a somewhat inexact spatial sense somewhere between *um* and *hiá*. This may simply reflect the choice of contrasting images, which are themselves less clearly spatial than those in *Guðrúnarkviða I* 18. We have noted the lack of a spatial relationship between silver and gold as general substances, and though there is a connotation of the hart being “among” other animals, the relationship is ambiguous at best. It is important to note, however, that the prose version of this expression retains *af* and uses it in the construction *bera af*, meaning “to surpass.” This has led to the suggestion that what we should understand as being elided in this ellipsis is not

*vera* but *bera*,<sup>44</sup> whether because *vera* here is a corruption for *bera* or simply because the latter is being assumed from context. This possibility would certainly make the sense of *uf/af* clearer; in this case, we have the additional extension of this grammatical figure from the simple use of prepositions as spatially contrasting coordinators into the more complex territory of verb constructions, which would seem to show a keen awareness of the slipperiness of Old Norse prepositions.<sup>45</sup> However, what we have on the page leaves little room for this sort of ambiguity. Unlike our example in *Atlakviða*, the clauses of this sentence, though elliptical, are coordinated in a conventional way. The *eða* of *Guðrúnarkviða II* 2:8 clearly links the *af* of the following half-line to the *var* of 2:1; we would only be able to incorporate *bera* here if we were to assume that *vera* is merely a corruption. In this case, it is more prudent to read *af* as a preposition on its own, independent of constructions, but with a less precise meaning than the prepositions in *Guðrúnarkviða I* 18.

Both the *Guðrúnarkviða* strophes proceed by a gradual increase of ellipsis. This is a more marked and smooth process in *Guðrúnarkviða I* 18. First we are given the base argument in 18:1-2; then we are given the first figurative extension of that argument, here with the unreal nature of that extension clearly marked by the conjunction *sem* (“as”) and the subjunctive verb *væri*: “as would be ...”. In 18:4-5 *sem* is replaced in its metrical position by *eða* (“or”), also a conjunction, but here signifying nothing other than the continuation of the sentence and the equivalence of the individual clauses. In a similar fashion to *Atlakviða*

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<sup>44</sup> Dettler, F. & R. Heinzel ed. (1903): *Sæmundar Edda mit einem Anhang: herausgegeben und erklärt von F. Dettler und R. Heinzel; mit Unterstützung der K. Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien*, Leipzig: G. Wigand, p. 492. The key to this suggestion lies in the similarity between the preterite forms of *vera* and *bera*: *var* and *bar*.

<sup>45</sup> “*Bera af*” having the sense as a set phrase of “to surpass,” as we see in the *Vǫlsunga saga* example above.

11: 1-4, *Guðrúnarkviða I* 18:1-4 could be a complete sentence on its own, and only *eða* signals the continuation of the sentence: along with, as in *Atlakviða* 11, the lack of a finite verb. In 18:7-8, however, both the conjunction and the subjunctive verb are elided and only the nominative noun, preposition, and dative noun are given. Here the equivalence of concepts is assumed based on the repetition of the formula, and the figure is stripped down to its most basic components. However, because these components are grammatical repetitions, their relationship to one another can still be intelligible. This also occurs, albeit to a lesser extent, in *Guðrúnarkviða II* 2, which also uses the *sem væri* formula to introduce its first figurative contrast. Here, however, the subjunctive verb is elided in the two subsequent long lines, whereas *eða* is included in both of them. The elision of the verb in *Guðrúnarkviða II* 2 approaches the extreme terseness of *Atlakviða* 11's non-finite clauses, though the repeated use of *eða* allows a more intelligible relationship between the different parts of the sentence.

Although their grammatical structures have significant differences, there is clearly a comparable use of both ellipsis and repetition in the service of parallelism in the *Guðrúnarkviða* strophes and *Atlakviða* 11. In both cases, elision of some grammatical elements allows for the repetition of others, for the stylised extension of the sentence in a chain of clause after clause. The aim of syntactic extension here is to parallel, and the parallel is both thematic and purely syntactic. In *Atlakviða* 11, the prophetic animal/verb images are paralleled / the dative/accusative/non-finite groups are paralleled. In the *Guðrúnarkviður*, the Sigurðr-substitutes and the Gjúkung substitutes are paralleled / the nominative groups and the prepositionally conditioned dative/accusative groups are



paralleled. We must write these last two sentences in this way because it is not enough to connect these two forms of parallel with the usual conjunction *and*; they occur entirely simultaneously, with no conceptual time or space separating them. Here it is not merely the case that the structure asserts itself into the foreground of the verse, but moreover that the boundary between structure and whatever we imagine clothes it becomes troubled.

The complex of repetition and ellipsis in the service of parallel in poetry is by no means unique to Eddic verse. Indeed, in a discussion of poetic parallelism Jakobson reaches back to the 1860 assertion of Gerard Manley Hopkins that “the artificial part of poetry, perhaps we shall be right to say of all artifices, reduces itself to the principle of parallelism. The structure of poetry is that of continuous parallelism”.<sup>46</sup> In examining the centrality of parallelism in Russian verse, Jakobson furthermore invokes examples from Vedic and Biblical poetics that distinctly link repetition with elliptical phrasing, a “condensed expression” or “abbreviated repetition” that produces “incomplete parallelisms”.<sup>47</sup> Ellipsis here is a play on identity, the identity implied by repetition; it is this play on identity, rather than an identity in itself, that Jakobson raises up as a fundamental aspect of poetry. Moreover: “[t]he poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination. Equivalence is promoted to the constitutive device of the sequence.”<sup>48</sup> In our examples, as we have noted, the play on identity is both structural and rhetorical and these two aspects are not separable. In a sense relevant to our present

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<sup>46</sup> Jakobson (1960) 1981 p. 39 citing House, Humphrey ed. (1959): *The journals and papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. Humphrey House, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 84.

<sup>47</sup> Jakobson, Roman ([1966] 1981): “Grammatical Parallelism and its Russian Facet”, *Selected Writings III*, The Hague: Mouton, p. 132.

<sup>48</sup> Jakobson (1960) 1981 p. 27, emphasis original.

examples, Peter Szondi delicately needles out the “metadiscursive” element translated and augmented by Paul Celan’s translation of William Shakespeare’s Sonnet 105.<sup>49</sup> In this example, the source text contains the paralleling couplet

“Fair,” “kind,” and “true” have often liv’d alone,  
Which three till now never kept seat in one.<sup>50</sup>

to which Celan adds a new parallel in German:

“Schön, gut und treu” so oft getrennt, geschieden.  
  
*In Einem will ich drei zusammenschmieden.*<sup>51</sup>

For Szondi, “the metadiscursive realization of both the separation and union of the three ‘virtues’ consists in this minimal variation, the near-identity of *schieden* and *schmieden*”;<sup>52</sup> the resulting translation is “a poem which does not *deal* with itself but which *is* itself!”<sup>53</sup> In essence, what is “metadiscursive” about this figure is that its form reflects the rhetorical strategy by which its theme is conveyed. In this sense our present examples, especially the *Guðrúnarkviða* strophes, must also be said to be “metadiscursive.” Szondi notes here a sort of repetition with a difference, similar to the grammatical parallelism and ellipsis we have

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<sup>49</sup> Szondi, Peter ([1971] 1986): “The Poetry of Constancy: Paul Celan’s Translation of Shakespeare’s Sonnet 105”, *Peter Szondi: On Textual Understanding and Other Essays*, trans. Harvey Mendelsohn, Manchester: Manchester University Press, p. 165.

<sup>50</sup> Evans, G. Blakemore with J.J.M. Tobin (1997): *The Riverside Shakespeare: General and textual editor G. Blakemore Evans with J.J.M. Tobin, eds. Herschel Baker, Anne Barton, Frank Kermode, Harry Levin, Hallett Smith, Marie Edel, essays by Heather Dubrow, William T. Liston, Charles H. Shattuck*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Sonnet 105:13-14, p. 1862.

<sup>51</sup> Alleman, Beda & Stefan Reichert ed. (1983): *Paul Celan: Gesammelte Werke, Band 5: Übertragungen II, herausgegeben von Beda Allemann & Stefan Reichert unter Mitwirkung von Rolf Bücher*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, p. 344.

<sup>52</sup> Szondi (1971) 1986 p. 166.

<sup>53</sup> Szondi (1971) 1986 p. 178, emphasis original.

seen above and very much of a kind with the increasingly complex figures of repetition we will examine below, as he considers a seemingly paradoxical union between repetition and difference: Celan's figure is "not so much an instance of varied repetition" as it is a "union" of one element with two different elements in a conceptually branching pattern. Here we have not only a play on grammar together with a play on words, but a play on parts of words and on qualities of words; this is a concept that will be echoed in our own study of the repetition of individual words in Eddic poetry in chapter 4.

### 2.3 Eddic Grammar and Orality

In the preceding chapter we have referred to the study of orality in Eddic poetry, while for the most part ruling it out as an element of our current methodology. We also noted that it was an issue that would continually arise in the course of this study, and already with this examination of grammatical figures we have reached a point that seems to overlap with some of the concerns of oral theory. Two points have been made that are particularly important to the overall discussion of Eddic stylistics: on the one hand we have established the particular rather than the generic as the focus of our study, and on the other hand we have noted the fluidity of poetic intention. This forms an ontological basis for our concept of the stylistic figure, which does not necessarily depend on intentionality. Already with these points it may seem that we are moving into the territory of oral theory, since these points could equally be construed as having relevance to the context of oral

performance and composition. In any case, one might ask, are we not borrowing the very methods of oral theory in examining Eddic poetry at the grammatical level?

The latter point requires some explanation. What I refer to here as “oral theory” is primarily that methodology developed in its most fundamental form by Milman Parry and A. B. Lord.<sup>54</sup> This methodology has given significant elaboration to what has often been a point, as Joseph Harris puts it, “taken for granted:” that Eddic poetry was orally composed and transmitted.<sup>55</sup> It is the concept of “oral formula” in Parry and Lord’s approach that is particularly relevant here. For the Lord-Parry model of oral-formulaic composition, performers (and for oral-formulaic theory “performer” and “composer” are largely interchangeable or equivalent concepts) of oral poetry draw on a pre-existing cache of formulae, allowing them to improvise effectively while injecting their own original compositions into the text. To this end, in Parry’s conception there is a “dichotomy of originality versus traditionality,”<sup>56</sup> with the latter rather than the former being that which most conspicuously marks orally composed verse. Parry’s work largely deals with pre-modern texts, especially Homer, while Lord famously draws on the then-currently extant tradition of the Balkan *guslar* as a model whose technique can be abstracted to understand oral performance and transmission of verse in general. As Harris characterizes this model, “there is no text in our sense, only the subject of the poem (the story), the singer, and his

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<sup>54</sup> For Parry, Parry, Milman (1987): *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Parry*, ed. Adam Parry, Oxford: Oxford University Press. Lord’s works on the subject are many, but of critical importance is Lord, Alfred B. (1960): *The Singer of Tales*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

<sup>55</sup> Harris 1983 p. p. 210.

<sup>56</sup> Mellor 2008 p. 6.

technique or singing tradition.”<sup>57</sup> The formula used by the performer consists of “a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical condition to express a given essential idea”.<sup>58</sup> This is not, then, a strictly structural unit in a grammatical sense, but a unit that is structured in a primarily mnemonic way, though it is likely that grammatical structures should play an important role here.

That this general point is the case is the central hypothesis of Scott Mellor’s analysis of ten poems from Codex Regius.<sup>59</sup> Here a statistical method of analysis is employed to produce certain findings regarding the formulaic nature of Eddic verse; among these is the observation that “repeated structures often occur in the second half-line,” and that parallel constructions tend to involve the half-line of Eddic metres in a structural way.<sup>60</sup> For Mellor, this “points to an improvised poetry behind the written document”. Furthermore, Mellor develops a concept of the verse in Codex Regius as “transitional poetry,” that is, the product of a literary milieu in which the performance and composition of oral poetry was still current and to-hand as a concept for the recorder of Eddic verse.<sup>61</sup> For Mellor, this is what makes it possible to recover the trace of orality in the written form in which we have received the Eddic corpus. This attitude toward orality and literacy must be seen as a departure from the view of Lord, for whom the oral poet must be as illiterate as possible if the specific mode of oral production is to be preserved: “the oral poet, if he is at all literate,

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<sup>57</sup> Harris 1983 p. 211.

<sup>58</sup> Parry, Milman ([1930] 1987): “Studies in the Epic Technique of Oral Verse-Making: I. Homer and Homeric Style”, *The Collected Papers of Milman Parry*, ed. Adam Parry, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 272.

<sup>59</sup> Mellor 2008.

<sup>60</sup> Mellor 2008 pp. 167-168.

<sup>61</sup> Mellor 2008 pp. 65-68.

can have only a smattering of writing, if he is to remain an oral poet.”<sup>62</sup> Mellor’s designation, however, is highly plausible; crucially, he notes that “by labelling the text as either a literary or an oral work, important understandings of the composition method of the narrative are missed, since it has elements of both.”<sup>63</sup> Moreover, it is intriguing for our purposes that he identifies the “oral voice in the text” as the object which analysis can recover.<sup>64</sup>

What, then, is the relationship between the oral-formulaic view of grammatical formula and repetition in Eddic poetry, and the one we have developed here? Though there are certain similarities of approach, there are also obvious differences, and these are primarily differences of aim. One could identify two related aims of the oral-formulaic approach. On the one hand, there is the purely instrumental aim: to demonstrate that oral formulae are present. This view seems to be either agnostic about the meaning of poetic style, or to propose a functionalist model of oral poetic composition: that the stylistic features of oral poetry are primarily geared toward an economy of composition and effectiveness of communication of an “essential idea” (to return to Parry’s terms), and that these stylistic features have developed in this way through a sort of natural selection, in which over the generations of the tradition oral poets have selected those formulae that offer them the most facility while discarding those that impede composition and memory. Here it is useful to draw an analogy with the discussion of oral formula in Homeric poetry,

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<sup>62</sup> Lord, Alfred B. ([1952] 1991): “Homer’s Originality: Oral Dictated Texts”, *Epic Singers and Oral Tradition*, ed. Albert B. Lord, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, p. 45.

<sup>63</sup> Mellor 2008 p. 65.

<sup>64</sup> Mellor 2008 p. 64.

where the oral-formulaic theory has its roots. In a study drawing on cognitive models, for instance, we see repetition in Homeric verse related to “four functions of repetition in spontaneous speech”: “production, comprehension, connection, and interaction.”<sup>65</sup> Here an important observation is made concerning the roots of poetic language in everyday conversational language. This view of Homeric poetry, however, essentially ends at its communicability. The only twist added at the end is a nod to the artistic quality of this repetition: there is a “play” on a traditional form at work, and for Minchin this constitutes the “poetic” in Homeric repetition. This “play” is something the audience “find[s] pleasure in”, though exactly how this interaction works is not explored here.<sup>66</sup> The brevity of this note on the poetic seems to grant it only a peripheral importance, as ultimately the stylistic structures of repetition examined must be oriented toward the ends of “spontaneous speech.”

The second aim one could identify in the oral-formulaic approach reaches somewhat further: this aim is reflected in Parry’s identification of an “essential idea” underlying the strategy of composition. Here the purely functionalist perspective finds an answer: yes, the formulaic strategy of composition is primarily instrumental, but it is instrumental to communicating an existing concept that, on the other hand, it does not itself simply embody. Because of this, the oral poetry we have received is fractured into two objects: form and content, the primarily instrumental text and the pure idea. This is what Harris means by claiming that “there is no text”, “only subject”, and part of what Gunnell refers to

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<sup>65</sup> Minchin, Elizabeth (2016): “Repetition in Homeric Epic: Cognitive and Linguistic Perspectives”, *Oral Poetics and Cognitive Science*, ed. Mihailo Antovic & Cristóbal Pagán Cánovas, Berlin: de Gruyter, p. 26.

<sup>66</sup> Minchin 2016 p. 27.

with his somewhat more ontologically extreme claim that Eddic poetry “was not what it has become”.<sup>67</sup> The true aim of analysis, therefore, is to recover this lost object, which can be inferred by abstracting the text’s purely formal aspects while remaining, as it were, aloof from them. Moreover, the narrative core of the oral poem can – according to this view – itself display a structural affinity with the form of the poem: Mellor, for example, follows Lord in designating “narrative” or “mythic patterns” in Eddic poetry.<sup>68</sup>

Though we touch on similar points to those brought up by oral-formulaic approaches, we can see already that there is a difference both in aim and in results. The syntactic strategies we have examined above each serve a certain purpose, and yet this purpose proves to be primarily expressive. It seems likely that the history of oral-compositional techniques in Old Norse poetry plays a significant role in the development of these grammatical figures, and yet the precise nature of this role can never be demonstrated: are we looking at a literature that was circulated primarily orally right up to its recording in writing, or are we seeing evidence of a long period of transition? Any answer to these questions must remain speculative. Yet the fact of the expressive or aesthetic features of Eddic grammar is sufficiently demonstrated in the form in which we receive Eddic poetry, and could have equally fruitful implications for a number of different models of poetic production and circulation. In any case, I would argue that oral formula and the type of aesthetic repetition we have identified here are by no means mutually exclusive.

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<sup>67</sup> Gunnell, Terry (2016): “Eddic performance and eddic audiences”, *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry: Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia*, ed. Carolyne Larrington, Judy Quinn, Brittany Schorn, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 92; we will return to this expression in the concluding chapter (6.1.3).

<sup>68</sup> Mellor 2008 pp. 22-24, pp. 131-139.



Moreover, even when they are separate, the difference between them tends to be sufficiently clear. For example, there would seem to be little reason for the pervasive repetition across multiple texts of such a phrase as *endlangan sal* (“from the other end of the hall”), peculiar to Eddic verse, as a second half-line in vastly different thematic contexts, except that it is used as a stock phrase by composers and reciters of Eddic verse to fill up a line.<sup>69</sup> By contrast, the figures of grammatical repetition and ellipsis we have noted above appear to run along similar compositional lines as the oral formula, but the result they produce does not have anything obvious to do with functionality or compositional economy; indeed, by developing its own grammatical style, Eddic poetry distances itself from common speech, albeit not as much as does skaldic poetry. Harris notes that “a highly organized and recursive poetic ‘grammar’ is proper to oral poetry”,<sup>70</sup> and argues that it is this “grammar” that marks Eddic poetry as originally oral; again, while this is entirely plausible, it remains beyond the reach of definitive demonstration, and on the other hand by no means rules out an expressive character in that grammar. What we have identified here is something different in kind from the oral formula, but not necessarily exclusive of it. The difference between, for example, *endlangan sal* as a formula and the figures of syntax we have examined above clarifies the particular scope of this study: in contrast to the oral-formulaic approach, we are not examining the general or generic so much as we are the particular and unusual. These particular figures nonetheless, as we will come to see, share

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<sup>69</sup> This formula is found in *Völundarkviða* 7, 16, and 30, *Oddrúnargrátr* 3 and *Skírnismál* 3 – curiously, in these two cases, in identical phrasing to one of its instances in *Völundarkviða – Þrymskviða* 27, and in a slightly different form twice in *Atlamál* 19 and 26.

<sup>70</sup> Harris 1983 p. 233.

noticeable traits in what is eventually revealed to be a particular aesthetic of Eddic repetition.

We might return to the Homeric analogy here: Ahuvia Kahane notes in a study of the use of repetition in Homeric poetry that “metrical form and sense” are, far from mutually exclusive, deeply related.<sup>71</sup> Though the specifics of Homeric composition are considerably different from our Eddic examples, the results of each show a certain affinity: Kahane gives as the aim of his study “to expose diction which is capable of generating thematically significant ambiguities and shades of meaning”, which he furthermore notes need not necessarily be considered “exclusive to ‘literate’ poetry.”<sup>72</sup> What Kahane suggests by arguing that oral performance is not mutually exclusive with complex ambiguities is perhaps a more fundamental idea: that, though the oral performance of a poem remains fixed in time, the ambiguity itself remains after the telling. We may also note that, in establishing our concept of the “grammatical fiction” we have previously cited work by Roman Jakobson in which he has occasion to discuss (among other literatures) the very oral Balkan poetry that Lord takes as his model in *The Singer of Tales*.<sup>73</sup> Jakobson is, as usual, speaking of poetry in general; in this paragraph he not only mentions literate readers and oral listeners in the same breath, but clearly draws an equivalence between their experiences in the particular aspect of processing parallelism and difference. It should be stressed that this is a particular equivalence and not a general equivalence: Jakobson is not suggesting that

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<sup>71</sup> Kahane, Ahuvia (1994): *The Interpretation of Order: A Study in the Poetics of Homeric Repetition*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 142.

<sup>72</sup> Kahane 1994 p. 143.

<sup>73</sup> Jakobson (1968) 1981 p. 93.

hearing is the same as reading. What he is suggesting – or rather assuming, both as already evident and as clearly demonstrated in his example – is that some aspects of language do not differ when spoken rather than written, heard rather than read. His findings are not contingent on the medium of transmission: they are findings of language in general. Similarly, our approach here should be seen as not contingent either on an oral or literary point of origin; this is part of what is meant by approaching Eddic poetry “as poetry” or “as verbal art,” as we discussed in the introductory chapter. This approach is indispensable due to the nature of Eddic poetry. As we have seen, in its present state we lack sufficient context to make definitive statements about its origin, and this has the potential to compromise arguments that stand on such statements. On the other hand, we must also assume a distinct heterogeneity to the text we have received; it cannot straightforwardly be considered the work of one hand or mind, troubling notions of authorial intent we would normally have about poetry as it is conceived in a modern sense. Our approach here must be able to sustain rather than overcome these problems, to take account of the heterogeneity of Eddic poetry rather than recover a lost originality. It is no doubt the case that Mellor’s “oral voice” persists in the text; but what other voices can we find, and what can they tell us?

### 3. Repetition, Voice, Deixis

In the above chapter we have examined particular manifestations of Eddic style under, as it were, a microscope; this microscopic point of view is essential for laying the foundations of a stylistic analysis of Eddic poetry. We have established the role of the Old Norse sentence as the medium or material of this poetry. We have furthermore established a concept of “grammatical fiction” in which it is not merely the theme conveyed that makes the art of Eddic poetry, but the structure of the conveyance itself, in a way that entangles theme and form and highlights the non-arbitrariness of Eddic grammatical constructions. Finally we have suggested a flexible model for considering the notion of poetic or authorial or artistic intent which accounts for the heterogeneous and fragmentary nature of the text we have to hand, indicating that while perhaps not necessarily conscious, these stylistic figures are nonetheless more than merely arbitrary.

A type of objection one might conceivably raise against the above analyses relates to this very microscopy. Even if it is considered permissible for the sake of a certain type of analysis to examine a text in isolation rather than as an artefact of a particular society (as discussed above in 1.3), is not the extent to which we have torn our examples out of their context rather extreme? In the analysis of *Atlakviða* 11 and the *Guðrúnarkviða* strophes in particular, the critical reader may have noted that these analyses do not refer even to the context of the overall stylistic structure of the individual poems themselves, but seem to excise the relevant strophes to be mounted upon the slide for examination. This approach

should, however, be seen partly as preparatory to the approach we develop below. In this section we will consider stylistic elements that occur across broader textual distances, with the concepts established above serving as guiding principles, and as we move forward toward our conclusion these distances will expand and the breadth and complexity of the figures under examination will increase correspondingly. The primarily syntactic level of selection, arrangement, and repetition, however, continues to play a structuring role in broader structures, as we will see. These previous analyses, therefore, form a conceptual starting point from which to build a more complex view of Eddic style.

In the above analyses, a search for the relevance of grammar to poetry has divulged an emphasis on repetition and parallel. We can see from these examples that the sense of repetition and parallel at work here has a far broader reach than the merely superficial sense of the repetition of certain words or phrases. We have seen the structuring element of the repetition and profiling parallelism of grammatical units in the above examples: in the *Guðrúnarkviða* strophes in particular, we have seen the strongly *metadiscursive* element of these structures. As we have stated above, these concepts will continue to play an important role throughout this thesis. From here a focus on voice in relation to repetition will develop, a relation which was perhaps not previously apparent. We will begin by examining some structures of repetition larger and more complex than those we have found so far, taking as our primary model the complex of repetition in *Skírnismál*. As we will see, voice and repetition intertwine in the stylistic structure of this text. Before moving on to this poem in more detail, however, we will consider some more general examples of repetition in Eddic dialogue.

### 3.1 Patterns of Repetition and Voice: *Þrymskviða* and *Lokasenna*

Dialogic repetition such as that found in the figure we shall examine below is by no means peculiar to *Skírnismál* among the poems in the Eddic corpus. It is relatively common in Eddic verse for dialogic sections to contain some form of repetition. One might consider, for example, the use of repetition in the comedic wedding sequence of *Þrymskviða* strophes 22-30, narrating the culmination of the plan to regain the god Þórr's stolen hammer from the giant Þrymr by disguising him as the beautiful goddess Freyja, whom the giant has demanded as his bride. The formulaic repeated elements of this sequence are inextricably linked to its dialogic nature. This is most evident in the repetition of formulae indicating the voices of Þrymr and Loki; for the former, at the beginning of strophes 22, 25, and 30:

*Þá kvað þat Þrymr,                    þursa dróttin:*

Then said that Þrymr,                    giants' lord:

Then Þrymr, lord of the giants, said that:

This comes in contrast to strophe 7, in which *Þrymr kvað* is inserted extrametricaly.<sup>1</sup> For the latter, we have, at the beginning of strophes 26 and 28:

*Sat in alsnotra                    ambótt fyrir,*

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<sup>1</sup> This indication of the speaker by the narrative voice should also be read in contrast to the nature of dialogue in *Skírnismál*, which as we discuss in more detail below requires such extrametrical speaker notation throughout its (entirely dialogic) verse.

*Er orð um fann*

*við iǰtuns máli:*

Sat the allclever

bondwoman there

Which words about found with the giant's speech:

There waiting sat the all-clever bondwoman, who had a response for the giant's words:

This formula is furthermore reflected prosodically – and to some extent grammatically – in 29, which introduces Þrymr's sister as the speaker:

*Inn kom in arma*

*iǰtna systir*

*Hin er brúðfiár*

*biðia þorði:*

In came the poor

giant's sister

That which a dowry

to ask dared:

In came the poor giant's sister, she who dared ask for a dowry:

A clearly comedic aspect of these formulae is the fact that in the lines indicating Loki as the speaker, the narrative voice in fact only designates the speaker as “the all-clever bondwoman” (“*in alsnotra ambótt*”), Loki's crossdressing disguise which he has assumed to go along with Þórr's own disguise as the bride Freyja, albeit with somewhat more enthusiasm and apparently in a rather more convincing manner. The focus of this sequence is on Þórr's total failure to convincingly disguise himself as a bride, compounded by the stupidity of the *iǰtnar* in their failure to recognise Þórr's hypermasculine traits for what they

are. The narrative voice here has passed subtly into the narrative, asking that we believe that the narrator himself has been duped by Loki's disguise. The comedic effect of this figure is strengthened by the fact that the other formulae indicating speakers so clearly refer to the actual speakers themselves. The formulaic nature of the sequence is rounded out by the repetition of the disguised Loki's responses to Prymr's suspicions about the bride:

26:5-8. *Át vætr Freyja*      *átta nóttom,*

*Svá var hon óðfús*      *í iǰtunheima.*

26:5-8. "Ate not-a-bit Freyja [for] eight nights,

So was she eager      in Jǰtunheim."

26:5-8. "For eight nights Freyja ate not one bit, so violently eager she was to be in Jǰtunheim."

28:5-8. *Svaf vætr Freyja*      *átta nóttom,*

*Svá var hon óðfús*      *í iǰtunheima.*

28:5-8. "Slept not-a-bit Freyja [for] eight nights,

So was she eager      in Jǰtunheim."

28:5-8. "For eight nights Freyja slept not one bit, so violently eager she was to be in Jǰtunheim."



Here, aside from the ironic nature of the lie, it may also be the case that Loki's excuses for the false bride's lack of femininity are comically implausible, and therefore that that phoniness is exacerbated by the repeated elements; that there should be two excuses of such a similar nature shows a clear disregard on Loki's part of any requirement for verisimilitude in his lies, and this makes it all the more absurd that Prymr should believe them. In this case, the disregard for verisimilitude is reflected in the stylistic structure of the sequence, in a similar manner to similar figures we will see below in *Skirnismál* and *Völundarkviða*.

It is in a similar vein that one might consider the equally extensive use of repetition in the entirely dialogic *Lokasenna*, in which the aforementioned god Loki arrives at a feast and harangues his fellow gods, dispensing no small amount of mythological information in the process of insulting everyone around him. Here there is no narrative voice, but the voices of the characters repeat elements across the poem in a similarly formulaic manner. This is most apparent in the speech of Loki, who begins many of the strophes in his voice with the formulaic half-line "*þegi þú, [name]*" ("Shut up, [name]"). Additionally, there is an even more frequent repetition of the grammatical structure of this half-line: "[imperative verb] [pronoun] [name]". This formula is repeated in different forms by Loki (such as in strophe 9:1, "*Mantu þat, Óðinn*" ("Remember you that, Óðinn")), and by other characters as well (such as Óðinn himself in the following strophe 10:1, "*Rístu þá, Víðarr*" ("Rise then, Víðarr")). In the end, however, we see the *þegi* formula deictically reversed, as it becomes Þórr's retort to Loki's slander in the exchange in strophes 57-63: "*þegi þú, / rög vætr*" ("Shut

up, / queer being”).<sup>2</sup> Additionally, Óðinn and Freyja both give retort-strophes with the same initial half-line – “Ærr ertu, Loki” (“You are crazy, Loki”) – which furthermore both stress the wisdom of fate (*þrlǫg*) possessed by Gefjun and Frigg, respectively.

In the cases of *brymskviða* and *Lokasenna* we see broad patterns of repetition in the context of dialogue; and dialogue, as we have noted in the introduction above, is a prominent feature of many Eddic poems. This overt use of repetition is striking, and perhaps especially so in the dialogic context. It is not merely the case that characters repeat themselves, but that elements are repeated between characters, between voices. Notably, in the case of *brymskviða*, they are even repeated between the voices of characters and the narrative voice. It is not enough to simply say that the same thing is repeated in separate but identical iterations; even if the words are identical, something has changed. In the case of the more elaborate pattern of repetition between voices in *Skírnismál*, we will look in more detail at what elements of language produce this effect, what its significance is, and we will see that far from being a mere ornamental figure, the stylistic strategy is complicit in the very concept of the text itself.

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<sup>2</sup> We will return to the significance of *argr* and related terms for sexual perversity in Old Norse below; on this term in particular see Meulengracht Sørensen (Meulengracht Sørensen, Preben (1983): *The unmanly man: concepts of sexual defamation in early Northern society*, trans. Joan Turville-Petre, Odense: Odense University Press). Note that in the aforementioned *brymskviða*, Þórr expresses a fear in 17:1 that he will be seen as *argr* – a related term – for putting on the bridal clothes, highlighting the slight against masculinity implied by these terms. Loki’s response to Þórr’s reservations begins, “Þegi þú, Þórr” (18:3). Furthermore, we might once more note Loki’s own seeming lack of scruples about putting on a feminine disguise (20).

### 3.2 Repetition and Voice in *Skírnismál*: Index and Absence

For this analysis, and several of those that follow, we will consider the poem as a whole. *Skírnismál* is one of a group of poems in Codex Regius that consist entirely of dialogue (apart from the usual interspersed prose sections) and are composed primarily in the less common *ljóðaháttr* metre.<sup>3</sup> Thematically, its narrative material is also alluded to in *Lokasenna* 42 and given with similar details in *Snorra Edda*.<sup>4</sup> The bulk of the poem is taken up by two sections, consisting of a dialogue between the principal characters Skírnir and Gerðr (11-25) followed by a monologue by Skírnir directed at Gerðr; these sections are bookended by smaller sections of dialogue between Skírnir and Skaði (1-2) and Skírnir and Freyr (3-10, 41-42). The god Freyr, having (as we are told in the framing prose) sat upon the magical throne Hliðskjálf and surveyed the entire world, happens to see a beautiful girl in the world of the *jǫtnar* and instantly becomes hopelessly obsessed with her. His servant Skírnir volunteers to travel to the world of the *jǫtnar* and persuade the girl to meet with him. No specific objective is stated at the beginning of the journey, but the outcome is that Gerðr agrees to meet and have sex with Freyr.<sup>5</sup> Skírnir begins by offering various precious and supernatural gifts in exchange for Gerðr's cooperation, which she consistently refuses. He then moves on to threats of violence, which are initially rebuffed. Finally Skírnir launches into the central portion of the poem, in which he threatens Gerðr with highly detailed

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<sup>3</sup> A group of poems which have various other similarities: see Gunnell 1994 pp. 203-206; Söderberg 1986 pp. 50-79; and to a certain extent, Gudbrand Vigfusson & Powell p. lxxvii and pp. 100-123, in which the authors posit that *Skírnismál*, *Lokasenna*, and *Hárbarðsljóð* were all composed by the same poet, a concept echoed by Bugge (Bugge, Sophus (1889a): "Iduns Æbler: Et Bidrag til de nordiske Mythers Historie", *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 5 (1889), pp. 1-45).

<sup>4</sup> Faulkes 2005 p. 37.

<sup>5</sup> 39:5-6 and 41:5-6: "*þar mun Niarðar syni / Gerðr unna gamans*"; *unna gamans*, literally "grant pleasure," is clearly meant in a sexual sense – not least considering the overall tone of the poem.

magical sexual compulsions and curses. It is not clear whether any of these curses are in fact instituted during the threat, which may be the case given their magical nature and the incantatory tone of some of Skírnir's verses. Lotte Motz argues that a curse is indeed carried out, though only by way of the curious conclusion that Gerðr "succumbs without a struggle", and that this "puzzling behaviour" must indicate magical compulsion.<sup>6</sup> It is difficult to imagine any reading of the sexual threats heaped one atop the other, each more horrific than the last, that would not reasonably conclude that they are threatening enough even devoid of active magical force. Whether magically compelled to do so or not, Gerðr capitulates entirely and the poem is brought to a fairly swift conclusion. It comes as no surprise that the striking thematic content of this narrative has been examined from a wide variety of viewpoints.<sup>7</sup> For our own purposes, we are departing from the more microscopic approach to examine *Skírnismál* as a whole because repetition plays a conspicuous role in

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<sup>6</sup> Motz, Lotte (1996): "The Power of Speech: Eddic Poems and Their Frames", *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur Älteren Germanistik*, Jan 1, 1996, Vol. 46, p. 107.

<sup>7</sup> Beginning primarily with a mythographical approach (Bergmann, Frédéric Guillaume (1867): *Le message de Skírnir et les Dits de Grimnir = Skírnisföer-Grimnismål: poèmes tirés de l'Edda de Sæmund / publiés avec des notes philologiques, une traduction et un commentaire perpétuel*, Strasbourg: Veuve Berger-Levrault; Niedner, Felix (1886): "Skírnis för", *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur*, 1886, Vol. 30, pp. 132-150; Olsen, Magnus (1909): "Fra gammelnorsk mytus og kultus", *Maal og Minne* 1 (1909), 17-36; Dronke, Ursula (1962): "Art and Tradition in Skírnismál", *English and Medieval Studies Presented to J.R.R. Tolkien*, ed. Norman Davies and C.L. Wrenn, London: George Allen & Unwin, pp. 250-268; Talbot, Annelise (1982): "The Withdrawal of the Fertility God", *Folklore* 93 (1982), pp. 31-46; Mitchell, Stephen (1983): "För Skírnis as Mythological Model: *frið at kaupá*", *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 98 (1983), pp. 108-122; Steinsland 1991; Gunnell 1994 353-355; Motz 1996), this story has also been examined for its more broadly social overtones (Lönnroth, Lars (1987): "Skírnismál och den fornisländska äktenskapsnormen", *Opuscula Septentrionalia: Festskrift til Ole Widding*, ed. Bent Chr. Jacobsen, Hafniae: C. A. Reitzels Boghandel, pp. 154-178), and – perhaps most crucially, given the subject matter – from a feminist perspective (Larrington 1992; Kress, Helga (2002): "Taming the Shrew: The Rise of Patriarchy and the Subordination of the Feminine in Old Norse Literature", *Cold counsel: the women of Old Norse literature and mythology: a collection of essays*, ed. Sarah M. Anderson with Karen Swenson, London: Routledge, pp. 81-92). More recently Christopher Abram has suggested a possible originary milieu for the poem at the tenth-century court of Jarl Hákon, identifying the poem's theme with Hákon's "hyper-masculine [pagan] religious persona" (Abram, Christopher (2011): *Myths of the Pagan north: the gods of the Norsemen*, London: Athlone, p. 148).

its stylistic structure from beginning to end, and, as we shall see, this stylistic feature is once again not simply arbitrary but plays a visible role in what might be called the text's climax.

In *Skírnismál*, repetition is inextricably linked to the dialogic nature of the text. This is evident from the very first two strophes, which present an almost comically mirroring form repeated in several places throughout the text:

*Þá mælti Skaði:*

1. *Rístu nú, Skírnir, oc gacc at beiða*

*occarn mála mǫg,*

*oc þess at fregna, hveim in fróði sé*

*ofreiði afi.*

Then spoke Skaði:

1. Rise-you now, Skírnir, and go to bid

Our young man to speak,

and this to ask, why the clever [one] seems

a too-angry man.

Then Skaði said:

1. "Rise now, Skírnir, and go bid our young man speak; and ask this, why the clever one seems such an angry man."

*Scírnir qvað:*

2. *Illra orða er mér ón at ychrom syni,*

*ef ec geng at mæla við mǫg,*

*oc þess at fregna, hveim in fróði sé*

*ofreiði afi.*

Scírnir said:

2. Ill words are to-me [an] expectation from your son,

if I go to speak with the young man,

and this to ask, why the clever [one] seems

a too-angry man.

Skírnir said:

2. "I expect to receive ill words from your son if I go to speak with the young man;

and ask this, why the clever one seems such an angry man."

Here there is no need to dig deep into the poem's language to find the sense of repetition, which could not be much more obvious. We are, however, instantly reminded of the sense of parallel and repetition we found in the purely syntactic examples. There are elements that are repeated word-for-word here, but there are also differences, creating a profiling effect comparable to the grammatical structure of the *Guðrúnarkviða* strophes. In terms of grammar, the difference between these two strophes is a difference of person; we

understand this from the extra-metrical notation (*Scírnir qvað*), but it would also be clear enough that we are dealing with a dialogue between two persons due to the change in grammatical person from the command given in the second person (given by the commander) to the repetition in the first person (given by the commandee).<sup>8</sup> The change in person does not, however, affect lines 4-6 of either strophe. In more pragmatic terms, we know that we are dealing with a difference of *voice*. However, repetition makes this difference far more problematic in this sense than it does in the purely grammatical sense. Two persons conducting a dialogue by repeating what the other says almost word-for-word cannot be seen as a figure that aims for the verisimilitude of actual social conventions, but must rather be seen as heavily stylized and non-representational. Though there are a number of elements at work in this figure, it is evident right away that this form of repetition serves to draw attention to the linguistic nature of the text as a dialogue, as a schema of voice or even a “speech act,”<sup>9</sup> but also to the text as verse. This form of repetition is replicated so often throughout the poem (1-2, 8-9, 17-18, 19-20, 21-22, and in variant forms in 23-25 and 39/41, as we shall see in more detail below) that one is never truly allowed to forget the versified and artificial nature of the language.

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<sup>8</sup> It is also notable in relation to this point that there are many dialogic strophes in Codex Regius that are not marked in this way and where confusion has arisen for the modern reader. For example, one might consider the aside-like nature we noted in *Atlakviða* 11, where no addressee is indicated but which we understand from context is in the voice of Gunnarr (in spite of him referring to himself somewhat in the third person). Additionally, consider the confusion elicited by the unclear, unmarked speaker in strophes 15 and 16 of *Völundarkviða*. It should, however, be noted that the scribe of the later fragmentary manuscript AM 478 I 4to, which gives strophes 1-27 of *Skírnismál*, does include speaker notation, both in the body of the text (extrametricaly) and in the margins.

<sup>9</sup> To use the terminology of J.L. Austin (Austin 1975) and John Searle (Searle, John (1969): *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

This pattern of repeating dialogue strophes could be divided into three sections. Firstly we have strophes 1-2 which we have examined above and strophes 8-9, which belong to the introductory portion of the poem. These two pairs of strophes introduce one to the style of repetition that will be prominently used throughout the poem. As we have seen, the parallelism of 1-2 places an emphasis on the difference of person, indicated primarily by the pronouns which condition the syntax of the two strophes. Thematically, we read 1 as a command and 2 as spoken in the voice of the one being commanded. Skírnir here may or may not be addressing his commander, as it is possible that his speech in 2 has the character of an aside. If he is addressing Skaði, his speech here, which is not exactly a straightforward assent, seems mildly insubordinate. This insubordination on Skírnir's part is in fact echoed in the next instance of this formula, as in 8-9 he actually issues a command to Freyr, who does assent to the command in spite of the fact that (as the prose frame tells us) Skírnir is his servant (*skósveinn*). Strophes 1 and 8 are linked by a certain parallel in the first line: "*Rístu nú, Scínir*" ("rise now, Skírnir"); "*Mar gefðu mér þá*" ("give me that horse, then"). Profiling these two lines emphasises the imperative second-person form of the verbs in *rístu* and *gefðu*, marking both as commands, in spite of the fact that the second instance is spoken by one who is supposed to be a servant. Additionally, Freyr's complete assent in 9 stands in contrast to Skírnir's grumbling tone in 2; the particularly effective nature of Skírnir's commands will be echoed later in the poem. It is this particular type of sameness-and-difference, the pronominal one, which makes this parallel what it is. However, unlike the purely syntactic parallels we examined in the above chapter, this parallel clearly extends outside of syntactic relations and into the realm of voice and deixis.



The linguistic category that is essential to this figure is what Jakobson terms a “shifter:” shifters are “indexical symbols,” primarily pronouns.<sup>10</sup> Jakobson develops this concept in relation to a model of the abstract linguistic function:

A message sent by its addresser must be adequately perceived by its receiver. Any message is encoded by its sender and is to be decoded by its addressee. The more closely the addressee approximates the code used by the addresser, the higher is the amount of information obtained.<sup>11</sup>

For Jakobson, this is the linguistic function (in essence, communication) that conditions all other language use; here we can discern very clearly the structuralist nature of Jakobson’s thought. In terms of this model, Jakobson distinguishes “two kinds of OVERLAPPING – message referring to code (M/C) and code referring to message (C/M).”<sup>12</sup> Shifters belong in this latter category of code referring to message: “the general meaning of a shifter cannot be defined without a reference to the message.”<sup>13</sup> Jakobson terms the shifter an “indexical symbol” in the sense that in it is combined the Peircean categories of symbol, “associated with the represented object by a conventional rule,” and the index, which “is in existential relation with the object it represents.”<sup>14</sup> Beyond these elements, Jakobson admits that it is difficult to define or establish a definite meaning for a shifter word; Benveniste, for example, must rely on the circular definition: “I is the ‘individual who utters the present

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<sup>10</sup> Jakobson, Roman ([1956] 1971): “Shifters, Verbal Categories, and the Russian Verb”, *Selected Writings II*, The Hague: Mouton, p. 132; here Jakobson borrows the term “shifter” from Jespersen, Otto ([1922] 1950): *Language: its Nature, Development, and Origin*, London, George Allen & Unwin.

<sup>11</sup> Jakobson (1956) 1971 p. 130.

<sup>12</sup> Jakobson (1956) 1971 p. 130.

<sup>13</sup> Jakobson (1956) 1971 p. 131.

