

**Translating the Untranslatable: A Comparative Study  
of Two Modern Language Translations of the Verses  
of *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar***

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In memory of my first teacher, my grandmother  
Maureen Conway.

*Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dílis.*

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## Abstract

My project analyses the extent to which, through a process of translation (or rewriting), skaldic poetry has been appropriated and manipulated in such a way as to help construct ideas of national identity. It combines two academic fields of study: one is the long-established and time-honoured tradition of skaldic scholarship and the other is the relatively new field of Translation Studies which in the last thirty years has gone from being a marginalised, almost ignored field of interest to a discipline which is now being studied as a subject in its own right. Translation Studies has become a very broad subject with many sub-specialities, but my research is chiefly concerned with theories of literary translation and in particular builds on recent research (by scholars such as Susan Bassnett, André Lefevere and Maria Tymoczko) on the links between colonialism and translation.

Translations of skaldic poetry provide a particularly suitable basis for the investigation of translation as a place of cultural interface. The complexity and subtlety of this poetry make it notoriously difficult to render into other languages, leading to claims that this genre is 'untranslatable'. While this is patently untrue, any attempt to maintain the form of skaldic poetry, communicate the content, and, at the same time, convey its metonymic implications in translation inevitably results in lacunae between source text and translated text which are more marked than those which occur when rendering prose. An examination of these liminal spaces can discover both the strategies employed by the translator and the extraneous (cultural, economic, ideological) factors, which may have influenced the production of the translation.

Similar studies carried out by translation scholars have so far concentrated on the twentieth-century literatures of British, Spanish and French ex-colonies. By examining Norwegian and Spanish translations, I analyse the less obvious but equally complex relationships between the target cultures and the source culture as reflected in the poetry. I argue that one strategy employed by ex-colonial powers to accommodate the notion that another culture or literary tradition is equal or superior to their own is by appropriating it through what I call 'retrospective colonization'. I extend this theoretical framework without being prescriptive, however; this is an empirical study consisting mainly of descriptive and critical analyses of the translated texts.



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## List of Abbreviations

<i>ANF</i>	<i>Arkiv för nordisk filologi</i>
Bm.	Bokmål
Ice.	Icelandic
ÍF	Íslenzk fornrit
CR	<i>Codex Regius</i>
CSI	<i>The Complete Sagas of Icelanders</i>
JEGP	<i>Journal of English and Germanic Philology</i>
K	<i>Kétilsbækir</i>
KLNM	<i>Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder</i>
M	<i>Möðruvallabók</i>
Nn	Nynorsk
OED	Oxford English Dictionary
ON	Old Norse
<i>Skj.</i>	<i>Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning</i>
W	<i>Wolfenbüttelbók</i>

## INTRODUCTION

The basic framework for this discussion employs some of the central tenets of models for Literary Translation Studies as developed by Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere in particular. Firstly, *Egils saga*, the text I have chosen, is an example of ‘cultural capital’ although the extent of its prestige will differ considerably depending on whether it is read in a Norwegian or a Spanish context. Secondly, I believe that Hallvard Lie’s and Enrique Bernárdez’s translations should be evaluated as literature in their own right. They have been produced for a readership that would otherwise not have had access to this saga or its poetry and hence (for the most part) function independently of the source text in the target culture. For the vast majority of the target audience, the translation *is* the saga. I will begin my analysis of these translations, therefore, at macro level, examining them primarily from a ‘target’ point of view.

The first chapter will introduce the ‘source text’ for the two translations, Sigurður Nordal’s 1933 edition of *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar*, explaining how the political and cultural climate in which it was produced affected editorial decisions, which in turn can be passed on to the target audience of the translated text. From the point of view of schema alone, this first volume of the Íslenzk fornrit series served as a model for the translators; Nordal’s modern Icelandic paraphrases of the skaldic verses, for instance, were also highly influential, not to mention his endorsement of the theory that Snorri Sturluson was the author of *Egils saga*. Chapter 1 will also provide a brief introduction to the poetics of the skaldic art, the reception of the genre, and a review of recent research in the field of skaldic studies.

The second chapter provides the theoretical framework which informs the discussions of the translations in this thesis. I position my research within the disciplines of Translation Studies and Postcolonial Studies and trace the development of both these fields of study until the point where they converge with Medieval Studies, with a view to



showing how theories of translation and postcolonialism can provide valuable tools for investigating translations of medieval texts.

In chapter 3, I examine the Spanish and Norwegian translations in the cultural and political context or