<sup>14</sup> Jakobson (1956) 1971 p. 132.

instance of discourse containing the linguistic instance *I*.”<sup>15</sup> It is in this sense that Jakobson’s shifter refers to “the message,” even though common sense would seem to indicate that a deictic unit such as a pronoun must refer to something outside language. Indeed, in everyday speech, “I” conventionally refers to a physically embodied speaker. But Jakobson is aiming for a definition more general than this, one that can take into account a wider variety of situations containing such deictic elements. Anterior to the everyday conversation that linguistics tends to take as its fundamental unit of ordinary language, “I” and “you” refer not (merely) to physically embodied persons but to actors in relation to a linguistic utterance, in relation to Jakobson’s “message.”<sup>16</sup> It must be borne constantly in mind that in this particular work Jakobson is speaking of language in general and makes no reference here to shifters in terms of what he elsewhere calls the “poetic function” of language. In order to establish what Jakobson’s concept of shifters means for a work of verbal art such as we are examining here, we must trace the structuralist trajectory of Jakobson’s thought: as we noted above, for Jakobson “poetics may be regarded as an integral part of linguistics” because “focus on the message for its own sake, is the POETIC function of language.”<sup>17</sup> We are able to make sense of the deictic elements of *Skírnismál* not because they refer to non-linguistic objects to which we have access, but because they are modelled on acts of language we are familiar with. These artistic elements share something

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<sup>15</sup> Benveniste, Émile (1971): *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek, Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami Press, p. 252; Jakobson points out that Husserl raises a similar conundrum.

<sup>16</sup> The emptiness or transparency of these pronouns is well illustrated by the necessity of placing them in quotation marks when speaking of them in the abstract.

<sup>17</sup> Jakobson (1960) 1981 pp. 63, 69.

with the communicative element of language; in Jakobson's structuralist framework, they are modelled on it and, in a sense, subordinate to it.

So far our points have been general ones, but it is important to be clear about the definition of these terms and the context in which they have arisen, so that we can make out the context in which we use them below. Through the concept of a shifter or indexical symbol, we can make out what is so notable about the formula of repetition we are examining here in *Skírnismál*. It is the deictic elements in these strophes which vary, while other elements are repeated identically, and it is primarily through an awareness of their deictic quality that this stylistic figure is made possible: it is a play on deixis, a trope of deixis.<sup>18</sup> Jakobson's idea that the shifter refers to the "message" itself of language provides the starting point for examining this figure. As we can see in the above example and as is also the case in 8-9, this is not to say that the deictic elements are the only elements that vary. Rather, what we are establishing here is that the variation of deictic elements constitutes the operational or essential part of the variation, the part that makes the figure of repetition and difference what it is.<sup>19</sup>

On the other hand, it is also repetition that makes this figure what it is, since this variation of deictic elements would not normally be unusual in any way, being rather for the

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<sup>18</sup> Consider the literal sense of *τρόπος* as "turn."

<sup>19</sup> It may seem arbitrary to exclude the other elements of variation, but I would argue that these are not essential to the stylistic function of this figure. For example, the variation between 8:5-6 (*er síalft vegiz / við iǫtna ætt* ("that bears itself / against the race of giants")) and 9:5-6 (*er síalft mun vegaz, / ef sá er horscr, her hefir* ("that will bear itself / if he is wise, who has [it]")) seems to serve no purpose other than allowing the poet to display a larger amount of contextual knowledge concerning the magically self-brandishing sword. By contrast, we see below that the deictically conditioned patterns of repetition play a more fundamental role in the structure of the poem.

most part a conventional aspect of dialogue. This works both ways. Repetition, as we have seen, highlights the difference of deixis: for example, the transposition from *gefðu* (“give you [to me]”) to *ek ... gef* (“I ... give”). In this case it is once again a repetition with a difference, since the same verb is used in both cases but with a difference of person and mood, a grammatical difference.<sup>20</sup> It is indeed a conventional feature of the character of dialogue that this repetition-with-difference should take place, though we can see in the highlighting of the imperative form of verbs spoken by two different voices that this convention has become the subject of play, of art, in linking these two pairs of strophes together. It is exactly this play that the identical repetitions engender and embody. Why should two people in dialogue repeat each other word-for-word in this way? It strikes one, reader or listener, and what strikes one is its artifice, its non-representational nature. It is in this sense that we noted above that the figure of repetition draws attention to the text “as verse.”

We can see at this point that this deceptively simple figure consists of a deeply complex interaction. For the purposes of exploring the implications of this complexity, it might be useful to take a speculative turn and imagine two different models of production and reception for this text alongside one another: an oral model and a literate model. As discussed at various points above, the literate model is justified by the fact that we currently receive the text in writing and not as spoken word, whereas the oral model is justified by the fact of the text’s likely oral roots, however murky those roots may be. This

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<sup>20</sup> It should however be noted that the first-person indicative form and the imperative form of *gefa* are in fact identical; the difference here is indicated by the contracted second-person pronoun suffixed to the imperative *gefðu*.

murkiness, however, requires our oral model to be particularly abstract and therefore not really suited to anything other than this manner of speculative thinking, since we lack any useable knowledge of the original context of the text's oral performance. However, the dialogic nature of the text means that we cannot, even in reading, do other than at least imagine an oral context, since the spoken word is what is being evoked here – not merely in the sense that that is what the written word is supposed to do anyway, but in the sense that an oral interaction is being depicted. In both models, however, there is a problematic complex of voice and presence/absence. Walter J. Ong notes that “the writer's audience is always a fiction”;<sup>21</sup> “for a writer any real recipient is normally absent”.<sup>22</sup> The converse of this idea is that for the reader there is perhaps an even greater absence, not only of the writer, and hence, as it were, the speaker, but of the extralinguistic referent of language itself, especially in the case of “fictional” writing such as we are dealing with here. On the other hand, we could consider the listener taking in the performance; again it is worth repeating and stressing that we are not imagining a particular historically situated performance but *any* possible performance. For the listener, the speaker is present, yet the dialogue has been taken out of the normal or default context to which dialogue normally refers and placed into an artistic frame: for the listener, the *context* is absent. For both reader and listener, an absence conditions the reception or experience of this text; one could say that this absence is the essence of the text “as art.”<sup>23</sup> Here in particular it is

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<sup>21</sup> Ong, Walter (1977): *Interfaces of the word: studies in the evolution of consciousness and culture*, Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, pp. 54-81.

<sup>22</sup> Ong 2012 p. 177.

<sup>23</sup> As Mallarmé might put it (Mallarmé, Stéphane (1956): “Crisis in Poetry”, *Mallarmé: Selected prose poems, essays, & letters*, trans. Bradford Cook, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, p. 42), and as one might argue is in fact the essence of language or in particular of poetic language (as for example, Large, W. (1997): “The being

embodied in and evoked by the figure of repetition. This is not a mimetic or in any way realistic depiction of two persons addressing one another, and we know this in the repetition between voices.<sup>24</sup> But the figure is not merely an ornament, a signal that one is reading or hearing an artistic text. Let us take even one step further in this speculation and imagine with Gunnell a dramatic character to the oral performance of *Skírnismál*; it is both valid and productive to read this text as “drama” given its dialogic character. For Gunnell, “the key feature which differentiates drama from other forms of active oral presentation like recitation or oratory is that of ‘representation’ or ‘mimicry’”.<sup>25</sup> That is, for drama there must not only be a performer, but moreover a conscious acting of the speaking roles. The fully realised form, as it were, of the dramatic performance of *Skírnismál* would then presumably require individual actors assigned to each speaking role. As Gunnell quite reasonably points out, a one-person performance of the text (as drama in any case, though Gunnell would no doubt argue that it would also be the case in a performance as recitation) would be so fraught with inferential difficulties that it would border on the absurd.<sup>26</sup> However, even if we are imagining this sort of performance and reception, the artistic or poetic element still remains in the figure of repetition, and it still bears the same conceptual effect. If anything, the effect is heightened when encountered in a dialogue that is not merely presented as such but actually simulated. This effect is a confusion of voice; whether

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of language: The literary theory of Maurice Blanchot”, *Textual Practice* 11:2 (1997), p. 311); we will return to Mallarmé’s flower in the conclusion (6.1.1, p. 279).

<sup>24</sup> That is to say, we know this on a stylistic level in the repetition between two voices, and this stylistic level is clearly complicit with the thematic level in which one knows the text to be non-realistic in the mythological or supernatural nature of the characters involved.

<sup>25</sup> Gunnell 1994 p. 12.

<sup>26</sup> Gunnell 1994 pp. 247-255.

one reads the word on the page, hears the poem recited, or listens and watches as the action is performed dramatically, this remains a constant. It is not merely the case that artifice intrudes on language; it intrudes on language here in such a way that the conventional boundaries of voice, which we associate with personality – as the very concept of drama so clearly demonstrates – are penetrated and made porous. Different voices borrow from one another, and in the end we can see that between these two pairs of strophes it is Skírnir's voice that dominates: he takes Skaði's words and uses them for his own purposes, and on the other hand gives words for Freyr to simply repeat in assent.

We can see, therefore, that this set of seemingly simple figures constitutes a structure of considerable complexity and sophistication. Quite aside from the superficial fact of the identical repetition of words, it is deixis that makes this figure work, the conventional deixis of the dialogue turned to the purposes of verbal art. It is a figure built out of the components of speech, of Jakobson's "message." It is through the deictic nature of the lexical units at play here – that is, their ability to indicate and to focus the direction of meaning and attention toward not only the linguistic actors of the speech event, but also toward one another – that the figure is formed. On the other hand, it is the obvious repetition that makes the figure strange and unfamiliar. This is not a depiction of two persons communicating; it is something new created out of the building blocks of dialogue. In fact, as we have suggested above, the absence of an actual dialogue is essential to the functioning of this dialogic figure. This we can see merely from these first two pairs of repeating dialogue strophes; however, these are not isolated, but the beginning of a chain of such repeating strophes that structures the entire text. Nor does the poem stick to an

exact formula, but, as we shall see, gradually varies the formula and introduces new (but related) forms of repetition, in a manner that suggests the same-but-different nature of the figure itself.

### 3.2.1 *Skírnismál*: Voice and Person

As noted above, *Skírnismál* contains different sections broadly marked by different speech situations: the introductory Skaði/Skírnir/Freyr dialogue section, the Skírnir/Gerðr dialogue section, the Skírnir monologue, and the brief concluding Skírnir/Freyr dialogue. These sections also are marked by a different spin on the formula of repetition. We have examined the form of repetition found in the first section, and in its manifestation in the second section it takes a similar but rather more extensive and elaborate form. Here the dialogue is between Skírnir and Gerðr, and the tone is far more confrontational. Gerðr's rebuffs are absolute and her repetition of Skírnir's words could be seen as carrying a mocking or spiteful tone. On the other hand, Skírnir does not take long in resorting to threats of violence; in fact, there is no build-up to the threat, merely an abandonment of the strategy of bribery attending an immediate resort to the strategy of violent threat. The violent threats must also be seen as being markedly different in nature to the magical sexual threats of the monologue. In the monologue Skírnir does in fact not make any sort of straightforwardly violent threat at all, seeming to have changed tack entirely from where he started. We will see below that the change in the nature of the speech event marked by the



monologue also bears its own particular figure of repetition, quite different but profoundly related to the one that occurs in the dialogue.

The interaction between Skírnir and Gerðr primarily takes the form of a series of negations. Consider the first words they exchange:

17. *Hvat er þat álfa, né ása sona,*

*Né víssa vana?*

*Hví þú einn um komt eikinn fúr yfir,*

*Ór salkynni at siá?*

17. “What is that of-elves, nor Æsir’s son,

Nor of the wise Vanir?

Why came you here alone over swelling fire,

Our home to see?”

17. “What is that; one of the elves? Surely not a son of the Æsir, nor of the wise Vanir? Why have you come here alone, over the swelling fire, to see our home?”

18. *Emcat ec álfa né ása sona*

*Né víssa vana;*

*Þó ec einn um komc eikinn fúr yfir,*

*Yðor salkynni at siá.*

18. "I am not [of] elves,           nor a son of the Æsir,  
   Nor [of] the wise Vanir,  
 Though I came alone           over swelling fire,  
   Your home to see."

18. "I am not of the elves, nor a son of the Æsir, nor of the wise Vanir; though I have  
 come alone, over the swelling fire, to see your home."

First of all we should note that though there is clearly a negation occurring between 17 and 18, the first strophe nonetheless uses the negative conjunction *né* ("nor"). This gives Gerðr's question a rhetorical tone, already negative, along the lines of "surely this is not ... nor ...".<sup>27</sup> Because of this, Skírnir's answer is both negation and agreement. It is a grammatical negation in what we have identified as the operative part of this parallel, the deictic part: in Gerðr's question, the demonstrative pronoun *þat* ("that"), together with the indefinite *hvat* ("what"), refers to Skírnir. In his own speech, this naturally becomes the first person *ek* suffixed as a contraction to *em*, but to it is further added the negative suffix, hence *emkat* ("I am not"). The compactness of this turn is impossible to render in an English translation, combining as it does person, existential action, and negation all in one two-syllable word.

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<sup>27</sup> English translations have tended to ignore the negative aspect of the question. Larrington 2014 p. 60 "Who are you, of the elves / or of the Æsir's sons" and Orchard (Orchard 2011 p. 62), "Which are you of the elves / or the Æsir's sons" read similar meanings in this strophe, dropping the negative and interpreting *hvat* in an unusual sense. Dronke, "What elves' son is that / or Æsir's son" preserves the sense of *hvat* but discards the negative sense of the conjunction (Dronke 1997 p. 380). Von See et al (von See, Klaus, Beatrice la Farge, Eve Picard, & Katja Schulz (1997): *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda, Band 2: Götterlieder*, Heidelberg: Winter, p. 95) come considerably closer to the sense in which we understand it here: "Das ist [doch nicht etwas] einer der Alben / oder der Asensöhne"

Gerðr's question should not be understood merely as an interrogative, but also as a challenge, and this sets the tone for the verbal sparring that follows. It is important to bear in mind that in the line above this strophe, Gerðr has predicted that the visitor will turn out to be *minn bróðurbanni* (15:6), literally "my brotherslayer," presumably in the sense that the categories of being she lists in this strophe are racial enemies of her own race, that of the *jǫtnar* or "giants." Gerðr seems therefore to expect the visitor to be a member of one of these races, hence the rhetorical nature of the first question; it is not given in expectation of a reply. And Skírnir does in fact not answer either question, but simply negates them. The implication of the way in which he responds to the second question actually changes the nature of what is being discussed, implying the unlikelihood of having successfully completed the journey he has just undertaken in spite of (*þó*) being a mere human.<sup>28</sup> In short, Skírnir turns Gerðr's challenge into a boast of his own. It is remarkable that such a change can be made while repeating identically so much of the first strophe's speech. Unlike the dialogic repetition we examined above, almost nothing is changed between these two strophes except for a very few deictic elements: *Hvat er þatt / Emcat* ("What is that / I am not"); *Hví þú / þó ec* ("Why you / though I"); and *ór / yðor* ("our / your [plural]"). As we can see when we set them side by side in this manner, the only words among the variants that are not pronouns are the prepositions *hví* and *þó*. Though not strictly speaking deictic words in the sense that pronouns are – that is, as discussed above, in the sense that their meaning must be defined by the deictic relation they represent – they serve here

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<sup>28</sup> Skírnir is never specifically said to be human, but the implication of him denying belonging to any of the given categories of supernatural humanoid beings is that he is, at the very least, mundane in a way that makes his achievements all the more remarkable.

primarily to modify the deictic elements in the two strophes. There does in fact seem to be an alliterative link created between *hvæt* and *hví*; *hvæt* seems to behave here as an interrogative pronoun conditioning the sentence much as does *hví* (“What/why?”), but in fact should be understood here more in its sense as an indefinite pronoun indicating the unknown visitor (“What manner of ...?”). Nonetheless, their similar positioning at the head of their respective lines draws an equivalence between them. Conversely, in much the same way as Skírnir denies and negates Gerðr’s questions rather than answering them, this relation is not exactly preserved in his answer, but rather subverted as he shifts into a different tone, repeating Gerðr’s words but giving them the new sense of the boast, primarily through the translation of *hví* into *þó*.

The following four strophes continue the antagonistic pattern of repetition initiated in 17-18:

19. *Epli ellifo*                      *hér hefi ec, algullin,*

*þau mun ec þér, Gerðr, gefa,*

*frið at kaupá,*                      *at þú þér Frey qveðir*

*óleiðastan lifa.*

19. “Eleven apples    here have I, allgolden,

them will I give to-you, Gerðr,

love to buy,                      that you to-you Freyr declare

unloathedest to remain.”

19. "I have eleven apples here, allgolden; I will give them to you, Gerðr, to buy your love, that you declare Freyr to be the one least loathed by [i.e. most dear to] you."

20. *Epli ellifo                    ec þigg aldregi*

*at manncis munom,*

*né við Freyr,                    meðan occart fiqr lifir,*

*byggjom bæði saman.*

20. "Eleven apples    I accept never

for no one's desires,

nor Freyr and I,                    while our life remains,

dwel both together."

20. "I will never accept eleven apples for anyone's desires, nor will Freyr and I, as long as we live, dwell together."

The idiomatic expression of 19:5-6 resists a neat translation into English, and requires some explanation. First of all, it is important to understand the verb *lifa* in both its iterations here as meaning not "to live" but in its apparently more archaic sense of "to remain," "to last."<sup>29</sup> Note that this verb is repeated between the two strophes in the same sense, and in the same half of the strophe, but as part of otherwise entirely different sentences. In 19, Skírnir

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<sup>29</sup> Cleasby & Vígfusson argue "the original sense ... was *to be left*" (Cleasby, Richard & Guðbrandur Vígfusson (1874): *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, Oxford: Clarendon, p. 388). Compare 20:5 in particular to the stock Eddic short line *meðan ǫld lifir* ("while the age [i.e. 'the world, humanity'] lasts"), *Vǫluspá* 21, *Grípisspá* 23, 41, *brot af Sigurðarkviða* 3, among other related uses.

uses the word as part of a characteristically Old Norse litotic phrase: *óleiðastan* would be most literally rendered as “the one most not loathing-inducing;” that is, the most loved one.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, we could in this case perhaps understand *lifa* as imparting the sense of “remaining, of all, the one most not loathing-inducing.” In 20, Gerðr uses *lifa* in a more conventional way for this sense of the word.

Altogether, there seems on the surface to be less of the strikingly identical repetition in 19-20 that we have seen in previous strophes, since the only element that is repeated word for word is the initial *epli ellifo*. However, we have noted above that the verb *lifa* is repeated between the two strophes in different sentences but in the same distinct sense. There is furthermore a certain similarity in the way the two sentences are constructed, though the similarity cannot be considered as close as in other repeated elements in this text. Both strophes begin with phrases that could stand as separate sentences on their own (*Epli ellifo / hér hefji ec; þau mun ec þér, Gerðr, gefa; Epli ellifo / ec þigg aldregi*); in both cases the preposition *at* serves as a hinge connecting them to the subjunctive, and therefore contingent, phrases that make up the second half of each strophe. The sense of *at*, however, is not identical between the two strophes, but turns slightly from a more specific meaning in 19 (essentially “in exchange for”) to a more general meaning in 20 (“according to”), though in both cases it refers to the proposed exchange which is the subject at hand here. In 19 *at* is used twice to connect two different phrases – *kaupa frið* (“buy love”) and *þú þér Freyr qveðir óleiðastan lifa* (“you declare Freyr to remain

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<sup>30</sup> On the frequent occurrence of this rhetorical figure in Old Norse literature, see Hollander, Lee (1938): “Old Norse litotes,” *PMLA* 1 March 1938, Vol. 53(1), pp. 1-33. Compare the similar wording of *Fáfnismál* 23:6.

unloathedest to you”) – to the phrase *þau mun ec ... gefa*. It is tempting to read *frið at kaup* in a merely infinitive sense (“to buy”), but this appearance is deceptive since the phrase does not stand on its own, and therefore *at* should be understood as relating to the preceding phrase (therefore “in order to buy”). This is more clearly the sense of *at* in its second usage in 19, where it is more clearly related to the exchange. In 20, the sense of *at* is less concrete, but the concept of the exchange is still invoked. In a manner similar to Skírnir’s appropriation of her own words in the preceding pair of strophes, Gerðr turns the sense of *at* with a subtle movement, barely noticeable, to suggest a relationship between the exchange and “desire,” *munr*. Here we understand the negative aspect of *mannzkis* (“no one’s”) as forming an emphatic double-negative: “never ... according to no one’s desires”, that is, “never according to anyone’s desires”. This is essentially a reframing of the proposition. Skírnir proposes to give Gerðr the golden apples “in exchange for” – *at* – the purchase and promise of her love for Freyr. What Gerðr denies is not this exchange in itself; she denies accepting a bribe “according to” – *at* – the desires of another. This must additionally, however, be seen as an ambiguous use of the word *munr* – a word of crucial importance to the overall concept of *Skírnismál*, which we shall discuss in more detail below as well as in the following chapter – as well as *at*. While Gerðr’s pronouncement could be read as we have above, it would also be possible to interpret *munr* as “desire” in the sense of “love” or “affection”; in this case, the sense of *at* is precisely the same as in the preceding

strophe, since Gerðr would essentially be saying that she will not accept the golden apples “in exchange for anyone’s love”.<sup>31</sup>

These repetitions between strophes 19-20 are on the surface less striking than those of previous pairs of strophes we have examined in *Skírnismál* so far. However, we can see it is also the case that a subtler kind of repetition is carried out below the surface, creating a back-and-forth sense of antagonism in the exchange between Skírnir and Gerðr. This slightly less elaborate form of repetition is continued in strophes 21-22, in which only the first halves of each strophe are mirrored:

21:1-3. *Baug ec þér þá gef, þann er brendr var*

*Með ungom Óðins syni;*

21:1-3. “A ring I to-you then give, that which burned was

With Óðinn’s young son”

21:1-3. “I give you then a ring, that which was burned with the young son of Óðinn”

22:1-3. *Baug ec þiccac, þótt brendr sé*

*Með ungom óðins syni*

22:1-3. “A ring I accept-not, though burned may-have-been

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<sup>31</sup> Compare, for example, some translations of this half-line into English and German: “for any man’s pleasure” (Dronke 1997 p. 380); “einem Manne zuliebe” (von See et al 1997 p. 100); Carolyne Larrington’s translation additionally reflects the ambiguity of Old Norse *at* with the less natural “at any man’s desire” (Larrington 2014, p. 60).



With Óðinn's young son"

22:1-3. "I do not accept the ring, burned though it may have been with the young son of Óðinn"

This exchange echoes that of strophes 19-20 in that the mutually contingent nature of *gefa* / *þiggja* ("give," "accept") accompanies the mutually contingent nature of the deictic movement between the two persons involved: "I give" / "I accept". Here, moreover, it should be made clear that we are speaking of "persons" being "involved" in a primarily grammatical sense. Gerðr continues to resist the proposed bribe, this time by simply negating Skírnir's own words. The negative terms she uses here, however, are strikingly similar to those Skírnir used to negate her own question in 18. As Skírnir did with the word *emkat*, Gerðr simply adds the negative ending to *þiggja*, while *þann er brendr var* ("that which was burned") becomes *þótt brendr sé* ("burned though it may have been"), again using almost precisely the same turn of phrase employed by Skírnir to turn *hví* into *þó*, with the addition of changing the mood of the existential verb from indicative to subjunctive. Again Gerðr's use of repetition seems intended to mock Skírnir, not only by repeating his words, but by repeating them in the same manner as he had repeated hers earlier: a repetition of a repetition.

The exchange continues in strophes 23-25; one can already see merely from the odd number of strophes remaining, however, that something in this pattern has changed. Indeed, though we see certain repetitions in these strophes, they are not of a uniform kind with those we have seen above:

23. *Sér þú þenna mæki, mæð, mióvan, málfán,*

*Er ec hefi í hendi hér?*

*Höfuð höggva                      ec mun þér hálsi af,*

*Nema þú mér sætt segir.*

23. "See you this sword, girl, slender, engraved,

That I have in [my] hand here?

Strike [your] head                      I will to-you off neck,

Unless you to-me consent declare."

23. "Do you see this sword, girl, slender and engraved, that I have here in my hand? I

will strike your head off your neck if you do not give me your consent."

24. *Ánauð þola                      ec vil aldregi*

*At manncis munom;*

*Þó ec hins get,                      ef iþ Gyimir finniz,*

*Vígs ótrauðir,                      at ycr vega tíði.*

24. "Compulsion suffer                      I will never

For no one's desires;

Though I this reckon,                      if you and Gyimir meet,

Slaughter unloth,                      that you fight quickly."

24. “I will never suffer compulsion for anyone’s desires; though I predict this: eager slaughter; that if you and Gymir meet, you will quickly come to blows.”

25. *Sér þú þenna mæki, mæ, mióvan, málfán,*

*Er ec hefi í hendi hér?*

*Fyr þessom eggjom                      hnígr sá inn aldni iqtunn,*

*Verðr þinn feigr faðir.*

25. “See you this sword, girl, slender, engraved,

That I have in [my] hand here?

Before these edges                      falls the old giant,

Becomes your father doomed to die.”

25. “Do you see this sword, girl, slender and engraved, that I have here in my hand?

By these edges the old giant will fall, your father will become doomed to death.”

The most obvious continuation of the use of word-for-word repetition is the exaggerated manner in which Skírnir repeats himself in the first halves of strophes 23 and 25, essentially repeating the same threat but first against Gerðr herself before threatening the absent Gymir when his potential protection is invoked. Additionally, we see Gerðr repeat her own words from before, *aldregi / at manncis munom*. But in light of what was so striking about the use of repetition in the preceding strophes – that words were repeated but also altered between voices – these instances of repetition present something of a contrast, since we

only see words repeated by their original speakers. We do, however, see a continuation of the pattern of repetitions disconnecting the repeated phrase somewhat from their original element and applying them to a new context. Most immediately noticeable is the fact that Skírnir's suggestive threat is first directed at Gerðr, and then at Gymir. But it is also the case that Gerðr repeats her words from 20 here to refer to a slightly different concept, while relating it to the overall nature of the exchange as she seeks to frame it. Once again she refuses Skírnir's proposition, though the negation is not as pronounced as before. Her repetition here of her words in 20 clearly echoes our first interpretation of those words, that she will not suffer compulsion "according to anyone's desire." For Gerðr, the overall nature of the proposition remains largely the same in spite of the bribes having suddenly turned into gruesome threats: her repetition of her words here indicates that she has from the beginning considered the entire prospect a form of compulsion, a subordination of her own desires to those of another.

Skírnir's extensive repetition between strophes 23 and 25 is also notable in that it is one of three instances in the text of *Skírnismál* in which the scribe of Codex Regius uses extensive abbreviation, rendering the second instance as *Sér þ. þ. m. m. er e. h. h. h.* The first instance of abbreviation was Skírnir's repetition in strophe 2 of "*oc þess at fregna, / hveim inn fróði sé / ofreiði afi*" ("and this to ask, why the clever one seems such an angry man"). The third case of abbreviation brings us to the final example of the type of repetition we have focused on in this text so far, that of strophes 39 and 41. An abbreviation here seems especially justified as this is the sole case in this poem of an entire strophe being reproduced exactly:

39/41. *Barri heitir, er við bæði vitom,*

*lundr lognfara;*

*enn eptr nætr nío þar mun Njarðar syni*

*Gerðr unna gamans.*

39/41. “Barri it is called, which we two both know,

a tranquil-travelled grove<sup>32</sup>

and after nine nights there will [to] Njarðr’s son

Gerðr grant pleasure.”

39/41. “There is a tranquil[?] grove called Barri, which we both know, and after nine nights Gerðr will grant pleasure to the son of Njarðr.”

In Codex Regius, the speaker of strophe 39 is not clearly given. Strophes 26-36 are taken up by Skírnir’s monologue, addressing Gerðr in the second person; this is followed by a response by Gerðr in 37, in turn followed by a further strophe in the voice of Skírnir in 38. Strophe 39 is followed by a brief prose interlude given in the narrative voice, and 40 is in the voice of Freyr. Based on the context, 39 is assumed to be in the voice of Gerðr, and is indeed marked as being in her voice in the notation of AM 478 I 4to (a fragmentary early

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<sup>32</sup> The meaning (and referent) of *lognfara* is unclear. See Olsen 1909 p. 30; Sahlgren, Jöran (1927-1928): *Eddica et scaldica: fornvästnordiska studier*, Lund: C.W.K. Gleerup, p. 257; Klingenberg, Heinz (1974): *Edda – Sammlung und Dichtung*, Basel: Hebling und Lichtenhahn, p. 43; Klingenberg, Heinz (1996): “*För Scírnis: Brautwerbungsfahrt eines Werbungshelfers*,” *Alvíssmál* 6 (1996), p. 52; Liberman, Anatoly (1996): Review of “Klaus von See et al.: Skírnismál: Modell eines Edda-Kommentars”, *Alvíssmál* 6 (1996), p. 118; von See et al 1997 pp. 143-145.

fourteenth-century vellum manuscript containing a partial version of *Skírnismál*). What most clearly indicates that Gerðr is the speaker of this strophe is a deictic marker in the preceding strophe:

38. *Ørindi mín*                      *vil ec ǫll vita,*  
  
   *áðr ec ríða heim heðan,*  
  
*nær þú á þingi*                      *munt inom þrosca*  
  
   *nenna Njarðar syni.*

38. “My message                      I want to entirely know,  
  
   before I ride home hither,  
  
when you to a meeting              will [with] the powerful  
  
   son of Njarðr join.”

38. “I want to know the entirety of my message before I ride home from here; when you will come to a meeting with the powerful son of Njarðr.”

It is primarily because Skírnir has inquired “when” – *nær* – Gerðr (the second person, *þú*, in 38) will come to a meeting with Freyr that we understand she is the speaker of 39, which answers this inquiry.

It may seem unremarkable that Skírnir should then choose to relay this information to Freyr in exactly the same words as he received it, but there is one aspect of this repetition that is particularly striking: the repetition of the same deictic element in different

contexts to refer to different things. Above we have seen extensive appropriation of voice, primarily Skírnir appropriating the speech of others by repeating it, but also in the case of Gerðr adding her own twist to Skírnir's words. What we have noticed most of all, however, is the way in which deictic elements tend to be the elements which vary, while other parts of the phrase stay the same. In strophes 39 and 41, the most crucial deictic element remains the same but refers to two different sets of persons, except, rather, that the two sets are not entirely different. This is the first-person dual pronoun *við*. In strophe 39, it refers to Gerðr and Skírnir, while in 41 it refers to Skírnir and Freyr. It is because one of these persons is present in both deictic fields that we must add a qualifying remark above. The deictic schema is used in two different contexts, but Skírnir remains through the turn; he is the hinge between these two contexts, much as we observed the turn between strophes 19 and 20 to hinge on the word *at*. It is this final example that gives us the key to understanding the nature of this stylistic feature; at this point we can truly discern its shape. It is true that there is repetition occurring here, but in a way that does not quite accord with the superficial concept of repetition. It is an asymmetrical repetition, an overlapping or interweaving, a textile, or perhaps a "concatenation" (that is, when we observe that in the chain the series of links must necessarily hinge around rather than discretely follow one another), a term that will take on added significance in the following chapters. One element is carried over identically while another is changed, then a further one carried over identically while a further one is changed, and so forth. And though, as we have seen, various kinds of elements including prepositions, nouns and verbs are both repeated and turned, it is precisely the deictic elements that make the structure of this figure possible.

The deictic elements facilitate the movement along the chain by their very nature as “indexical symbols” that point primarily to other symbols, to other deictic terms. Here we might consider the anaphoric nature of deictic elements: that is to say, that they tend to refer to an antecedent, either within language itself (endophorically) or outside of language but within the situational context of the linguistic event (exophorically).<sup>33</sup> Deictic elements are therefore anaphoric to the extent that they are tied to specific terms or concepts. But on the one hand, *anaphora* implies a certain direction of motion which does not seem appropriate to our concatenating figure here, where there is not so much a reaching-back or reaching-forward as there is a series of pairs of oppositions that further the text primarily in the way they overlap.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, it is not chiefly in their reference to other objects – either inside or outside the text – that the deictic elements effect this figure, but precisely in their propensity for movement. In terms of this figure, their most important operation is as Jakobson’s “shifters,” elements that direct attention to “the message” itself, or within that message. We are using the concept of movement as a broad metaphor here; the “movement” could be said to be a cognitive one. Karl Bühler, for example, refers to the thing that is moved as “the gaze:” deictic signs are “exclusively or mainly appointed to

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<sup>33</sup> On these terms see Bühler, Karl ([1934] 2011): *Theory of language: the representational function of language*, trans. Donald Fraser Goodwin in collaboration with Achim Eschbach, Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, passim, but in particular pp. 137-157 (on the general relationship between the concepts of deixis and anaphora); Schiffrin, D. (1990): “Between text and context: deixis, anaphora, and the meaning of *then*”, *Text* 10 (1990), pp. 245-270; Cornish, Francis (1996): “‘Antecedentless’ anaphors: deixis, anaphora, or what? Some evidence from English and French”, *Journal of Linguistics*, 1996, Vol. 32(1), pp. 19-41; Nunberg, Geoffrey (1993): “Indexicality and deixis”, *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 1993, Vol. 16(1), pp. 1-43.

<sup>34</sup> Here I am referring to the literal meanings of *anaphora* and *cataphora*; compare Bühler (1934) 2011 p. 138: “Seen from a psychological perspective every anaphoric use of deictic words presupposes one thing: that the sender and the receiver *have the flow of speech in front of them* and can reach ahead and back [in the original German, *vorgreifen* and *zurückgreifen*] to its parts”, emphasis original.



function as signposts for the gaze”.<sup>35</sup> So we arrive at a point where we can characterise this figure: as a concatenation of repeated language and deictic (cognitive) movement. It is movement rather than reference that characterizes the deictic framework of *Skírnismál*; if we do choose to dwell on the referential aspect of this framework, to what does it refer? We know that the answer is that it refers to nothing at all. This is the very absence we discussed above, and it is around that absence that this chain is wound.

### 3.2.2 Repetition and Voice in *Skírnismál*: “þíns eða míns munar?”

We have now established the specific characteristics of the figure of dialogic repetition in *Skírnismál*. However, we previously noted that there is additionally one section which is entirely a monologue. One might assume that any pattern of repetition contained in this section (strophes 26-36) would be of a different nature from that which we have examined so far, seeing as the latter depends so crucially on the deictic framework of the dialogue. This is certainly the case, but there is one important moment in this section – which I have above referred to as the “climax” of the poem, and which in light of the stylistic framework we are examining here might be seen also as the “key” moment – where a repetition occurs that is both different from and related to those we have seen in the more dialogic sections. First of all, it should be noted that although these ten strophes may be considered a monologue to the extent that they are all given in the voice of Skírnir and none of his speech seems meant to prompt any conversational response from Gerðr, the

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<sup>35</sup> Bühler (1934) 2011 p. 139.

dialogic frame is nonetheless retained throughout the section. All but two strophes of this section contain a second-person pronoun referring to Gerðr. It is not the case that she is not included in the speech; on the contrary, her participation is constantly reinforced by the repetition of *þú*, *þér* and *þik*. Rather, she is simply not given a chance to speak herself. Of the two strophes in which no second person is given, 32 is something of an aside in which Skírnir recounts in the past tense an action (of an obscure, apparently magical nature)<sup>36</sup> he has undertaken in the past, while 34 presents a self-contained apostrophic interlude into a separate deictic frame in which Skírnir addresses the giants and gods and Gerðr herself is referred to in the third person; this latter deictic frame must be seen as to some extent imagined by Skírnir, a concept we will consider in more detail later in this chapter. Other than these two strophes, it is important to the nature of Skírnir's threats that he constantly reinforce Gerðr's proximal position as the addressee. Much of this threat, however, operates in another imagined deictic frame, in which the threatened actions take place in the future and in an imagined location. Unlike, for example, Gunnarr's conditional prophecy in *Atlakviða*, however, there is no condition set on these events, no *ef*; they are simply narrated as if they will certainly take place, and this brings the severity of the threat closer to Gerðr herself.

Throughout his monologue, Skírnir makes use of short repetitive phrases:

28:2-3. *á þic Hrímnir hari, / á þic hotvetna stari!*

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<sup>36</sup> van Hamel, A.G. (1932): "Gambanteinn", *Neophilologus* 17, pp. 136-143; de Vries, Jan (1962): *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Leiden: Brill.

“at you Hrímnir gaze, / at you everyone stare!”

“May Hrímnir gaze at you, may everyone stare at you!”

29:1-2. *Tópi oc ópi, / tíqsull oc ópoli,*

“Frenzy and shrieking, / frustration and longing,”<sup>37</sup>

30:6-7. *kranga kosta laus / kranga kosta vön;*

“crawl choiceless / crawl lacking choice;”

31:4-5. *þitt geð gríði, / þic morn morni!*

“your mind seize, / disease consume you!”<sup>38</sup>

“May your mind be seized, may disease consume you!”

32:3-4. *gambantein at geta, / gambantein ec gat.*

magic wand to obtain, / magic wand I obtained.<sup>39</sup>

“to obtain the magic wand; I obtained the magic wand.”

33:1-2. *Reiðr er þér Óðinn, / reiðr er þér ásabragr*

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<sup>37</sup> The exact meaning of this particularly obscure line must remain open to speculation. On the hapax legomena *tópi*, *ópi*, and *tíqsull* see Finnur Jónsson 1931; de Vries 1962; Noreen, Adolf (1897): *Svenska etymologier*, Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, p. 73; Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon (1989): *Íslensk orðsifjabók*, Reykjavík: Orðabók Háskólans.

<sup>38</sup> On the interpretation of the obscure *morn morni*, see Niedner 1886 p. 146; Reichardt, Konstantin (1939): “Die Liebesbeschwörung in Fyr Skírnis”, *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 1 October 1939, Vol. 38(4), p. 490; Olsen, Magnus (1964): *Edda- og skaldekvad: Forarbeider til kommentar*, vol. VII, Oslo: Kommisjon hos H. Aschehoug, p.38f; Harris, Joseph (1975): “Cursing with the thistle: ‘Skírnismál’ 31, 6-8, and OE Metrical Charm 9, 16-17”, *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 1 January 1975, Vol. 76(1), p. 33; von See et al 1997 pp. 121-122; Schorn 2016b pp. 272-273.

<sup>39</sup> On the word *gambanteinn* see de Vries 1962; Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon 1989; Sturtevant, A.M. (1956): “Three Old Norse Words: Gamban, Ratatoskr and Gymir”, *Scandinavian Studies* 28 (1956), pp. 109-111.

“Angry is of-you Óðinn, / angry is of-you the god chief”

“Óðinn is angry with you, the chief of the gods is angry with you”

34:1-2. *Heyri iǫtnar, / heyri hrímþursar,*

“Hear giants, / hear frost-giants,”

“May giants hear, may frost-giants hear,”

34:5-6. *hvé ec fyrirbýð, / hvé ec fyrirbanna*

“how I forbid, / how I prohibit”

34:7-8. *manna glaum mani, / manna nyt mani.*

“men’s enjoyment [to] the girl, / men’s use [to] the girl.”

“the enjoyment of men to the girl, the use of men to the girl.”

35:9-10. *mær, af þínom munom, / mær, at mínom munom.*

“girl, by your desires, / girl, according to my desires.”

36:5-6. *svá ec þat af rist, / sem ec þat á reist,*

“so I that off carve, / as I that on carved.”

“Thus I carve off, just as I carved on.”

Skírnir’s threat is of an incantatory nature, and has been interpreted by some as the remnant, in one form or another, of a genuine curse: that is to say, presumably, one that might have been known and used in general and believed to be materially effective by its

users.<sup>40</sup> The case for a relationship between this section of *Skírnismál* and actually used magic is significantly strengthened by the existence of a metrical runic stick carving (NB 257 M) containing a similar formula to the one found in strophe 36, which does indeed appear to refer to the carving of runic lettering.<sup>41</sup> In light of the frequency of repetitive formulae in this section, and in particular of the uniformly anaphoric form of repetition seen in all the examples we have cited above except 29:1-2 and the cataphoric 36:5-6, one might expect to find some manner of relationship between this magical nature and the style of (perhaps incantatory or chant-like) repetition used, though with insufficient contextual knowledge this is difficult to demonstrate conclusively. Konstantin Reichardt in particular points to the stylistic peculiarity of this section in the context of the rest of the text to suggest that the latter was created as a frame for the former.<sup>42</sup> The possibility of an origin in magical wisdom for this section suggests the tempting notion that its stylistic structure may have a technical (magical) purpose rather than (or in addition to) an artistic one; however, lacking sufficient contextual evidence to productively compare with our present text, any analysis of such a function must remain largely speculative. For this reason, the technically magical aspect of this section will not be our focus here, but it is fruitful to suggest it nonetheless. Though it will remain outside the scope of our present analysis, it would seem reasonable to suggest a connection between magic – especially of a psychic nature – and some of the conclusions

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<sup>40</sup> Berendsohn, Walter (1934): “Zauberunterweisung in der Edda”, *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 50 (1934), pp. 250-259; Reichardt 1939; Steinsland 1991; Motz 1996; Mitchell, Stephen (2011): *Witchcraft and magic in the Nordic Middle Ages*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press; Harris (1975) also compares strophe 31 in particular to an Anglo-Saxon metrical charm, with some reference to a runic inscription (though not the same inscription as referred to below).

<sup>41</sup> Liestøl, Aslak (1064): “Runer frå Bryggen”, *Viking* 27 (1964), pp. 41-50.

<sup>42</sup> Reichardt 1939 pp. 484-485.

we are beginning to draw from the artistic aspect of *Skírnismál*, dealing as it does with a certain psychic ambiguity, as we are about to find.

Among this sequence of repetitions we are, in light of what we have learned in 3.1.1 above, particularly struck by the penultimate formula of 35:9-10. We recognise these as Gerðr's words being echoed here. However, it should first of all be noted that this formula repeats a half-line from 26:3: simply "*mær, at mínom munom*". Though strophes 26 and 35 do not follow the overall structure of repetition we observed in the above section, they clearly refer to and indeed repeat elements that were repeated within it. Not only is Skírnir invoking the concept of *munr* in reference to Gerðr's own use of the word, but in repeating the preposition *at* he also refers to her turning of the meaning of that word, as well as making it clear that he is referring to the specific sense of *munr* she was herself referring to in 22 and 24. This is another repetition with a difference, on a seemingly much smaller scale than those we have examined above; however, we are starting to get an impression of its considerable significance in this text. What is different between Skírnir's use of this line and Gerðr's is the pronoun involved: *mín* ("mine", here a possessive adjective) rather than *mannzkis* ("nobody's"). The thematic continuity is clear enough: Skírnir means for the same concept to be understood, but also that we now understand that the power of directing desires is his. This comes at the very beginning of his monologue, and we should consider the context of the first half of strophe 26:

26. *Tamsvendi ec þic drep, enn ec þic temia mun,*

*mær, at mínom munom;*

26. “[With a] taming-wand I strike you, and I will tame you,  
girl, according-to my desires;”

26. “I strike you with a taming-wand, and I will tame you, girl, according to my  
desires.”

Here I have translated *at* as “according to” in the interests of showing the level of repetition between this strophe and 22 and 24; and yet we can also see that the transitive verb *temia* (“tame”) provides yet another slight turn on the sense of *at*. It would be tempting to translate this as “tame you, / girl, to my desires”, at the cost of losing the full sense of repetition. Just as Gerðr did in her play on *at*, Skírnir has changed the context in which these words have their sense, and thereby provided his own turn on their sense: by *at* here we understand a sense of subordination and control.

We see, therefore, that the concept of *munr* has been incorporated and redirected in Skírnir’s speech. What is most remarkable here, however, is the manner in which it is repeated as part of one of the anaphoric formulae of the monologue section. Here Skírnir repeats himself, once again; in fact, he partially repeats himself twice, a triple repetition. But as with the other anaphoric formulae in this section, we find once again an asymmetrical repetition in which at least one element has changed. Here, as before, the change is primarily in the pronoun – the sense of the turn in 35:9-10 hinges on deictic forces:

36:4-10. *þar þér vílmegir á viðar rótom*

*geita hland gefi!*

*Æðri dryccio*                      *fá þú aldregi,*

*mær, af þínom munom,*

*mær, at mínom munom.*

36:4-10. "There to-you wretches on tree's roots

goats' piss give!

A better drink                      you receive never,

girl, of your desires,

girl, by my desires."

36:4-10. "May wretches there on the roots of the tree give you goat's piss! A better drink you'll never get, girl, of your desires, girl, by my desires."

The immediate thematic context serves to clearly illustrate the different use to which the concept of *munr* is being put: though it also applies in a general sense, its specific sense is simply that Gerðr will never be able to desire a better drink than goat's urine. Thus what I argue here to be the key to the entire text comes in conjunction with one of the poem's most physically aversive moments, forming both the centre of its stylistic development and the climax of its grotesque content.



Complicating our interpretation of the formula in strophe 36 is the other changed element, the preposition. Above we have seen how much has hinged on the repetition in different contexts of the word *at*, as well as how much a change in preposition can affect such an asymmetrical repetition. Here, however, the change in sense that these two prepositions signify is unclear: partly due to the wide variety of possible meanings that Old Norse prepositions tend to have, and partly due to the characteristically Eddic compactness of the expression of this phrase. Some translators have interpreted *at* and *af* as having essentially the same meaning,<sup>43</sup> or have simply emended the difference into a repeated *at* in both half-lines.<sup>44</sup> Other scholars have read a far more divergent change of meaning into *af*; Finnur Jónsson and Hugo Gering both interpret *af þínom munom* as essentially “against” or “in spite of your desires,” rendering a formula of a more clearly oppositional character.<sup>45</sup> This makes for a satisfyingly clear-cut interpretation, and yet considering both the poem’s themes and everything we have so far discovered in its stylistic structure, it is more likely that something subtler than that is happening here. First of all, in a purely thematic sense, we know from the preceding portions of the monologue that Gerðr is most certainly not being threatened with something straightforwardly against her desires; she is being threatened with magically induced desiring for things she would otherwise find extremely undesirable. She is threatened with the prospect of desiring repulsive sexual partners, of desiring repulsive activities such as drinking goat’s urine, and of being filled with unbearable

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<sup>43</sup> Olsen 1964 p. 44; Larrington 2014 p. 63.

<sup>44</sup> Dronke 1997 p. 384.

<sup>45</sup> Finnur Jónsson 1931 entries for both *af* and *munr*; Gering, Hugo (1903): *Vollständiges Wörterbuch zu den Liedern der Edda*, Halle: Niemeyer, entry for *af*.

and unfulfillable lust, a state which shares many aspects with the general concept in Old Norse literature of a woman being *ǫrg*.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, what we are being asked to imagine is not a simple antagonism, but a subordination or redirection: as we noted above, Skírnir says that he will “tame” Gerðr to “his desires.” Therefore, a more subtle interpretation of the difference between these two prepositions is necessary. Von See et al note the precedent of other formulations involving *af* together with a state of mind, such as *af ǫllom hug* (“wholeheartedly,” *brot of Sigurðarkviðo* 10:4, *Grípisspá* 47:6) and *af heilom hug* (“sincerely,” *Reginismál*),<sup>47</sup> which in this case would give 36:9 the sense of “having your desires.” This reflects the psychic relationship being proposed between Skírnir and Gerðr more clearly: she has no agency in having these desires, whereas Skírnir is the one whose desire determines everything, the only one who may act with agency.

If by any chance we are still sceptical of the deliberate continuity between these repetitions of *munr*, the text puts our doubts to rest with a final appearance toward the end:

40. *Segðu mér þat, Scírnir, áðr þú verpir sǫðli af mar*

*oc þú stígir feti framarr:*

*hvat þú árnaðir í iǫtunheima*

*þíns eða míns munar?*

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<sup>46</sup> Meulengracht Sørensen 1983 p. 22: “When the feminine form *ǫrg*, from *argr*, is used of a woman it does not mean that she is disposed towards having sexual relations with men in the normal way, but that she is lewd, perverse, or lustful in a broader sense.”

<sup>47</sup> von See et al 1997 p. 133.

40. “Tell me that, Skírnir, before you throw saddle from horse,

And you step a foot forward:

what you accomplished in Jötunheimr

[of] yours or mine desire?”

40. “Tell me, Skírnir, before you even take your saddle from your horse and take one step forward: what of your desires or mine you accomplished in Jötunheimr?”

Once again we are faced with considerable ambiguity. In this case, it is not immediately clear to what extent this strophe is composed of a single sentence or multiple independent phrases; it has been translated in both ways.<sup>48</sup> The ambiguity largely resides in the fact that, as a weak verb, the ending *-ðir* in *árnaðir* may be either indicative or subjunctive in the second-person singular past tense.<sup>49</sup> The difference between these two possibilities of “*Segðu mér ... hvat þú árnaðir*” could be rendered as “tell me ... what you achieved” (subjunctive) and “tell me: ... what [did] you achieve ...?” In the former case we interpret the pronoun *hvat* as relative, in the latter interrogative. This in turn affects how we interpret *munar*, the genitive ending of which indicates that it must necessarily refer to *hvat*; because of this, even if we interpret *hvat* in its interrogative form as the beginning of a question, it still retains a relative function in being the referent of *munar*: both “what did you achieve?” and “what [of] yours or my desires did you achieve?” In this case, the genitive pronouns *þín*

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<sup>48</sup> For example, von See et al interpret the strophe as being composed of a sentence in lines 1-3 followed by a grammatically separate question in 4-6 (1997 p. 146), as does Larrington (Larrington 2014 p. 64), while Dronke translates 4-6 in a manner that is grammatically dependent on the preceding lines (Dronke 1997 p. 385).

<sup>49</sup> On this type of verb, Heusler 1950 pp. 93-97; Noreen 1923 pp. 341-350.

and *mín* form possessive adjectives complementing *munar*. In addition to being equally subordinated to the noun they complement, *munr*, these two deictic adjectives are further equated by the conjunction *eða*. Here the conscious relation or equation between the second person and first person by the voice of Freyr – as well as the extension of the deictic pronoun into the realm of the (nonetheless deictic) adjective – highlights the deictic playfulness we have observed throughout *Skírnismál*. It appears as a sly half-admission that the poem has something up its sleeve, and perhaps even a recognition on the part of Freyr of Skírnir’s particular psychic powers, his ability to manipulate both the speech and the desires of others. Here we must note that this is in fact not the first time that Freyr has used the word *munr*, and indeed that his first use of it forms a part of this chain of repetition:

4:4-6. *þvíat álfrǫðull            lýsir um alla daga,*

*oc þeygi at mínom munom.*

4:4-6. “because elf-ray            shines throughout all days,

And yet-not to my desires.”

4:4-6. “because the elf-ray [the sun] shines throughout the days, but not according to my desires.”

Here Freyr is describing his own unbearable longing, his longing for the woman he viewed from afar but does not know how to obtain. The conscious repetition and deliberate recontextualisation of this phrase throughout the poem should by now be apparent. It is through the asymmetrical repetition of dialogue that we understand the overall nature of

repetition and deixis in *Skírnismál*, and once we have understood the way in which the particular *munr*-repetitions in the monologue implicate themselves in the wider structure of repetition, then we can see in its fullness the pervasive nature of this repetition. Viewing this structure as a whole, we are able to make out the sense of *munr* that is traced throughout this text. Freyr, in the beginning, is unable to effect his desires in the world, which carries on in its own impersonal way regardless of them. Gerðr seeks to resist being subordinated by the desires of others by denying and negating them. But Skírnir is able to manipulate all desires, to subordinate and confuse desires, to tie them together. A sense of desire as “flow,” related to the “flow” of the poem’s stylistic structure, begins to develop in here, and this is an idea we shall return to below, especially in section 4.4.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Section 4.4, pp. 198-213 of this thesis.

#### 4. Repetition of the Word: Metaphoric and Cryptophoric Movements

So far we have examined figures of repetition in terms of syntax and in terms of the deictic positioning of repeated phrases. An examination of the repetition of individual words must necessarily bring up questions of metaphor and metonymy. The link between metaphor and repetition is, however, not necessarily obvious; it has to do with words and concepts, or words and semantic meaning. In this chapter we will first of all map a specialised understanding of the concept of metaphor in terms of the word and semantics, which requires a delving into the considerable body of thought on the subject. Our understanding of a link between metaphor and repetition comes primarily in the form of a particular figure in Eddic poetry, a figure of the repetition of individual words, which necessarily touches on concepts of metaphor; the word is repeated, but the meaning does not necessarily stay the same. We will see that these movements of words through repetition function in similar ways both within a particular text and across chains of Eddic texts. Moreover, as we examine the repetition of words, a clear conceptual relation to other figures of repetition we have examined in the previous chapters begins to come to light. It is primarily through the analysis itself that we will arrive at this connection; however, due to the complexity of this subject, considerable attention must first be paid to theories of metaphor and their histories.

#### 4.1 Theories of Metaphor: Conceptual Metaphor, Semantics, and the Word

Scholarly inquiry into the nature of metaphor in Old Norse poetry has largely focused on that quintessentially skaldic figure, the kenning.<sup>1</sup> This comes as little surprise given the striking nature of the figure and its ubiquity in skaldic verse: that “*barbarische Stilfigur*” (“barbaric stylistic figure”)<sup>2</sup> so alien to any Aristotelian understanding of the nature and function of poetics.<sup>3</sup> The kenning reaches out and grabs one; it is at once both obviously ornamental, *poetic* in a superficial sense (in Heusler’s word, “*farbgebend*”<sup>4</sup>), and at the same time jarringly archaic – and often bizarre – to an ear attuned to a more modern poetic tone. Heusler acknowledges that the kenning is a metaphor, but in a specialized sense: it is a “*Metapher mit Ablenkung*”, with a *deviation*<sup>5</sup> (if you will, a *trope*). Bergsveinn

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<sup>1</sup> Note, however, that the kenning is by no means the sole preserve of skaldic verse; in addition to appearing with relative rarity in Eddic verse, kennings feature heavily in Anglo-Saxon poetry. Consider, for example, Thomas Gardner’s framing of the concept in the title of his article on the subject (Gardner, Thomas (1969): “The Old English Kenning: A Characteristic Feature of Germanic Poetical Diction?” *Modern Philology*, 1 November 1969, Vol. 67(2), pp. 109-117). For Gardner, although he devotes considerable discussion in this article to skaldic verse, the kenning seems nonetheless to be a primarily Anglo-Saxon figure by default; in response to his title’s question, Gardner ultimately concludes that the kenning is not “a characteristic feature of Germanic diction” (Gardner 1969 p. 110). Wolfgang Krause had previously picked up the concept of the kenning’s Germanicness and gone beyond it, arguing for an influence from figures in Irish verse (Krause, Wolfgang (1930): “Die Kenning als typische Stilfigur der germanischen und keltischen Dichtersprache”, *Schriften der Königsberger Gelehrten Gesellschaft*, 7:1 (1930), pp. 1–33). On the kenning in general, see also Clunies Ross 2005 pp. 108-110, 114-115, 236-246; Clunies Ross, Margaret (1987): *Skáldskaparmál: Snorri Sturluson’s Ars Poetica and Medieval Theories of Language*, the Viking Collection 4, Odense: Odense University Press; Amory, Frederic (1988): “Kennings, Referentiality, and Metaphors”, *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 103 (1988), pp. 87-101; Amory, Frederic (1997): “On the Linguistic Understanding of Kennings”, *NOWELE. North-Western European Language Evolution, Volume 31-32, Issue 1*, (1997) pp. 1–11 ; Bergsveinn Birgisson 2008; Marold, Edith (2011): *Kenningkunst: ein Beitrag zu einer Poetik der Skaldendichtung*, Berlin: De Gruyter Reprint 2010 (2011); Spamer, James Blakeman (1977): *The Kenning and the Kend Heiti: A Contrastive Study of Periphrasis in two Germanic Traditions*, PhD Thesis, Brown University; Lindow, John (1974): “Riddles, Kennings, and the Complexity of Skaldic Poetry”, *Scandinavian Studies*, 1 July 1975, Vol. 47(3), pp. 311-327, pp.311-327; Heusler 1943; Meissner, Rudolf (1921): *Die Kenningar der Skalden: ein Beitrag zur skaldischen Poetik*, Bonn and Leipzig: K. Schroeder; Schulte 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Krause 1930 p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> On the non-mimetic quality of the kenning, see Bergsveinn Birgisson 2008; Bergsveinn Birgisson 2012; Lie, Hallvard (1957): “*Natur*” og “*unatur*” i skaldekunsten, Oslo: Aschehoug.

<sup>4</sup> Heusler 1943 p. 137.

<sup>5</sup> Heusler 1943 p. 137.

Birgisson in particular juxtaposes the nature of the kenning as a metaphor with a proposed concept of an ideal metaphor whose origin lies in “classical aesthetics”.<sup>6</sup> Bergsveinn identifies an “aesthetics of harmony and *claritas* ubiquitous in the Middle Ages”,<sup>7</sup> particularly associated with the thought of Aristotle. Aristotle is an appropriate starting point for our discussion of metaphor, since “[i]t is he who actually defined metaphor for the entire subsequent history of Western thought”.<sup>8</sup> Aristotle both initiates Western writing on metaphor and crystallizes a concept of metaphor which is fully formed enough for scholars such as Bergsveinn to hold up as the normal or default understanding of metaphor. Bergsveinn shows that a program of metaphorsing that values clarity and mimesis or likeness is fundamentally at odds with that which characterizes kenning-production, and for him the difference is cultural, though he does acknowledge an abstract (rather than genetic) relationship between the aesthetic of the kenning and the aesthetics of Surrealist poetry.<sup>9</sup> Bergsveinn’s point is aimed primarily at the theories of conceptual metaphor<sup>10</sup> and conceptual blending,<sup>11</sup> the former of which we shall address shortly. In the context of Bergsveinn’s argument, what is important to point out about these theories, which stress the fundamental and ubiquitous nature of metaphorical thinking, is that they presuppose (in a manner analogous to Jakobson’s “message” discussed previously) clarity or economy

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<sup>6</sup> Bergsveinn Birgisson 2012 p. 285.

<sup>7</sup> Bergsveinn Birgisson 2012 p. 284.

<sup>8</sup> Ricœur, Paul ([1975] 2003): *The Rule of Metaphor: The creation of meaning in language*, trans. Robert Czerny with Kathleen McLaughlin and John Costello, London and New York: Routledge, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Bergsveinn Birgisson 2012 p. 284.

<sup>10</sup> As delineated first and foremost in Lakoff & Johnson 1980; expanded upon in Lakoff, George & Mark Johnson (1999): *Philosophy in the flesh: the embodied mind and its challenge to Western thought*, New York: Basic Books.

<sup>11</sup> Fauconnier, Gilles & Mark Turner (2002): *The way we think: Conceptual blending and the mind's hidden complexities*, New York: Basic Books.



of expression as a default principle in making metaphors.<sup>12</sup> Aristotle himself is in fact somewhat ambiguous – in *Poetics*, at least – on the subject of clarity in metaphor. Though in *Rhetoric* Aristotle claims that “it is metaphor above all that gives perspicuity”,<sup>13</sup> he also acknowledges that it must have “unfamiliarity”, while in *Poetics* he states that “[t]he merit of diction is to be clear and not commonplace.”<sup>14</sup> As a trope, poetical or rhetorical, Aristotle acknowledges that a certain strangeness must obtain in metaphor, or else it simply would not be detectable at all. And yet, at the same time metaphor for Aristotle has to do with resemblance: “the right use of metaphor means an eye for resemblances.”<sup>15</sup>

In fact, the concept of metaphor as more than a purely ornamental or rhetorical device is by now hardly controversial. A general characteristic of theories of metaphor belonging to the cognitive-linguistic school of thought is that, in contrast to Aristotle, they focus not primarily on the manifestation of metaphor in particular tropes of rhetoric or poetry, of the deliberate or artistic arrangement of language, but on metaphors whose use is common and general enough in everyday speech that their existence as metaphor might well go undetected. To illustrate this notion one can do no better than to quote the opening paragraph of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s seminal work on the subject, *Metaphors We Live By*:

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<sup>12</sup> Fauconnier & Turner 2002 pp. 329, 345.

<sup>13</sup> Freese, J. H. trans. (1926): Aristotle, *Art of Rhetoric*, Loeb Classical Library 193, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1405a.

<sup>14</sup> Halliwell, Stephen, W. Hamilton Fyfe, Doreen C. Innes, W. Rhys Roberts trans. (1995): Aristotle, Longinus, Demetrius. *Aristotle: Poetics. Longinus: On the Sublime. Demetrius: On Style*, Loeb Classical Library 19, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1458a.

<sup>15</sup> Halliwell et al 1995 1459a.

Metaphor is for most people a device of the poetic imagination and the rhetorical flourish – a matter of extraordinary rather than ordinary language. Moreover, metaphor is typically viewed as characteristic of language alone, a matter of words rather than thought or action. For this reason, most people think they can get along perfectly well without metaphor. We have found, on the contrary, that metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature.<sup>16</sup>

Aside from emphasizing the generality and ordinariness of the figures they see as their proper object of study – a notion of linguistics we will return to in the discussion of etymology below – a crucial point is made here of the nature of metaphor, and that is its fundamentally *cognitive* operation. This may seem obvious for the general conceptual schemata Lakoff and Johnson examine – starting with “ARGUMENT IS WAR”<sup>17</sup> – but its importance should be neither underestimated nor understated. Lakoff and Johnson repeatedly eschew the notion that metaphor belongs to what they call “mere language”,<sup>18</sup> and although they do not give a specific definition of the relationship between language and cognition, for them metaphor is really anterior to language, stemming from the realm of pure thought. It is for this reason that it is “conceptual”; it has to do with the nature or movement of concepts. This relation between the concept, the word, and metaphor is

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<sup>16</sup>Lakoff & Johnson 1980 p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> Starting with Lakoff & Johnson 1980 and continuing into virtually all writing that refers to the conceptual metaphor, up to and including Bergsveinn’s article, it is the common practice to capitalise the metaphorical proposition, though I have nowhere seen the meaning of this practice defined in so many words.

<sup>18</sup> Lakoff & Johnson 1980 p. 159.

central to what we will be examining here. However, there is an important difference of focus between the aims of Lakoff and Johnson and our own. For cognitivists such as Lakoff and Johnson, it is the “conventional” rather than the “unconventional”<sup>19</sup> – that is, artistic – use of language that is their proper object of study. Our object here is practically the opposite: we are considering what is particular to Eddic texts, even what is particular to individual Eddic texts, and we will see that the figures used stretch our understanding of the concept of metaphor to its limit.

Traveling in a somewhat parallel vein to Lakoff and Johnson is the earlier work of Paul Ricœur on metaphor in *The Rule of Metaphor*, though this work operates with a vastly different style and reaches distinct, if related, conclusions.<sup>20</sup> In contrast to Lakoff and Johnson’s writing, which tends to argue directly from its own verbal logic in a pointedly commonsensical style, Ricœur works through the then-already enormous body of writing on the subject of metaphor, starting with Aristotle. Ricœur’s work is complex and moves through several stages, arriving finally at conclusions that have to do with ontology. This is not dissimilar from Lakoff and Johnson’s use of their concept of metaphor to come to a conclusion that supports an ontological point of view they term “experientialism,”<sup>21</sup> but unlike them, Ricœur’s conclusion is largely aimed at philosophical discourse and makes extensive reference to such.<sup>22</sup> In the course of *The Rule of Metaphor*, Ricœur examines a concept – which he sees as the existing, default position of Western thought on metaphor –

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<sup>19</sup> To use their own words, Lakoff & Johnson 1980 p. 172.

<sup>20</sup> Ricœur (1975) 2003.

<sup>21</sup> Lakoff & Johnson 1980 pp. 226-228.

<sup>22</sup> Ricœur (1975) 2003 pp. 303-371.

that metaphor is primarily the domain of the individual word, and in particular, of the noun. Indeed, Aristotle designates metaphor specifically as a property of the noun, though he then immediately discusses metaphor as a movement between genus and species, seeming to acknowledge a purely abstract notion of the metaphor.<sup>23</sup> Ricœur moves beyond this simplistic notion of metaphor as a property of the noun by advancing from the relationship between metaphor and the semantics of the word to the relationship between metaphor and the semantics of the sentence.<sup>24</sup> He does not, however, completely do away with the word; instead, “the word remains the carrier of the effect of metaphorical meaning”, “metaphor, which is produced at the level of the statement as a whole, ‘focuses’ on the word.”<sup>25</sup> The move toward a liberation of metaphor from the word would certainly seem to be in accord with the attitude of Lakoff and Johnson, for whom metaphor need not be linguistic at all.<sup>26</sup> However, Ricœur’s nuanced notion of the metaphor as applying to the realm of the sentence or of discourse but still “focusing” on the word is what is particularly relevant to our work here. In writing on poetry we will naturally be focusing on words, but we will also see that the movement of metaphor is autonomous in a somewhat ghostly way.

As regards the relation between word and metaphor, Ricœur’s reading of Aristotle produces the concept of the “*epiphora* of the name,”<sup>27</sup> that is the noun, the *ὄνομα*.<sup>28</sup> This *epiphora* is “a sort of displacement, a movement ‘from ... to ...’”<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, “for

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<sup>23</sup> Halliwell et al 1995 1457b.

<sup>24</sup> Ricœur (1975) 2003 pp. 74-104.

<sup>25</sup> Ricœur (1975) 2003 p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> Though it should be noted that at the same time Lakoff and Johnson seek to avoid abstraction, and so all their examples of metaphor remain nonetheless linguistic.

<sup>27</sup> Ricœur (1975) 2003 pp. 13-26, italics original.

<sup>28</sup> Here Ricœur is referring to Aristotle’s terms in *Poetics*, Halliwell et al 1995 1457b.

<sup>29</sup> Ricœur (1975) 2003 p. 17.

Aristotle the word *metaphor* applies to every transposition of terms.”<sup>30</sup> It is in this “movement,” this *epiphora* that we should understand what above I have called the “autonomy” of metaphor. Though in our examples we will see that, as Ricœur points out (and Lakoff and Johnson suggest in a rather different sense), the metaphor must manifest through the word, its effect is felt in larger units of language – the sentence and discourse – and it must therefore be understood as operating to some extent behind or in between words. One might note that these spatial metaphors bear a similarity to those used to understand poetic figures in Eddic poetry in the above analyses. “*Epiphora*”, says Ricœur, referring in a later section to his earlier analysis of Aristotle, “spatializes in many ways: it is a transfer of meaning ‘from (*apo*) ... to (*epi*)’; it runs alongside (*para*) standard usage; it is a replacement (*anti*, in place of).”<sup>31</sup> This metaphor of “movement” will inform the following examination of Eddic metaphor, and provide a link to the spatiality of repetition we have suggested previously.

If metaphor is not necessarily a property of the word as such, could it be said more precisely that it is a property of meaning? For Geoffrey Leech, writing primarily on semantics in general, metaphor is specifically “one type of semantic transfer”: note, again, the importance of the idea of movement in thinking about metaphor.<sup>32</sup> Such transfer is not necessarily metaphorical for Leech, however.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, he repeats the distinction between, now in his words, “everyday” and “poetic” uses of metaphor: in the “everyday”

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<sup>30</sup> Ricœur (1975) 2003 p. 17, italics original.

<sup>31</sup> Ricœur (1975) 2003 p. 168, italics original.

<sup>32</sup> Leech, Geoffrey (1981): *Semantics: the study of meaning*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, p. 217.

<sup>33</sup> Leech 1981 pp.215-219.

usage, “a doughnut of mud remains solidly and palpably a piece of mud, not a mysterious fusion of ‘doughnutness’ and ‘muddiness’ of the kind that ... characterizes poetic language.”<sup>34</sup> Leech’s notion of “conceptual fusion”<sup>35</sup> in poetry prefigures the “conceptual blending” theory of Fauconnier and Turner as used by Bergsveinn: note that Leech gives as an example of this concept the Anglo-Saxon kenning *mere-hengest* (“sea-steed,” of a ship).<sup>36</sup> For Leech, this fusion amounts to “breaking through the conceptual bonds with which language constrains us”;<sup>37</sup> metaphor has a “power of realigning conceptual boundaries”, and its power is “beyond language”.<sup>38</sup> In a more general sense, John Lyons speaks of metaphor as a semantic extension beyond a word’s “central meaning”,<sup>39</sup> or more particularly in regard to the semantic concept he is discussing, “from an original highly specific sense to a subsequent more general meaning.”<sup>40</sup> Lyons does not suggest that this is the general trajectory of semantic meaning, but the notion of a word having a “central meaning” is a crucial concept in this semantic understanding of metaphor: in order for it to be a deviating movement, there must be an original position to move away from, to deviate from. It has to do with what he has termed, in yet another spatial metaphor, the “semantic field”.<sup>41</sup>

In relation to the concept of the “semantic field,” we should note the role of etymology in this discussion. In giving order to the meanings of words, we run the risk of

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<sup>34</sup> Leech 1981 p. 217.

<sup>35</sup> Leech 1981 pp. 37-39.

<sup>36</sup> Leech 1981 p. 37.

<sup>37</sup> Leech 1981 p. 37.

<sup>38</sup> Leech 1981 p. 38.

<sup>39</sup> Lyons, John (1977): *Semantics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 263.

<sup>40</sup> Lyons 1977 p. 264.

<sup>41</sup> Lyons 1977 pp. 230-269.

hierarchising those meanings, perhaps in a potentially unhelpful way: what is known as the “etymological fallacy.” When building an argument it is tempting to appeal to a sense of a word which is in some way more original than others, which has a genetic precedence over others.<sup>42</sup> In the case of a historical language like Old Norse this would present significant problems, since it is difficult to tell exactly how the meaning of a word has shifted relative to historical time, or what meaning would have been considered precedent by users of this language at the time of the writing of the text. When one factors in the murky question of Eddic origins, moreover, this problem becomes ever more complex. Therefore, without getting lost in the complexities of the etymological question, we should stress that what we are appealing to in the shifts or transpositions of meaning we are examining below is not so much the extensibility of semantic meaning in relation to a “central” meaning, but rather that extensibility itself. It is not even so much a question of “meaning” as such, but rather of “movement,” as we shall see shortly especially in the case of a line of association stretching across multiple Eddic texts, and then in a return to the repetitions in the structure of *Skírnismál*.

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<sup>42</sup> I seek as much as possible to remain agnostic about such diachronic relations, but consider the below examination of the various senses of *munr*: it would be tempting, given the etymological relationship between *munr* and the Anglo-Saxon (*ge*)*mynd* and ultimately the modern English word “mind,” to consider some sense along the lines of “the mind” as being the primary sense of the word. However, in the discussion of the word’s semantic field that follows, we will see that a hierarchy of meanings is of little importance or even use; it is rather the conceptual links that connect the different senses, seen from a point of view that has no fixed relation to diachronic history, that are important for us.

#### 4.2 Metaphoric Expression in Eddic Poetry: a Figure in *Guðrúnarhvöt*

Having begun to establish a nuanced view of metaphor, then, we should further establish the particular style of metaphor that obtains in Eddic poetry. We have brought up some thought on the kenning as metaphor, with the suggestion that this is perhaps what one might by default think of when given the subject of metaphor in Old Norse poetry. The kenning, we have noted, is striking; metaphor in Eddic poetry, we will see, is of a considerably different nature, especially in that it tends to be subtle. Eddic metaphor does not necessarily strike one as such initially. In terms of Old Norse vernacular poetics, it seems reasonable to assume that Old Norse speakers may not have understood these figures as “poetic metaphor” as such, and perhaps they would not have understood them as figures at all. This is why the theories we have referred to above, whereby metaphor can be structural or “conceptual” in everyday usage aside from its particular use in poetry, are important to our understanding of Eddic metaphor. We are examining figures that perform metaphorical work whether their composers perceive them as such or not (to touch briefly once again on the question of intention), and that are in fact “poetic” whether or not the poets perceive them as such. These figures could rather be seen as everyday metaphor appropriated in the interests of poesis, in much the same way as we have shown in the previous chapter that conventional deictic figures can be appropriated for poetic purposes.

Previously we saw, in the strophe repeated in variants in *Guðrúnarkviða I 18* and *II 2*, a case of extended figurative language and imagery which on the surface takes the form of the plain simile or analogy, in making various comparisons to illustrate the comparison of character between Sigurðr and the Gjúkungs. In this case, the preposition *sem* and the



subjunctive verb *væri* prevent us from detecting a metaphor. By contrast, a kenning would under no circumstances be introduced by any such marker of irrealty; the kenning-image is merely given as if (grammatically speaking) it referred to a real thing. However, in both variants of this strophe we see the boundary between metaphor and simile tested. In both cases the preposition *sem* is given once and then elided as the part of the sentence containing the figural imagery is repeated, resulting in an increasingly metaphorical tone. Taken out of context, any of the comparative phrases could be interpreted just as easily as a metaphor. The more regular and symmetrical variant of *Guðrúnarkviða II* furthermore elides the subjunctive verb, adding to this sense of grammatical dislocation. On the other hand, we see that although the variant of *Guðrúnarkviða I* reaches a less regular conclusion, it results in an even more unreal, hybrid image of the gemstone “over” the chieftains. We could elaborate on this and suggest that the variant of *Guðrúnarkviða I* 18 begins as a straightforward simile but ends in an expression that must be considered entirely metaphorical; the logic of the simile passes into the logic of the metaphor. Furthermore, this metaphor runs along the same lines as the logic of the kenning: it is not so much an artistic resemblance that is being evoked with this image, but the combination or hybridisation of associations. These associations are partly general and social – the theme of personal character as being akin to a “value” – but also partly something original to the poem itself, since the image of the gemstone has been constructed entirely within this strophe and has no “reality” in the diegesis itself.

Another illustrative example of the nature of metaphor – this time as much a metaphor of the verb as of the noun – also comes through the voice of Guðrún, in

*Guðrúnarhvøt*. The purpose of this figure is to articulate Guðrún’s emotional state – in particular her grief for her slain husband Sigurðr, which is the overall subject of this poem (as well as one of Guðrún’s primary attributes as a poetic persona).<sup>43</sup> These figures show the operation of metaphor not only in the word, but between words, applying to the semantics of the sentence. First of all, Guðrún relates in strophe 13 both in a narrative sense an episode in her life in which she attempts suicide, and in a psychological sense an expression of her emotional state at the time, in a way that conceptually binds these two things:

13. *Gecc ec til strandar, grøm varc nornom,*

*vilda ec hrinda stríð grið þeira;*

*Hófo mic, né drecþo, hávar báror,*

*því ec land um stéc, at lifa scyldac.*

13. Went I to shore, furious I-was [with] the Norns,

I wanted-to push off their harsh terms [?];

Raised me, nor drowned, the tall waves,

So [that] I on land stepped, that live I should.

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<sup>43</sup> Note, in light of the discussion of voice in the previous chapter, that this poem is given primarily (in strophes 10-20) as a monologue in Guðrún’s own voice, except for the first half in which Guðrún’s and Hamðir’s dialogue is interspersed with the narrative voice, as well as the final strophe in which the narrative voice addresses the real-life listener directly. From the title itself *Guðrúnarhvøt* is designated as a very particular act of speech: a *hvøt*, an “inciting” (literally a “whetting,” as of a blade), as Guðrún uses her many and various tales of woe as a means of inciting her sons to avenge the death of their sister.

13. I went to the shore, grim with anger against the Norns; I wanted to cast off their harsh terms [?]. The tall waves raised me, did not drown me; so I returned to land, because I should continue to live.

The first and perhaps most obvious figure in this strophe is what could more properly be called a metonymy rather than a metaphor. This is the reference to the Norns, mythological figures which *Völuspá* (as well as *Snorra Edda*) identifies as the coordinators or determiners of fate. Guðrún is, therefore, speaking of the Norns primarily as representatives of fate; she is angry with them only in the sense that she is angry about her fate. This seems as if it should be read as a fairly conventional case of metonymy (practically identical with the classically informed metonymy of the Fates<sup>44</sup>). The essentially metonymic association between the Norns and fate, especially fate of a tragic variety occurs with some regularity in Old Norse poetry.<sup>45</sup> One should also note that the Norn-formula we see in *Guðrúnarhvöt* occurs in a nearly identical form in a verse attributed to Kveldúlfur in *Egils saga*, but with the agents reversed: “*norn erum grim*” (“the Norn is grim [to] me”):

1:1-4. *Nú frá ek norðr í eyju,*

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<sup>44</sup> One sees this equivalence between the Norns and the *Fata, Parcae* or *Moirai* (albeit normally in a more generally mythological sense rather than in a specifically stylistic sense) referred to frequently in passing, almost as a cliché (for example, Marija Gimbutas (Gimbutas, Marija (1981): “The ‘Monstrous Venus’ of Prehistory or Goddess Creatrix”, *Comparative Civilizations Review*, Fall 1981, Vol. 0(7), p. 4): “The Fates – Norns, Moirai, Parcae”); the connection between these triads of fate-coordinating supernatural feminine figures appears clear at a cursory glance, and yet the possibility of a genetic connection between the classical and Old Norse versions seems not to have been explored in much detail so far (from Gimbutas’ structuralist perspective, for example, such a connection is simply obvious). Indeed, in her exhaustive study of appearances of the Norns in Old Norse literature, Karen Bek Pedersen (Bek Pedersen, Karen (2011): *The Norns in Old Norse Mythology*, Edinburgh: Dunedin) makes no mention of the classical Fates.

<sup>45</sup> Bek Pedersen 2011, passim, but in particular see pp. 40-41, 171-172; Mundal, Else (1993): “Supernatural Beings: 5. Norns”, *Medieval Scandinavia: an Encyclopedia*, ed. Phillip Pulsiano & Kirsten Wolf, New York & London: Garland p. 626.

*Norn erum grimm, til snimma*

*Þundr fell þremja vandar,*

*Þórólf und lok fóru.*<sup>46</sup>

1:1-4. Now heard I, north in the island,

The Norn is [to us] grim, too soon

Edges' wand's Óðinn fell,

Þórólfr met his end.

1:1-4. Now I have heard that Þórólfr met his end north on the island – the Norn is grim toward me – Óðinn of the wand of edges [man/warrior] fell too soon.

This verse comes in the context of the death of the poet's son, and as such prefigures (in a text riddled with foreshadowings, doubles, and doppelgangers<sup>47</sup>) Egill's long-form poem *Sonatorrek*, which deals with the same subject and likewise uses various mythological figures to metaphorically stand in for more abstract concepts, especially in personifying the sea as his son's "slayer." (9:4: "*sonar bani*")<sup>48</sup> The similarity of the Norn expressions in

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<sup>46</sup>Bjarni Einarsson ed. (2003): *Egils saga*, London: Viking Society for Northern Research, University College London p. 31; not only is agenthood reversed here, but also number, since we have only a single Norn while Kveldúlfr uses the skaldic first-person plural poetic voice; or, from a different perspective, the numbers stay in the same "place" while the agent and patient swap places.

<sup>47</sup> As noted by, for example, Jón Karl Helgason Jón Karl Helgason (2015): "Bloody runes : the transgressive poetics of Egil's saga," *Egil, the viking poet: new approaches to Egil's saga*, ed. Laurence De Looze, Jón Karl Helgason, Russell Poole, and Torfi H. Tulinius, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp. 198-202); Torfi H. Tulinius (2004): *Skáldið í skriftinni: Snorri Sturluson og Egils saga*, Reykjavík: Hið Íslenska Bókmenntafélag, pp. 219-233.

<sup>48</sup> *Sonatorrek* 9:4 (Bjarni Einarsson 2003 p. 149). Bek Pedersen interprets Kveldúlfr's verse as using Óðinn in a similar role ("Þundr [Óðinn] chose him much too soon"); this is partly due to the *Íslensk Fornrit* edition of *Egils saga* cited by Bek Pedersen reading *kaus* ("chose"), following the K redaction, rather than *fell* as Bjarni Einarsson's edition has it, following the version in *Möðruvallabók* (Sigurður Nordal ed. (1933): *Egils saga Skalla-*

*Guðrúnarhvöt* and Kveldúlfr's verse strongly suggests that they are drawing from a generally used expression, whose mythological content has become "petrified," to return to Leech's terminology: the existence of the Norns themselves is entirely subordinated to the purpose of expressing the concept of a tragic fate. However, it is not the case that the poet of *Guðrúnarhvöt* remains satisfied with this "petrified" figure; the concept is, rather, extended and put to work as part of the strophe's overall figural structure. The link connecting the metonymy of the Norns to the metaphorical movement of *hrinda* lies in the personal pronoun *þeira*: when Guðrún describes the rejection of fate that drives her to attempt suicide, she is still framing the concept of fate in the form of the Norns by referring grammatically to them as persons. This provides two possible readings regarding this expression's metaphoricity, which seem equally valid. Indeed, though in general we wish to remain agnostic concerning aesthetic intentions, it is likely that both readings are intended to be equally accessible to the listener. One is the metaphorical reading, that Guðrún is using the concept of the Norns and their actions as a conceptual framework to speak of fate; the other is the literal reading, that Guðrún (as a pagan) literally believes in the material (or at least mythic) existence of the Norns and their actual control over fate, in which case she would understandably feel that they personally deserve her anger.

Guðrún expresses a desire to commit suicide as a desire to deny or abrogate her cruel fate. The unique term *stríð gríð* might help to enlighten us as to the nature and

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*Grimssonar*, Reykjavík: Hið Íslenska fornritafélag, Íslensk fornrit 2, p. 60; *kaus* also appears in Finnur Jónsson's *Skjaldedigtning*: Finnur Jónsson ed. (1912-15): *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*, 2 vols. Copenhagen: Villadsen & Christensen, reprinted 1967, Copenhagen: Rosenkilde & Bagger, AI p. 29). The version in *Möðruvallabók* makes for a more cohesive kenning, however.

function of this expression, were it not for the fact that it appears to be corrupt and is practically undecipherable. It is unclear whether *stríð grið* ought to be read as two words or as a compound word. In either case, the word(s) lacks the dative plural ending that would seem to be appropriate given the plural form *þeira*. Moreover, adding any dative plural ending here renders the line metrically unacceptable. Our interpretation here should be seen as a conjecture. *Stríð* as a noun certainly has a sense of “woe” or “calamity” (and by extension “war,” “strife”), and as the adjective *stríðr* has the arguably related sense of “hard” or “stubborn.” *Grið* is less certain but is likely either *gríð*, “eagerness” or “vehemence,” or the more common *grið*, “quarter”, the terms of a truce. Therefore the two most likely senses seem to be either that which we have given above, or something more along the lines of “stubborn vehemence”, which would be less clear.<sup>49</sup> Based on such shaky ground, it would be unwise to understand the metaphor at work here based on this term. We can, however, say something about the verb *hrinda* and its metaphoricity. *Hrinda* is concretely or physically a casting motion, a “push,” “kick,” or “throw,” casting something away from oneself. By extension we also see in prose the usage “*hrinda skipi fram ór í vatn*” of launching a ship,<sup>50</sup> and more abstractly – though no less transitively – in a legal sense of rendering a case void.<sup>51</sup> With our discussion of etymology in mind, how should we consider the possible order of these senses? It is risky, as we have noted above, to posit any one as

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<sup>49</sup> On the interpretation of this line, see von See et al 2012 pp. 771-774; for an alternative interpretation, consider Dronke’s aggressive emendation resulting in “I wished to fling myself from their vehement storming” (Dronke 1969 p. 149); by emending *hrinda* to *hrindast*, Dronke gives the verb a reflexive sense which changes the direction of the metaphor.

<sup>50</sup> Bjarni Einarsson 2003 p. 142.

<sup>51</sup> Jakob Benediktsson ed. (1968): *Íslendingabók. Landnámabók*, Reykjavík: Hið Íslenska fornritafélag, Íslensk Fornrit 1, p. 114: “*því at Þórarinn vann eið at stallahring ok hratt svá málinu.*”

taking priority over the others, and yet it would be reasonable to assume a derivation of abstract concepts from concrete ones, as Lakoff and Johnson generally suggest.<sup>52</sup> Because *þeira* connects this line to the Norns, the metaphor of their standing in for fate is continued in the following manner: Guðrún wants to “cast away” their *stríð gríð* in a way that resembles her desire to cast off the terms of her own fate; it is striking that the spatial or motive aspect of the metaphorised verb evokes the act of casting oneself into the sea.

#### 4.3 Norns, *nauð*, †: Cryptophora

In this expression in *Guðrúnarhvöt*, we see a metaphorical extension of an otherwise fairly conventional Old Norse poetic association, made possible through the poet’s own awareness of that very metaphoricity. That the simple association between the Norns and the concept of fate is conventional in Eddic poetry is illustrated by various formulae found in other Eddic poems which consist of an object with *nornir* attached in the genitive: especially *dómr norna* (“Norns’ judgment”) in *Fáfnismál* 11 and *Hljóðskviða* 32, as well as *skop norna* (“Norns’ shapings”, in the sense of doing, creating, or deciding) in *Fáfnismál* 44 (seemingly related to the *nornir skóp oss* (“Norns shaped us”) expressions in *Reginismál* 2 and *Sigurðarkviða in skamma* 7). We will consider some of the wider associations that the Norn expressions connect to in the Eddic context, running along a cryptic and even esoteric

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<sup>52</sup> See especially Johnson, Mark (1987): *The body in the mind: the bodily basis of meaning, imagination, and reason*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Lakoff & Johnson 1999.

level of association, as this will illustrate our above discussion of metaphor, semantics, and the shift of meaning. In this complex of associations we have a case in which the poetic form, in terms of the rules of alliteration, and the conceptual form of the text become intertwined.

Karen Bek Pedersen notes “the alliterating combination of *nornir* with *nauð*”, a word whose range of meaning we will consider here but elaborate on further in the following chapter. This word is cognate with the modern English word “need” and certainly entails a sort of “necessity,” but always of a distinctly negative sort; crucially, in terms of the discussion of Norns, it is a sort of necessity linked to concepts of “fate” (and here we might reiterate the generally tragic sort of fate usually referred to in any invocation of the Norns). The examples Bek Pedersen gives for this association, both formal and conceptual, between *nornir* and *nauð* are *Atlakviða* 16, *Fáfnismál* 12, *Sigrdrífumál* 7 and 17, and the fifth *þula* of names for female goddesses, which deals specifically with the Norns: “*Norna heita, þær es nauð skapa*”,<sup>53</sup> “they are called Norns, those who shape [or decide] *nauð*”. This last example is especially telling of the association between *norn* and *nauð*. Here *nauð* is a term for “fate” and the property of the Norns, in a similar sense to the uses of *dómr* and *skop* discussed above. The two Eddic examples of this alliterative association both involve a compound word of which *nauð* is the first element: *nauðgöngull* in *Fáfnismál* 12, and *nauðfölr* in *Atlakviða* 16. *Nauðgöngull* reads literally as “*nauð*-going,” though what this

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<sup>53</sup> Gurevich, Elena ed. (2017): “Anonymous Þulur, *Ásynja heiti*,” *Poetry from Treatises on Poetics*, Kari Ellen Gade and Edith Marold (eds.), *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 3*, Turnhout: Brepols, p. 762.



indicates other than a general association with *nauð* is uncertain.<sup>54</sup> The example in *Atlakviða* shows another important property of the semantic extensibility of the word *nauð*:

16. *Betr hefðir þú, bróðir, at þú í brynio færir*  
*sem hiálmom aringreypom, at síá heim Atla;*  
*sætir þú í sǫðlom sólheiða daga,*  
*nái nauðfǫlva létir nornir gráta,*  
*Húna scialdmeyjar hervi kanna,*  
*enn Atla síálfan létir þú í ormgarð koma;*  
*nú er sá ormgarðr ycr um fólgin.*

16. Better had you, brother, that you in byrnie travel  
with helms eagle-shaped,<sup>55</sup> to see Atli's home,  
sat you in saddles [throughout] sunbright days,  
*nauð*-pale corpses let Norns mourn,

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<sup>54</sup> Though von See et al interpret this word as “die in Not zu Hilfe kommen,” which would provide an example of a less negative association for the Norns (von See, Klaus, Beatrice la Farge, Eve Picard, & Katja Schulz (2006): *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda, Band 5: Heldenlieder*, Heidelberg: Winter, pp. 429, 431). Larrington (2014 p. 155) also follows this interpretation. Coming as it does in a strophe in which Sigurðr is replying to Fáfnir's more obviously negative association of *Norna dómr* in 11, one could, following this interpretation, read the expression as a counter-proposition in this dialogic battle of wits.

<sup>55</sup> This word is found only in *Atlakviða*, where it is used three times in two apparently completely different senses: in strophe 1 of benches, and in 3 and here in 16 of helmets; it seems likely that the sense of the *arin* element in 1 is that of a “hearth” (i.e. “hearth-encompassing”) while that in 3 and 16 is of an “eagle” as Cleasby & Vígfusson (1874 p. 25) suggest, though the exact nature of these helmets remains unclear. See also Dronke 1969 pp. 46, 48; von See et al 1997 pp. 194-195, 265.

Huns' shieldmaidens	learn the harrow,
and Atli himself	let you in the snakepit come;
now is that snakepit	for you-two reserved.

16. It would have been better for you, brother, had you travelled in armour with eagle-shaped helm; sat in the saddle through the sun-bright days; let the Norns mourn deathly pallid corpses, the Huns' shieldmaidens learn the plough; and let Atli himself come to the snakepit. Now that same snakepit awaits the two of you.

In a similar vein to the structure of strophe 11 of *Atlakviða* which we have examined above, here we see a repetition of a non-finite (in this case subjunctive) verb phrase, or a group of phrases which all occupy the same position in the sentence – until the last long line, which is syntactically distinct and straightforwardly indicative. The image of the Norns weeping over the corpses of the (past-conditionally) slain is perhaps something of a stretch of their normal association with fate, and the alliterating *nauðfǫlr* stretches our understanding of the senses of *nauð*. Here it is primarily used to intensify *fǫlr*, seemingly with a distinctly negative connotation, and thus should be understood as “extremely pale.”<sup>56</sup> However, the

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<sup>56</sup> Compare *nauðamikill* (“very severe”) in *Hønsa-Póris saga* (Sigurður Nordal & Guðni Jónsson ed. (1938): *Borgfirðinga sögur. Hønsa-Póris saga. Gunnlaugs saga Ormstungu. Bjarnar saga Hítðælakappa. Heiðvarvíga saga. Gísls þáttur Illugasonar*, Reykjavík: Hið Íslenska fornritafélag, Íslensk fornrit 3, p. 11); *nauðljótr* (“extremely hideous”) in *Ǫrvar-Odds saga* (Boer, R.C. ed. (1892): *Ǫrvar-Odds Saga*, Halle: Niemeyer (1892), p. 188). One might note also an alliterative link between the adjectival form *nauðigr* and *nár* in *Guðrúnarkviða II* 42:7-8, *Baldur's Draumar* 4:7-8, and *Sólarljóð* 33:6 (Larrington, Carolyne & Peter Robinson ed. (2007): “Anonymous Poems, *Sólarljóð*”, *Poetry on Christian Subjects*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross, *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 7*, Turnhout: Brepols, pp. 331-332). The instance in *Guðrúnarkviða II* in fact recalls a similar alliterative link in 34:3-4 between *niðr* and *nauðigr*, also present in *Atlakviða* 35:5-6, in which the same narrative episode is being portrayed: Guðrún serving her slaughtered sons by Atli to be eaten (unwittingly) by him and his men, as part of her revenge on him for killing her brothers. The precise sense of *nauðigr* in *Atlakviða* is unclear; Larrington translates it here as “reluctantly” (Larrington 2014 p. 209), Dronke as “with repulsion” (Dronke 1969 p. 10). In terms of the discussion of *Skírnismál*, one might note with interest the

use of this particular word in the compound does not seem arbitrary here, neither in adjectival relation to the corpses of the slain, nor in alliterative relation to the Norns, and especially not when triangulated between these connecting points. Rather than a coincidence, this term should be seen as an extension of the semantic field of *nauð*, and furthermore as an extension of the conceptual association between *nauð* and the Norns.

The example of a link between the Norns and *nauð* in *Sigrdrífumál* is considerably more esoteric, and introduces a distinctly cryptic, magical element to the *nauð* concept. This should be clear enough from the nature of *Sigrdrífumál* itself, which – like the rune section of *Hávamál*, and in a manner not dissimilar from that of the incantatory episode of *Skírnismál* we examined in the previous chapter – is primarily concerned with magic, but treats its subject matter in a cryptic fashion. This poem takes the form of an address by the Valkyrie Sigrdrífa to Sigurðr, imparting esoteric, largely magical advice. In this case the connection between *nauð* and *nornir* is not direct. Rather, we are somewhat artificially reading this connection across strophes:

7. *Ǫlrúnar scaltu kunna, ef þú vill, annars qvæn*

*vélit þic í trygð, ef þú trúir;*

*Á horni scal þær rísta oc á handar baki*

*oc merkia á nagli Nauð.*

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expression “*nauðigr nái / nýta ec scyldac*”, “I would be made to enjoy their corpses under compulsion”, in *Guðrúnarkviða II* 42:7-8.

7. Ale-runes shall you know, if you want another's wife

not-betray you in trust, if you confide;

On horn shall they carve and on hand's back

and mark on the nail *Nauð*.

7. You must learn "ale-runes,"<sup>57</sup> if you want to keep another's wife, who you have confided in, from betraying you; they shall carve on the drinking horn and on the back of the hand, and mark the nail with *Nauð*.

17. *á gleri oc á gulli* and *oc á gumna heillom,*

*Í víni ok virtri* and *ok vilisessi,*

*á Gungnis oddi* and *oc á Grana briósti,*

*á nornar nagli* and *oc á nefi uglo.*

17. on glass and on gold and on mens' talismans,

In wine and wort and on joy-seat,

On Gungnir's point and on Grani's breast,

On Norn's nail and on owl's beak.

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<sup>57</sup> This is the literal meaning of *ǫlrúnar*, and indeed here the spell has to do with drink, but this word has been associated with the apparently magical runic formula *alu* (Krause, Wolfgang (1932): *Beiträge zur runenforschung*, Halle: Niemeyer, p. 69; McKinnell, John & Rudolf Simek with Klaus Düwel (2004): *Runes, magic and religion: a sourcebook*, Wien: Fassbänder, p. 35). Note, in light of the discussion that follows, that this word is also identical to the name of Egill's wife in *Vǫlundarkviða* 4.

17. “on glass and on gold and on mens’ talismans, in wine and beer and on the breast,<sup>58</sup> on Gungnir’s point and on Grani’s breast, on the nail of the Norn and on the owl’s beak.”

Strophes 15-17 of *Sigrdrífumál* present an unusual instance in Eddic poetry of a sentence being stretched across multiple strophes. This is not, however, a sentence of any complexity, but rather a long list, as one can see from 17. The sentence begins with 15:1, “*Á skildi kvað ristnar*” (“On the shield [he] said to carve”), referring to the disembodied head of Mímir mentioned in strophe 14. Everything that follows, to the end of 17, consists of a list of places on which one should draw the magical runes. 7 also refers to the drawing of magical runes, in the context of a list of types of runes or spells which Sigrdrífa wishes to teach to Sigurðr. Strophes 7 and 17 are, notably, in different metres, in a text which has frequently been interpreted as being of a composite or interpolated nature.<sup>59</sup> Yet whether the intention is original or not, there is a clear parallel between the two strophes. The word *nagl* here serves as a linchpin drawing *nauð* and *norn* together across the poem. And it is furthermore clear here that what is meant by *nauð* in strophe 7 is yet another meaning of this word: here it is the name of the runic character ᚠ, which corresponds to the

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<sup>58</sup> Here we interpret *vilisess* as “the breast” insofar as the *heart* is the physical resting-place of *vili*, a psychic or emotional term similar to *munr*, with a connotation of *joy*. Compare the uses of the term *vilialauss* in *Völundarkviða* discussed in the following chapter; the association of the heart and breast as the physical resting-place of sorrow in *Guðrúnarhvöt* 20:5-8; and the “place of the mind” expressions in *Sonatorrek* 1 and 2. One assumes that the magical rune should be drawn *on* the breast, *over* the heart.

<sup>59</sup> Given the mixture of metres and the seemingly disjointed themes of this text, a number of possible configurations have been proposed. See Finnur Jónsson 1920-1924 278f; Finnur Jónsson (1921) 1933 pp. 122-124; Boer 1922 p. 190; de Vries 1964-1967 pp. 146-148; Einar Ólafur Sveinsson 1962 p. 462; Heusler, Andreas ([1902] 1969): “Die Lieder der Lücke im Codex Regius der Edda”, *Kleine Schriften Bd. 2*, Berlin: de Gruyter, p. 226; von See et al 2006 pp. 498-530.

consonantal sound /n/.<sup>60</sup> The purported names of the runic characters are primarily known from “rune poems,” which in the case of Scandinavian sources are mostly found in manuscripts considerably later than Codex Regius.<sup>61</sup> However, *Sigrdrífumál* makes clear reference to the names (as known from the aforementioned sources) of two runes: in addition to † in 7, we have † (Týr) in 6; moreover, both of these uses of runic character-names are clearly analogous to that which we have seen above in *Skírnismál* 36 of Þ (*þurs*), as they are given in a similar context. This context, as we shall see below, is furthermore analogous to certain known uses of runic characters inscribed on material objects.

The discovery of this association instantly complicates our discussion, and this complexity should not be understated. We have followed a movement of metaphor – an associative movement that seems familiar on the surface, and yet, as we have seen in the above discussion, becomes somewhat mysterious when its inner workings are probed – through a movement of purely phonetic alliteration, and have arrived on a cryptic plane upon which these operations seem linked, and moreover appear to suggest a new and even more mysterious operation. To illustrate this cryptic dimension, let us consider some of the material instances of the use of the character † and the word *nauð* for apparently magical

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<sup>60</sup> The character itself, one should note, is not found in the manuscript; it is merely referred to by this name.

<sup>61</sup> An Icelandic and a Norwegian “rune poem” are attested in manuscripts dating from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, respectively; earlier examples of the names of Germanic runic characters include the Anglo-Saxon “rune poem” in an eleventh-century manuscript, and the ninth-century Latin *Abecedarium Nordmannicum*. See McKinnell et al 2004 pp. 32-33; Page, R.I. (1999b): *The Icelandic rune-poem*, London: Viking Society for Northern Research; Bauer, Alessia (2003), *Runengedichte: Texte, Untersuchungen und Kommentare zur gesamten Überlieferung*, Wien: Fassbänder; on the names of runes see also Barnes, Michael (2011): *Runes: a handbook*, Woodbridge: Boydell, pp. 157-163. In many respects these rune-names correspond to the names of the letters of the Gothic alphabet as recorded by Alcuin in the ninth-century Codex Vindobonensis 795; this seems to be the case with the name of the letter N, *noicz* (Krause, Wolfgang (1968): *Handbuch des Gotischen*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Munich: Beck, §46a).

purposes. First we have the example of a copper amulet from Sigtuna, dated to the late eleventh century.<sup>62</sup> The inscriptions on this object are apotropaic, intended to ward off illness: “*Þórr/Þurs sárriðu*”, “*Þórr* [or *Þurs*, a giant] of gangrene.”<sup>63</sup> One line of inscription reads “[*H*]af þér ní nauðir, úlfr!” (“May you have nine *nauðir*, wolf!”). This seems to allude to the actual carving of the rune *ᚠ*, and yet, curiously, the inscription itself does not include nine *ᚠ*s. The omission is particularly noticeable given that the inscription does contain three *l* characters, to which the surrounding inscription also refers.

A similar reference to “nine *nauðir*” is found on a fourteenth-century wooden stick from Ribe, which bears text (once again, a charm against illness) in runic script on its five sides. Much of the text, notably, is in *fornyrðislag*, a metre we would normally associate with Eddic verse.<sup>64</sup> This includes the lines:

*Svartr heitir stein,                      hann stendr í hafi úti,*

*þar liggja á því níu nauðir.*<sup>65</sup>

“Black” is-called a stone,            it stands in the sea out,

There lie on that nine *nauðir*.

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<sup>62</sup> SRD U Fv1933;134, Samnordiskruntextdatabas: Institutionen för nordiska språk, Uppsala universitet, accessed 22 December 2017. <http://www.nordiska.uu.se/forskn/samnord.htm>; see also McKinnell et al 2004 pp. 126-127; Olsen, Magnus (1940): *Sigtuna-amuletten: Nogen tolkningsbidrag*, Oslo: Det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi i Oslo; Macleod, Mindy & Mees, Bernard (2006): *Runic amulets and magic objects*, Woodbridge: Boydell, pp. 118-119.

<sup>63</sup> McKinnell et al 2004 p. 126.

<sup>64</sup> SRD DR EM85;493 M, Samnordiskruntextdatabas: Institutionen för nordiska språk, Uppsala universitet, accessed 22 December 2017. <http://www.nordiska.uu.se/forskn/samnord.htm>; on this object see also McKinnell et al 2004 pp. 142-143; Moltke, Erik (1985): *Runes and their origin: Denmark and elsewhere*, trans. Peter Foote, Copenhagen: National Museum of Denmark, pp. 493-498; Barnes 2011 p. 112.

<sup>65</sup> McKinnell et al 2004 p. 142.

There is a stone called “Black,” which stands out to sea; on it are carved nine *nauðir*. Once again, the inscription itself lacks the nine þs; however, this example apparently refers to a second object which, presumably, does actually bear these characters, suggesting a rather more complex magical operation (and perhaps that the Sigtuna amulet itself refers to a second object, albeit in a less clear way).<sup>66</sup> This association between *nauð* and the number nine extends to a (non-runic) charm recorded in an eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon manuscript, yet again as a form of apotropaic magic against illness. Here we see the line “*Neogone wæran Nopðæs sweoster*” (“Nine were the sisters of Nop”),<sup>67</sup> followed by a reduction charm of a type with the common *abracadabra* formula.<sup>68</sup> Here the word *nauð* has apparently been reinterpreted as a proper name; in the context of the association between *nauð* and the Norns, it is particularly striking that we see nine (seemingly supernatural) female figures referred to. Through this somewhat oblique line of investigation we must also bring into this associative fold the cryptic reference in *Völuspá* 2 to the *níu íviðjur* remembered by the speaker – here *íviði* apparently refers to a sort of witch or troll-woman, one out of a variety of Old Norse terms for monstrous supernatural female figures (this particular word is attested only in *Völuspá* 2 and *Hyndluljóð* 48).<sup>69</sup>

Furthermore, consider the equally cryptic strophe 51 of *Sólarljóð*:

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<sup>66</sup> References to named stones appear in other runic inscriptions; see McKinnell et al 2004 p. 133.

<sup>67</sup> Cockayne, Thomas Oswald (1866): *Leechdoms, wortcunning, and starcraft of early England: Being a collection of documents, for the most part never before printed, illustrating the history of science in this country before the Norman conquest*, London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, pp. 62-63.

<sup>68</sup> MacLeod & Mees 2006 pp.138-139.

<sup>69</sup> The latter in the form *íviðja*; see Björn M. Ólsen (1914): “Til Eddakvedene. I: Til *Völuspá*”, *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 30 (1914), p. 131n; Pipping, Hugo (1925): “Eddastudier I”, *Studier i nordisk filologi* 16 (1925), p. 46n; von See et al 1997 pp. 827-830. There is also the word *íviðgjarn* in *Völundarkviða* 28:8, which seems to have the sense of “wicked” or “evil.”



51. *Á norna stóli*                      *sat ek níu daga,*

*Þaðan var ek á hest hafinn;*

*Gýgjar sólir*                      *skinu grimmliga*

*Ór skýdjúpnis skýjum.*<sup>70</sup>

51. On Norns' seat                      sat I nine days,

From-there was I on a horse lifted;

Witch's suns                      shone grimly

Out-of cloud-drooper's clouds.

51. I sat on the Norn's seat for nine days; from there I was lifted onto a horse. The witch's suns shone grimly through the cloud-drooper's clouds.<sup>71</sup>

As with much of *Sólarljóð*, a complete interpretation of this strophe is unfeasible. However, in the context of this section of the poem, sitting on the Norns' seat seems to refer to either the state or process of death. *Gýgr* – a word comparable in meaning to *íviði* – appears here

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<sup>70</sup> Larrington & Robinson 2007 pp. 331-332.

<sup>71</sup> Note that Cleasby & Vígfússon interpret *gýgjar sólir* as being related in meaning to the Icelandic word *gýll*, a parhelion (1874 p. 222). This section of *Sólarljóð* features various meteorological visions, of a primarily sensuous nature (as I have discussed elsewhere (Sandberg, Pete (2016): "Dis-embodied Cognition and Sensory Perception in *Sólarljóð*", *Sensory Perception in the Medieval West*, ed. Simon Thomson & Michael Bintley, Turnhout: Brepols, pp. 198-201)), that are nonetheless difficult to interpret. This late poem could be considered "meta-Eddic," being a late composition compared to most other uses of Eddic metres, and having at times a seemingly intentionally "Eddic" style mixing Christian and pre-Christian mythic and religious motifs (on this see Larrington, Carolyne (2002), "Freyja and the Organ-Stool: Neo-paganism in *Sólarljóð*", *Germanisches Altertum und christliches Mittelalter. Festschrift für Heinz Klingenberg*, ed. B. Broganyi, Hamburg: Kovač, pp. 177-96). Clunies Ross points out that later poems such as *Sólarljóð*, *Hugsvinnsmál*, *Merlínusspá* and the possibly much later *Hrafnagaldur Óðins* seem to consciously adopt the Eddic verse-form and style in order to present their moralising, prophetic, or occult content (Clunies Ross 2016 p. 31).

in close association with the Norns, who are furthermore associated (not least alliteratively) with the number nine. This number does indeed seem to be the go-to for Eddic poets seeking mythological significance and alliterative convenience: consider Óðinn hanging himself for nine nights in order to gain wisdom in *Hávamál*.<sup>72</sup> The alliterative usefulness of *níu* (“nine”) should not be underestimated as a reason for its frequent use: in the *Hávamál* example, for instance, it is useful in alliterating with *nættir* (“nights”), while above we have seen it alliterate with *norn* and *nauð*. One sees this alliterative coupling again in *Hávamál* 154 between *níunda* (“ninth”) and *nauðr*, once again in an apparently magical context.<sup>73</sup> Finally, let us bring this chain of association to a close with a tantalizing example from a text we shall examine in greater detail in the following chapter, *Völundarkviða* 3, in which the swan-maidens at the beginning of the poem mysteriously depart after nine years spent with their husbands: “*enn in níunda / nauðr um skilði*” (“and [in] the ninth / necessity separated [them]”).<sup>74</sup> We will also see in more detail in the following chapter that this is not the only sense in which *nauð(r)* is used in *Völundarkviða*. Later on, in strophe 11, it is used in the material sense of “bondage,” when Völundr wakes to find himself bound.<sup>75</sup> Notably, *nauðr* is also used in this sense in the first strophe of *Sigrdrífumál*: “*hverr feldi af mér / fǫlvar nauðir?*” (“who removed from me / pale bonds?”). In the context of our current

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<sup>72</sup> *Hávamál* 138:1-3: “*Veit ec, at ec hecc / vindgameiði á / nætr allar níu*”: “I know that I hung on the windy-tree nine nights altogether”.

<sup>73</sup> This section of *Hávamál* consists of a series of strophes that begin with a practically identical long line. Schorn points out that the number of the spell in the list also determines the alliteration in 151 (Schorn 2016b pp. 281-282); in fact, this is the case in each strophe in this section. We will return to the uses of repetition in *Hávamál* in particular in the concluding chapter.

<sup>74</sup> This word, *nauðr* (also feminine, in spite of its nominative ending), can be considered practically identical to *nauð*.

<sup>75</sup> On the etymology and contiguity of meanings of this word and its cognates in Old Norse and other Germanic languages, see the more detailed discussion in section 5.2, pp. 234-236 of this thesis.

investigation, this line is doubly interesting: firstly because it parallels the wording of *hǫfgar nauðir* (“heavy bonds”) in *Vǫlundarkviða* 11; secondly because it is clearly a reversal of *nauðfǫlr* from *Atlakviða* 16, in which an entirely different meaning has been produced.

There are a number of possible avenues of thought opened up by the mapping of this complex of associations between the Norns, *nauð*, and *†*; before we proceed, we should make clear which of these it is necessary to close off, for the moment at least. Eddic poetry tends toward the cryptic and obscure, and as such seems to invite speculative interpretation. It is precisely interpretation, however, that we must resist here – however tempting it may be – in order to examine the operation of Eddic poetry, which is our proper subject; though in the following chapter, we will move more into the direction of interpretation while examining a related figure in *Vǫlundarkviða*. There are multiple reasons for the necessity of this abstinence from interpretation. Firstly, there is the simple and obvious fact of the unlikelihood of definite success in interpretation. As we have noted many times, we simply lack sufficient contextual information for an ironclad interpretation of the most obscure aspects of Eddic poetry; this is not to say that there is no place for speculation, but that speculation must always recognise its contingent nature. Furthermore, it is especially tempting in this case to interpret these connecting elements as having mythological significance, due to the subject matter. The ensuing discussion of provenance, which we have avoided elsewhere, would be just as unhelpfully circular here. Moreover, the reading of a mythological source at the nexus of these associations would in fact obscure the significance of this complex.

This significance has to do with the concept of metaphor as a movement, which we considered above: a transference or transposition, an *epiphora*. Here, however, we have seen this movement go considerably beyond the bounds of semantics, even if it seems to have its origin in the semantic field. It is primarily the crucial role played here by alliteration that troubles one. As we have noted, moreover, the importance of alliteration here discourages one from reading this complex as one of ideas: surely the sound /n/ on its own does not impart a concept. The Norns do travel hand-in-hand with *nauð*, and there is a conceptual connection between them: the inalterable stricture of fate. Yet as we traverse the chain of their association across the known corpus of Eddic poetry in texts such as *Sigrdrífumál*, *Guðrúnarhvöt*, *Atlakviða*, and others, we see this conceptuality break down even as the association grows stronger; it becomes more difficult to discern a sensible concept behind the association of these two terms, especially when the meaning of *nauð* is semantically and metaphorically extended beyond its actual conceptual link to the Norns (as in *nauðfǫlr*). Then there is the extension of *nauð* outside the realm of the manuscript and into the magic inscription, by way of its becoming †. Let us not understate the significance of this movement: the word-concept becomes a glyph, and an inescapable consequence of this movement is that it must temporarily be reduced to a sound, hence the importance of alliteration. There is something mysterious about words as objects (as we will discuss shortly), but in this movement the word has gone beyond even that mysterious aura and attained an altogether alien materiality. It is in this way that *nauð* can be associated with the number nine, not (necessarily) because of some conceptual, mythological association between these words, but through their materiality as sound. Finally, by way of a

movement that returns to the straightforwardly metaphorical, we are presented with a riddle in the form of *nauðfqlr/fqlvar nauðir* (“deathly pale/pale bonds”). It seems impossible that these terms appear coincidentally. What, then, are we to make of them? This problem illustrates perfectly the form of crypticness we are discussing here. Because they come in different contexts and are used to mean unrelated things, no sense can be made of a concept behind their association. A certain problem remains unaddressed even if we resort to arguably the two safest interpretations of this repetition. On the one hand, there is the interpretation that *Atlakviða* and *Sigrdrífumál* were perhaps composed by the same poet (or compiled by the same editor), making either an intentional cross-textual reference or simply unwittingly drawing from his or her personal poetic lexicon. On the other hand, and in a slightly related sense, it could be that the recollection of an association between these terms has to do with the process of oral composition, as we discussed in chapter 2.<sup>76</sup> What remains unanswered is the question of why these words in particular have been repeated, especially in the context of the wider web of associations in which we have found them. Once again, we must stress that poetic “intention” is not our primary concern here, and I would again argue that it is not necessary to posit an intention in order to identify the poetic operation that is taking place.

This operation is cryptic; as we have established, it is not our goal to dispel the darkness that surrounds it, to penetrate it, but rather to map it out. Above I have made various references to the generally cryptic nature of much Eddic poetry, and the style of

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<sup>76</sup> Section 2.3, pp. 91-99 of this thesis.

mythic allusion one frequently finds in these texts is well illustrated by our example of *Sólarljóð* 51. Furthermore, the mysteriousness of Eddic poetry is something that remains even when the key to the riddle has been lost: we still recognize these expressions as cryptic even though we often have insufficient contextual knowledge to be able to say with any surety what is being referred to. It is, therefore, perhaps critically naïve to understand an Eddic poem as a puzzle oriented toward its solution; rather, Eddic crypticness forms what Daniel Tiffany calls the “spectacle of obscurity”.<sup>77</sup> It is, indeed, generally true of Eddic poetry that it tends toward emphasising that which it hides, but in the case of this associative figure we see a particular sort of mystery left out in the open, one which is far more difficult to penetrate than a mere oblique mythological allusion. This figure has to do with a cryptic transposition, a metaphorical movement, and it seems to have something to do with the symbolic. Tiffany furthermore cites Gotthold Ephraim Lessing in saying that “the cloud” – here specifically the divine mist that hides warriors in the *Iliad*, but for both Lessing and Tiffany this cloud is itself an analogy for the poetic creation of obscurity – “is a true hieroglyphic”.<sup>78</sup> for Tiffany, it is an “index of disappearance.”<sup>79</sup> In our present example, we truly have a sort of hiero-glyph in the form of †, which while perhaps not “holy” as such, certainly performs a magical operation in the inscriptions we have examined above. Furthermore, cryptography makes some significant appearances in the runic corpus (the word *rún* itself having, as we shall also see in more detail below with reference to *Snorra*

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<sup>77</sup> Tiffany, Daniel (2009): *Infidel poetics: riddles, nightlife, substance*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press p. 15.

<sup>78</sup> Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim (1984): *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, trans. Edward Allen McCormick, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, p. 68.

<sup>79</sup> Tiffany 2009 p. 15.

*Edda*, an arguably primary meaning of a “secret”); in addition to many examples of straightforward letter-based encryption,<sup>80</sup> we also have the example in *Bósa saga* of a rune-based riddle,<sup>81</sup> which riddle itself is represented in several actual inscriptions.<sup>82</sup> The appearance of † in this complex of associations moreover suggests a more sophisticated symbolic operation than the arguably naïve view that individual runic characters were considered by their users to have magical functions related to some symbolic dimension of their names.<sup>83</sup> After all, the most likely significance of the individual names of runes is as a mnemonic device related to their sound value.<sup>84</sup> Additionally, we have seen that this sound value plays a significant role in the complex of associations.<sup>85</sup> Bearing this in mind, we consider the words of Jean-Joseph Goux in his analysis of the role of the symbol in economy (in particular, in his narrative of the historical development of the economy of symbols):

The *glyph* is sacred, the signifier of a mystery that it manifests but does not elucidate or articulate; it is the indecipherable, *enigmatic* sign of a hierarchically superior, overwhelming meaning; like an intercessor, it bears eternal witness to the

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<sup>80</sup> Barnes 2011 pp. 144-152; McKinnell et al 2004 pp. 26-30.

<sup>81</sup> Guðni Jonsson & Bjarni Vilhjálmsson ed. (1944): *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda, Guðni Jonsson og Bjarni Vilhjálmsson sáu um útgafuna*, vol. 2, Reykjavik: Bókaútgafan Forni, pp. 474-475.

<sup>82</sup> Barnes 2011 pp. 156-157.

<sup>83</sup> For this view, see for example Olsen, Magnus (1916): “Om troldruner”, *Edda* 5 (1916), pp. 225-245; McKinnell et al 2004 pp. 31-37. For an emphatic counterpoint, Barnes 2011 p. 194.

<sup>84</sup> Barnes 2011 p. 157.

<sup>85</sup> In this respect, Maria Elena Ruggerini has identified certain “alliterative lexical collocations” which run along similar – if somewhat less wide-ranging – lines of association as the complex we have mapped here; in particular, the *níð/nótt* collocation partly intersects with *nauð/norn*, though Ruggerini’s analysis has not extended quite that far (Ruggerini, Maria Elena (2016): “Alliterative lexical collocations in eddic poetry”, *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry: Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia*, ed. Carolyne Larrington, Judy Quinn, Brittany Schorn, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 321-326).

impenetrability of a transcendent generative mystery, which it signifies in a cryptophoric rather than a metaphoric way, since it cannot reflect this mystery.<sup>86</sup>

Goux uses the word “cryptophoric” five times in *Symbolic Economies*, without ever exactly defining it. Given Goux’s generally Freudian critical background, this term should be read as related to Nicolas Abraham and Maria Török’s “cryptonym,” a concept developed in their own examination of the case of Freud’s famous Wolf Man patient. The cryptonomic operation, for Abraham and Török, is “no mere phonetic or patronymic displacement”, nor a “simple metonymic displacement”;<sup>87</sup> “not a *metonymy of things* but a *metonymy of words*.”<sup>88</sup> In the case of the Wolf Man, Abraham and Török pursue a “sought-after key word”, “unutterable for some reason”,<sup>89</sup> the key to deciphering the riddle of the Wolf Man’s complex. Walter Benjamin similarly associates riddle and mystery with the nature of the word: for Benjamin, riddles “can be redeemed only through the word”, the *Rätseiwort* (the “key word” but literally simply the “riddle word”).<sup>90</sup> Here it is not so much our aim to provide a “key word” that explains the riddle of this complex of associations, but rather to highlight the riddling, both concealing and signifying operation that makes it possible.

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<sup>86</sup> Goux, Jean-Joseph (1990): *Symbolic Economies: After Marx and Freud*, trans. Jennifer Curtiss Gage, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, p. 171, emphasis original.

<sup>87</sup> Abraham, Nicolas & Maria Török ([1976] 1986): *The Wolf Man's magic word: a cryptonymy*, trans. Nicholas Rand, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, p. 18.

<sup>88</sup> Abraham & Török (1976) 1986 p. 19, emphasis original.

<sup>89</sup> Abraham & Török (1976) 1986 p. 18.

<sup>90</sup> Benjamin, Walter (1996): “Riddle and Mystery,” *Selected Writings* ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press (1996), pp. 267-268; Tiffany also makes note of Heidegger’s preoccupation with *Rätseiwörter* (Tiffany 2009 pp. 64-65; 89).



#### 4.3.1 Texture: Economy and Poetry in *Snorra Edda*

Here we have opened up two avenues of thought which are both sufficiently complex as to require some further explication: on the one hand we have the cryptic or cryptophoric operation, while on the other we have, through Goux, the concept of an economic import in symbol or language. We have begun to get the sense that these avenues of thought are related – much as this relation may seem counterintuitive on the surface – and they will increase in importance as we continue into the following chapter. For the latter, we can say something here not only about the general idea, but about its appearance in the context of Old Norse literary thought. Kurt Heinzelmänn's work *The Economics of the Imagination* sets out to explore the conceptual intertwining of economics and literature, an intertwining that shows no particular sign of epistemological priority of one concept over the other, but rather a complex relationship in which both systems inform and structure one another. As Heinzelmänn argues, it is a relationship in which both systems are ordered by a common "fictive (cultural) structuring".<sup>91</sup> It is perhaps no coincidence that Heinzelmänn introduces this argument with a brief examination of a passage from the *Skáldskaparmál* section of *Snorra Edda*, that which explains the *tal jǫtna* ("giants' talk") kenning for "gold", which we shall discuss in more detail presently.<sup>92</sup> Heinzelmänn reads this passage primarily as a narrative of the economic division of an originary wholeness on a "mythic" level, with the story of the three *jǫtnar* dividing their

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<sup>91</sup> Heinzelmänn, Kurt (1968): *The economics of the imagination*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, p. 10.

<sup>92</sup> Faulkes, Anthony (1998): *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, London: Viking Society for Northern Research, University College London, pp. 2-3.

father's wealth.<sup>93</sup> However, a closer look at the diction of this passage would serve to expand the argument. Working from a modern English translation, Heinzelmann unfortunately lacks access to the polysemic nature of the word *tal*.<sup>94</sup> The two groups of meanings for *tal* correspond to the two verbs of which *tal* can be considered the nominalized form – *tala*, “to speak,” and *telja*, “to reckon” or “to number”<sup>95</sup> – in which sense one could almost consider this to be a pair of homonymic words rather than a single word. However, the meanings are conceptually linked in addition to being phonetically consonant. We should, therefore, understand *munntal jǫtna* (the slightly expanded form of this kenning) in an intentionally polysemic sense: outside of the context of this mythological tale, it is the “mouth-speech of the *jǫtnar*.” With the full story in mind, however, we know that it is also the “mouth-reckoning of the *jǫtnar*,” perhaps even the “mouth-accounting,” because their mouths serve in this story as the units of measurement by which they divide up their inheritance. And although one sees a conceptual link when considering these two senses of *tal* abstractly, in this case we can see yet another semantic turn that actually involves a conceptual rupture. There is a movement from one sense of *tal* to another, but it does not straightforwardly follow a conceptual path.

Snorri himself provides the key to understanding this movement in the way he presents it, and we can see instantly how it relates to the figure we have examined above:

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<sup>93</sup> Heinzelmann 1968 pp. 5-6

<sup>94</sup> Brodeur, Arthur Gilchrist ed. (1912): *The Prose Edda: by Snorri Sturluson, translated from the Icelandic, with an introduction, by Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur*, New York: The American-Scandinavian Foundation, p. 92.

<sup>95</sup> *Tal* in the latter sense is particularly well illustrated in the role it plays in the titles of lists or literary works which take the form of lists, for example *Ynglingatal*. Indeed, it seems that this convergence is common to Germanic languages, as one can see in the variety of senses of the modern English words *tell*, *tale*, and *talk*.

*En þat höfum vær orðtak nú með oss at kalla gullit munntal þessa jǫtna, en vér felum í rúnum eða í skáldskap svá, at vér kǫllum þat mál eða orða<k>, tal þessa iǫtna.<sup>96</sup>*

“And that has become an expression with us now to call gold the mouth-*tal* of these *jǫtnar*, but we hide [it] in secrets or in poetry in this way, that we call that a speech or an expression, the talk [*tal*] of these *jǫtnar*.”

Here we see that one is to understand “the talk [*tal*] of *jǫtnar*” as “gold” not through a conceptual intuition but by association with the more unusual word *munntal*.<sup>97</sup> Above we have considered figures of speech in terms of “movement,” but here it is also appropriate to speak of an “exchange:” the idea that an exchange is occurring is encapsulated rather neatly by the fact that the subject at issue here is gold, a medium of exchange.<sup>98</sup> As Marx puts it,

Gold, as gold, is exchange value itself. As to its use value, that has only an ideal existence, represented by the series of expressions of relative value in which it stands face to face with all other commodities, the sum of whose uses makes up the sum of the various uses of gold.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Faulkes 1998 p. 3.

<sup>97</sup> Though Snorri gives *munntal jǫtna* as an apparently known kenning for “gold,” in the extant corpus of Old Norse literature it is only found in *Edda*.

<sup>98</sup> Indeed, one might note that Snorri treats gold as the ultimate (“hierarchically superior,” perhaps, to return to Goux’s terms) metaphor in an even more extensive manner as *Skáldskaparmál* develops: after this story is related, further mythological stories are introduced to explain various other kennings for gold.

<sup>99</sup> Marx, Karl ([1885] 1971): *Capital: a critique of political economy, Vol.2, The process of circulation of capital*, by Karl Marx, edited by Frederick Engels, London: Lawrence & Wishart, p. 114. Here Marx has already set up “use value” and “exchange value” as opposing concepts (in a capitalist economic system, that is), which nonetheless are both paradoxically contained within each commodity (Marx, Karl ([1867] 1954-1959): *Capital: a critique of political economy / edited by Frederick Engels ; translated from the 3rd German ed. by Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, pp. 51-56). We should understand here that the “use value” is, for Marx, the *real* value that a commodity has as a material object, whereas an exchange-value

For Marx, then, gold in its economic capacity is absolutely abstract: any attempt to locate its “use value” will result in a tautology, because its use value can only be expressed as a series of exchanges which have been made according to its “exchange value” relative to other commodities. Here gold could be seen as a sort of pure metaphor, or perhaps the medium of metaphor. This is how Marc Shell, thinking in a similar vein to Heintelmann (and, for that matter, Goux), understands a fragment of Heraclitus, through Marx. Heraclitus says in this fragment that “All things are an equal exchange (*antanamoibē*) for fire and fire for all things, as goods (*chrēmata*) are for gold (*chrysou*) and gold for goods.”<sup>100</sup> After dissecting this dense expression, Shell goes on to describe metaphor as an “*antanamoibē* of meaning”,<sup>101</sup> an equal exchange between meanings, not only in the transactional sense but in a sense metamorphic, and therefore metaphoric: meanings are exchanged according to a mysterious system of value or equivalence, with metaphor as the linking substance. Indeed, Marx elsewhere describes gold as forming “only a connecting link between the metamorphoses of commodities”,<sup>102</sup> “a link not only of one endless chain of metamorphoses, but of many such chains”,<sup>103</sup> as Goux puts it, “[t]he symbolic order of currency is that of *pure concatenation* or abstract *textuality*”.<sup>104</sup> Here we should make a

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is purely an abstraction: “So far no chemist has ever discovered exchange value either in a pearl or a diamond” (Marx (1885) 1971 p. 94).

<sup>100</sup> Shell, Marc (1978): *The Economy of Literature*, Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, p. 53; “Πυρὸς ἀνταμείβεται πάντα καὶ πῦρ ἀπάντων, ὥσπερ χρυσοῦ χρήματα καὶ χρημάτων ζῆχρυσός”, Jones, W.H.S. trans. (1931): Hippocrates, Heraclitus. *Nature of Man. Regimen in Health. Humours. Aphorisms. Regimen 1-3. Dreams. Heraclitus: On the Universe*, Loeb Classical Library 150, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, p. 478.

<sup>101</sup> Shell 1978 p. 55; notably, in the case of Fragment 90 Shell notes a “dispute about whether *exchange* is a noun or verb” (1978 p. 52n).

<sup>102</sup> Marx, Karl ([1859] 1904): *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. N.I. Stone, New York: International Library, p. 150.

<sup>103</sup> Marx (1859) 1904 p. 117.

<sup>104</sup> Goux 1990 p. 48, emphasis original.

note about translations as we read between English, French, and German: though we have above cited the English translation of Marx used in the English translation of Goux, it is likely that Goux himself uses the word “concatenation” because he is reading either from the original German or from a French translation which comes closer to the word Marx himself uses, “*Verkettung*,” which indeed would more properly be understood as a “concatenation,” *Kette* on its own being a “chain.”<sup>105</sup> Moreover, this is the same word Marx uses in the original German of the second quotation: “*Metamorphosenkette*.”<sup>106</sup> For now we will note merely in passing a further sense of *Kette* which will take on added significance in the following chapter: a “manacle.”

Part of the difficulty of the expression Snorri is attempting to construct in this passage is the fact that he is speaking about expression itself (“*orðtak*,” very much a “figure of speech”). What is worse, that expression takes the form of expression (*tal*) even though it is a cryptic way of expressing something else entirely, that is, gold, though we are now beginning to see the affinity between expression and gold. We should remember that Snorri is, after all, writing a grammatical treatise, a poetics, and the nature of this passage is therefore largely metadiscursive (and supremely “textual” in the sense meant by Goux).<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Marx, Karl ([1859] 1971a): *Zur Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie*, Karl Marx/Friedrich Engels Werke vol. 13, Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag p. 94; for an alternate translation, consider Marx, Karl ([1859] 1971b): *A contribution to the critique of political economy*, Karl Marx, trans. S. Ryazanskaya, ed. Maurice Dobb, p. 114: “merely the interlinking of the metamorphoses of commodities”.

<sup>106</sup> Marx (1859) 1971a p. 29.

<sup>107</sup> As an example of Snorri’s textual awareness, one might note that the form of the *Gylfaginning* section of *Edda* very much reflects the dialogic knowledge-contest form of several Eddic poems (as noted by Clunies Ross 2005 p. 101).

The diction of this section reflects a previous exchange in which a general definition for poetry and poetic terms is asked for:

*Þá mælir Ægir: "Hversu á marga lund breytið þér orðtökum skáldskapar, eða hversu mörg eru kyn skáldskaparins?"*

*Þá mælir Bragi: "Tvenn eru kyn þau er greina skáldskap allan."*

*Ægir spyr: "Hver tvenn?"*

*Bragi segir: "Mál ok hættir."*

*"Hvert máltak er haft til skáldskapar?"*

*"Þrenn er grein skáldskaparmáls."*

*"Hver?"*

*"Svá: at nefna hvern hlut sem heitir; önnur grein er sú er heitir fornöfn; in þriðja málsgrein er kǫlluð er kenning"<sup>108</sup>*

Then Ægir says: "In how many ways are the expressions of poetry changed, or how many categories are there in poetry?"

Then Bragi says: "There are two categories which divide all poetry."

Ægir asks: "Which two?"

Bragi says: "Speech and metres."

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<sup>108</sup> Faulkes 1998 p. 5.

“What figures of speech are there in poetry?”

“There are three categories of poetic language.”

‘Which?’

“These: to name everything as it is called; the second category is that which is called ‘pronouns;’ the third category of speech is that which is called a kenning”

First of all, we must note a certain difficulty in the translation of the word *fornafn* here.

Though what one might call its “indigenous” meaning is unclear since it only appears in the context of grammatical treatises such as *Snorra Edda*, this word is certainly used as a calque for the Latin *pronomem*,<sup>109</sup> to which it indeed corresponds as a cognate in both elements of the word: *for* being equivalent to *pro*, *nafn* being equivalent to *nomen*.<sup>110</sup> I have rendered it here in a manner that suggests Snorri’s awareness of affinities between Old Norse and Latin rhetorical terminology. Clunies Ross translates *fornafn* here more neutrally as “substitution”, which is, after all, one aspect of what a *pronoun* is.<sup>111</sup> Snorri here seems aware of the slipperiness of the Old Norse linguistic terminology he is using. There is a certain movement from *orðtak* (“word expression”) to *máltak* (“speech expression”): *mál*,

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<sup>109</sup> Clunies Ross, Margaret (1993b): “Fornafn”, *Medieval Scandinavia: an Encyclopedia*, ed. Phillip Pulsiano & Kirsten Wolf, New York & London: Garland (1993), p. 205; Clunies Ross 1987 pp. 64-79; Tryggvi Gíslason (1967): *Íslensk Málfræðiheiti miðaldamerking, þeirra fyrirmyndir og saga*, Mar. art. diss., University of Iceland, pp. 110-111; Halldór Halldórsson (1975): *Old Icelandic Heiti in Modern Icelandic*, University of Iceland Publications in Linguistics 3, Reykjavík: Institute of Nordic Linguistics, pp. 25-27.

<sup>110</sup> This is not to say that these two words have “naturally” evolved cognate to one another; rather that either they have independent etymological histories nonetheless sufficiently congruent for grammarians like Snorri to notice their similarity, or that perhaps *fornafn* was coined primarily as a calque for *pronomem*.

<sup>111</sup> Clunies Ross 2005 p. 105; in these terms, this concept bears a strong resemblance to Pierre Fontanier’s definition of metonymy as part of the list of tropes, as noted by Ricœur ([1975] 2003 p. 212): “changes of names, that is, names for other names” (Fontanier, Pierre ([1830] 1968): *Les Figures du discours*, Paris: Flammarion, p. 79).

“speech” in general, becomes for poetry a matter of “naming” (*nefna*) things, either according to the way they are normally “called” (*heita*), or by a more mysterious and characteristically poetic “substitution” (*fornafn*). *Tal jǫtna* requires a “substitution,” but it also necessarily refers to speech itself; by this substitution the “measure” (*tal*) becomes the “speech” (*tal*) of the *jǫtnar*.

We must furthermore note something very important about the way Snorri characterizes this figure of speech: that it is – spectacularly – *cryptic*. We “hide” or, in a more material sense, “bury” (*fela*) this meaning in “secrets” (*rúnar*) and “poetry” (*skáldskap*), two categories which Snorri implicitly equates as being analogously cryptic. The concept of encrypting things in poetry is widespread in Old Norse literature (perhaps unsurprisingly given the value placed on complexity by the Old Norse poetic aesthetic),<sup>112</sup> but the use of this particular word, *fela*, finds a parallel in an episode of *Egils saga*. Here Egill Skallagrímsson’s friend Arinbjörn asks whether Egill has “buried” the name of a woman in his verse, which he indeed has, apparently using an elaborate pun to refer to the name of his recently widowed sister-in-law, his love of whom he is at first ashamed to admit. In the verse that follows, Egill himself refers to the concept of “burying” a name in poetry, and makes another punning reference to the word “sister-in-law” (*sifkona*) itself:

24. *Sef-skuldar fel ek sjaldan,*

*Sorg Hlés vita borgar,*

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<sup>112</sup> As John Lindow points out in the case of skaldic poetry in particular (Lindow 1974).



*í niðerfi Narfa –*

*nafn aurmýils drafnar*<sup>113</sup>

24. Relative-Skuld's hide I seldom,

Sorrow [of] Hlér's fire's hill,

In the toast [of] Narfi –

Name – earth-mound's – lessens

24. I seldom hide earth-mound's relative-Skuld's [pun for *sifkona*, "female in-law"]

name in the toast of Narfi [poetry] – the grief of Hlér's fire [gold]'s hill [woman]

lessens.

Furthermore, Snorri refers again to hiddenness with the term "*yrkja folgit*", quite literally to "compose hidden", speaking of composing obscure phrases in poetry.<sup>114</sup> In the case of *tal jǫtna*, there are various forms of encryption at play. Again, Snorri shows an awareness of the difficulty in expressing a concept to do with expression. However, he also refers to the hidden and inscrutable manner in which one term becomes exchanged with another, or metamorphoses into another. As with the figures we have examined above, the movement from one term to another is not sensible; it cannot be intuited according to conventional and strictly semantic associations, it does not move along a normal avenue of semantic conceptuality. Just as the number nine seems to have no semantic or etymological

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<sup>113</sup> Bjarni Einarsson 2003 p. 85.

<sup>114</sup> Faulkes 1998 p. 109.

connection to the Norns or to *nauð*, so too one cannot reach *munntal jǫtna*, and from there “gold,” from *tal jǫtna*, through a straightforward semantic association. Furthermore, as with figures we examined in chapter 2, this figure operates through an elision: *tal jǫtna* is essentially an elliptical expression, eliding the crucial *munn* and thereby making the expression unfamiliar and mysterious.

This hiding or burying – encrypting – is performed, as we have seen, by denying an intuition which would appeal to the extralinguistic relations or resemblances between the objects conventionally referred to by words. The fully “conceptual” line of association, that which might lead to a structural metaphor of the sort Lakoff and Johnson take as their object of study, is ruptured here. We arrive at *tal jǫtna* from *munntal jǫtna* not quite by the conceptual association of those words and not entirely through the contextual knowledge of the story itself, but through properties of the words themselves, as words. In this sense the figures used by Egill to bury the name of the object of his desire, which work through a punning, metalinguistic association, are of a similar nature to those we are examining in Eddic poetry. Above I have gone as far as to call this operation “perverse,” and now we can see in what way this is the case, in a strictly neutral sense of the word. Snorri himself has a sense of this operation as it functions in the case of certain kennings, and yet he is unable to put his finger on the exact nature of the operation or to define it in a lucid way: an element of it remains cryptic.<sup>115</sup> This cryptic element is where the figure reaches its apex of

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<sup>115</sup> Here we must return to the discussion of genre in Old Norse poetry that we referred to in the first chapter, since one might question whether a figure found in a kenning can really be illustrative of figures found, quite apart from kennings, in Eddic poetry; and yet, the similarity of these operations has been demonstrated here. It is not within our current scope to examine the extent to which this form of crypticness obtains to kennings, but I would predict that there are many parallels to be found. The more one examines the kenning, the less it

abstraction: through abstract concatenation and substitution, two elements we have seen recur throughout our examination of Eddic repetition. Jakobson, speaking of the task of incorporating discussions of meaning into linguistics, says that “[l]anguage entails two axes. Syntax is concerned with the axis of concatenation, semantics with the axis of substitution”:

If, for instance, I say ‘the father has one son’, then the relations between ‘the’, ‘father’, ‘has’, ‘one’, and ‘son’ are relations within the sequence; they are syntactic relations. If I compare the contexts ‘the father has one son’, ‘the mother has one son’, ‘the father has one daughter’, ‘the father has two sons’, I substitute certain signs for others, and the semantic relations we deal with are no less linguistic than the syntactic relations. Concatenation implies substitution.<sup>116</sup>

In this particular spatialisation of the problem, Jakobson’s paralleling of multiple sentences is just as artificial as our own identification of the epiphora of words across multiple texts, and yet the results are no less conclusive for that, the “semantic relations” “no less linguistic than the syntactic relations.” Jakobson is showing not the irrelevance but rather the explanatory power of the spatial metaphor of “concatenation” by simply rotating the axes by ninety degrees, so that the catena proceeds in a direction that common sense would normally resist, but that remains nonetheless compellingly orthogonal. Jakobson is able to do this partly because he knows that the view of a syntagma as a linear “sequence” in this instance is conditioned by the linearity of modern English syntax; like us, he knows

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appears – as Snorri would have us believe – that it is a unitary and discrete trope; rather, it is likely that the kenning will prove to be a broader category that performs numerous operations in each instance. Given the tendency of the kenning toward ever greater complexity, this should come as no surprise.

<sup>116</sup> Jakobson, Roman ([1953] 1971): “Results of a Joint Conference of Anthropologists and Linguists”, *Selected Writings II*, The Hague: Mouton, p. 565.

that there are other languages for which syntax is not so straightforward. Jakobson's identification of a pair of axes should be read in terms of his earlier binary – demonstrating, as Ricœur puts it, the “binarist zeal” of “structural linguistics”<sup>117</sup> – of “combination” and “selection” as the “two modes of arrangement” of “[a]ny linguistic sign”.<sup>118</sup> Indeed, “selection and substitution are two faces of the same operation.”<sup>119</sup>

Considering the implications of Jakobson's thought, Ricœur associates substitution and selection with “the power to define words, to provide an *equational* definition”.<sup>120</sup> Through substitution and selection, “I designate elements of my code by means of equivalent elements within the same code”;<sup>121</sup> here the Jakobsonian cryptological terms of “code” and “message” should be familiar from the previous chapter. Metaphor, for Ricœur, must move through this mysterious equivalence, just as, for Marx, commodities metamorphose through the mysterious equivalence of exchange value. Further on in this analysis, Ricœur reads through the “reformulation of Jakobson's theses” by Michel le Guern.<sup>122</sup> Here Ricœur compares three “phenomena:” “symbol, metaphor, and synaesthesia”:

In the symbol (‘Faith is a great tree’ writes Péguy), the analogical correspondence through which the symbol represents something else depends upon an extra-

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<sup>117</sup> Ricœur (1975) 2003 p. 205.

<sup>118</sup> Jakobson, Roman (1971): “Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances”, *Selected Writings II*, The Hague: Mouton, p. 243.

<sup>119</sup> Jakobson 1971 p. 243.

<sup>120</sup> Ricœur (1975) 2003 p. 209, emphasis original.

<sup>121</sup> Ricœur (1975) 2003 p. 209.

<sup>122</sup> Ricœur (1975) 2003 p. 213; le Guern, Michel (1973): *Sémantique de la métaphore et de la métonymie*, Paris: Larousse.

linguistic relationship that, to develop this correspondence, brings into play the mental representation of 'tree.' It is this very perception of the image that sustains the logical information of the statement. In other words, the symbol is an intellectualized image.<sup>123</sup>

This is to say that in its symbolicity, the symbol short-circuits the "logical" analogy, what we have above referred to as the "normal" line of association, through a sort of iconicity, a sort of materiality.<sup>124</sup> For Ricœur and le Guern, this is the "extra-linguistic" character or referent of the symbol. In the figure we have examined above, we can see this sort of symbolic operation, and yet it is far more difficult to say whether it is truly non-linguistic; indeed, it is difficult to say at all what it is, given our lack of cultural context. However, as with Ricœur's metaphor, there is a certain "semic incompatibility".<sup>125</sup> There is a rupture, as we have noted, in the way one would normally intuit semantic associations, linking words in a way that makes those words strange and then finally moving beyond the word altogether and into the realm of the glyph, all seemingly as part of the same movement. This strangeness comes from the unseen order of equivalence that binds all these words and symbols together, that endows words not so much with meaning as with the symbolic: here we understand a word not just as a *σημεῖον*, a symbol, but also as a *σῆμα* in the sense of a token to be exchanged, a coin, as Shell points out.<sup>126</sup> As Goux puts it, here "signifiers" have

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<sup>123</sup> Ricœur (1975) 2003 p. 219. Jakobson elsewhere discusses the "annoying ambiguities" in the overlapping of the semantic fields of "symbol" and "seme", and the genealogy of these terms in the work of Saussure and Pierce (Jakobson, Roman ([1965] 1971): "Quest for the Essence of Language", *Selected Writings II*, The Hague: Mouton, p. 347).

<sup>124</sup> Ricœur indeed goes on from here to discuss iconicity in metaphor ([1975] 2003 pp. 222-225): "semantic clash is just one side of a process whose other side is the iconic function" ([1975] 2003 p. 225).

<sup>125</sup> Ricœur (1975) 2003 p. 220.

<sup>126</sup> Shell 1978 pp. 63-68.

“an iconic, figurative value”.<sup>127</sup> We have now arrived at the point where we can really understand Goux’s distinction of “a cryptophoric rather than a metaphoric” way of signifying, a figure that “manifests but does not elucidate or articulate”. Therefore, and we cannot overstate this fact, the associative figure of *norn/nauð* we see here is one not so much of straightforward metaphorical movement; the “contiguity” which makes this movement possible is “not a representation of things, not even a representation of words, but arises from the lexical contiguity of the various meanings of the same words”, “allosemic” in Abraham and Török’s terms.<sup>128</sup> It is a contiguity at a level with a cryptic existence beneath the conventional understandings of words, and furthermore beyond even this into the realm of the “glyph.” In the following chapter we will see again this cryptic form of signification, association, and movement when we examine the repetitions of individual words in *Völundarkviða*.<sup>129</sup>

#### 4.4 *Skírnismál* Revisited: Epiphoras of *munr*

If the above analysis seems overly abstract, this is due in large part to its intertextual nature. Though the analysis demonstrates the fact of the *norn/nauð* figure’s intertextuality, it is difficult to define the exact nature of intertextual movement. Are we seeing evidence of influence, subliminal or conscious, of direct borrowing, or of some more fundamental verbal (or artistic) substratum? Again, our limited knowledge of the context of Eddic literary

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<sup>127</sup> Goux 1990 p. 171.

<sup>128</sup> Abraham & Török (1976) 1986 p. 19.

<sup>129</sup> Section 5.2, pp. 229-244 of this thesis.

production prevents us from going much further with that question. In order to get a better view of the subject, we will now shift the axes back to a more conventional position and examine the repetition of a particular word within a single text. Although even as we do this it is important to bear in mind the heterogeneous character of Eddic texts that we noted in the chapter 1, it is nonetheless rather less problematic to assert such a figure of repetition and metaphoric movement in a single text than it was in the continuum we traced above, spanning as it did not only multiple texts but multiple media, multiple languages, and multiple historical contexts. However, even as we follow the circuitous journey of a word through a single poem, we will find that it too is haunted by intertextuality.

In the preceding chapter we examined the turnings of the word *munr* in *Skírnismál*, and this examination in many ways prefigured the concerns of the present chapter. However, in contrast to our concerns of metaphor and semantics here, we previously viewed the turnings of *munr* in terms of deictic elements, in particular the ways in which prepositional and pronominal elements of the sentence affect the meaning or usage of the repeated word. As we saw, *Skírnismál* contains a network of interwoven stylistic figures which manifest in repetition but which operate on the level of index, the level of syntax and the pronoun. I have said that this deictic aspect presents a contrast to our present concerns, but in fact it is more the case that the previous chapter should inform our understanding of this one. After all, we have seen that the movements of words across Eddic texts, though operating through the movement of metaphor, somehow exceed or deny straightforward semantic contiguity. They operate on a more cryptic level of contiguity, and in this sense their movement is analogous to the syntactic movement we examined previously, the

relations of the words somehow analogous to the relations of syntactic elements. Though they perform more or less clear semantic functions in the texts in which they respectively appear, the thread that connects them bears a certain resemblance to the index. With this in mind, our following examination of the semantic field of *munr* should be seen more as a synthesis of these concepts, rather than a positing of one over or against the other. Additionally, in its repetition of the word and exploration of its semantic field, we will see that *Skírnismál* constructs or contributes to a wider abstract concept.

*Skírnismál*, as we have seen, encourages exploration of the full breadth of the semantic field of *munr* not only by way of scattered repetitions across the poem, but in particular by what we previously identified as the climactic point of the poem, in which the word is used twice in the same strophe with a shift in its deictic frame. This introduces the concept of a sort of hierarchy of “desires,” since Skírnir’s threat has the effect of subordinating the *munir* of Gerðr to those of his own. Whether or not the magical element of the threat has taken effect, Skírnir has successfully forced her to submit to what he wants, which, furthermore, has eclipsed even the desires of his master Freyr. We posited a translation of *munr* as “desire” in the first instance in a somewhat arbitrary way, but the subsequent reading of the poem shows the condition of this translation: *munr*, throughout *Skírnismál*, has something to do with willpower, with the capacity of an individual to influence reality. In their commentary on the text, von See et al translate *munr* as “*Wünsch*” in each of its appearances except that of 26:3, where *munir* is given as “*Willen*.”<sup>130</sup> These

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<sup>130</sup> von See et al 1997 p. 107.



translations reflect the specific usage of *munr* here, as relating to a wish or desire or will to (do) something, yet they cannot denote the more complex associations of *munr* as a general psychological term in Old Norse.

*Munr* is part of a group of Germanic words associated etymologically with the modern English word “mind:” at the level of Anglo-Saxon this includes (*ge*)*mynd* and *myne*. In terms of the complex vocabulary for psychic phenomena in Anglo-Saxon, Antonina Harbus notes both the “semantic overlap” and the “semantic range” of nouns pertaining to the cognitive or mental faculty.<sup>131</sup> The difficulties Harbus notes in studying these overlapping fields of meaning are familiar to us by now. Viewing these languages at a considerable distance and with a considerably impaired sense of context, we cannot definitively say “to what degree the mind language is employed idiomatically or figuratively or how to read it when it is. Subtle nuances can be encoded, even within conventional usage.”<sup>132</sup> These psychological terms are, in the Anglo-Saxon corpus, represented to a high degree in poetry, particularly in the so-called elegiac poems, which tend toward introspection.<sup>133</sup> In these poetic usages, as with the diction we are examining here, it is difficult to tell which usage is artistic and which is merely conventional, or what the relation between these two types of language is. In our present discussion of metaphor, however,

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<sup>131</sup> Harbus, Antonina (2002): *The life of the mind in Old English poetry*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, pp. 28, 37.

<sup>132</sup> Harbus 2002 p. 37.

<sup>133</sup> Harbus 2002 p. 127: “The Old English poems which most explicitly dwell on the life of the mind are those which are usually called ‘elegies’.” One might note furthermore that Harbus must go on here to discuss the legitimacy of the much-debated “elegiac” as a genre in Anglo-Saxon poetry, a discussion somewhat parallel to our own of genre in Eddic poetry.

we are in a better position to see the overlap between art and convention, and in particular how the former exploits the latter, consciously or not.

*Munr* moves through its semantic field from the notion of a faculty for thought and emotion, to a wishing or willing of an object by the desiring subject, and from there to a meaning of love or pleasure: the final sense being conceived as the successful closing of the process of desiring something.<sup>134</sup> We could provide examples of this semantic movement, but *Skírnismál* itself reflects this breadth of meaning all on its own, with the notion of *munr* as “mind” always in the background.<sup>135</sup> The initial exchange between Skírnir and Freyr already demonstrates in a relatively compact textual space a significant part of the movement of *munr*:

4. *Hví um segiac þér,                    seggr inn ungi,*  
  
*mikinn móðtrega?*  
  
*Þvíat álfrøðull                    lýsir um alla daga*  
  
*oc þeygi at mínom munom.*

4. Why about tell I [to] you,    the young man,  
  
[of] great mood-sorrow?

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<sup>134</sup> Whence *munuð* or *munað*, which denotes more specifically lust and sensuality; for example, *Sólarljóð* 18:1 has those who “*Munað ... drýgðu*” (“perpetrated” or “suffered lust”) consequently experiencing a sensuous punishment of extreme heat and cold in hell, drawing attention to the specifically physical form of this pleasure. See Cleasby & Vígfússon 1874 pp. 438-439.

<sup>135</sup> Note that *munr* is given as a heiti in the *þula* for “*hugar ok hjarta*”, equivalent in this context to such words for “mind” and “thought” as *geð*, *móðr* and *hugr* (Gurevich, Elena ed. (2017b): “Anonymous Pulur, *Hugar heiti ok hjarta 1*” *Poetry from Treatises on Poetics*, Kari Ellen Gade and Edith Marold (eds.), *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 3*, Turnhout: Brepols, p. 964).

Because elf-ray                      shines throughout all days

And is-silent to my *munir*.

4. “Why should I tell you, young man, of my great unhappiness – when the elf-ray  
[i.e. the sun] shines all day long, but not according to my *munir*.”

5:1-3. *Muni þína*                      *hycca ec svá micla vera,*

*at þú mér, seggr, né segir;*

5:1-3. Your *munr*                      think-not I so much to be,

That you [to] me, man, not say;

5:1-3. “I do not think that your *munr* can be so great that you cannot tell me of it,  
man”

In 5 we see the only instance of *munr* in the singular in *Skírnismál*. Between this and the context of Skírnir’s overall expression, it is likely that this use of *munr* is closer to the concept of a “mind;” it is analogous to certain uses of the word “mind” in modern English, to “have a mind to” something. Freyr’s use of the word in the plural, however, is more clearly in the sense of “desire” that we see throughout the poem: on the one hand, Freyr bemoans the fact that the normal course of things continues regardless of his own desires; on the other, he is perhaps expressing his unhappiness as an anhedonic inability to take pleasure in normally pleasurable things.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> The latter sense is how, for example, Cleasby & Vígfússon understand this expression, when they compare it to one of Hamlet’s: “Man delights not me”, etc (1874 p. 438).

Gerðr's use of *munir* in identical phrasing in strophes 20 and 24 could certainly be read in the context of this psychological association; considering the context of *Skírnismál* as a whole, the psychological echo is unavoidable. And yet here we seem to be dealing with the problem of art versus convention: because whereas one could, as we previously have, read this expression in the sense of "for no one's pleasure" or "according to no one's desires," it also has a more prosaic sense of simply "for no one's sake." Gerðr certainly invokes the concept of psychic desire here, but her expression of it has an idiomatic ring to it. *Munr* here does not seem to be foregrounded in the way that it is, for example, in strophes 26 or 35 ("af/at þínom/mínom munom"). Yet even if we are to read *at manzkis munom* ("for no one's sake") as a "petrified" expression, it is nonetheless impossible for us to read it outside of the context of its repetition across the entire text. It fits within a pattern of *munr* being combined with a possessive pronoun, making it a sort of attribute. Gerðr's use of it here in particular calls to mind Skírnir's in strophe 5, in which it denotes not only a general state of mind, but more specifically a will for the world to be other than it is, a will to affect reality. This sort of will is exactly what Gerðr rejects (that is, as long as it is someone else's will), and here we start to see the sense of *munr* as "desire." The modern English word too has a continuum of meaning moving from will in general to sexual desire in particular, and as the text takes on more erotic charge, a sexual understanding of *munr* also becomes apparent.

Through metonymy, in *Skírnismál* we see *munr*'s semantic field cover the mind, desire or the faculty of desire, but also the state of desiring and even the object of desire. These latter two can both be seen in a section of *Hávamál*: first in the slightly

anthropomorphised “*inn mátki munr*” (“the mighty love”) which makes fools of men in 94, and then in a more personal sense when in the first-person speaker (presumably Óðinn) in 96 speaks of a time when he “awaited” his “beloved,” “*oc vættac míns munar.*” In this latter example, the sense of *munr* as particularly the object of desire in a person is fairly clear. Though the sense of *munr* is different, one might note that the genitive phrasing here is similar to that in *Skírnismál* 40:6. One also sees the interplay between concepts of love, desire, and pleasure in the expression of *Fjölsvinnsmál* 50, in which the protagonist’s lost love expresses her joy in their reunion:

50:1-3. *Þrár hafþar es ek hef til þíns gamans,*

*en þú til míns munar.*<sup>137</sup>

50:1-3. Longings had which I have for your pleasure,

and you for my desires.

50:1-3. I have suffered great longing for your pleasure, and you for my desire.

Here a deictic switch within repeated phrasing, comparable to the various figures in *Skírnismál*, equates *gaman* (“pleasure”) with *munr*. The context is the return of a lost love, but the diction is very much that of desire and pleasure, perhaps with a sexual connotation.

A similar sense of both love and longing can be seen in an expression in *Oddrúnargrátr*, a

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<sup>137</sup> Sijmons, Barend & Hugo Gering ed. (1903-1931): *Die Lieder der Edda*, Halle: Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses, p. 213. This poem, of apparently relatively late composition, is (similarly to *Sólarljóð*) only attested in paper manuscripts (now lost) dating to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and tells part of the same story as the similarly late *Grógaldr*. Note that *Fjölsvinnsmál* has a fully dialogic but partly narrative structure similar to *Skírnismál*, but contains a knowledge contest or battle of wits comparable to the mythological wisdom poetry of Codex Regius. See Einar Ólafur Sveinsson (1973): “Svipdag’s Long Journey: Some Observations on *Grógaldr* and *Fjölsvinnsmál*”, *Béaloideas*, Iml. 39/41 (1971 - 1973), pp. 298-319.

poem dealing with narrative material related to and featuring a theme of grieving similar to  
*Guðrúnarkviða I*:

22:5-8. *þeygi við máttom við munom vinna,*

*nema ec helt hofði við hringbrota.*

22:5-8. Yet-not we-two might against desires overcome,

Unless I held [my] head against the ring-breaker.

22:5-8. And yet we could not overcome our desires, unless I leaned my head against  
the breast of the ring-breaker [the king, Gunnarr].

The subject here is again one of lost love: in this case the forbidden love between Oddrún and Gunnarr, whose proposed marriage has been rejected by her brother Atli. As Oddrún ends her lament, she claims that “*maðr hverr lifir / at munom sínom*” (34:5-6: “each person lives / according to their desires”), painting a consistent picture of *munr* as an inescapable compulsion, not entirely dissimilar from depictions of *fate* in the Eddic corpus.

As we can see, among Eddic poems the association of *munr* with love and desire is the norm. On the other hand, we should note a non-Eddic example that illustrates the sense of *munr* as “the mind” more generally in a kenning in Egill Skallagrímson’s *Hofuðlausn*, a poem ostensibly composed in honor of Eiríkr Blóðøx in order for the poet to avoid being executed by him. Here the subject of the kenning is poetry itself:

19:5-8. *Hrærdá ek munni*

*af munar grunni*

*Óðins ægi*

*of jǫru fægi.*<sup>138</sup>

19:5-8. I stirred the mouth

from the mind's shallows

Óðinn's sea

for battle's cultivator.

19:5-8. I stirred up with my mouth Óðinn's sea [poetry] from the mind's shallows [the breast] for the cultivator of battle [the king, Eiríkr].

Here *grunni* could be the dative form of either of two related words, the neuter *grunn* ("shallows, shoals" – here perhaps in the sense of a shoreline as a boundary) or the masculine *grunnr* (the "bottom" of a body of water). Either way, this aquatic imagery merges into the kenning describing the mead of poetry as Óðinn's "sea." This kenning can be read in a more conventional way as, materially, "the breast" as the container of thought. However, it should be read in the context of another psychological expression of Egill's in *Sonatorrek* 1:8: "*hugar fylgsni*",<sup>139</sup> "thought's hiding-place". This strophe uses the same verb, *hræra*, of the tongue in describing the effort of composing and declaiming poetry. Taken together, we see a consistent association on Egill's part between stirring the mouth

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<sup>138</sup>Bjarni Einarsson 2003 p. 111.

<sup>139</sup>Bjarni Einarsson 2003 p. 146.

or tongue and dredging something up from the container of thought, which may be a bodily location or may be a purely abstract psychological schema.

It is to this broad semantic range that *munr* refers in *Skírnismál*, and one sees in the similarity of expressions containing the word in Eddic verse in particular a certain amount of intertextual play. And yet, while one must consider these various meanings to be activated to some extent in the repetitions of *munr*, it could also be said that this text in particular – which alone accounts for a quarter of the uses of the word in the Eddic corpus – constructs its own specific set of meanings and its own particular concept of “desire.” We start with Freyr’s desire, a feeling of suffering produced not only by infatuation but by lack of access: Freyr desires what he lacks. The exact language used, however, actually denies this direct association between desire and lack; it is not so much that the desire constitutes a lack as that there is a tension between reality and desire, where desire arises whether the object of desire is lacking or not. In strophe 4 Freyr laments that the world does not proceed “according to [his] desires” (“*oc þeygi at mínom munom*”). This primacy of desire over reality foreshadows the greater plasticity of the concept of desire that develops as the word is repeated throughout the text. By the end, we have arrived at a concept of desire as something that flows, that can be directed and redirected, as Skírnir threatens to redirect Gerðr’s desire and, arguably, succeeds. There is no clear boundary here between magical compulsion and what a modern reader would consider to be mundane psychic phenomena.

This concept of desire not predicated on the lack of an object reflects a certain philosophical debate. Alan D. Schrift traces the thread of the concept of desire as lack running through Western philosophy, starting with Plato, through Descartes and Hegel,



finding its modern culmination in Sartre, Lacan, and perhaps most importantly in Freud's distinction between drive and desire.<sup>140</sup> For Schrift, the opponents of this concept are Spinoza, Nietzsche, and through them Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. It is the particular concept of desire of Deleuze and Guattari which I wish to focus on here, as it has many useful parallels to the concept of *munr* in *Skírnismál*. This idea, developed by Deleuze and Guattari through the two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, is necessarily multi-faceted and perhaps occasionally inconsistent.<sup>141</sup> It begins with and frequently returns to an absolute repudiation of the idea of desire as lack: as Deleuze says elsewhere, "who, except priests, would want to call it 'lack'?"<sup>142</sup> Schrift presents Deleuzoguattarian desire as a synthesis of Spinoza's *conatus* and Nietzsche's will to power, but it should also be said that they have incorporated much of Freud's thought (even as they turn against it), as well as the Marxian concept of labour power.<sup>143</sup> This is a model of desire not as lack but as production, and as such it is the production of the real in general. For Deleuze and Guattari, desire "flows;" because they have conceived of reality as an endless (and endlessly reducible) succession and network of "machines," a diagram of desire as a flow can be drawn through the couplings, connections, and redirections of these machines. A "machine"

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<sup>140</sup> Schrift, Alan D. (2000): "Spinoza, Nietzsche, Deleuze: an other discourse of desire", *Philosophy and desire*, ed. Hugh J. Silverman, New York and London: Routledge p. 173-176.

<sup>141</sup> The exact relationship between the two individual volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* has been the subject of some discussion (Holland, for example, discusses the relationship between the various works of Deleuze & Guattari: Holland, Eugene W. (1999): *Deleuze and Guattari's Anti-Oedipus: introduction to schizoanalysis*, London: Routledge, pp. ix-x). In the case of Deleuzoguattarian desire in particular, Ben Turner (Turner, Ben (2017): "Ideology and Post-structuralism after Bernard Stiegler", *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 02 January 2017, Vol. 22(1), p. 101) ponders some possible internal inconsistencies in the idea, specifically in terms of Bernard Stiegler's reading of it.

<sup>142</sup> Deleuze, Gilles & Claire Parnet (1987): *Dialogues*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, London: Athlone, p. 62.

<sup>143</sup> Holland 1999 pp. 11-12, 15-17, 106-112.

here is absolutely abstract: “[a] machine may be defined as a *system of interruptions or breaks (coupures)*.”<sup>144</sup> It is because of this completely abstract definition that they can claim the term is “no metaphor”, that is to say that it is not a reasoning by analogy.<sup>145</sup> Desire moves through these “chains” of connections, and through “connective”, “disjunctive”, and “conjunctive” syntheses becomes “at once the production of production, the production of recording, and the production of consumption”.<sup>146</sup>

A notable consequence of Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of machinic assemblage is that it rejects the perceived boundaries of personality or subjectivity. This is what we should understand, in terms of our current subject, by their complex idea of the “body without organs”:<sup>147</sup> first of all, that the concept of a “body” is being considered in its most abstract sense, of which human bodies are one but not the only kind, and secondly that the body is not an “organism” because there is nothing “essential” to it. Rather, it is a provisional entity formed by the connections of various machines, and therefore itself a sort of machine. This image of bodies as concatenations of machines – where the boundaries between bodies are not essential, the connections between them multifarious, and their constituent components not necessarily unique to each individual body – finds a certain echo in the troubled boundaries of personality we have seen in *Skírnismál*. When in strophe 26 Skírnir threatens to “tame” Gerðr “*at mínom munom*”, von See et al note that he is entirely

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<sup>144</sup> Deleuze, Gilles & Félix Guattari ([1972] 1984): *Anti-Oedipus: capitalism and schizophrenia*, preface by Michel Foucault / translated from the French by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane, London: Athlone, p. 36, emphasis original.

<sup>145</sup> Deleuze & Guattari (1972) 1984 p. vi.

<sup>146</sup> Deleuze & Guattari (1972) 1984 pp. 38-41.

<sup>147</sup> A term first found in Deleuze & Guattari (1972) 1984 p. 8, borrowed from an expression of Antonin Artaud.

“identifying” with the desires of Freyr, his master, rather than appearing as a “*Hypostase*” of Freyr.<sup>148</sup> Skírnir has indeed become something more than a mere messenger or avatar of Freyr: as we have seen, his desires override those of the other characters in this text. We saw in the previous chapter that repetitions of deictic elements of the sentence proceed in *Skírnismál* (as well as in *Brymskviða* and *Lokasenna*) in a distinctly non-naturalistic manner: the voices of the characters conform to the pattern, rather than the pattern reflecting a theory of the characters’ personality.<sup>149</sup> This artificial aspect is reflected in the conspicuous repetition of *munr*, as well as in its movement through the text and through the word’s own slippery semantic field. Through deixis we have the concept of *munr* belonging to a particular individual, but through the jarring repetition of phrases with shifting deictic markers, the individuality of desires becomes shaken, until Skírnir finally destroys the concept in 35:9-10: “*mær, af þínom munom; / mær, at mínom munom:*” “girl, of your desires, girl, by my desires”. This dissolution of boundaries is part of the horror Skírnir threatens to – and, ultimately, does – inflict upon Gerðr. Skírnir threatens to reconstitute or absorb her into his own desiring being, to make her flow only through him and to cut off those flows which are not in accordance with his own desires. The very phrasing used – the repetition of *munr*, the shifting repetition of deictic markers – calls into question the boundaries of Gerðr’s subjectivity. As Larrington points out, the poem “paradoxically” acknowledges the reality of Gerðr’s desires; they are by no means so suppressed that they

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<sup>148</sup> von See et al 1997 pp. 107-108.

<sup>149</sup> I use “naturalistic” here largely for want of a better term. It would be inappropriate to suggest that realistic prose fiction as we know it today would have been considered the default norm for readers or listeners of Old Norse. Here I am invoking this idea primarily in a comparative sense, to highlight the particularity of these figures in Eddic poetry rather than to posit any genealogical or causal connection or disjunction.

cannot be spoken of at all.<sup>150</sup> Rather, if there is something that is not spoken of at all in the text, it is the possibility of Skírnir's subjectivity being in any way violable. He is the one who holds the instrument of magical power, and likewise the power of language in the poem is centred on him. We should once more note that there is no narrative voice in this text, only dialogue. Yet in his own threatening soliloquy Skírnir takes on the role of the narrator in describing the curses he will inflict on Gerðr. It seems reasonable to identify a level of investment in his voice similar to that which there would normally be in the narrative voice. In the end, we see that even Freyr appears to question the continued integrity of his own subjectivity in relation to Skírnir's.

By focusing on the repetition of the individual word in particular and adding this frame of reference to our previous analysis of the pattern of deictic repetition in *Skírnismál*, we come to a complete picture of the poem's structure. The deictic shifts and parallels coupled with the specific schema of *munr* built up by the repetition of that word produces an effect of uncertain and shifting subjectivity, and an economy of desire oriented toward Skírnir's domination of Gerðr. The formal structure of *Skírnismál* almost constitutes a meta-narrative of its own. Indeed, given the medium – the aesthetic arrangement of language in meter – and the nature of this text as, presumably, a representation of a narrative already known to its audience rather than the construction of a narrative for its own sake, it is right to consider this formal structure to be of as much significance as the narrative itself. Most of the forms of repetition we have so far examined find themselves represented in this

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<sup>150</sup> Larrington 1992 p. 14.

structure, building from the grammatical level up to the semantic. In the following chapter we will carry this approach into an analysis of *Vǫlundarkviða*, considering the text as a whole from the start. As we shall see, not only are many devices of repetition shared between *Skírnismál* and *Vǫlundarkviða*, but there is also a surprisingly similar preoccupation with desire, violence, and transgressions of personality and subjectivity.

## 5. The Structure of Repetition in *Vǫlundarkviða*: an Economy of Cruelty

In previous examples we saw cases of apparent intertextual reference of a surprising and unusual nature. In the case of *Vǫlundarkviða*, the text is notable for the relatively broad array of expressions which refer to its central narrative. The supernatural smith Vǫlundr/Weland/Wieland appears also in prose in *Þiðreks saga*, in Anglo-Saxon verse in *Deor* and *Beowulf*, and later in Middle High German verse in *Friedrich von Schwaben* and *Heldenbuch*. Additionally, the story told in *Vǫlundarkviða* is depicted with remarkable clarity and detail on a panel of the eighth-century Northumbrian carved whalebone box known as the Franks Casket.<sup>1</sup> Vǫlundr's legendary and supernatural metalworking abilities are his defining characteristic, except in *Deor*, which treats him primarily as one of a list of figures of tragedy (along with Beadohild/Bǫðvildr from the same narrative material). *Vǫlundarkviða*, as we shall presently see, dwells considerably on Vǫlundr's craftsmanship, while in *Beowulf* his reputation adds a legendary touch when he is attributed as the creator

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<sup>1</sup> On this object and its provenance see Dobbie, Elliott van Kirk ed. (1942): *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records: The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, vol. 6, New York: Columbia University Press, pp. cxxv-cxxx, 116, 204-207; Webster, Leslie (1991): "The Franks Casket," *The Making of England: Anglo-Saxon Art and Culture AD 600—900*, ed. Leslie Webster and Janet Backhouse London: British Museum Press, pp. 101-103; Webster, Leslie (1999): "The Iconographic Programme of the Franks Casket," *Northumbria's Golden Age*, ed. Jane Hawkes and Susan Mills, Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton, pp. 227-246; Page, R.I. (1999a): *An Introduction to English Runes*, 2nd ed., Woodbridge: Boydell, pp. 172-179. Other possible pictorial representations of this narrative material in Northumbrian stone sculpture have been proposed: see Bailey, Richard N. (1980): *Viking Age Sculpture in Northern England*, London: Collins, pp. 105, 107; Lang, James T. (1976): "Sigurd and Weland in Pre-Conquest Carving from Northern England", *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal* 48 (1976), pp. 83-94; McKinnell, John (1987): "Norse Mythology and Northumbria: A Response", *Scandinavian Studies*, Vol. 59, No. 3, *Anglo-Scandinavian England* (Summer 1987), pp. 325-337. However, these potential depictions of Vǫlundr/Weland are unclear and lacking in detail compared to that on the Franks Casket, rendering their relevance to the present discussion doubtful.

of the eponymous hero's armour<sup>2</sup> as well as Widdia's sword Mimming,<sup>3</sup> both "*Welandes geweorc*". The Old Norse poem consists of a narrative in which Vǫlundr, after meeting and then being left by his swan-maiden wife, is taken captive and maimed by the local king Niðuðr, and forced to make precious objects for him. The narrative culminates in Vǫlundr's revenge: dismembering the king's sons and fashioning their body parts into precious objects, and raping and impregnating the king's daughter Bǫðvildr. As we shall see, unlike the entirely dialogic *Skírnismál*, *Vǫlundarkviða* tells its story through a mixture of dialogue and narration; it is the interplay between these voices that forms the key to the poem's stylistic structure.

The depiction of the Vǫlundr/Weland story on the Franks Casket includes strikingly clear details from the narrative as we know it in *Vǫlundarkviða*, such as the dismembered and hidden legs of Niðuðr's sons and Vǫlundr's hand offering a cup to a female figure that must be Bǫðvildr. These are made all the more remarkable by the constraints of the medium, carving in bone on a miniature scale, forcing the visual style to tend toward brevity and suggestion; as Thomas Klein puts it in an analysis of the panel, the narrative material is "redundantly revealed through gesture and detail".<sup>4</sup> The Franks Casket carvings also depict classical and Biblical narratives, with the secular Germanic Vǫlundr/Weland material juxtaposed rather curiously on the same side as a panel depicting the adoration of Christ by

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<sup>2</sup> Fulk, R.D. et al. eds. (2008): *Klaeber's Beowulf*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 454-455.

<sup>3</sup> Fulk et al 2008 405-406.

<sup>4</sup> Klein, Thomas (2014): "The Non-Coherence of the Franks Casket: Reading Text, Image, and Design on an Early Anglo-Saxon Artifact", *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 2014, Vol. 45(2), p. 33.

the Magi.<sup>5</sup> This panel is perhaps the best example of the object's nature as a whole: it possesses a playful suggestiveness which proves absolutely irresistible to the modern scholar, resulting in a wide variety of interpretations.<sup>6</sup> Each panel features pictorial carving bordered by writing in Anglo-Saxon and Latin, with both languages in Roman and runic script. In keeping with the Casket's overall suggestive rather than descriptive aesthetic, the runic titulus on the Weland/Magi panel does not refer to the pictorial narratives it encircles at all, but rather to the object itself. It is first of all striking that this titulus reads clockwise, with the runic characters on the bottom border running retrograde. This centrifugal form together with the syntactic ambiguity of the text makes it impossible to determine precisely where a reading ought to begin, but the inscription is normally read thus:

*Fisc flodu ahof on fergenberig*

*warþ gasric grorn, þær he on greut giswom*

*Hronæs ban*<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The jarring difference in theme between these two narratives is clear enough, though both Klein (2014 p. 32) and Webster (1999 p. 246) characterize the dichotomy between the two as one between "pagan" and "Christian" elements. This appears to be based on the assumption that the story of Weland predates the spread of Christianity to whatever Germanic group it originated with, for which there seems to be no particular evidence apart from a lack of overtly Christian subject matter; in any case, it can hardly be said that the Vǫlundr/Weland story contains any clear religious themes.

<sup>6</sup> Webster (1999), for example, discusses religious and/or secular kingship as the overarching theme of the casket's designs. Other thematic programs proposed include exile (Lang, Jennifer: "The Imagery of the Franks Casket: Another Approach", in *Northumbria's Golden Age*, ed. Jane Hawkes and Susan Mills (1999), pp. 247-55; Webster also devotes some attention to this theme (1999 pp. 244-245)), a common topic of Anglo-Saxon poetry which also plays a significant role in *Deor*, which we will discuss below; as well as gift exchange (Hinton, David A. (1998): *Anglo-Saxon Smiths and Myths*, Manchester: Manchester Centre for Anglo-Saxon Studies, p. 282), and heroic or dynastic birth (Hinton 1998 p. 270; Webster, Leslie (1982): "Stylistic Aspects of the Franks Casket", *The Vikings*, ed. R.T. Farrell, London: Phillimore, p. 29).

<sup>7</sup> Dobbie 1942, pp. 204-207.



The tide cast a fish on the mountainside;<sup>8</sup>

The *gasric* started to mourn, when he swam on the sand –

Whale's bone.

This riddle in alliterating lines clearly refers to the material from which the casket is constructed; it has nothing to do with the scenes depicted on the front panel it encircles. This fact is emblematic of the overall aesthetic strategy of the casket's carvings, which depict carefully detailed narrative scenes and yet form no clear relationship with one another, seeming to lack what Klein calls "hierarchical signals" or "meaningful hierarchies that might structure ... a narrative".<sup>9</sup> Klein's conclusion that the casket's designer deliberately avoids such a "hierarchy" seems likely, and it is highly suggestive that the figure of *Vǫlundr/Weland*, who we will discuss in detail presently, can be found in an object whose aesthetic strategy (which includes not only the riddle but also runic cryptography) has a close affinity with the flamboyantly cryptic tendencies of Eddic poetry we examined in the previous chapter.

### 5.1 Reading *Vǫlundarkviða* and its Characters

The below analysis of *Vǫlundarkviða*, though primarily a mapping out of the formal strategy of the text in terms of its use of repetition and voice, will also entwine notions of

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<sup>8</sup> In addition to other interpretive difficulties including the hapax legomena *gasric* and *grorn*, the inflections and consequently the subject and object of the first line are unclear.

<sup>9</sup> Klein 2014 pp. 38, 44.

formal characteristics with those of narrative content or theme in a manner prefigured by the character of *Skírnismál* we have accumulated over the previous two chapters. With this in mind, we will examine two readings of *Völundarkviða* by John McKinnell and Ármann Jakobsson which are primarily concerned with narrative theme and especially with the psychology of the characters.<sup>10</sup> These detailed readings provide an important insight into scholarship on this text, as well as a crucial contrast to my own approach. In spite of obvious differences, these readings have an affinity with that of this study, in that they both seek an internal logic in a text that is resistant to interpretation. As with *Skírnismál*, themes of violence, sexuality, and domination play a key – as we see below, structuring – role in *Völundarkviða*. In their readings of the poem McKinnell and Ármann both seek to make sense of a story that, from the point of view of a modern Western scholar at least, seems to lack much in the way of a sound moral. However, we will see presently how one’s approach to reading and mapping out the text affects the way one understands the relationships between the characters that act within it; how do they affect one another, and how are they represented?

Questions of form and content already become entwined in one of the recurring questions asked of *Völundarkviða*: whether the Codex Regius text is an original whole or a composite of what were originally two different poems. We saw a similar argument surrounding the integrity of *Skírnismál*, which features a significant shift in both tone and metre in the Skírnir-monologue section. In the case of *Völundarkviða*, the question is rather

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<sup>10</sup> McKinnell, John ([1990] 2014): “*Völundarkviða*: Origins and Interpretation”, *Essays on Eddic Poetry*, ed. Donata Kick and John D. Shafer, University of Toronto Press, pp. 221-248; Ármann Jakobsson (2006): “The Extreme Emotional Life of Völundr the Elf”, *Scandinavian Studies* 78 (2006), pp. 227-254.

one purely of narrative flow and the progress of ideas: the entire poem is in *fornyrðislag* and features a mix of dialogue and narration, though the opening section is entirely in the narrative voice. McKinnell summarises the question of the poem's integrity by characterising the difference between the two thematic sections as one between "the two archetypal stories on which its plot is based", that is, from the point of view primarily of structuralist mythography, the two main narrative foci are seen as having distinct origins.<sup>11</sup> However, though there may be a thematic rift between the introduction and the bulk of the poem in some ways, in many others they are linked: both thematically and, as we shall see, stylistically. A reading is possible, therefore, that seeks a continuous logic across the whole text; in this case the formal question "what does the first part of the poem have to do with the rest of it?" can be phrased as the thematic question "what do the swan-maidens have to do with Níðuðr and his family?"

Ármann and McKinnell's readings implicitly conceptualise the poem's narrative as a group of characters who are essentially discrete, distinct, and autonomous social agents with unique social identities, histories, and private motivations, very much in the way one might read a modern novel-form fiction text. This sort of reading implicitly judges a fictional text by how well the social causation it depicts squares with the way the reader thinks social causation works in the non-fictional world. As in a novel, the reader accepts the illusion that the characters are other social agents, and seeks to understand their motivations accordingly. This mode of reading reflects how we read other social agents as discrete

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<sup>11</sup> McKinnell (1990) 2014 p. 221.

minds like our own. As a cognitive practice, this has been termed “mentalisation” in a study of the concept’s implementation in reading literature by Elisa Galgut;<sup>12</sup> it is notable that all the examples drawn in this study are readings of modern novel-form fiction.

Though it is understood as one of the fundamental mechanisms of the modern novel, this might seem an uncritical attitude with which to approach a poetic text conceived and recorded in a sociohistorical moment very distant from the one in which the concept of literary realism has arisen; however, it is arguably such a fundamental mode of cognising that it must necessarily feature in criticism whether one wills it or not. As Galgut puts it, “[r]eading requires – and perhaps facilitates – mentalization”; for her, this statement requires no historicisation.<sup>13</sup> McKinnell’s reading of *Vǫlundarkviða*, as with many of his other pieces of Eddic criticism, modifies the discussion of “myth” or “archetype” as an abstract sociohistorical category with an analysis of the motivations of the characters that appear in the poem. The latter approach provides coherence and immediacy to the former, and together they make up a method of exploring the poem’s coherence and navigating its structure. In his essay McKinnell weaves these two epistemologically distinct modes of inquiry into one smooth pattern that follows the causal flow of the poem, to some extent using its structure to structure his own text, but filling in the details where the poem has remained oblique, obscure, or silent.

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<sup>12</sup> Galgut, Elise (2010): “Reading Minds: Mentalization, irony and literary engagement”, *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* vol. 91 (2010) pp. 915-935.

<sup>13</sup> Galgut 2010 p. 915.

Stylistically, McKinnell's analysis shifts significantly from a detached stance in the discussion of the provenance and dating of *Vǫlundarkviða* to the more literary analysis of its narrative coherence, which makes considerable use of what could be called free indirect speech or discourse. Galgut, in fact, pays particular attention to the use of free indirect discourse in fiction in her own essay, characterising it as "the literary technique whereby the first-person thoughts of the character are written in the grammatical third person",<sup>14</sup> and furthermore citing David Lodge as saying that "[f]ree indirect speech is a deviation from strict grammar and strict logic, and thus perhaps comparable to the more obvious non-logical linguistic features of poetry".<sup>15</sup> Indeed, this stylistic confusion of grammatical voice has a particular resonance with analysis of voice and deixis in the dialogue of *Skírnismál*. As with most cases of free indirect speech, McKinnell does not signal when he is speaking indirectly – it is a common enough feature of literary criticism that doing so would be rather unusual – and so the analysis is able to dip in and out of this mode as it suits the structure and flow of the argument, despite the deictic shift that is implied. In fact, this also has the effect of obscuring that deictic shift, in much the same way as fiction writing itself does: one does not have to clarify the ontological status of everything one says, but the elision of the deictic change, which remains simply implicit and provisional, may also conceal the conditions under which some of the essay's more ambiguous propositions originate, as well as the relationships between various propositions. Consider the following passage:

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<sup>14</sup> Galgut 2010 p. 924.

<sup>15</sup> Lodge, David (2002): *Consciousness and the Novel*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, p. 16. On the term "free indirect discourse" in general, see especially Vološinov, V.N. ([1930] 1986): *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. Ladislav Majteka & I.R. Titunik, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press. Vološinov provides a similar definition of the term to Galgut's ([1930] 1986 p. 115).

Staying put in such a situation is also more sensible in terms of this relationship; the human will not be able to find his supra-human mate against her will, and as the marriage was initiated and ended by her choice, it is only by her return, whether voluntary or compelled by magic, that it is likely to begin again. That is probably why Völundr spends his time perfecting rings, whose completion seems to function as a symbol of female sexuality in this poem, as well as creating the idea of a chain magically binding the characters to each other. There is an apparent 'rightness' about this behaviour.<sup>16</sup>

Shifts through multiple deictic frames must take place for these propositions to be tied together. In this part of the analysis, the primary frame of reference is that of free indirect speech: an assessment of what the characters conceived by the poem's medieval composer might find reasonable as courses of action, presented as if they were actual people in the sense that one experiences actual people. This frame of reference then blends into one in which the crafting of rings can function as a symbol of female sexuality, where the conceptual status of the events being reported is clearly stated as being in this text (outside of which we, the critic and the reader, stand). This in turn leads to some original poesis on McKinnell's part, exploiting the metaphorically extensive possibilities of rings to relate to, notably, social causality, a speculative note that blends back into free indirect discourse of a yet more ambiguous nature than before. There is no agent to the concluding statement; the "apparent 'rightness'" simply "is." Here it seems that what is apparent to one has been

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<sup>16</sup> McKinnell (1990) 2014 p. 237.

conflated with what would be apparent if the circumstances of this section of *Völundarkviða* really obtained to one.

McKinnell's use of free indirect speech is especially pronounced in his examination of the female characters of *Völundarkviða*. For example, McKinnell characterises Bǫðvildr as the sort of woman who seeks to get her own way by a mixture of what she regards as feminine charm with flattering the servant by making him her partner in a little conspiracy. There is also a touch of duplicity about the way she intends to conceal the breaking of the ring from her parents; she thoroughly deserves the insincere reassurances Völundr offers her in return, and perhaps even the drink-supported seduction which follows.<sup>17</sup>

Here we can see an even more complex form of distanced, indirect thought representation – which nonetheless lends a certain proximity to the tone of the writing. It is somewhat unclear exactly whose thoughts and judgments are being represented here, and within the critical text's ambiguous deictic frame, we are presented with a description of Bǫðvildr as a person capable of entertaining notions about herself which are not reported in the source text, in particular false notions of what constitutes “feminine charm.” Note that this psychologically detailed profile of Bǫðvildr has been extrapolated from the suggestive possibilities of strophe 26:

26. *Þá nam Bǫðvildr*

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<sup>17</sup> McKinnell (1990) 2014 p. 240.

*baugi at hrósa, er brotið hafði:*

*“Þoriga ec at segja, nema þér einom.”*

26. Then began Þoðvildr

The ring to praise, which [she] had broken:

“Dared-not I to say, except [to] you alone.”

26. Then Þoðvildr began to praise the ring which she had broken: “I dared tell no one, save you alone.”

Perhaps the most crucial and ambiguous word in McKinnell’s characterisation of Þoðvildr in this episode is “deserves.” Here the status of the writing as free indirect speech is brought to the foreground; presumably this is not the opinion of the critic. But the concept of Þoðvildr “deserving” what happens to her is here both invoked and implicitly disavowed, without making clear who we ought to understand considers it to be the case. Is it the poet? The postulated original audience, whoever they may be? The characters themselves, in the text’s own internal social logic? This thread is picked up again later on when it is suggested that “[s]ome recent criticism has regarded Þoðvildr with a good deal more sympathy”,<sup>18</sup> again ambiguously referring to Þoðvildr as if she were real: clearly to rhetorical effect, and yet it is striking that such treatment is sustained in such a consistent manner. The implied lack of sympathy must surely be attributed to the voice of the critic, whose unsympathetic attitude seems to be cemented by the following statement that Þoðvildr “can hardly

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<sup>18</sup> McKinnell (1990) 2014 p. 241.



complain about Vǫlundr's seduction of her." The more immediate and closer to the first-person voice these pronouncements become, the less it is clear how one should understand their actual status.

The scene between Vǫlundr and Bǫðvildr on the island is described in a typically oblique manner, but it is clear that Vǫlundr causes Bǫðvildr to become intoxicated and then forcibly impregnates her, primarily as an act of aggression against a third party (as we shall return to below). The reluctance of scholars to describe or conceive this act of sexual aggression as "rape" is therefore somewhat remarkable; much as it may merely be an artefact of changing cultural standards across the decades (though Motz is particularly keen to read consent on Bǫðvildr's part; we will return to the reasons for this below).<sup>19</sup> This brings us back to an aforementioned aspect of *Vǫlundarkviða*: its thematic preoccupation with forms of violence and sexuality, with sexuality seeming to appear primarily as a form of violence. McKinnell indeed characterises the poem's treatment of women as "hostile",<sup>20</sup> which attitude has been embedded in his own indirect characterisation of the female characters. The analysis of the logic of *Vǫlundarkviða* that is presented by McKinnell expresses an ambiguous opinion about the culpability of Bǫðvildr and her mother in their own unpleasant fates, and at the same time a reluctance to consider the full implications of what is perpetrated against Bǫðvildr. This analysis, moreover, is stymied by the exaggerated and disproportionate nature of Vǫlundr's revenge, which denies any form of symmetry and,

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<sup>19</sup> While McKinnell's treatment seems merely euphemistic, Motz and Dronke both interpret Bǫðvildr's behavior as to some extent consenting, as we will discuss in more detail below (5.3.2, pp. 250-262): Motz, Lotte (1986): "New Thoughts on *Vǫlundarkviða*", *Saga-Book XXII:1* (1986), pp. 50-68; Dronke 1997 p. 257.

<sup>20</sup> McKinnell (1990) 2014 p. 241.

as McKinnell notes, finds no parallel in any actual known laws that could have been current for the poet or the poem's original audience.<sup>21</sup> Vǫlundr's violence can only be reconciled in this analysis by appealing to his supernatural aspect, which simply places him outside human social mores. The indirect voice is careful, however, to note that "to explain Vǫlundr's behaviour as due to his elvish origins does not ... amount to a defence of him."<sup>22</sup> This final note truly cements the ambiguity of such statements; we cannot determine, here, who would be defending Vǫlundr to whom, or why one would do such a thing. McKinnell attempts to lose his own voice by casting himself into the medieval audience of *Vǫlundarkviða*, and yet the narrative logic delineated by this reading remains a loose thread.

The reading of *Vǫlundarkviða* by Ármann Jakobsson takes a different approach from McKinnell's, and yet arrives at a comparable attitude. Ostensibly Ármann examines Vǫlundr's nature as an elf (based on the three instances of an epithet including the word *álfr* being applied to Vǫlundr in the poem), but primarily his goal is to regard Vǫlundr's character from a psychological point of view. This psychological focus in fact implies a certain anthropomorphisation, in spite of the assumption that Vǫlundr is an elf, a category of being which must be considered problematic for its non-human and yet anthropomorphic nature.<sup>23</sup> For the bulk of this argument, the difference of elvishness has to actually be discarded in order to examine Vǫlundr as a discrete human mind with an implied

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<sup>21</sup> McKinnell (1990) 2014 p. 242.

<sup>22</sup> McKinnell (1990) 2014 p. 242.

<sup>23</sup> On the subject of *álfr* in Old Norse and Anglo-Saxon literature, see Hall, Alaric (2007): *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England: Matters of Belief, Health, Gender and Identity*, Woodbridge: Boydell, especially pp. 21-53 which deal specifically with Old Norse examples.

life outside the text, much as McKinnell does. This seems to be a silent acknowledgment of the particular paradox of psychologically analysing an elf; neither poet nor listener has any model of a mind to appeal to other than that of the human when constructing this character's psyche. Ármann is therefore forced to analyse Vǫlundr as an elf by primarily analysing him as a human. Ultimately, however, this contradiction becomes the crux of the argument. Vǫlundr's particularly elven characteristics, as identified here, are "representations of" or "metaphors for" elements of the human psychic structure as it stands in the theoretical frameworks Ármann appeals to.<sup>24</sup>

One might assume that the structuralist roots of Ármann's thought in this analysis would deny the individuality of the minds of the characters in the poem in favour of archetype, much as one might have expected McKinnell to focus on symbol and archetype rather than on individual human agency. The conclusion that Vǫlundr in his elvishness "represents" aspects of human psychology seems to belong in this structuralist vein; Ármann refers to "the Otherness of *álfr*", though he does not expand on his use of this term.<sup>25</sup> In fact, by apparently identifying this Otherness as something that is ultimately interior to an individual human mind, Ármann implicitly denies the truly radical exteriority of the Other as posited by Lévinas, Lacan, or Husserl;<sup>26</sup> on the contrary, Ármann's Other is one "buried inside us under layers of self-control".<sup>27</sup> Thus, for Ármann, the *álfr* nature

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<sup>24</sup> Ármann Jakobsson 2006 p. 250.

<sup>25</sup> Ármann Jakobsson 2006 p. 250.

<sup>26</sup> For Husserl's Other, see Husserl, Edmund ([1931] 1973): *Cartesian Meditations: an introduction to phenomenology*, trans. Dorion Cairns, The Hague: Nijhoff; for Lacan, see Lacan, Jacques (1981): *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XI*, trans. A. Sheridan, New York: Norton; and for Lévinas, see Lévinas, Emmanuel ([1974] 1998): *Otherwise than Being, or, Beyond Essence* (trans. Alphonso Lingis, Dordrecht: Nijhoff).

<sup>27</sup> Ármann Jakobsson 2006 p. 250.

expressed in Vǫlundr's character is an emanation of this interior yet disturbing and alien force. This psychological analysis is in fact tempered by a strongly existentialist point of view that assumes individuality as an essentially a priori condition of existence: in this case, the existence of the characters of *Vǫlundarkviða*. It is in this sense, the assumption of discrete individuality, that Ármann's reading is of a kind with McKinnell's, and this is more apparent in the textual analysis itself.

Throughout their readings of the poem, Ármann and McKinnell attempt to make sense of the characters' interactions on the characters' own terms, building them up into acceptably complex and discrete social agents and constructing their motivations and psychic states, and yet this does not resolve the violence of the text. The way in which these interpretations fall back into indeterminacy brings into question the extent to which the poem itself is really structured by McKinnell's notion of a "causal chain." Stylistically, *Vǫlundarkviða* is not a text that proceeds in an analytic fashion. After a misleadingly serene and thematically somewhat opaque introduction, the plot descends into violence while the poet makes ever more dramatic use of repetition and disjunction in the arrangement of narrative events, culminating in the practically word-for-word repetition of an entire two strophes detailing nothing other than the dismemberment and reconfiguration of Níðuðr's sons. The poem's structure discourages an analytic or sequential reading of it. Therefore, we should stress that the following analysis is not oriented primarily toward a perceived reception of the poem in any specific context; rather, we are looking into the direction of the poem's origin, not in the sense of its provenance, but in the psychic conditions of its possibility.

## 5.2 Repetition and Voice in *Vǫlundarkviða*

Throughout this study so far we have examined forms of repetition across the corpus of Eddic poetry, but *Vǫlundarkviða*'s particularly extensive and dramatic use of repetition, while showing similarities to the stylistic strategies of other poems we have examined above, sets it somewhat apart from or above the rest. Nearly every strophe contains a link to (an)other strophe(s) on a line of association that does not straightforwardly relate to the narrative flow; just as we saw with the cryptic recurrences of individual words in the previous chapter, the path of association has less to do with conceptual contiguity and more to do with cryptic riddling. As noted above, we know from other sources that the narrative material of *Vǫlundarkviða* was, in one form or another, a widely attested story well before the time of the poem's compilation in Codex Regius; therefore, as with other Eddic poems, as a presentation of a pre-existing narrative, the poem's structuring element cannot necessarily be said to be its plot. Much as the plot itself has a certain structure, we can see from other examples of Vǫlundr's appearances in literature and art that the elements of the existing narrative material can be rearranged to some extent. It is more appropriate to shift our point of view slightly: it is the stylistic structure itself that effects *Vǫlundarkviða*, that makes it *Vǫlundarkviða* and not simply an account of the legend of Vǫlundr the smith.

Paul Taylor makes this very point about *Vølundarkviða*: that the stylistic structure of the poem is, first of all, not incoherent or corrupt, but also that it is not arbitrary.<sup>28</sup> Taylor identifies instances of repetition and parallelism that stylistically link the first few strophes with the rest of the poem, whereas thematically there is a significant gap between the introductory swan-maiden episode and the bulk of the poem's narrative which other critics have, as mentioned above, interpreted as an interpolation from another text. But whatever the source or sources of the narrative material, Taylor argues that the poem itself coheres as a structure. He then goes further to argue that the system of repetition is what structures the poem: it is "an intricate Gothic structure whose various components repeat, in different proportions, the same design; and whose unity consists of a series of repetitions of one essential idea", likened to the "interlaced ribbons in a net of congruous designs" of the tenth-century Jelling stone carving.<sup>29</sup> Taylor's vision is compelling, but one might question whether the "unity" he posits as the structuring principle of the poem is really so central to *Vølundarkviða*. Does repetition lead to unity? Superficially, it seems as though repetition implies identity (that is to say, that something is reproduced identically). But this is not exactly the case on an abstract level, and we have seen previously that repetition paradoxically implies difference as much as or more than sameness. As we have seen above

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<sup>28</sup> Taylor, Paul Beekman (1963): "The Structure of *Vølundarkviða*", *Neophilologus* 47:1 (1963), p. 235. For context, it is important to note that various scholars have interpreted *Vølundarkviða* as either the fusion of two texts or as the artistic entwining of two sets of narrative material into one poem, due to the two distinct narrative arcs it contains. This view has been put forth by for example Boer (Boer, R.C. (1907): "*Vølundarkviða*", *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 23 (1907), pp. 113-142), Neckel (Neckel 1908 p. 283), Holmström (Holmström, Helge (1919): *Studier över svanjungfrumotivet i Volundarkvida och annorstädes*, Malmö: Maiander), Einar Ól. Sveinsson (1962 pp. 417-418), and Bouman (Bouman, A.C. (1954): "On *Vølundarkviða*", *Neophilologus* 34 (1954) pp. 169-173; Bouman, A.C. (1939): "*Vølundr as an Aviator*", *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 55 (1939), pp. 27-42).

<sup>29</sup> Taylor 1963 p. 228; we will return to the affinity between poetic repetition and decorative motif in section 6.1, p. 279 of this thesis.

and will return to in greater theoretical detail in the concluding chapter, the repetition of an element implies multiple contexts.<sup>30</sup> One iteration of the element and another iteration must necessarily occupy separate places in space and time (or some other contextual quality – consider the deictic contexts of *Skírnismál*) in order to be distinguishable as repetitions rather than as one and the same thing. Identity and repetition, therefore, are somewhat incommensurable in spite of the fact that repetition provides a certain linkage. A close examination of the use of repetition in *Völundarkviða* reveals a consciousness of the way in which context affects meaning by repeating words, phrases, and entire strophes in different contexts as well as by exploiting the metaphorical extensibility of concepts – just as we have seen in numerous individual examples in the preceding chapters.

Taylor’s analysis is in fact not an exhaustive catalogue of the repetitions in *Völundarkviða*. He identifies instances of repetition where the first iteration is a “foreshadowing” of the second, and given these connections identifies as the “artistic principle” of the poem the idea that “man’s youth foreshadows his old age.”<sup>31</sup> Fate is indeed notably evoked in the poem’s opening strophe:

1:1-4. *Meyjar flugo sunnan myrcvið í gognom*

*alvitr ungar,                      ørlög drýgia.*

1:1-4. Maidens flew from-south through darkwood

young alien-beings,                      fate [to] endure.

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<sup>30</sup> Section 6.1, pp. 276-282 of this thesis.

<sup>31</sup> Taylor 1963 p. 228.

1:1-4. Maidens flew from the south, through the dark wood, young alien beings,  
enduring fate.

Just as it seems to be a comment on the advent of the swan-maidens here, the formula *ørlǫg drýgia* is repeated in the third strophe as a comment on their abrupt departure. This ambiguous phrase is not only, however, a repetition restricted to *Vǫlundarkviða* itself; it is the repetition of a set phrase attested elsewhere in Anglo-Saxon literature (one of a number of linguistic features seemingly derived from or connecting it to Anglo-Saxon – perhaps particularly Northumbrian – tradition).<sup>32</sup> *Drýgia* in this formula possibly has the sense of “endure,” “suffer [a thing]”. In fact, it is notably used in this sense when Weland appears in *Deor*:

1. *Welund him be wurman wræces cunnade,*

*Anhydig eorl earfoða dreag,*

*Hæfde him to gesippe sorgde ond longað,*

*Wintercealde wræce; wean oft onfond,*

*Sipþan hine Niðhad on nede legde,*

*Swoncre seonobende on syllan monn.*<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> As in *Dómes dæg* 29, “*ond þonne a to ealdre orleg dreogeð*”: Krapp, George & Elliott van Kirk Dobbie ed. (1936): *The Exeter Book*, New York: Columbia University Press, p. 212; McKinnell summarises the apparent Anglo-Saxon influence on this poem in the first half of *Vǫlundarkviða* ([1990] 2014), as well as *Norse Mythology and Northumbria* (1987).

<sup>33</sup> Krapp & Dobbie 1936 p. 178.



1. Weland himself because-of serpents[?]<sup>34</sup> knew exile,

Resolute man hardship suffered,

Had he as companion sorrow and longing,

Winter-cold exile; received often misfortune

Since him Niðhad on fetters laid,

Supple sinew-bonds on a better man.

1. Weland himself [?], knew persecution; the resolute man suffered hardship and had as his companion sorrow and longing, winter-cold misery. He often experienced misfortune, since Niðhad laid fetters on him, supple sinew-bonds on the better man.

There are multiple parallels between the diction of this strophe of *Deor* and that of *Völundarkviða* which we will address presently. In both Anglo-Saxon and Norse verse, the verb *drygja/dreogan* is used in an ambiguous sense which is comparable to the modern English senses of “suffer:” in Old Norse the word is used more often in ecclesiastic writing and in a far more negative sense with the connotation of “perpetrate.”<sup>35</sup> This is a significant

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<sup>34</sup> The sense of *wurman* is particularly unclear and has been the subject of varying interpretations; see Kaske, Robert E. (1963): “Weland and the wurmas in *Deor*”, *English Studies* 44: 190–191; Schücking, Levin (1933): *Kleines angelsächsisches Dichterbuch*, 2nd ed. Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, pp. 30-31; Malone, Kemp (1933): *Deor*, London: Methuen. Cox, Robert (1991): “Snake Rings in *Deor* and *Völundarkviða*”, *Leeds Studies in English* vol. 22(1991), pp. 1-20) explores some possible iconographic and conceptual associations between snakes and the character of *Völundr*, touching on the senses of *lind* which I also consider below.

<sup>35</sup> Consider “*hann hafðe dryktt hordom*” as a gloss in *Barlaams ok Josaphats saga* for “*adulterio perpetrato*” (Rindal, Magnus ed. (1981): *Barlaams ok Josaphats saga*, NT 4, Oslo: Norsk historisk kjeldeskrift-institutt, p. 127); also *Sólarljóð* 15, “*oftmetnað drygja*”, “perpetrate pride”; as Cleasby & Vígfusson put it, the word is used “mostly in a bad sense” (1874 p. 108).

semantic ambiguity, as the direction of agency is reversed between the two senses.<sup>36</sup> Taylor suggests a concept of fate that overrides individual agency; it is “endured.” An event is foreshadowed and then occurs, with appropriate symmetry and inevitability. But does the ambiguity of agency in the word *dryggja* not suggest something less clear-cut? There is an undeniable symmetry to the swan-maidens’ coming and going, but the formula relating them to fate is repeated in different contexts, and this in fact highlights potential differences in the meaning as well as identity.

The repetition of this formula ties it to other less obvious points in the poem in a pattern that spans the entire text. The repetition of the opening formula is clear enough, but in its second iteration it is tied with a rather opaque explanation for the swan-maidens’ departure: *nauðr um skilði*, “need separated them” (3:6). Taylor notes the poem’s “tension between the values of *beauty* and the *necessity* which controls it”, but curiously does not directly bring up this line, which implies that it is “necessity”, *nauðr*, that causes the separation of the (beautiful) swan-maidens from their husbands.<sup>37</sup> In addition to recalling a conceptual connection between “fate” and *nauð(r)* we have previously seen, the repetition of this word across the poem ties this iteration to one we have noted previously, in which the restraints laid upon Vǫlundr when he is taken captive by Níðuðr are referred to as “*hofgar nauðir*” (11:6): literally “heavy needs.” This is, as we have noted before, precisely

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<sup>36</sup> As discussed extensively in the case of Anglo-Saxon in Crozier, Alan (1987): “Old English *Dreogan*”, *English Studies* 68:4 (1987) pp. 297-304.

<sup>37</sup> Taylor 1963 p. 228, emphasis original.

the same turn of phrase used of the same episode in Anglo-Saxon in *Deor*: “*Sippan hine Niðhad on nede legde (9)*”.

We have already delved into the poetic uses and associations of *nauð(r)* in Eddic poetry in the preceding chapter, but here we will consider its etymology in more detail. It is striking that the same word, having as it does such an abstract central meaning, should be used in such a material sense in both Norse and Anglo-Saxon treatments of the same narrative material, describing the same thing. The cognates of this word in other Germanic languages have a remarkable semantic contiguity, frequently showing this dual abstract/material sense of the word. Guus Kroonen gives meanings along the lines of “necessity” in Gothic, Old Norse, Faroese, Anglo-Saxon, Old Frisian, Old Saxon, Dutch, Old High German, and modern German, and furthermore connects this etymology to Old Irish (*núne*, “famine”) and Lithuanian (*nõvyti*, “to oppress, torment, destroy”).<sup>38</sup> The Gothic cognate word *naups* is used in the Gothic Bible translation with a similar range of meaning to that in Old Norse and Anglo-Saxon: for example, as a translation for *ἀνάγκη* in II Corinthians 9:7,<sup>39</sup> and (as *naudi-bandi*) for *ἄλυσις* in Mark 5:4.<sup>40</sup> In the former case we see the word having the more abstract sense of compulsion (giving under compulsion as opposed to giving freely), whereas in the latter we see it in its more material sense (the chains which could not contain the Gerasene demoniac). These Biblical Gothic examples show a clear parallel to the use in Old Norse we see in the Eddic material of *nauð* as the first

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<sup>38</sup> Kroonen, Guus (2013): *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Germanic*, Leiden: Brill p. 385.

<sup>39</sup> Streitberg, Wilhelm ed. (1908): *Die Gotische Bibel*, Heidelberg: Winter, pp. 312-313; note also the related *naudipaurft*, similarly for *ἀνάγκη* in 9:5 and with a similar sense.

<sup>40</sup> Streitberg 1908 pp. 178-179.

part of a compound word. One also sees in the Old Saxon *Heliand* the compound word *nôd-rôf* (“theft”) with a comparable sense of *nôd* as a compound component.<sup>41</sup>

This apparently pan-Germanic range of meaning in this case creates a parallel between the two subjects at hand: it certainly is a repetition of a word, but – as with other repetitions of individual words we have examined in Eddic examples – with a shift in semantic sense. This does not seem to be a foreshadowing, but rather a sub-conceptual link between two points in the poem. It has the effect not only of uniting and juxtaposing the two events, but also of diversifying the potential meanings of the word. In particular, its use in the second iteration is a striking substitution of an abstract idea of “bondage” for whatever the physical mechanism of bondage of the hands is in this case. It is in contrast to the shackle, *ffjqturr*, placed on Vǫlundr’s feet or legs, the meaning of which is clear.

Or is it? In fact, this description of Vǫlundr’s capture in strophe 11 is not the only use of the word *ffjqturr* and not the only sense of the word that is used in the poem. Just as *nauðr* ties strophes 3 and 11 together, the word *ffjqturr* ties 11 to 24 and 34 (the second half of 34 being a nearly word-for-word repetition of the first half of 24, as we shall see in more detail below). Here we see the scene of Vǫlundr’s capture paralleled with the scene of his revenge by killing and dismembering the king’s sons. In its first iteration, *ffjqturr* is clearly a counterpart of *nauðr* and is to some extent equated with it, a more concrete term for a

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<sup>41</sup> *Heliand* 3272: “*ni nodrof ni fremi*” (“nor benefit from theft”) (Sievers, Eduard ed. (1935): *Heliand*, Berlin: Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses GMBH, pp. 224-225); the context again is Biblical, in that this is a paraphrase of the seventh commandment (not to steal, hence “*nodrof*”), as repeated by Christ in the dialogue with the rich man. It seems equally plausible that *nod* here could be being used in its sense of an intensifier, or alternately that a special meaning is indicated; given the other uses of this cognate, one could speculate that “theft under compulsion” is the specific sense of this word.

restraint. But its use later on is in describing the shackles on a smith's bellows, part of the paraphernalia of the forge. This seems to have no thematic or narrative link to its earlier use; is its recurrence a coincidence? The immediate syntactic context of the repetitions suggests otherwise:

11:7-8. *enn á fótom*            *fiqtur um spenntan*

11:7-8. and on [his] feet        a shackle spanned about

24:3-4. *oc undir fen fiqturs*    *fætr um lagði*

24:3-4. and under the [bellows-]shackle's pool feet/legs [he] about laid.

This is not only a repetition in diction, it is a syntactic formula, comparable to those examined in chapters 2 and 3 above. Even the spatial position of the “feet” in relation to the “fetter” remains unchanged; *fætr* in the case of strophe 24 likely has the sense more of the entire leg than just the foot, but the same word is used in both cases. Their syntactic positions are reversed, but the prepositions *á* and *undir* are used in antonymic senses (“on” and “under”) – the spatial schema of the feet/legs underneath shackles is the same in both cases. The connection between these lines is undeniable, but, like other examples we have seen, they are connected in a way that nonetheless profiles their difference. This is a difference that is especially clear in the contrast between the impersonal sense of *spenntan* – in the participle form, something static, having been wrapped around one – compared to the agency of *lagði*: actively “laid” by one. Indeed, though Taylor makes no mention of this instance of repetition, it does arguably support his notion of the foreshadowing function of repetition in *Vǫlundarkviða*.

Is this, however, merely a foreshadowing? In the sense that the repetition of *fjǫturr* and the syntactic formula it appears in highlights the proportional nature of vengeance to ironic effect, this certainly seems to be the case. However, foreshadowing is not all that is happening in this repetition, and this is especially apparent when one considers the entire progression from *nauðr um skilði* to *hǫfgar nauðir* to *fjǫturr* to *fen fjǫturs*. These words have been arranged in a way that highlights their metaphoric extensibility, a semantic progression along the lines of metaphor much like those we saw operating across multiple Eddic poems in the previous chapter, but here strung across a single text. It is not simply the case that they are linked by causality; in fact, the first instance of *nauðr* hardly seems causally related to the final instance of *fjǫturr*. Rather, they are linked by the same form of cryptophoric association we have already examined at length, and as in those instances, together they form a concatenation that spans the text.

Another parallel drawn in the poem is in a similar vein: the word *bast* is used in strophes 5 and 7 and apparently again in strophe 12 to refer to the rope or cord on which Vǫlundr keeps the rings he has forged and as such seems to be another part of the paraphernalia of the smith's forge (and in keeping with Vǫlundr's supernatural qualities, this cord is apparently able to hold seven hundred rings).<sup>42</sup> This is a metonymic sense of the word; as in modern English, "bast" is a kind of fibre made from the inner bark of linden or

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<sup>42</sup> The instance in strophe 12 reads in the manuscript "*besti byr síma*" (36:10); the interpretation of this metrically corrupt line is doubtful, but this presumably has the sense of a bast cord. Neckel & Kuhn render this as the single word *bestibyr síma*, but consider also the emendations *bestisíma* (simply "bast cord", Finnur Jónsson ed. (1888): *Eddalieder: Altnordische gedichte mythologischen und heroischen inhalts, vols. I-II*, ed., Halle: Niemeyer, p. 83), *besti yr síma* ("cord [made] out of bast", Bugge, Sophus (1910): "Det oldnorske Kvad om Vǫlund (Vǫlundar-kviða) og dets Forhold til engelske Sagn", *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 26 (1910) p. 53), and *besti, hǫrsíma* ("bast and linen cord", Kock, E.A. (1923-1944): *Notationes norrænæ*, Lund: Lunds Universitets Årsskrift, §27).

lime trees, and can be used to make ropes. After Vǫlundr has been captured and his products appropriated, there is a scene in strophe 18 where he sees Níðuðr bearing on his belt a sword of Vǫlundr's, one that he had made himself:

18. *Scínn Níðaði*                      *sverð á linda*  
*þat er ec hvesta,*                      *sem ec hagast kunna,*

18. Shines [for] Níðuðr              a sword on the belt  
That which I sharpened,              as I skilfulliest knew

18. "There shines on Níðuðr's belt a sword, that which I made sharp as I most skilfully knew how to do"

The word used of Níðuðr's belt here is *lindi*, identical to the word for a linden tree, and derived from it metonymically in a manner analogous to the use of *bast*. The parallel of *baugr á bast / sverð á lindi* ("ring on cord / sword on belt") not only contrasts the two situations (Vǫlundr's products in his own possession and Vǫlundr's products appropriated), it shows an awareness of the metonymy employed in both terms by referring to two different kinds of cord not literally, but by the material they are or could be made out of.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> There is additionally a *lindbaugr* in strophe 5, but it is unclear what is meant by *lind* in this hapax legomenon and a variety of interpretations have been proposed; for example, McKinnell ([1990] 2014 p. 223) interprets *lind* here in an identical sense to its use in 18, whereas Jón Helgason (Jón Helgason (1963): *Tvæð kviður fornar: Völundarkviða og Atlakviða með skýringum*, Reykjavík: Heimskringla 2 1962, p. 59) interprets the word as referring to a kind of dragon or serpent (from *linnormr*) as might feature in the metalwork design of a ring. However, the *lind* in *linnormr* is itself metonymically derived from the use of *lind* as "belt," drawing on the morphological resemblance between belt and serpent. See also the discussion in Einarson, Leif (2015): "Artisanal Revenge in Völundarkviða: Völundr's Creations in the Spatial Relations of the Poem", *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 01 January 2015, Vol. 114(1), pp. 10-18

Again, there is a stratum that suggests not so much a causal structure as a cryptic, riddling, sub-conceptual one.

The most noticeable instances of repetition in *Vǫlundarkviða* are those where entire lines or even strophes are repeated more or less word-for-word. This is a different sort of repetition from the above examples; when identical diction is used, there is no sense of paraphrase, metaphor, or metonymy. Rather, we are looking at forms of dialogic repetition of the same kind as those we saw in *Skírnismál*. This is particularly apparent when a description of the grisly death, dismemberment, and reconfiguration of Níðuðr's sons is repeated nearly word-for-word in strophes 24-25 and 34-36. Here there is no possibility of a foreshadowing, as Vǫlundr is simply repeating something that had already occurred earlier in the narrative. Taylor can find little purpose to this extensive repetition beyond "dramatic emphasis alone", since there is no apparent significant difference between the two iterations. However, he then briefly mentions what difference there is: "The repetition allows the audience to sympathize with Nidud's horror in hearing directly what has been revealed by the narrative voice."<sup>44</sup> Here Taylor touches on a crucial difference of context between the two iterations, but does not consider the significance of this difference. Vǫlundr, a character entirely within the poem's diegesis, repeats, nearly word-for-word, something previously spoken by the narrative voice. In fact, one of the most noticeable differences between these two iterations is the forceful insertion of the first-person pronoun as the subject in 34:5, where in 24:1 the subject is elided altogether, burying the

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<sup>44</sup> Taylor 1963 p. 234.



sense of person in the narrative voice while foregrounding it in the voice of Vǫlundr. While this repetition certainly is a “dramatic emphasis”, it has another stylistic effect, which is to muddle the distinction between Vǫlundr’s voice and the narrative voice, Vǫlundr’s person and mind with that of the narrator. In doing this, moreover, it draws attention to the stylistic structure of the poem itself. In this sense we do indeed see the same form of dialogic repetition with deictic difference as in *Skírnismál*, in which repeated elements are used interspersed with shifting deictic markers; but here it appears in an even more ontologically problematic sense: it is not only the boundaries between characters that are blurred, but those between the characters and the form of the narrative itself.

This is not the only instance of dialogic repetition in *Vǫlundarkviða*, though it is the most extensive and strident. At the end of the poem there is an instance of a repetition between voices, but it is less problematic and closer to the examples in *Skírnismál*, being entirely contained in dialogue between two characters in the diegesis. Bǫðvildr answers her father’s question,

40. *Er þatt satt, Bǫðvildr, er sǫgðo mér:*

*Sátoð iþ Vǫlundr saman í hólmi?*

40. Is that true, Bǫðvildr, which [they] said to-me:

Sat you-two Vǫlundr together on the island?

40. “Is it true, Bǫðvildr, that which has been said to me: did you and Vǫlundr sit together on the island?”

With his own words:

41:1-4. *Satt er þat, Níðaðr, er sagði þér:*

*Sáto við Vqlundr saman í hólmi,*

41:1-4. True is that, Níðuðr, which [one/he] said [to] you:

Sat we-two Vqlundr together on the island

41:1-4. "It is true, Níðuðr, that which has been said to you: Vqlundr and I sat together on the island"

Additionally, in an earlier and more conspicuous example in strophe 5, the narrative voice reports:

5:1-2. *En einn Vqlundr sat í Úlfdqlom*

5:1-2. And alone Vqlundr sat in Úlfdalir

In the following strophe this is repeated via indirect speech as something reported to Níðuðr and his minions:

6:3-4. *At einn Vqlundr sat í Úlfdqlom*

6:3-4. That alone Vqlundr sat in Úlfdalir

In all these instances we see voices that are ostensibly separate and discrete sharing identical phrases; moreover it appears that there is a connection being drawn between these two repeating pairs through the similarity of their diction and syntactic form.

Aside from the repetition of entire phrases, there are cases in *Vǫlundarkviða* of repetitions of individual words between voices. When Vǫlundr is captured and awakes to find himself helplessly bound by Níðuðr’s men, he wakes “*vilia lauss*” (11:4), literally devoid of “will”, but in the sense of being bereft of joy, a sense of *vilia* comparable to certain uses of *munr* we noted in the previous chapter.<sup>45</sup> On the opposite end of the narrative in strophe 31, Níðuðr borrows the narrative voice’s diction to describe his own state of sleeplessness following the death of his sons at (unbeknownst to him at this point, in a scene heavy with dramatic irony) Vǫlundr’s hands:

31:1-2. *Vaki ec á valt, vilia lauss,*

31:1-2. I wake always, joyless,

This is in fact not only an echo of the description of Vǫlundr in strophe 11, but also that in strophe 20, when the incarcerated Vǫlundr must also remain awake “*á valt*”, continuously, as he is forced to continue producing goods for his captor. This is another point in the poem where the poetic justice of Vǫlundr’s proportional revenge is emphasised, but it is striking that not only does Níðuðr’s voice become confused with the narrator’s, but his character becomes confused with Vǫlundr’s as they share the same experience. At the same time the difference in their experiences is also indicated by the play on the meanings of the two separate but semantically and phonologically proximal words *vekja* and *vaka*: in Vǫlundr’s case, *vekja*, to awaken to suffering, and in Níðuðr’s case, *vaka*, to be awake due to suffering.

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<sup>45</sup> *Guðrúnarkviða II* (9:3) uses the same term; notably, *Grottasǫngr* contains seemingly the exact opposite description to that in *Vǫlundarkviða*: “*vaki hann at vilia*” (5:7). One wonders whether one or all of these usages could perhaps be a play on a common expression.

Another instance where the characters share diction with the narrative voice is in the verb used by Níðuðr's wife in her suggestion that Vǫlundr's sinews be cut, and later by the narrator and Vǫlundr himself in the description of the decapitation of Níðuðr's sons: *sníða* (17:7). This is a relatively unusual word to use of a killing by beheading (one might rather expect the more overtly violent *slá* ("strike")), and normally carries a sense of the "scission" of a material.<sup>46</sup> This suggests a metaphorical expression of Vǫlundr's sinews as non-human material, and the queen refers to the sinews themselves metonymically as *sina magn*, the "sinews' strength" rather than the sinews as such. If this seems a gruesome image, it nonetheless only serves to prepare one for Vǫlundr's scission of the king's sons' heads from their bodies, apparently using the lid of a treasure chest. This is not the only feature of the queen's speech that is grimly prophetic: she also calls attention to Vǫlundr's eyes and teeth, body parts which will be used by him in his vengeful refashioning of the king's sons. These features blend the queen's voice with the narrator's, and by extension later on with Vǫlundr's. But in addition to this, they extend a notion of human bodies as material from an abstract metaphor (in the queen's usage) to a concrete non-metaphorical image in the fate of the king's sons. The mutation or metamorphosis of materials, it

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<sup>46</sup> In *Egils saga* we also see the word used of the protagonist forcefully cutting off Ármóðr's beard: "*Síðan sneið Egill af honum skeggit við hǫkuna*" ("then Egill cut off his beard at the chin"), Bjarni Einarsson 2003 p. 135, similarly with the preposition *af*. One example of *sneiða* used in the sense of a violent dismembering blow comparable to that in *Vǫlundarkviða* can be found in *Njáls saga*: "*hann sníðr hann sundr í miðju*" ("he slices him asunder in the middle") (Einar Ólafur Sveinsson ed. (1954): *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Reykjavík: Hið Íslenska fornritafélag, Íslensk fornrit 12, p. 97). Here the adverb *sundr* ("asunder/apart", that is, in this case, exactly in half) makes the nature of the action clear, but the use of *sneiða* again seems to impart a particularly gruesome note; however, note the diagrammatic difference between cutting in half and cutting a part of something off the whole. More usually in Old Norse prose, one would expect a word such as *slá* or *hoggva* to refer to the blow itself, with the dismembering being given as a consequence of that action rather than part of the action itself; as in *Laxdæla saga*, "*ok gekk þegar af hǫfuðit*" ("and then the head went off immediately") (Einar Ólafur Sveinsson ed. (1934): *Laxdæla saga. Halldórs þættir Snorrasonar. Stúfs Þáttr*, ed., Reykjavík: Hið Íslenska fornritafélag, Íslensk fornrit 5, p. 209).

increasingly seems as we look closer at the structure of *Vǫlundarkviða*, plays a crucial yet cryptic role in the text.

### 5.3 *Vǫlundarkviða* and Desire

What is one to make of the troubling way in which the voices of *Vǫlundarkviða* overlap? Above we invoked, primarily for contrastive purposes, a seemingly common-sense understanding of the mechanism of fiction in literature as stimulating one's theory of mind. This model makes the characters presented seem to be actual discrete minds that interact with one another in a way that corresponds to how the reader theorises the ways in which other minds socially interact with one another in life outside the text, while conversely drawing attention away from the narrative voice, making it appear transparent and unobtrusive. As Lisa Zunshine puts it in an examination of this model of reading, "we ascribe to a person a certain mental state on the basis of her observable action ... we intuit a complex state of mind based on a limited verbal description."<sup>47</sup> *Vǫlundarkviða*, however, displays no such respect for the discreteness of its characters' minds, and no aspiration toward any sort of aesthetic of mimesis, psychological or otherwise. It is primarily this quality of the text, rather than the aporia of social or psychic logic at which they both arrive, that frustrates the readings of John McKinnell and Ármann Jakobsson. How can we imagine these characters as real, discrete minds when the very structure of the poem denies their

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<sup>47</sup> Zunshine, Lisa (2006): *Why we read fiction: theory of mind and the novel*, Columbus: Ohio State University Press, p. 6; see also Zunshine's reading of the character Unferth in *Beowulf* (pp. 73-75), which bears a certain similarity to John McKinnell's reading of the characters of *Vǫlundarkviða*.

individuality, makes their identity problematic, cuts up their voices and splices them into a psychic lattice? Taylor's conception of "Gothic", "interlaced ribbons" as the aesthetic of heroic poetry applies not only to theme, and here we are reminded also of Bergsveinn Birgisson's view of the surrealistic and mimesis-defying aesthetic of skaldic kennings. In our cartography of the poem's overlapping repetitions we have mapped the language of the poem, but arguably we have also mapped its cognition, as a reader of the Lakoff and Johnson mould might put it. The overtly formalistic and non-representational character of the poem's stylistic/psychic structure encourages a reading of the text not so much as an effort to transmit a legendary narrative, but rather as a moment of thought, a structure of thought and desire.

Here we are again confronted with the concept of the "flow" of desire, and we can instantly see that *Völundarkviða* presents us with a diagram of desire similar to that which we found in *Skírnismál*. There are, however, some important differences that must be noted. In *Skírnismál*, the mapping of desire is clearly visible on the surface, as each twist and turn of its flow is marked by a repetition of the word *munr*. In *Völundarkviða* we lack an element of repetition that so clearly corresponds to "desire." The flow of desire here is implicit, buried – encrypted – in a chain of seemingly insignificant, and yet clearly more than incidental, repetitions which ties in to the series of dialogic repetitions. Nonetheless, the model of desire of Deleuze and Guattari is just as applicable here as it was to *Skírnismál*, if not perhaps more so, and in this case we are particularly reminded of that root of Deleuze and Guattari's idea which lies in the Marxian model of labour power. Deleuze and Guattari

identify their model of desire with what Marx calls a “*passion ... the activity of my being.*”<sup>48</sup> Their delineation of this model echoes the young Marx of 1844 on several points; first of all, in insisting on the “reality” and “objectivity” of desire and its products,<sup>49</sup> they are recalling Marx’s own insistence on the “objectivity” of the concepts he brings to light, and in particular “the *objectified essential powers* of man in the form of *sensuous, alien, useful objects*”.<sup>50</sup> Likewise, in emphasising the independence of desire from “lack” or “need,”<sup>51</sup> they echo Marx’s railing against the science of the human which sees industry as mere “vulgar need” rather than the productive force which gives rise to history and human reality.<sup>52</sup> Even more importantly for our current investigation, for Marx it is the force which constitutes “the perceptibly existing human *psychology.*”<sup>53</sup> It is in this insistence on the “reality” of desire that Deleuze and Guattari identify its relationship to society: “the social field is immediately invested by desire, ... it is the historically determined product of desire,” or more provocatively, “[t]here is only desire and the social, and nothing else.”<sup>54</sup> It is this nexus of desire, psychology, and economic and social production that we have uncovered in the stylistic structure of *Vǫlundarkviða*, and which we will now map in more detail.

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<sup>48</sup> Marx, Karl ([1932] 1959): *Economic & Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. Martin Mulligan, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 4:X, emphasis original.

<sup>49</sup> Deleuze & Guattari (1972) 1984 pp. 26-27.

<sup>50</sup> Marx (1932) 1959 4:IX, emphasis original.

<sup>51</sup> Deleuze & Guattari (1972) 1984 p. 27.

<sup>52</sup> Marx (1932) 1959 4:IX.

<sup>53</sup> Marx (1932) 1959 4:VIII.

<sup>54</sup> Deleuze & Guattari (1972) 1984 p. 29.

### 5.3.1 Vǫlundr, Metallurgist

Before proceeding further, we should clarify our use of Marx here in relation to our previous reference to Marx in the preceding chapter. These two instances are not completely separate from one another, and yet there is an important distinction to be made. In connecting the exchange of words and signs in the chain of repetitions and associations we identified above to Marx's theory of commodity exchange and the abstractness of money, the connection we were drawing should be seen as conceptual or diagrammatic; equally, however, it should not to be understood as "metaphorical" due to the absolute abstraction of both concepts. One might be tempted to see the connection as "metaphorical" or as a sort of allegory due to the fact that there is no apparent actual connection between associations between words recorded in Old Norse manuscripts and inscriptions and the political economy of capitalism, nor are we implying that there is any causal connection. But to say that we are drawing a conceptual parallel between the two things is not to say that we are holding up Marx's commodity exchange as an allegory, because the two things are of a similar kind. In expanding on Marx's theory of the commodity, the Frankfurt School critic Alfred Sohn-Rethel refers to the commodity exchange as a "real abstraction".<sup>55</sup> It is "real" because it involves material actions and actual objects, and this is also the case with our own model; in the case of the commodity exchange we have whatever object has been endowed with the status of a commodity, and in the case of our own chain of associations we have a series of words and signs that

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<sup>55</sup> Sohn-Rethel, Alfred (1978): *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology*, trans. Martin Sohn-Rethel, London: Macmillan Press, p. 20.



objectively exist but whose value in terms of meaning or sense has been abstracted from them.

In our examination of *Vǫlundarkviða* up to this point, we see that the stylistic structure of the text bleeds over into the themes of its narrative to an even greater extent than did that of *Skírnismál*. It must be stated clearly here, therefore, that we are drawing on Marx in this instance as much as a political economist as a “pure” theorist. As we will shortly see in detail, the themes of *Vǫlundarkviða* have to do with the sort of objective conditions of production that Marx takes as his proper object of study. Fundamental to our understanding of the text is the idea that it reflects some set of actual economic relations; though, given the undetermined origin and possibly heterogeneous production of Eddic poetry in the form in which we receive it, which we continually bear in mind in this investigation, it is necessary to consider not so much a single specific economic milieu that has produced *Vǫlundarkviða*, but rather a general continuum of political-economic history. Our continuum, then, falls somewhere along the transition from an early Medieval (or “Late Iron Age” or indeed “Viking Age”) economy to a “High” medieval one. It is necessary for us to keep our scope in this regard very general, and we will see that *Vǫlundarkviða* constructs generalised – one could even say “mythic” – economic figures. Given this focus, it is necessary to guard against inappropriately applying to the text at hand elements of Marx’s thought that relate specifically to the capitalism of the modern world; especially given that in general it is capitalism that is Marx’s primary critical object, and even when he makes reference to economic formations predating capitalism, it is essential to see his writing as always subordinated to a critical examination of the political economy of his own age. This

is also the case with Deleuze and Guattari in *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. However, this pair of thinkers tends both toward generalization in many instances as well as toward an eclectic approach to case studies and examples of cultural phenomena. The below discussion of metallurgists refers (if in a broad and general manner) to non-capitalist economic conditions, while Deleuze's discussion of masochism to which we will refer later on should be seen as a highly abstract psychological model. Indeed, this is part of a general trend for *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* to draw on more general and abstract writings of Deleuze when formulating a work devoted specifically to society under capitalism.<sup>56</sup>

The specific model of "labour" to which Marx devotes so much attention, then, is not precisely what we are dealing with in *Vǫlundarkviða*. Marx focuses on the capitalist phenomenon of "abstract" or "generalised" labour, in which the alienation of the worker from his work and product produces a proletarian class whose labour is itself a commodity.<sup>57</sup> In *Vǫlundarkviða*, we are dealing with the figure of the smith, an artisan rather than an unskilled labourer, in a pre-capitalist economic system. On the surface, it appears that what motivates the despot Níðuðr is simple greed for the prestige goods Vǫlundr produces. Yet he does not merely kill Vǫlundr and take his rings, even if there are seven hundred of them. Níðuðr appropriates Vǫlundr himself because what he desires is Vǫlundr's creativity, his labour power. Marx says of the medieval craftsman that he possesses "property in the instrument of production and labour itself, as a certain form of

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<sup>56</sup> Below, for example, we will cite Deleuze both in *Coldness and Cruelty* and in *A Thousand Plateaus*, where the figure of the masochist reappears. Furthermore, several of the concepts crucial to *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* appear in a preliminary form in Deleuze, Gilles (2003): *Francis Bacon: the Logic of Sensation* London: Continuum.

<sup>57</sup> As elaborated in Marx (1867) 1954-1959 chapter VI.

craft skill not merely as the source of property but as property itself.”<sup>58</sup> The skilled pre-capitalist artisan is himself “the proprietor of his instrument”,<sup>59</sup> inseparable from his own production as such, and his “labour itself is still half the expression of artistic creation, half its own reward.”<sup>60</sup> For Marx, the “medieval” economic formation under discussion is more properly the guild economy of the High Middle Ages; yet Marx nonetheless identifies a generalised figure of the pre-capitalist skilled artisan, the smith, the metallurgist, and a type of labour power that is peculiar to that figure and impossible to abstract from it. It is precisely this type of labour power (or desire) that drives the narrative action of the poem, just as the conceptual power of the forge lies at the centre of its stylistic structure. Níðuðr finds the creative desire that emanates from Vǫlundr irresistible, and uses the violent political power he has at his disposal as a despot to appropriate that desire. Though we have seen that stylistic features of the poem make the boundary between Vǫlundr and Níðuðr as persons or minds problematic, they do seem to form separate and opposing poles of the text’s structure. The reading of *Vǫlundarkviða* as a story of labour power is especially clear from the point of view of the Vǫlundr-pole, the view of the smith or metallurgist.

Whatever the specific context of its origin, then, we can say that in *Vǫlundarkviða* we are dealing with an expression of a material socioeconomic relation. That the technological and economic aspects of *Vǫlundarkviða* are more than mere ornament is a point that has been made most succinctly by Leif Einarson: for Einarson, the very act of

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<sup>58</sup> Marx, Karl ([1952] 1964): *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*, trans. Jack Cohen, London: Lawrence & Wishart p. 104.

<sup>59</sup> Marx (1952) 1964 p. 97.

<sup>60</sup> Marx (1952) 1964 p. 98.

revenge is “artisanal”. *Vǫlundr*’s refashioning of *Níðuðr*’s sons is “heavily ironic and subversive”, and amounts to a “parody” of the “social function of prestige metal items and the role of the king and queen within the ceremonial space of the hall”.<sup>61</sup> It is a narrative image of a ruler attempting to establish a “monopoly” on the production of these goods.<sup>62</sup> Einarson does not associate the poem’s stylistic structure with artisanship in the way that we do here, but his reading lifts the poem out of being a mere stitching together of existing threads and shows the structuring role of material economic conditions in the text’s possibility. Though these generalised characters have a “mythic” quality to them, they are rooted in conditions of production and exchanged. *Vǫlundr* is both an “archetype” of a smith, the smith writ large, and a particular smith, in fact an aberrant and supernatural one. Einarson’s reading shows the text arising from the economic “tensions” between “highly skilled artisans and ambitious aristocrats”.<sup>63</sup> *Vǫlundarkviða* certainly reflects this tension and conflict, but not in a way that clearly privileges one side over another. In order to get a view of the text’s relationship to this conflict, we must dig deep into the nature of both of the “poles” we have identified in its structure.

The fact of *Vǫlundr* being a smith is, as we have noted, his most distinctive feature as a legendary character; indeed, we have noted that this trait is what primarily unifies his depictions in Old Norse and Anglo-Saxon literature. But of all these depictions, *Vǫlundarkviða* is the text which most closely engages with the idea of smithing and with the technology of the forge. We have seen that forge technology is not only a thematic feature

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<sup>61</sup> Einarson 2015 p. 23.

<sup>62</sup> Einarson 2015 p. 24.

<sup>63</sup> Einarson 2015 p. 31

but forms a conceptual structuring element in the poem's language, in the repetition and shift of the words *fjǫturr* and *nauð*. The poem therefore shows some knowledge of the paraphernalia of the forge, but does not display much familiarity with the actual processes of metallurgical industry and as such does not present anything like a strictly realistic depiction of the metalworking economy. The entire system of natural resource exploitation of various kinds, trade, and manufacture that produces the finished metal object has been drastically simplified. *Vǫlundr* simply exists alone in the wilderness and seems to create precious metal objects out of nothing. This ability to obtain or produce metal does not change with his relocation to an island prison, suggesting an ambulatory quality to his profession.

Deleuze and Guattari discuss the figure of the metallurgist in relation to nomadic and sedentary social formations, claiming that “the first and primary itinerant is the artisan”,<sup>64</sup> and furthermore that “smiths are ambulant, itinerant.”<sup>65</sup> In general, Old Norse literature does not present a clear and coherent view of the artisan. Rather, it seems that artisanship is largely considered a subsidiary activity engaged in by men of relatively high status whose proper occupation is the management of an agricultural property. There can be little doubt that this picture comes about as a result of the tendency of Old Norse saga prose to focus on men in such positions as its focal characters, with a supernatural smith like *Vǫlundr* seen more as a figure belonging to an exotic age and location. In some narratives men who are not artisans by profession turn out to have an unexpected hidden

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<sup>64</sup> Deleuze & Guattari (1980) 2013 p. 479.

<sup>65</sup> Deleuze & Guattari (1980) 2013 p. 481.

artisanal talent, such as Hreiðarr Þorgrímsson in his *þáttr* in *Morkinskinna*.<sup>66</sup> In cases such as these, the seemingly naïve notion of being naturally talented, *hagr*, takes precedence over any sort of craft training or traditional knowledge, thus disabling the figure of the professional artisan as an autonomous agent and eliding the artisan's role in the economy.<sup>67</sup> Skalla-Grímr Kveldúlfsson of *Egils saga* is said to have been a smith in addition to being a high-status agricultural settler in Iceland; he composes a *dróttvkætt* verse about the importance of an early start to working in the smithy which features some striking kennings for forge paraphernalia,<sup>68</sup> and upon his death is buried with his forge tools (among other items reflecting his social status).<sup>69</sup> Archaeological finds of forge tools in high-status early medieval Norwegian graves seem to corroborate this idea.<sup>70</sup> This also reflects Marx's view of pre-feudal manufacturing as being limited primarily to subsidiary craft industry as a sort of side-project of agricultural production; for Marx the truly professional artisan is a product of the medieval town and guild as opposed to the countryside or the wilderness.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Ármann Jakobsson & Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson eds. (2011), *Morkinskinna*, Reykjavík: Hið Íslenska fornritafélag, Íslensk fornrit XXIII pp. 152-164; in this case the discovery is all the more remarkable given Hreiðarr's primary character trait of stupidity.

<sup>67</sup> It should be noted that both in Vǫlundr's own voice (18:4) and that of the narrator (in the prose introduction), he and his work are identified in *Vǫlundarkviða* in the superlative form of this word, *hagaztr*. Consider also the use of this word in reference to dwarves (also famous for their handiwork) in *Hyndluljóð* 7, "*hagir dvergar*".

<sup>68</sup> Bjarni Einarsson 2003 p. 42; note also the manner in which Skalla-Grímr is introduced to the saga: "*hann var hagr maðr á tré ok járn ok gǫjrðisk inn mest smiðr*" ("he was a skillful man in wood and iron and became the greatest of smiths"), Bjarni Einarsson 2003 p. 1.

<sup>69</sup> Bjarni Einarsson 2003 p. 100.

<sup>70</sup> Grieg, Sigurd (1920): "Smedverktøi i norske gravfunn", *Oldtiden: tidsskrift for norsk forhistorie* 9, (1920) pp. 21-95; Petersen, Jan (1951): *Vikingtidens redskaper*, Det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi i Oslo, Skrifter, II. Hist.-Filos. Klasse, No. 4. (1951); Jørgensen, Roger (2012): "The Social and Material Context of the Iron Age Blacksmith in North Norway", *Acta Borealia: A Nordic Journal of Circumpolar Societies*, 29:1 (2012), pp. 1-34.

<sup>71</sup> Marx (1952) 1964 p. 73.

However, the artisan portrayed in *Vǫlundarkviða* corresponds more to Deleuze and Guattari's itinerant metallurgist. Deleuze and Guattari identify the figure of the metallurgist as having a special relationship with material and with society. Metallurgists have a relationship with the "sedentary" people who provide sustenance through agriculture, but they also have "relations with the forest dwellers, and partially depend on them: they must establish their workshops near the forest in order to obtain the necessary charcoal."<sup>72</sup>

Vǫlundr is in fact a forest dweller himself and is associated or conflated in this poem with two types of forest-dwelling outsiders: the nonhuman but anthropomorphic *álfar*, and (in a prose section) the human but (from an Old Norse point of view) supernaturally inclined *Finnar*, a demonym which in Old Norse writing is applied more often to Sami people than to the people we would now call Finnish. We have previously discussed, through Ármann Jakobsson, the "Other"-ness of Vǫlundr. Yet if the poem's narrative voice is alienated from him as a type of being, it is no less alienated from the mode of production that he represents, or more properly "embodies," since he is physically inseparable from it. This alienation is betrayed by a conflation of metallurgy with the wilderness, the conflation of all aspects of the production of metallic crafts into one figure, and also the conference upon the metallurgist of supernatural abilities beyond that of being able to transform metal.<sup>73</sup>

Vǫlundr is not shown to have any primary or proper occupations aside from his craft

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<sup>72</sup> Deleuze & Guattari (1980) 2013 p. 480.

<sup>73</sup> Mircea Eliade seems to echo, in his own way, this congruence we find between metallurgy and magic: "[t]he ambivalent magic of stone weapons, both lethal and beneficent, ... was transmitted and magnified in the new instruments forged of metal" Eliade, Mircea (1962): *The Forge and The Crucible*, trans. Stephen Corrin, London: Rider & Company, p. 30). It is remarkable, however, that nowhere in Eliade's study of smithing and alchemy in myth and religion does he refer to the Weland/Vǫlundr character, despite frequently invoking Norse mythological themes as a structuralist support.

(hunting being the only other activity he engages in), but rather is apparently able to contain within himself every aspect of the metalworking industry.

Much like metal, the reconfiguration and transformation of desire in *Vǫlundarkviða* is effected through trauma. Vǫlundr responds to the trauma of separation from his spouse by isolating himself in the wilderness and endlessly producing metal objects at his forge. Together with the anhedonic experience of being isolated in the wilderness, this seems like a morbid response to trauma, and yet Vǫlundr's desire remains productive, endlessly producing and transforming materials (5:3-6). This section of the poem also contains an obscure interlude in which Vǫlundr hunts and butchers a bear, consuming its flesh and then sitting on its fur to count his rings (10:1-4). Vǫlundr's desiring-production is then reconfigured and appropriated through a further trauma, that of his capture and bondage by Níðuðr. The poem in fact presents this as doubly traumatic in the way Vǫlundr's capture is related to his separation from his spouse: what he takes as a sign of her return turns out to be a sign of his imminent enslavement. Combined with the trauma of mutilation and imprisonment (again confined in a non-stimulating, anhedonic space, but this time by force), Vǫlundr's desires are once again transformed, and (albeit temporarily) subjugated. Níðuðr has appropriated his labour power and subordinated his desire to the king's interests. But the king does not really have complete control over the smith's desire: Vǫlundr's desires seem subordinated to the king's at first, but he is able to transform them yet again, this time in a transformation of violence. The desire that led Vǫlundr to transform his environment by reconfiguring the body of the bear into useful products is repeated in a monstrous new iteration. By butchering and reconfiguring the king's sons, Vǫlundr as smith



and Vǫlundr as butcher are combined. The use of the word *húnar*, “bear cubs,” to describe the young boys Vǫlundr dismembers is a grim and far-from-subtle device of repetition connecting these two episodes.

Vǫlundr completes his liberation from Níðuðr’s oppression of his desire by becoming smith, butcher, and rapist. The rape of Bǫðvildr is also a “creative” act in that Vǫlundr forcibly impregnates her. It is furthermore notable that the poem draws a clear association between Vǫlundr’s skill as a smith and Vǫlundr’s “skill” as a rapist: in strophe 18 Vǫlundr describes the sword Níðuðr has appropriated as something he created “*sem ek hagazt kunna*”, “as I most skilfully knew how to do” (18:4). The narrative voice echoes Vǫlundr’s estimation of his abilities in its oblique description of his rape of Bǫðvildr: he gets her drunk “*þvíat hann betr kunni*”, “because he knew how to do better” (28:2), that is, because he was more “skilful” than her. The poem ends with an anguished expression of helplessness on Bǫðvildr’s part as she confesses the incident to her father. She echoes the narrative voice in portraying the rape as being effected through Vǫlundr’s skill and power through the parallelism of the two negative words “*vinnac*” and “*kunnac*”: “I could not manage to,” “I was not able to [resist him]” (41:7-8).<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Note that the manuscript reads here simply “*ec vętr hō kunac ec vętr hō vina mattac*” (38:6), which seems to be another case of scribal elision for an obvious repetition; on the other hand, this could simply be a scribal error.

### 5.3.2 Níðuðr, Masochist

If we return to the idea of *Vǫlundarkviða* to be structured around two opposing psychic “poles” rather than two discrete minds, we see that the Vǫlundr-pole of the structure presents a view of creative desire transformed into a violent fantasy of revenge: the use of the productive skills of the artisan to kill, rape, and generally violate his economic oppressor. Yet the note of helplessness and impotence, so poignantly expressed, on which the poem concludes, may bring us to regard the structure from the point of view of the Níðuðr-pole. The political ruler Níðuðr is able to enact his desires through the use of political violence; he has considerable power and influence (emphasised by a description of his soldiers’ equipment (6:5-7)), but is not shown to really have a transformational skill in the way that Vǫlundr does. In other words, Níðuðr is a despot, the end-point of a system of tribute and therefore the representative of the power of a certain agricultural area and sedentary society, upon the fringes of which Vǫlundr exists. When he encounters Vǫlundr’s desiring-production (in the form of tangible products, the reality Vǫlundr has created), the king desires it for himself. As we have seen, it is only superficially that the despot desires riches, and on another level it is shown that he desires Vǫlundr himself. Rather than simply plundering the smith of his products, he appropriates the smith and attempts to modify his body in such a way that he has no physical or social autonomy and his irresistible desiring-production is redirected into the flow of the king’s desire. This is a violent abrogation of any sort of reciprocal relationship between the itinerant smith and the sedentary agricultural/military despot: the flaring up of the “tensions” identified by Einarson. Níðuðr attempts to reduce Vǫlundr to the level of a slave, who has no autonomy but is merely

incarnated abstract labour, who “stands in no sort of relation to the objective conditions of his [own] labour”.<sup>75</sup>

This drive to subjugate, to appropriate, and to incorporate Vǫlundr as an instrument of labour or desiring-machine into the king’s person is, however, coupled with the apparent inevitability of being overwhelmed by the smith’s desire. That the creative tendency in Vǫlundr which the king finds so irresistible becomes the means of gruesome retribution is grimly ironic from either pole, but in subtly different ways. What was a violent fantasy of power seen from the Vǫlundr-pole becomes a seemingly masochistic fantasy of transgression and punishment from the point of view of the Níðuðr-pole. Here the heterogeneous sense of personality we have observed in the poem is particularly important, as Níðuðr and his family are essentially treated as one party in the flow of power, desire, and violence. Níðuðr’s wife, in spite of having some important lines of dialogue, does not even have a name; devoid of any semblance of physical agency, she is just a voice, and serves as the bad conscience the king needs in order to carry out his ultimately self-destructive act. Likewise, the king’s children only play a role in the poem to the extent that they are appendages of him; they are, in fact, the medium through which Vǫlundr’s violence against the king is triangulated. When Bǫðvildr’s impotent voice closes the poem with an expression of utter helplessness in the face of Vǫlundr’s power and creativity, it may as well be her father’s voice speaking.

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<sup>75</sup> Marx (1952) 1964 p. 87.

Given this psychic fusion and con-fusion of person, mind, and voice, we might recall John McKinnell's characterisation of Bǫðvildr, where it is ambiguously implied that the "drink-supported seduction", being ("perhaps") "deserve[d]", is in some way consciously or unconsciously sought by Bǫðvildr herself. This indirect manner of referring to the narrative action defers the question of agency that it itself raises, ultimately to an indeterminate point. This is, however, the very question we must grasp firmly here: who, what person, is "asking for it" here? The text presents us with a hapless female character who obliviously places herself in a position of obvious vulnerability, resulting in a rape and impregnation apparently calculated to injure a third party. We might well begin to speak of a desire for rape in *Vǫlundarkviða*, but not on the part of Bǫðvildr, who is not so much a person or character in this text as she is an appendage or, along with the king's sons, a medium. McKinnell appears to postulate an original audience that deems Bǫðvildr to be deserving of rape and impregnation on account of her character flaws. Yet it seems that the desire for rape runs deeper than that, inside the poem itself. Just as we have seen that Vǫlundr's violence and Vǫlundr's creativity are all part of his powerful desiring capacity, surely it must also be the case that the attraction to a creativity that inevitably leads to violence is one with the attraction to rape. The language associated with being *hagr*, with creativity and skill as we noted above, is the same language used to describe the rape.

One feature which makes it possible for a reader to interpret Bǫðvildr's encounter with Vǫlundr as something other than rape is in a brief description by the narrative voice of her emotional state as she leaves the scene. The narrative voice represents Bǫðvildr's chief causes for concern at this point as being not the fact of the encounter itself, but *fǫr friðils ok*

*frǫður reiði*, “lover’s leaving and father’s wrath” (29:9-10), again triangulating her between the two men. Here I have followed the tendency to translate *friðill* as “lover”; based on this choice of word, one might assume that Þoðvildr’s distress at Vǫlundr’s leaving is caused by a sudden emotional attachment to him. This is how Dronke translates the word and how she understands the scene. Expanding on the brief description given by the narrative voice, Dronke concludes that “he must, indeed, have behaved tenderly with her, as she weeps to see him go.”<sup>76</sup> The poem seems to encourage such a reading: although Vǫlundr clearly used forcible impregnation as a weapon, the violent aspect is presented with a veneer of almost comical triviality, the physical act itself encrypted in the giving of beer and in Vǫlundr’s “skill”. But from our point of view we can see that the way in which this treatment of rape masks real violence mirrors the way the text itself contains its own dark side. Von See et al point out an alternative interpretation of *friðill* as more neutrally a “*nichtehelichen Beischläfer*” (at its most literal, “non-marital co-sleeper”) rather than the – at worst, possibly unsanctioned – object of one’s emotional and sexual affections that the modern English word “lover” implies. The Old Norse word does not in itself carry any necessary implication of “love.” One might consider the feminine version of this word, *friðla* or *frilla*, which is far more common and which carries with it a distinctly negative connotation. At its most positive the word neutrally implies extramarital sex.<sup>77</sup> One can also see the more

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<sup>76</sup> Dronke 1997 p. 257.

<sup>77</sup> Especially in the compound *frillubarn*, “illegitimate child”; for a conventional usage see for example in *Knýtlinga saga*, “*Sveinn konungr átti mǫrg frillubörn*” (Bjarni Guðnason ed. (1985), *Danakonunga Sögur: Skjöldunga Saga, Knýtlinga Saga, Ágrip af Sögu Danakonunga*, Reykjavík: Hið Íslenska fornrítarélag, Íslenskt fornrít 35, p. 135). Compare, however, the more positive ring in *Hymiskviða* 30:1-2 of “*ip frípa frilla*”, “the beautiful mistress” of Hymir; Cleasby & Vígfússon use this lone example to suggest that the negative connotations of *frilla* are confined to Old Norse prose (1874 p. 173).

negative and religiously charged term “*frillulifnaðr*”, “fornication,” especially as a gloss for *fornicatio* in *Speculum Pœnitentis*.<sup>78</sup> Thus the positive connotation modern readers have drawn from *friðill* is based largely on its masculinity, and assumptions of emotional connection are extrapolated from there. Note that, in comparison to *frilla* and its various compounds, *friðill* apparently occurs only twice in the entire corpus of Old Norse; in fact, the only other *friðill* mentioned as such is Vilmundr in the prose introduction to *Oddrúnargrátr*, who appears similarly to have abducted and impregnated Borgný (whose specific feelings on the matter are not discussed), and furthermore placed a sort of curse on her preventing her from actually giving birth. The text of *Vǫlundarkviða* ambiguously offers this interpretation, but in the end there is nothing in it that unequivocally demonstrates a real emotional bond between Vǫlundr and Þoðvildr. As if in an echo of this problem, Ármann Jakobsson optimistically suggests that Þoðvildr’s final declaration of helplessness “could just as well refer to a lack of inclination to harm,” but this interpretation is not obvious.<sup>79</sup>

It is no coincidence, moreover, that it is the narrative voice that provides this problematic idea of a certain relationship between Vǫlundr and Þoðvildr. In its perforation and manipulation of the characters’ voices throughout the poem, the narrative voice has shown its complicity in the text’s violence all along. Put another way: imagine the entire poem spoken in just one voice. Though in the case of *Skírnismál* it seemed that such a

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<sup>78</sup> Holme Pedersen, Knud-Erik & Jonna Louis-Jensen ed. (1985): *Speculum penitentis*, Opuscula 8, BA 38, Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana vol. XXXVIII, p. 219.

<sup>79</sup> Ármann Jakobsson 2006, p. 248f. Ármann is able to reach this conclusion partly by interpreting “*vinna*” as “harm” (p. 248); if this were the case, one would expect an indirect qualifier along the lines of “*vinna ... geig*”, but with simply the dative “*honom*” instead it is much more likely that it has the sense of “withstand.”

reading would be untenable given its fully dialogic – yet repetitive – nature, here it would more accurately reflect the characters’ lack of autonomy and discrete personality. After the sombrely tragic tone with which the poem opens, the narrative voice leads its characters to their fates with a certain sense of levity and even grotesque humour (or at the very least irony), in much the same way that Vǫlundr unempathetically laughs in the culmination of his revenge.<sup>80</sup>

We can see, then, a certain view of the text from the Níðuðr-“pole,” or put in another way read it in a way that sees Níðuðr as the more sympathetic character or focal point of investment; for all his apparent antagonism, many of the truly antagonistic features of his personality are deferred to the auxiliary character of his wife. Moreover, at the end of the poem the bereft king is in a far more sympathetic state than the laughing and flying, sadistic and supernatural Vǫlundr: the arrangement of desire that leads inexorably to Vǫlundr’s revenge does take on a masochistic aspect. After all, Níðuðr occupies both the centre and apex of his own society: the economic system of agricultural production overseen by a military elite. Vǫlundr, by contrast, is as we have seen the consummate outsider, a supernatural forest-dweller with an undetermined set of skills to which the agriculturalist lacks access. In this case, why tell the tale at all if it leads to identification with the punished party?

“Masochism” is a term with a complex history, and we must clarify our specific use of it here. In an early work, Gilles Deleuze sought to disentangle masochism from sadism in

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<sup>80</sup> The sense of the word “grotesque” here should be read in connection with my use of the same word in chapter 3 (pp. 76n-77n of this thesis).

the complex posited most famously by Freud, but originally suggested (albeit in a more clinical and less theoretical sense) by Richard von Krafft-Ebbing.<sup>81</sup> Deleuze accomplishes this disentanglement partly by returning the discussion of sadism and masochism to analysis of the literary works of Sade and Sacher-Masoch from which the terms are derived. The figure of the masochist Deleuze extracts from this reading is a revolutionary or transformative persona, which is later given further theoretical refinement and deployment with Félix Guattari in the second volume of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia, A Thousand Plateaus*. By this point the masochist has moved into the territory of a generalised, abstract figure or diagram (in their words, a “conceptual persona”)<sup>82</sup> which Deleuze and Guattari illustrate with various examples; albeit still with a focus on clinical psychoanalytic literature.<sup>83</sup>

There are some similarities between the Vǫlundr/Níðuðr complex and the Deleuzian masochist, but the differences are perhaps more pronounced. Whereas Deleuze’s masochist formulates a contract or “program” with his mistress, in *Vǫlundarkviða* there is never any question of consent by either party.<sup>84</sup> We have seen, however, that there is a sort of unspoken contract that is broken: the existing socioeconomic contract between the itinerant artisan and the sedentary agriculturalist despot, not so much a “contract” as an existing and real “system.” By deliberately perverting the normal system of labour relations, the king is committing a wilful transgression. And as we have also seen, the object

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<sup>81</sup> Deleuze, Gilles ([1967] 1989): *Coldness and Cruelty*, trans. Jean McNeil, New York: Zone; Freud, Sigmund (1922): *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie*, Vienna: Franz Deutick; von Krafft-Ebbing, Richard (1890): *Psychopathia sexualis mit Besonderer Berücksichtigung der conträren Sexualempfindung: eine Linisch-Forensische Studie*, Stuttgart: Verlag von Ferdinand Enke.

<sup>82</sup> Deleuze, Gilles & Félix Guattari ([1991] 1994): *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson, London: Verso, p. 21.

<sup>83</sup> Deleuze & Guattari (1980) 2013 pp. 174-193.

<sup>84</sup> Deleuze & Guattari (1980) 2013 p. 176.



of his desire, Vǫlundr's labour or creative desiring-production, becomes the engine of his downfall, just as the heavy chains he lays on Vǫlundr become the bellows-shackles under which the king's dismembered sons will lie. In the chain of conceptual and metaphoric shifts spread across the poem, the dangerous consequences of appropriating the smith inhere in the actual act of appropriation. The desire for Vǫlundr is the desire for dismemberment, rape, and impregnation. Additionally, just as Níðuðr's inadvisable decision-making process has been deferred to his wife, the consequences of his actions have been deferred to his children in order to make their enactment more palatable to the mind structuring the text from Níðuðr's perspective. In the case of the rape and impregnation, moreover, it is necessary that these actions be deferred to a female character: according to this schema, Níðuðr can only be raped insofar as he is female.

In an examination of the rape of Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus*, Tina Mohler asks, “[h]ow might the rape of a man have been staged in early modern England?”<sup>85</sup> The character of Lavinia, “a young, wellborn woman”, supplies a “culturally appropriate and conventionally sanctioned means of displaying violent desire on stage” as a “wholly unremarkable victim of rape”,<sup>86</sup> and therefore takes the place of Bassianus as the victim of rape in a scene which Mohler shows to be replete with symbolism suggesting male rape. For Mohler, the depiction of rape between men cannot merely be a question of implicitly eroticised violence between men; a female figure must become involved, because (in the early modern English context in any case) the concept of rape has a “profound dependence

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<sup>85</sup> Mohler, Tina (2006): “‘What Is Thy Body but a Swallowing Grave ...?’ : Desire Underground in *Titus Andronicus*”, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 57:1 (2006), p. 23.

<sup>86</sup> Mohler 2006 p. 26.

on the image of the victimized woman.”<sup>87</sup> There is a clear parallel between the characters of Lavinia and Þjóðvildr in that they both provide conventional recipients of sexual violence, thus saving the diagram of rape from an impermissible transgression. However, unlike early modern England, Old Norse literature has a well-attested language of rape between men and even male impregnation associated with the terms *níð* (sexual slander and shame) and *ergi* (male sexual deviance). Like the early modern concept of sodomy, however, these concepts of homoerotic desire are not things that one can attribute to oneself: they only ever arise in the context of an insult or insulting accusation. *Níð* insults can involve not only the sodomisation of the accused, but also the transformation of the accused into an abased form such as a female animal or female supernatural being, a more “appropriate” recipient of violent masculine sexual force. In these cases the active partner is considered blameless;<sup>88</sup> it is the passive partner who is the abased *argr maðr*, and the mere fact of being the passive partner seems to equate to his willingness, his desire for the act.<sup>89</sup> The notion of the consent of the partner is problematic, and there seems to be a double bind here: the passive partner does not so much “give” consent as he does “disavow” or renounce the very capacity for giving or withholding consent. This is also true of the female

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<sup>87</sup> Mohler 2006 p. 24.

<sup>88</sup> As Ström shows: Ström, Folke (1974): *Níð, Ergi, and Old Norse moral attitudes*, London: Viking Society for Northern Research, p. 6.

<sup>89</sup> Though Meulengracht Sørensen makes a terminological distinction between the verb participles *sorðinn* and *stroðinn* (which “merely signify that a person (or animal) has been sexually used by a man – willingly or not”) on the one hand and *argr* or *ragr* (which is a personal “quality or tendency” (Meulengracht Sørensen 1983 p. 18)) on the other, it is still likely that the former at the very least strongly implies the latter in most cases. Meulengracht Sørensen also notes, however, that in some instances a certain stigma is also attached to the active partner; in this case it is not so much the stigma of the “unmanly” as that of the “uncivilized and savage” (1983 pp. 57-58). David Clark terms these actions of the active partner “phallic aggression”, especially in the context of *Gísla saga*, but also in the Eddic themes that are used in that text (Clark 2012 pp. 107-114). See also Dronke, Ursula (1981): *The role of sexual themes in Njáls saga*, Dorothea Coke memorial lecture in Northern Studies, London: Viking Society for Northern Research.

*ergi*, and we have previously seen an example of this same phenomenon in *Skírnismál* above. As we have stressed, the true horror of the threat against Gerðr is not to make her do things against her will, but rather to make her “desire” things against her will. The aggressive male figure remains the master of desire, deciding arbitrarily what constitutes “consent” or desire on the part of others. In the model of *ergi*, consent is something the accuser or the active partner has the authority to confer on the passive partner or to ignore altogether, and in its clearer depictions this model of aberrant sexuality is always revealing of the structure of power at work.

In a milieu in which *ergi* is the only culturally accessible (that is, the only openly conceivable or speakable) model of homoerotic desire, how would latent desire between men be expressed? In *Vǫlundarkviða* the creatively powerful itinerant smith is constructed as the dominant partner, his irresistible desiring-production goaded into action through the breaking of a contract, the perversion of a system of labour relations. From here the passive partner is exploded into a group of characters so that the male mind at its core, the despot Níðuðr, is shielded both from masochistic desire itself and from the consequences of that desire. Unlike Sacher-Masoch’s masochistic heroes, who affirm their desire and take constructive action to implement the masochistic relationship, the masochism of *Vǫlundarkviða* is defective, repressed, imperfectly realised, and ultimately it must be encrypted. *Vǫlundarkviða* encrypts a request for punishment in a narrative of revenge informed by the schema of *ergi*. *Vǫlundr* himself is a blameless (albeit excessively brutal) figure, just as the active partner is blameless, his own masculinity never called into

question; he is merely delivering righteous punishment to the transgressive *argr maðr* who disavows his rights as a man and submits to his punisher.

Just as the use of repetition troubles the distinction between the individual members of the *Níðuðr*-pole, we have also seen a troubling of the psychic or emotional boundary between *Vǫlundr* and *Níðuðr*. Deleuze and Guattari's masochist is a figure that similarly troubles personal boundaries. Citing a clinical case of Roger Dupouy's in which the particular masochist in question performs the role of a horse for his mistress, they note how "one series" of a mode of being "explodes into the other, forms a circuit with it." This masochist announces the goal that "little by little all opposition is replaced by a *fusion* of my person with yours"; furthermore, this redirection of desires is "less a destruction than an exchange and circulation ('what happens to a horse can also happen to me')." <sup>90</sup> Deleuze rejects Freud's second interpretation of masochism as merely a sadism turned around by the superego onto the ego; for Deleuze the masochist lacks a superego altogether, instead externalising it "onto the beating woman", only to "emphasise its derisory nature and make it serve the ends of the triumphant ego". <sup>91</sup> The masochistic ego is "insolent" and "humorous", its "weakness" is "a strategy by which the masochist manipulates the woman into the ideal state for the performance of the role he has assigned to her." <sup>92</sup> By the end of the poem, *Vǫlundr* is cold and cruel; he has been goaded into extreme cruelty by the insolence of the *Níðuðr*-and-family entity which then is made to identify with him, being given the same emotional states as him while possessed by the narrative voice that

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<sup>90</sup> Deleuze & Guattari (1980) 2013 p. 181, emphasis original.

<sup>91</sup> Deleuze (1967) 1989 p. 124.

<sup>92</sup> Deleuze (1967) 1989 p. 124.

penetrates all personalities in the text. The tone of grotesque humour that permeates the scenes of revenge in particular – the mocking tone describing Bǫðvildr’s impregnation, the cartoonish tone of the murder and dismemberment of the sons – in spite of a strong shift of emotional investment toward Níðuðr in the second half of the poem, may not be so surprising if we consider these things to have been desired by the ego, the undeclared *ek* of the narrative voice, at the heart of the text. It is an ego that has exploded itself into various pieces in order to manufacture and receive punishment, and goaded the creative desire of the powerful outsider figure into punitive action. Deleuze and Guattari’s masochist has a body composed not of organs but of “planes” and “intensities”.<sup>93</sup> The sites of intensity which for the stereotypical masochist would be primarily his flesh as it appears under the whip, in *Vǫlundarkviða* appear as the bodies of the boys under the smith’s hammer and Bǫðvildr’s womb under his penis. In the end it is repressed and encrypted masochistic desire that triumphs here; it is fitting that the poem closes on a note that, though seemingly helpless and bereft, glorifies in Vǫlundr’s superior, punishing desiring-power.

#### 5.4: *Vǫlundarkviða*: Repetition and the Economy of Cruelty

In the course of an attempt to relate the archaeological record to representations of artisanship in Eddic poetry, John Hines briefly touches on a feature of *Vǫlundarkviða* for which we have seen extensive evidence by now: that the “narrative itself” (that is, the narrative voice) associates itself “with the antagonistic perspective of the royal family.”<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Deleuze & Guattari (1980) 2013 pp. 180-181.

<sup>94</sup> Hines 2003 p. 34.

Hines cites one instance of overlapping voices (the *álfr*-epithets used by Níðuðr and the narrative voice), but we have seen that a troubled distinction between voices or persons, manifest in the repetitions found throughout the poem, is an important structuring feature of the text. Through an examination of this stylistic feature, a kind of psychodrama begins to emerge from the heart of the poem that is not as straightforward or obvious as the narrative material it superficially presents. We have seen that, on the one hand, the figure of Vǫlundr stands somewhere outside the human, an implacable desiring force that eventually turns to cruelty. The “royal family” consists of a wife who receives the blame for Níðuðr’s own cruel decisions, male children who receive corporal punishment, a daughter who receives sexual punishment, Níðuðr himself who lies behind the buffer zone of his family and feels only the exquisite sensations of punishment, and the narrative voice that subtends the whole structure and makes all other voices speak and act.

One observation that Hines makes that does not quite accord with what we have seen here is that “*Vǫlundarkviða* contains no epithets that directly endorse or value Vǫlundr’s technical skill.”<sup>95</sup> This is, strictly speaking, true (in the case of epithets only), but as we have seen, the poem is most certainly concerned with his skill and his power. The transduction of Vǫlundr’s metallurgical, artisanal skill to violence is the essential complex or image that this poem extracts from the raw narrative material of the vengeful smith. In the introduction to a special issue of *Angelaki* dedicated to the concepts of masochism, sadism, and sadomasochism as figures in philosophical writing, Frida Beckman and Charlie Blake

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<sup>95</sup> Hines 2003 p. 34.

take note of a “fundamental problem consistently raised in the historical debate on sadism and masochism ... concerning the differentiation between the cultural-political and the private spheres in which these economies of cruelty are enacted.”<sup>96</sup> They further note that, in these representations of cruelty, “while the foundational documents of sadism and masochism have been clinical ... the image – whether still, moving, or textually conveyed – has always occupied a central place as its mode of transmission”, using the example of the infamous Abu Ghraib human-pyramid photographs: “the image, it seems, was a worse crime than the act of torture.”<sup>97</sup> *Vǫlundarkviða* similarly presents us with an “economy of cruelty,” a self-contained (albeit encrypted) system in which cruelty is produced and exchanged or transformed, a *Metamorphosenverkettung* (a “concatenation of metamorphoses”) as well as an “image” of cruelty, a thin slice of narrative that hinges primarily on acts of violence. Here even more than in *Skírnismál* we can see the manner in which this structure and system of operation makes the narrative possible, running along the same lines of association as the cryptic implications inherent in these particular presentations of these particular narratives. The relatively extreme use of repetition we have examined in detail here might seem, at first, a somewhat inelegant stylistic strategy, one which draws attention to the medium of poetry itself rather than contributing to a sense of immersion, clarity, and verisimilitude, threatening to expose the figure of the poet in the materiality of the poem itself. Yet perhaps it is no coincidence that the stylistic

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<sup>96</sup> Beckman, Frida & Charlie Blake (2009): “Shadows of Cruelty: sadism, masochism, and the philosophical muse - part one,” *Angelaki* 14:3 (2009), p. 2.

<sup>97</sup> Beckman & Blake 2009 p. 2.

strategy of *Vǫlundarkviða* takes this form when one bears in mind the economy of cruelty it enacts.



## 6. Conclusions

This thesis has examined stylistic aspects of Old Norse Eddic poetry, with a particular focus on the use of repetition in Eddic verse. We began in chapter 2 with a close analysis of certain uses of syntax in Eddic poetry. This chapter examined a number of passages from different texts (especially *Atlakviða*, *Völuspá*, *Guðrúnarkviða I* and *Guðrúnarkviða II*), identifying several distinct stylistic figures which were nonetheless related in their repetition of syntactic categories. In *Atlakviða* and *Völuspá*, we saw how the artificial repetition of syntactic units was used to convey a complex and sophisticated sense of prophetic time; in the *Guðrúnarkviður* we furthermore saw the metadiscursive relationship between form and content in a strophe that presents both a grammatical and conceptual contrast. Identifying these minute grammatical building blocks of repetition in Eddic style allowed a more complex, wider ranging analysis to proceed in chapter 3. Here we moved on to an examination of repetition and deixis, especially in *Skírnismál* but noting similar stylistic phenomena in *Brymskviða* and *Lokasenna*. In these analyses we retained the grammatical focus from the previous chapter while moving on to larger stylistic structures. As in the previous chapter, we found structures in which there is a considerable amount of repetition that nonetheless contains some change from one iteration to the next. In particular, in the entirely dialogic *Skírnismál* we saw instances where different characters repeat each other's words, and here the primary difference between each iteration lies in the changing pronouns, the deictic markers in the characters' speech. We noted how what Roman Jakobson terms the "shifters" in language effected a sort of turn across the text, through

repetition in dialogue. This perhaps surprisingly sophisticated stylistic program suggested to us, in the end, a diagram of power and the flow of desire based on the central character of the poem, Skírnir.

In the chapter 4 we shifted our focus to the repetition of individual words, moving on from grammar to semantics. After establishing a general view of the semantic trope and metaphor in Eddic poetry, we began an analysis that focused on a shifting web of connections between words: in particular, *nauð(r)* and *norn*. Though at first this perhaps seemed a departure of sorts from the focus on deliberate repetition within individual texts, in retrospect, having connected this investigation to the analysis of repeating words and their shifting meanings in *Skírnismál* and *Völundarkviða*, we can now see clearly the necessity of tracing the *nauð(r)/norn* cartography. In drawing together the various configurations in which these words have been combined and associated in Eddic verse and beyond, in runic inscriptions, we discovered a particular mode of association, distinct from metaphor proper, which indeed defies classification as a known poetic trope of semantics. This mode of association is the key to the cryptic, riddling nature of Eddic poetry and suggests a connection not only to the riddle or enigma, but also to magic. Having traced and analysed this web of associations, we returned to *Skírnismál* for an examination of the repetition of the word *munr* in that poem, finding a useful analogue for its shifting meaning and the developing idea of a “flow” of desire in the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Finally, all the stylistic concepts so far established in the thesis were synthesised in chapter 5 in an analysis of the stylistic structure of *Völundarkviða*. This text shows a similar use of repetition in dialogue to that which we examined in *Skírnismál*, with repeated

dialogue facilitated by shifting grammatical or deictic markers, albeit to a more radical extent due to the presence of a narrative voice in addition to the dialogue. Additionally, *Vǫlundarkviða* shows a chain of repetition of certain words with shifting meanings, a progression of great subtlety that nonetheless becomes striking when read closely. Here the analysis based on stylistic structure was contrasted with previous readings of *Vǫlundarkviða*, especially those by John McKinnell and Ármann Jakobsson, which focused on the individual psychology of the characters and their interactions as individuals. Building on the previously established concept of desire, this analysis was able to more fully account for the psychodrama present in the poem by taking into consideration the stylistic means by which it violates the individuality of the characters it contains. In the end, the perspective we were able to build up based on previous observations in this thesis was that of a complex psychic diagram revolving around masochism, power, desire, violence, and the transgressive figure of Vǫlundr the smith.

The end result is that we are left with a certain character, an aesthetic of repetition in Eddic poetry. We have not seen a hypothesis proven, but rather a newly observed phenomenon delineated. It remains, then, to elaborate the character of these figures of repetition; here we return to Deleuze and furthermore turn to Maurice Blanchot's thought on the narrative voice to give a coherent overall account of the complex of repetition and voice we have identified in Eddic poetry. Furthermore, we will take into account certain potentially opposing views on Eddic poetry which we have touched on at various points throughout this thesis, before moving on to a consideration of the exact scope of the analysis and suggestions for further avenues of research that have been opened up.

## 6.1 Repetition as an Aesthetic principle in Eddic Poetry

In this study we have examined concrete instances of the use of repetition in the verbal art of Eddic poetry. Throughout these analyses, the nature of repetition – on the surface such a self-evident concept – has repeatedly proved complex and problematic, and suggestive of certain paradoxes. We have also had to deal with some of the concepts that repetition implies or accompanies: difference, resemblance, identity, elision, and parallel. This use of repetition continually evokes the concept of difference, not necessarily as its own difference, as an alterity to repetition as identity, but as an integral aspect of repetition itself. There would be no repetition without some sort of difference, only identity. Even when there is a difference, however, repetition still occurs. The appearance of multiple iterations of the same element in what one perceives as different positions in the text gives rise to the metaphor of movement, together with a set of spatial metaphors we have developed to discuss Eddic poetry. Repetition moreover disrupts the sense of resemblance, which proves to be something distinct from repetition. All the examples we have considered build up to a concept of repetition that denies discreteness and, in particular, the personality of the characters in the text; in this sense, it could be said that repetition disrupts nature.

This distinction between repetition and resemblance forms the starting point for Deleuze's work on the subject, *Difference and Repetition*: as he puts it most plainly,

“[a]ccording to the law of nature, repetition is impossible.”<sup>1</sup> For Deleuze, the “law of nature” belongs to the domain of resemblance; here he draws a distinction first of all between repetition and generality, where the latter refers more broadly to that which can be considered equivalent and therefore subject to a general rule. Generality is predicated on the exchangeability of ideas, whereas repetition disrupts this exchangeability: “[i]f exchange is the criterion of generality, theft and gift are those of repetition. There is, therefore, an economic difference between the two.”<sup>2</sup> We saw the manner, at once cryptic, metaphoric, and economic, in which the chain of associations of *norn* and *nauð* exploits the metaphoric exchangeability of words while denying any clear sense of the production of analogical meaning one would normally associate with metaphor.<sup>3</sup> Though the mechanism of metaphor is exploited, we have concluded that metaphor as such is not precisely what is at work here; rather, metaphoric movement and exchange is put into the service of the figure of repetition. This appearance of equivalence is indeed visible in all instances of repetition we have examined. At the syntactic level, we saw that grammatical equivalences are exploited in figures of repetition in *Atlakviða* and in the *Guðrúnarkviður*. But in no case are these equivalences real: in fact, it is the jarring difference between the ideas thus equated that makes the figures what they are. In the cases of *Skírnismál* and *Völundarkviða*, deictic signs such as pronouns that we would normally use to form particular equivalences

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<sup>1</sup> Deleuze, Gilles ([1968] 1994): *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton, London: Continuum, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Deleuze (1968) 1994 p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Deleuze furthermore associates repetition with the cryptic and the symbolic: “Repetition is truly that which disguises itself in constituting itself, that which constitutes itself only by disguising itself. It is not underneath the masks, but is formed from one mask to another, as though from one distinctive point to another, from one privileged instant to another, with and within the variations. The masks do not hide anything except other masks”, Deleuze (1968) 1994 p. 19.

and connections related to person are activated, but in such a way as to deny the consistent personality that these signs would conventionally designate. Instead of discrete personalities, we see repetitions of certain words and phrases – in the case of *Vǫlundarkviða*, to an extreme extent bordering on the absurd – creating artificial equivalences and denying the intuitive equivalences of generality, the equivalences that adhere to what Deleuze refers to as the “law of nature”. We see personality itself abstracted as part of the artistic medium of the text, an artificial and non-realistic sense of personality. In Deleuze’s terms, these figures of repetition belong not to the domain of “resemblances”, since they deny the sense of resemblances to real persons, but rather to the more uncanny domain of “[r]eflections, echoes, doubles and souls”.<sup>4</sup> Deleuze himself even refers to deixis and personality in repetition when he says that “[r]epetition must be understood in the pronominal; we must find the Self of repetition, the singularity within that which repeats. For there is no repetition without a repeater, nothing repeated without a repetitious soul.”<sup>5</sup> As we have built up our analysis of Eddic repetition, this repetitious soul has gradually begun to reveal itself as the real object of our study; in many places I have had to for the sake of convenience refer to “the poet” of an Eddic text, but as discussed in the introductory chapter, the origins of Eddic poetry must be considered more heterogeneous than this personal designation would imply, and indeed to some extent unrecoverable. That is not to say, however, that there is no “mind” in Eddic poetry, no “repeater” of which we can productively (if provisionally) speak. We noted in the previous

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<sup>4</sup> Deleuze (1968) 1994 p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Deleuze (1968) 1994 p. 26.

chapter the aporias and paradoxes inherent in treating the characters of *Vǫlundarkviða* as if they were fully discrete personalities, and with Deleuze we can articulate why arguments based on such premises must collapse in the way they do: repetition of the signs and symbols of personality must ultimately say less about the purported persons involved than it does about the repeater.

As for difference, it appears in these figures of repetition not as a sort of shadow cast by them, as their absolute alterity, but as something intrinsic to them. They include difference, rather than referring to it second-hand in the manner of the deictic sign. It is, in fact, primarily through their difference that we can recognise repetitions as such: repetition rather than mere identity. In all the instances we have examined, no matter what the unit of repetition happens to be, we can discern a difference between one (re)iteration and another. There is always a repetition of one thing at the same time that there is a difference of another: what we have called the repetition-with-a-difference.<sup>6</sup> The spatial metaphor has been the key to understanding what in these analyses we identify as the “movement” of repetition, analogous, in many instances, to visual forms of repetition. Thus Deleuze:

Consider ... the repetition of a decorative motif: a figure is reproduced, while the concept remains absolutely identical ... However, this is not how artists proceed in reality. They do not juxtapose instances of the figure, but rather each time combine an element of one instance with *another* element of a following instance. They

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<sup>6</sup> Especially in 3.2.1 and 3.2.2 (pp. 120-149 of this thesis).

introduce a disequilibrium into the dynamic process of construction, an instability, dissymmetry or gap of some kind which disappears only in the overall effect.<sup>7</sup>

This is precisely the artistic instability we find in Eddic poetry. In the movement between repeated iterations, where repetition is “woven from one distinctive point to another,” the concept that supposedly remains constant between them shifts slightly each time.<sup>8</sup> We see this disrupt the stability of language in terms of syntactic, deictic, and semantic meaning, finally culminating in the disruption of personal stability.

This destabilising of the concept is particularly well illustrated by our consideration of the repetition of the individual word. Is it, Deleuze asks, “the identity of the nominal concept which explains the repetition of a word?”<sup>9</sup> After all, according to the principle of “sufficient reason” and that of “the identity of indiscernibles”, there is “one concept per particular thing” and “one and only one thing per concept”.<sup>10</sup> Repetition, however, disrupts these common-sense principles. We have seen how the epiphoric movement of words, across one text or among multiple texts, weakens the tether between a word and its referent, obscuring meaning while foregrounding the iconicity of the word as a word: in the case of *nauð* and †, even the word as symbol or the symbol as word. Deleuze distinguishes this epiphoric movement in the repetition of the word from “a repetition by default which results from the inadequacy of nominal concepts or verbal representations”; rather, it is “a

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<sup>7</sup> Deleuze (1968) 1994 p. 22, emphasis original.

<sup>8</sup> Deleuze (1968) 1994 p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> Deleuze (1968) 1994 p. 24.

<sup>10</sup> Deleuze (1968) 1994 p. 13.



positive repetition, one which flows from the excess of a linguistic and stylistic Idea".<sup>11</sup> It is not simply the case that the meaning of the word changes as it is repeated; as the word shifts, something is carried over, an "excess" of meaning. As we saw in chapter 4, this excess of meaning even spills outside the bounds of the (already porous) semantic field. It is not so much the case that an "idea" or "concept" is being repeated, as that in the first instance the word as object or material is being repeated; and from there, sub-lexical elements of this word are repeated in an overlapping pattern, and a gradual turn in signification is accomplished. We saw previously that this turn involves not only the semantic field, but the purely phonological characteristics of the word, as well as the purely iconic characteristics of the glyph. This turning of words moves through the mysterious, seemingly ineffable (or at least inexpressible) space of metaphor: the linkage, the catenation, of concept to concept, concept to word, and word to word. This is the open secret or "spectacle of obscurity" of Eddic poetry; though these repetitions and linkages are undeniable when one draws them together in a close reading, they are nonetheless never openly acknowledged in the texts themselves. Indeed, we should stress again that what we have brought to light here is no codified poetic practice acknowledged as such in Old Norse literature, but a more deeply buried stylistic technique, particularly in the case of the repetition of the individual word. These unacknowledged, non-reflexive stylistic structures seem to point toward a mysterious model of Eddic crypticness as an aesthetic *telos*, an idea which I would suggest could be more perfectly elaborated in future studies. Furthermore, the character of these figures of repetition indicate a model of Eddic poetry gesturing

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<sup>11</sup> Deleuze (1968) 1994 p. 25.

toward a central absence, a concept we have encountered repeatedly throughout this thesis. What remains to be demonstrated is that this absence is the heart of the Eddic narrative voice.

### 6.1.1 Repetition and Voice in Eddic Poetry

The latter half of this study has focused particularly on repetition of and in dialogue in *Skírnismál* and *Völundarkviða*. We have noted how repetition in these cases creates a stylised and non-representational form of dialogue, and with it a stylised sense of personality as it is conveyed through such dialogue. Repetition, here, seems (at least to the modern ear) to violate something; it breaks the illusion of verisimilitude and draws attention to the structure and language of the text itself. Maurice Blanchot approaches the same problem in his consideration of the narrative voice in literature in general:

Often, in a bad tale – assuming that there are bad tales, which is not altogether certain – we have the impression that someone is speaking in the background and prompting the characters or even the events with what they have to say: an indiscreet and clumsy intrusion; it is said to be the author talking, an authoritarian and complacent “I” still anchored in life and barging in without any restraint. It is true, this is indiscreet – and this is how the circle is wiped out. But it is also true that the impression that someone is talking “in the background” is really part of the singularity of narrative and the truth of the circle: as though the centre of the circle

lay outside the circle, in back and infinitely far back, as though the *outside* were precisely this centre, which could only be the absence of all centre.<sup>12</sup>

Here, in spite of his own focus on a certain canon of Western literature which by no means takes anything like Eddic poetry into account, Blanchot enunciates precisely the phenomenon we have seen in these dialogic poems. *Vǫlundarkviða* in particular strikes one as “indiscreet” – as well as indiscrete – in this manner, with its strident disregard for the discreteness of its characters. Yet it is also the case with *Skírnismál* that a central psychic investment – indeed, a distinctly erotic ego – is being revealed to us, centred on the voice of Skírnir himself, through the verbal interactions of multiple voices. Blanchot characterises these artistic strategies perfectly for us; he is inclined to consider something so “indiscreetly” expressed as a “bad tale,” and yet on the other hand he is inclined to correct or at least second-guess his assumption “that there are bad tales”. One could simply write off the repetitive nature of *Vǫlundarkviða* as “bad” in the sense that it is an artistic expression attempting to grasp verisimilitude but failing in its own aims due to being mired in *barbarischen Stilfiguren* – in Sievers’ terms, “barbaric stylistic figures” – unable to break sufficiently with the archaic strictures of Germanic formalism to achieve a fresh mode of figuration. But this is only the case insofar as we consider *Vǫlundarkviða* to aim for realism, which concept there seems – especially in light of everything we have uncovered throughout this study – no reason to assume exists, as such, in the toolbox of Eddic stylistics. Rather, what the structures of these texts show is something that Blanchot finds

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<sup>12</sup> Blanchot, Maurice ([1969] 1981): “The Narrative Voice”, *The Gaze of Orpheus and other literary essays*, trans. Lydia Davis, ed. P. Adams Sitney, Barrytown: Station Hill Press, p. 134.

all the more profound for having come to him through the “bad tale:” that the “centre” of the text lies “outside” it, that the “centre” in fact consists of “the absence of all centre.”

Blanchot treats the narrative voice of the novel as his primary subject in this essay; when he mentions the “distant epic narrator”, this figure stands in implicit contrast to the novelistic narrator. The literary history Blanchot traces leaps directly from the classical to Don Quixote without considering any form of narration that might have existed in between, but from his description of “epic” narration in the abstract we can see that Eddic narration lies closer to this broad category:

The distant epic narrator recounts exploits that happened and that he seems to be reproducing, whether or not he witnessed them. But the narrator is not a historian. His song is the domain where the event that takes place there comes to speech, in the presence of a memory; memory – muse and mother of muses – contains within it truth, that is, the reality of what takes place; ... To tell a story is a mysterious thing. The mysterious “he” of the epic institution very quickly divides: the “he” becomes the impersonal coherence of a *story* (in the full and rather magical meaning of this word); the *story* stands by itself, preformed in the thought of a demiurge, and since it exists on its own, there is nothing left to do but tell it.<sup>13</sup>

In the afterword to this work, which in French is subtitled “*le ‘il’, le neutre*”, Sitney notes that “[t]he very absence of a neuter case in French gives to the common pronoun ‘il’ the

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<sup>13</sup> Blanchot (1969) 1981 p. 135, emphasis original.

ambiguous designation of both 'he' and 'it.'"<sup>14</sup> What is rendered here as "he" in English should therefore be understood as a pronoun in the third person but otherwise of complete indeterminacy. "Epic" narration, in this description, exists in a comparable situation to Eddic narration; at least, it is comparable to the way Eddic verse frequently presents itself. An Eddic poem tends to be framed as a remembering of the ancient past, as seen most explicitly through the voice of the *vǫlva* in *Vǫluspá*, but as is also evident in the frequent use of "*ár var alda*" ("early was the age") and equivalent phrases. Blanchot understands that the epic itself is not "the story," but "the domain where the event that takes place there comes to speech, in the presence of a memory". One might detect a tinge of irony in his tone when putting it so simply as that "there is nothing left to do but tell" the story; Blanchot has himself already indicated what a complex and mysterious process this telling is. The epic narrative voice in Blanchot's diagram "divides", creating a heterogeneous space where the "story" coexists with the "telling of the story", where "the event" both "takes place" and "comes to speech": "in the presence of memory".

This heterogeneous space accords in many ways with the appearance of Eddic poetry to the modern scholar. Consider Schorn's characterisation, for example: Eddic verse has both a "blend of the familiar and the remote"<sup>15</sup> and a "blend of conservatism and flexibility".<sup>16</sup> It is "remote" in terms of its otherworldly subject matter, "familiar" in the

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<sup>14</sup> Sitney, P. Adams (1981): "Afterword", *The Gaze of Orpheus and other literary essays*, trans. Lydia Davis, ed. P. Adams Sitney, Barrytown: Station Hill Press, p. 195

<sup>15</sup> Schorn, Brittany (2016a): "Eddic Modes and Genres", *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry: Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia*, ed. Carolyne Larrington, Judy Quinn, Brittany Schorn, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 231.

<sup>16</sup> Schorn 2016b p. 286.

particulars extracted from that subject matter, which include the “anxieties of the real-world societies of medieval Scandinavia”,<sup>17</sup> as we have indeed seen, especially in the case of *Völundarkviða*. It is “conservative” in terms of what Blanchot calls the “preformed” story which “stands by itself”, which the poet does not create but merely refers to; it is “flexible” in terms of the telling itself, the particular expression, the freedom that comes with having “nothing left to do but tell” the story. We could say that it is this expressive aspect of Eddic poetry, as opposed to the relative rigidity of the transmitted story, that has been the subject of our analysis all along. And it can also be said that this divided narrative voice is Eddic repetition itself: we have seen over and over that repetition is both an identity and a difference. In Blanchot’s words, it is both the singular “*objective* reality” of the story and multiple “individual lives, *subjectivities*”.<sup>18</sup> The narrative voice, then, is “a manifest ‘ego’ under the veil of an apparent ‘he’”.<sup>19</sup> In the “epic” diagram, this is the “demiurge” whose “thought” contains the “preformed” story: and is this not also one and the same as Deleuze’s “self of repetition?” The veil of the ego – the silent *ek* – is thinnest of all in *Völundarkviða*, where the seemingly masochistic voice of the narrator subtends and permeates all other voices. Blanchot has developed the concept he presents in *The Narrative Voice* from an earlier reading of Kafka, in which that writer “observes with surprise, with enchantment and delight, that as soon as he was able to substitute ‘he’ for ‘I’ he entered literature.”<sup>20</sup> For Blanchot via Kafka, this passage is the bare abstract

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<sup>17</sup> Schorn 2016a p. 231.

<sup>18</sup> Blanchot (1969) 1981 p. 136, emphasis original.

<sup>19</sup> Blanchot (1969) 1981 p. 136.

<sup>20</sup> Blanchot, Maurice ([1955] 1981): “The Essential Solitude”, *The Gaze of Orpheus and other literary essays*, trans. Lydia Davis, ed. P. Adams Sitney, Barrytown: Station Hill Press, p. 69.

requirement of literature as it appears in the novel, and he sees the seed of this passage in the “epic institution” by the time of *The Narrative Voice*.

It is, however, the modern novelistic “he” that provides the greatest contrast to Eddic voice. When Schorn characterises the use of voice in Eddic poetry as “[l]etting the voices of the ancient past speak for themselves”, this appears more to be a statement about the apparent aim of Eddic narration rather than its actual effect;<sup>21</sup> surely the modern reader, in any case, is not fooled by the act. Eddic narration does not bring us into the presence of the characters involved, but, as Blanchot puts it, into the presence of “memory”, in a heterogeneous space where the “story” is, strictly speaking, completely absent. The Eddic poem is humbled by its disguise as a mere gesture toward the absent story, with the narrative voice disguised as what Blanchot refers to as the “neuter.” But the expressive flourish of the Eddic poem belies this humility, making something out of nothing; one could compare Egill Skallagrímsson’s rhetorical figure at the beginning of *Sonatorrek* in which he elaborately declares, through poetry, that grief has made it nearly impossible for him to compose poetry. The figure of repetition hinged around deictic markers such as pronouns in particular reflects this implicit flamboyant acknowledgment of absence: when the material around them is so labouriously repeated and the “shifters” themselves are the difference, one’s ear is drawn toward them, even though they ultimately gesture toward nothing. The nothing that they are gesturing toward is the narrative voice itself, the concept of Eddic narrative, of being narrated, the “neutral” and ostensibly undetermined figure that

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<sup>21</sup> Schorn 2016b p. 286. By “apparent aim” what I mean is not so much that the composer of Eddic poetry really aims at it when composing the poem, but rather that this is the aim one accepts as nominally present when entering into the situation of reading or listening to Eddic poetry.

is the narrator. This is the case even in a completely dialogic poem like *Skírnismál*, where even in the absence of a proper narrative voice the repeating characters gesture toward a single “repeater,” an “ego,” a “demiurge.” If one could draw a broad and perhaps excessively general generic distinction (and we will return to the subject of genre below), it could be said that this character separates the quintessentially Eddic from the quintessentially skaldic: Eddic poetry is truly “narrative” in this sense, performing a complete absence of poet and even of speaker, whereas skaldic poetry tends to be more or less firmly rooted in the *ek* of the skald and the objective fact of the occasion for which the skaldic poem is composed. Even if this distinction is not always true, it is nonetheless useful in building a concept of Eddic narrative, the particularly narrative character of the Eddic voice.

Repetition shows us that the Eddic narrative voice has its “centre” “outside” itself, as Blanchot puts it. It is the “singularity of narrative” itself that is indicated by this sort of voice, and as such it points toward the essence of narrative by indicating its own absence. One might conclude the elaboration of this mysterious operation with Stéphane Mallarmé’s famous formulation:

When I say: “a flower!” then from that forgetfulness to which my voice consigns all floral form, something different from the usual calyces arises, something all music, essence, and softness: the flower which is absent from all bouquets.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Mallarmé 1956 p. 42.



For Mallarmé, then, one could say that the essence of the poetic in language is the absence at the heart of it; here Mallarmé shows in relatively few words an acute awareness of the very phenomenon we have observed in the mysterious transference at the heart of the repetition of the word, where meaning becomes untethered from the other aspects of the word and the word itself becomes unfamiliar and thing-like. Likewise, the narrative voice of Eddic poetry dwells on a similarly mysterious transference, gesturing to a reality outside language that is not there; as Blanchot says, the narrative voice is the voice that “cannot be embodied”.<sup>23</sup>

#### 6.1.2 “Reading” Eddic Poetry/Reading Eddic “Poetry”

In the introductory chapter we noted the heterogeneous character of Eddic poetry as, presumably, a recording of texts composed and transmitted orally over an unknown period of time prior to their writing down, texts that have passed through many anonymous hands before appearing to us in the form in which we know them. Right away we established the necessity of dealing with the text in the form in which we have it, rather than proceeding with some more provisional model of an “original” text. Nonetheless, the question of the oral aspect of Eddic poetry has arisen here and there throughout this study, and it has even become apparent that the text itself suggests or conjures up the oral voice. This is apparent in Schorn’s description of “ancient voices”, “speak[ing] for themselves”. In the end, these analyses should be seen as having a sort of hybrid character that reflects the

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<sup>23</sup> Blanchot (1969) 1981 p. 142.

heterogeneous nature of Eddic poetry. Now we have elaborated on the nature of the Eddic narrative voice in light of the figures of repetition we have examined, and this too has been shown to have a heterogeneous character, both a presence and an absence.

One could anticipate the objection, however, that our analysis remains excessively literary: too literary in its approach and method, that is, to do any justice to an originally orally performed text. Though we dealt with this question in the introduction, we revisit it here as our elaboration of a theory of Eddic repetition and voice bears implications for it. Here we are considering in particular the view of Terry Gunnell, whose work hinges on this very question. For Gunnell, the state of Eddic poetry is not merely difficult, it is a crisis: Eddic poetry “was not what it has become”;<sup>24</sup> what it is now (a written text) is not what it is (a dynamic, “living” tradition of unique individual performances, now lost), or at least not what it is supposed to be, which in Gunnell’s view would be the ritual drama performance he sees as the original form of the text. This is perhaps the worst possible state for it to be in. The written form of Eddic poetry is, to Gunnell, an abject thing, “the contents of a single, fairly insignificant-looking, medieval manuscript”.<sup>25</sup> The loss of Eddic poetry is irretrievable: it cannot be analysed as such, but must first be reconstructed. Gunnell’s writing on Eddic poetry must therefore begin with a mourning of this loss. In *Eddic performance and Eddic audiences*, the context of Eddic poetry prior to its recording in writing is referred to as “living” a total of seven times; writing is not explicitly referred to as “dead” (merely

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<sup>24</sup> Gunnell 2016 p. 92.

<sup>25</sup> Gunnell, Terry (2005): “Eddic Poetry”, *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture, Second Edition*, ed. Rory McTurk, Oxford: Blackwell, p. 82.

“silent”)<sup>26</sup>, but that seems to be its implied place in the overall conceptual diagram Gunnell constructs.<sup>27</sup> The concern here is that the static, (relatively) unchanging written word can never adequately reflect the constantly changing, “living” nature of performance. When one analyses the written word, one analyses not the thing itself but the loss of that thing.

Part of the crisis of Eddic poetry not being what it is is the idea that – in Gunnell’s analysis – it is in fact not poetry at all: “[t]here is all the more reason, in light of these considerations [of the originally oral context of Eddic poetry], for questioning the general classification of the works under discussion as ‘poems,’ rather than as ‘songs,’ ‘chants,’ or ‘dramas.’”<sup>28</sup> Classification is important in this context, since Gunnell here is writing an encyclopaedic overview of Eddic poetry as a topic. Yet in this question of taxonomy one might well question the rigidity of these terms: what should we understand to be the distinction, exactly, between a “poem” and a “song?” In various places we have preferred the term “verbal art” as one that is both more neutral and more inclusive in regard to these various forms, and as a term that focuses on what is primarily under examination here: the artistic, aesthetic, and stylistic aspects of the texts. The distinction between “poem” and “song” seems to presuppose an unnecessarily rigid definition of “poem” as a literary object that cannot be performed in the context Gunnell envisages. However, we saw for example in the case of *Skírnismál* that one can no more exclude its artistic or poetic character than one can its overtly dramatic character. Even in the absence of any clear and specific

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<sup>26</sup> Gunnell 2016 p. 93.

<sup>27</sup> The persistent association between writing and death which Gunnell reproduces here has been noted by Ong (2012 p. 80).

<sup>28</sup> Gunnell 2005 p. 94.

evidence for the existence of drama as an “indigenous” concept in medieval Scandinavia, one would have to say that the dialogic nature of much Eddic verse suggests, even if abstractly, the idea of drama and indeed takes on the aspect of drama as it is experienced, no matter how one experiences it, whether through writing or through oral performance. At the same time, however, we see that the Eddic text gestures toward something beyond the mere simulation of characters; repetition, “impossible” according to the “law of nature,” disrupts the simulation and introduces the literary or the artistic – the poetic – into the dramatic framework. This is the repeating narrative voice of Eddic poetry: present, spectrally, even where there is strictly speaking no narrative voice at all, as in *Skírnismál*. As Blanchot puts it, “[t]he narrative voice ... cannot be embodied ... it is always different from what utters it, it is the indifferent-difference that alters the personal voice.”<sup>29</sup> Just as Schorn is able to state the pretence of Eddic narration without passing into it, one cannot but believe in a series of Eddic audiences across time experiencing not the simulation of some reality, but the particularity of an expression, no matter what utterer – book or human – bears the absent narrative voice.

We can see, then, that our analysis bears fruit not only for Eddic poetry conceived as written text but also for Eddic poetry conceived as oral performance. However, one could anticipate an additional objection from a proponent of the primacy of the latter, and this has to do with the method we have used. The above readings of Eddic poetry rely heavily on the technology of writing and the form of Eddic poetry as written text. It has been possible

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<sup>29</sup> Blanchot (1969) 1981 p. 142.

for us to trace these figures of repetition primarily because we read them, and in many cases one might argue that they would be far less evident to one experiencing an oral performance of the text. In addition to the other senses which are stimulated by the oral performance, Gunnell notes the moving and changing “temporal” character of performance.<sup>30</sup> By contrast, written texts, as Ong puts it, “are thing-like, immobilized in visual space”, the written word is “a thing, not an event”, it “is present all at once” and “can be cut up into little pieces.”<sup>31</sup> This cutting up is essentially what close reading is, and for readings this close, the text must be written down. The same holds true to some extent for one whose primary object of study is the original oral context; the difference is that we do not aim very far, if at all, beyond the written text. To take a certain point of view to its logical extreme, therefore, our method could be seen as fallacious and circular: because our conclusions remain in a sense confined to the written text, we prove nothing, because there is nobody for whom the text was meant to be a written text; it is not what it is. Because of this, surely any figure which requires the atemporality of reading to become visible must not be a thing of any significance: it cannot be a real stylistic feature if it cannot realistically be processed by the listener in an oral performance. Here we might make a categorical distinction between two types of repetition we have identified: the relatively overt and obvious repetition of dialogue, and the often extremely subtle repetition of the individual word. Where the proponent of the purely oral model of Eddic poetry might allow the validity of the former, the latter would perhaps seem far-fetched. In particular, the chain of

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<sup>30</sup> Gunnell 2005 p. 95.

<sup>31</sup> Ong 2012 pp. 98, 90.

associations between repetitions of individual words across multiple texts and even in disparate media would seem to be a sort of illusion of technologically mediated perception.

Yet just as Eddic poetry persists in being what it is, the repetitions of individual words persist in being what they are. In any case, the end would seem to justify the means here, because however artificial and textual our reading may appear, the results we have produced are not arbitrary or meaningless. Among other things, what we have found suggests a certain writtenness to Eddic poetry. Gunnell envisages a situation of what Ong calls “primary orality,”<sup>32</sup> a society untouched by the consciousness-altering *techne* of writing. It is more likely that in Eddic literature we are surveying a period of time in which oral forms of performance and circulation of verbal art likely persisted alongside written forms of circulation and consumption (since the written can never abolish the spoken word), and in which the two almost certainly had a tremendous influence on one another.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, in the very figure of repetition itself, are we not perhaps seeing this influence? We noted earlier the idea of the oral formula of Lord and Parry, the necessity of repetition to memory in the absence of writing: as Ong puts it, “knowledge, once acquired, had to be constantly repeated or it would be lost.”<sup>34</sup> We made a distinction at that point between oral formula and aesthetic repetition, and this distinction still holds, but we could also speculate that the two have an influence on one another, reflecting the overall heterogeneous character of Eddic poetry. Furthermore, it is simply not the case that Eddic poetry was dead on arrival in its recording. Apart from the influence of Eddic verse on the later Icelandic

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<sup>32</sup> Ong 2012 p. 6.

<sup>33</sup> As we have seen noted by Mellor (2008 p. 63) above (Section 2.3, p. 94 of this thesis).

<sup>34</sup> Ong 2012 p. 23.

verse-form of the *rímur*, which in any case carries on many of the themes present in the Codex Regius poetry,<sup>35</sup> we also have the continuation of Eddic form in both original texts such as *Sólarljóð* and poetic translations such as *Merlínusspá*, even extending to the much later Eddic “pastiche” *Hrafnagaldur Óðins*,<sup>36</sup> all self-conscious uses of the Eddic idiom for fresh poetic expressions. We have also seen an association between Eddic form and magical inscription on objects from the relatively late medieval period. All of this suggests a continuing relevance and use of the Eddic form (if you like, a “living” tradition), especially in antiquarian and what might be called occult contexts, even after the production of Codex Regius. If this is not perhaps the lost “original” form of Eddic poetry, it is nonetheless the form that we have to hand, and as we have noted previously, there seems no reason not to take it as a valid object of study. If we exclude what we consider to be unacceptably late works from the term “Eddic,” we are making a historical distinction, not an aesthetic or formal distinction.

## 6.2 The Scope of this Study and Areas for Future Research: Repetition and Refrain

We mentioned above, and previously in this thesis, a distinction between repeating elements in Eddic poetry as a form of oral formula, and the particular aesthetic of repetition we have identified here. It is worth saying something more about the distinctiveness of

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<sup>35</sup> As pointed out, for example, in Clunies Ross 2016 p. 18; Jorgensen, Peter A. (1993), “Rímur”, *Medieval Scandinavia: an Encyclopedia*, ed. Phillip Pulsiano & Kirsten Wolf, New York & London: Garland, pp. 536-537.

<sup>36</sup> As Clunies Ross describes it (Clunies Ross 2016 p. 31); see Lassen, Annette ed. (2011): *Hrafnagaldur Óðins (Forspjallsljóð)*, Viking Society for Northern Research, Text Series 20, London: Viking Society for Northern Research.

these patterns of repetition from other uses of repetition, not least because there might seem to be some obvious cases of repetition in Eddic poetry that we have overlooked. What can be said in general is that we have identified a number of related but individual stylistic strategies involving the use of repetition, which show a generic relation without existing in a strictly codified form.

Schorn makes note of the highly visible use of repetition in *Hávamál*, a long monologic poem in *ljóðaháttr* divided into distinct sections which frequently make use of refrains. As Schorn puts it, the refrains “serve to draw individual stanzas together by explicitly relating them to the frame narrative.”<sup>37</sup> The “*Ráðomk þér, Loddfáfnir*” refrain (“Take counsel, Loddfáfnir”) used between strophes 112 and 137 remains unchanged in each iteration, and this indeed keeps the content of the strophes rooted in the subject matter at hand; on the whole, *Hávamál* is presented as a series of lists, primarily a list of gnomic advisements addressed to a second person by the god Óðinn, and as such it is in its nature to be repetitive. Schorn also points out the formulaic nature of the list of charms,<sup>38</sup> in which each strophe begins with an identical half-line except for the number of the charm in the list; and here, the initial consonant or vowel of that number is the alliterative determiner for the next line. Schorn rightly stresses the “mnemonic value” of this figure: in each strophe the “number of the spell” is linked alliteratively to “the difficulty for which it is

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<sup>37</sup> Schorn 2016b p. 281.

<sup>38</sup> We noted this briefly in passing as it seems to tie into the Norn/*nauð(r)* complex when in 154 *níunda* alliterates with *nauð* (section 4.3, pp. 167-185 of this thesis).



a remedy.”<sup>39</sup> Here, as with the oral formula, the form is linked instrumentally to the purpose of the text.

We noted briefly some grammatical aspects of two of the refrains in *Vǫluspá*, which is particularly laden with refrains. The most immediately noticeable formal distinction between *Hávamál* and *Vǫluspá* is that the latter is presented as a narrative (albeit a wide-ranging and frequently disjunctive one), while the former must be grouped with the “wisdom poems” as a collection or list of knowledge.<sup>40</sup> The refrains of *Vǫluspá*, as we noted, both appear at key points of the narrative and seem to mark distinct sections of it. Furthermore, we noted some slight changes in diction between the various iterations of some of the refrains, while some others remain identical. *Vǫluspá* represents a bridge between the purely instrumental use of refrain we see in *Hávamál*, and the aesthetic or expressive use of repetition we see best exemplified in *Skírnismál* and *Vǫlundarkviða*. In *Hávamál* one could call the use of repetition “metric” in the sense that it occurs at strictly symmetrical intervals in the text; like poetic metre itself, this rigidly regular repetition shows a relation to memory. By contrast, the structures of repetition in *Skírnismál* and *Vǫlundarkviða* are asymmetrical, occurring at seemingly arbitrary points in the text and in no way reflecting the regularity of a metre. This asymmetry reflects their artistic rather than mnemonic character, and it can be seen all the way down to the level of grammar at which we began our analysis: the grammatical figures of repetition we saw appeared as artificial extensions of sentences rather than as metrically arranged elements. Even in the case of the

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<sup>39</sup> Schorn 2016b p. 282.

<sup>40</sup> On which, see for example Larrington, Carolyne (1993): *A store of common sense: gnomic theme and style in Old Icelandic and Old English wisdom poetry*, Oxford: Clarendon.

comparative panegyric figure praising the character of Sigurðr in the *Guðrúnarkviður* which played a metadiscursively contrastive role (“*Svá var Sigurðr*”, “so was Sigurðr”), ultimately symmetry as such is denied in favour of a sort of hybrid image. Between the aesthetic and the mnemonic uses of repetition lie the refrains of *Völuspá*, which could on the one hand be said to aid in the memorising of the poem in their structural function of marking off the sections of the poem, but which also play an expressive role in emphasising certain aspects of the narrative. In the refrain increasingly repeated toward the end, by addressing Óðinn in the second person and asking “*vituð ér enn, eða hvat?*” (“do you [plural] know yet, or what?”), the *völva* ties her monologue to the frame narrative in a manner comparable to the Loddfáfnir refrain in *Hávamál*, and yet there is a subtle difference: as with the repetitions in *Skírnismál* and *Völundarkviða*, this formula gestures to something outside even the frame narrative, to the nature of the text itself. This is a far more ambiguous and complex operation than the refrain in *Hávamál*, and unlike the Loddfáfnir refrain, it occurs only at irregular intervals.

### 6.2.1 Eddic repetition and genre

In the introduction to this study we noted the difficulty of establishing Eddic poetry as a genre when in fact the term seems to be one of convenience whose outer fringes are considerably porous.<sup>41</sup> It is not only the case that what we call “Eddic poetry” includes a diverse range of poetic forms and subjects, but also that its boundaries are debatable. In

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<sup>41</sup> Section 1.2, pp. 25-36 of this thesis.

particular it seems that we must define Eddic poetry negatively by appealing to what is quintessentially skaldic and contrasting it with what is quintessentially Eddic. This risks introducing a certain circularity to the discussion. We have focused on certain poems contained in Codex Regius which would uncontroversially be considered “Eddic,” but in following the line of investigation we have also taken into account later works such as *Sólarljóð*, *fornyrðislag* runic inscriptions whose relation to “poetry” is debatable, and even alliterative poetry in other old Germanic languages. It is likely that further connections and comparisons could extend to other areas outside of what is traditionally considered “Eddic,” although this lies outside our present scope.

In the elaboration of repetition and Eddic narrative voice, we noted a generic distinction between voice in Eddic and skaldic poetry for which the model we have developed here has considerable significance. Skaldic poetry is more reflexive in that the voice of the poet frequently refers to the actual person of the poet, in stark contrast to the more complex narrative voice of the anonymous Eddic poem, which gestures toward an absence. Even a skaldic poem of relatively unusual form and content such as the aforementioned *Sonatorrek* remains highly reflexive, focusing as it does on the poet’s own emotions in relation to an objective occasion. One could compare this to the various poems revolving around the character of Guðrún Gjúkadóttir – especially *Guðrúnarkviða I* – in which introspection and emotion play a fundamental role. Here Guðrún’s own voice seems to sometimes take on a narrative role much like Skírnir’s in *Skírnismál*, and yet the text maintains its ostensibly objective narrative frame. This is a significant generic difference, indicating a radically different construction of voice. One might assume, therefore, that the

forms of repetition we have seen in Eddic poems such as *Skírnismál* and *Völundarkviða* would necessarily be absent in skaldic poetry, given its formal differences.

However, to demonstrate this absence conclusively would require some analysis of the use of repetition in skaldic poetry, which lies outside the scope of this study. Although one would expect to find differences, it is equally possible that some analogous phenomenon occurs in skaldic poems. It is furthermore likely that, in spite of the different construction of voice, a similarly complex situation exists in many skaldic poems. The skaldic *ek* lacks the distance necessary to be identified with Blanchot's "epic institution" in the way that the Eddic narrative voice can be, and yet it is not entirely the case that skaldic poetry is solely descriptive, that the voice of the poet does not to some extent become a narrative voice. Indeed, although the historical existence of the skalds usually seems to be a given, one might question the rigidity of the boundary between the absolutely real *ek* of the named or unnamed skald and the *ek* of the *vǫlva* or other mythical or supernatural being, who themselves appear to stand in for poets. Conversely, the skalds seem sometimes to stand in for the "neuter" voice of the narrator. Finally, it is likely that the figures of repetition and voice in Eddic poetry and whatever analogous figures may be found in skaldic poetry are not absolutely separate from one another, as there is plenty of potential for cross-germination between bodies of poetry that are primarily perceived as separate genres only by modern readers. In particular, one might look to those texts that straddle the generic boundary between Eddic and skaldic – in particular *Eiríksmál*, *Hákonarmál*, and perhaps in particular *Darraðarljóð* with its conspicuous use of refrains – as these have the potential to show both similarities to the more properly "Eddic" material and the

differences, the movement from one mode of poetry to another. Considering the differences and similarities between “Eddic” and “skaldic” verse, there is great potential for the demonstration that the use of voice and repetition in both “genres” shares the overall aesthetic we have identified in this study. This should provide a direction for future research.

### 6.3 Concluding Remarks: Old Norse Verse and Poetry

Throughout this study we have treated the text of Eddic poetry at extremely close range. But at the same time, we have had occasion to refer to a wide variety of theories and cultural concepts relating to poetry, aesthetics, and psychology. In each individual case the relevance of these references is clear enough, and in the conclusion to this study we have also shown the relevance of Eddic poetry to these concepts. This is a point that should not be understated. One finds both the paradoxical and disruptive nature of abstract repetition identified by Deleuze, as well as the absent presence of the narrative voice identified by Blanchot, both elaborately represented in Eddic poetry. It is also the case that Eddic poetry has something to say itself to these concepts: modifying Deleuze’s repetition with its own highly unique form of crypticness, which at the same time presents an alternative and a challenge to established concepts of metaphor, defying the neatly linear genealogy Blanchot constructs between the epic narrator and the narrator of the novel, as well as disrupting the assumptions of the cognitive approach to poetics by denying much of what language is “supposed” to do. There are very likely similar and comparable figures in other

forms of verbal art, and yet it is unlikely that anything could be perfectly analogous to the complex model of repetition we have identified in this study. Furthermore, the problematic and heterogeneous nature of Eddic poetry as a group of texts of uncertain and complicated provenance, which seemed at first to be a problem that needed to be overcome, turns out to be a fruitful ground for theoretical investigation. We have seen in the course of this study that this heterogeneous nature causes theoretical implications to multiply rather than diminish. In both these senses, Eddic poetry has something unique to say to the concept of poetry in general. My aim here has been to let it speak for itself as much as it has been to analyse it. Moreover, this study has treated a relatively minute aspect of the style of Eddic poetry; there is considerably more ground for future studies than what falls within our current scope. This study, therefore, provides future directions for research, and demonstrates both the value of the study of poetry to Eddic verse, and the value of Eddic verse to the study of poetry. Repetition is a concept that lies at the very heart of what makes poetry poetry, and the unique and surprising manner in which it is deployed in Eddic verse adds a new and essential element to the overall understanding of verbal art.

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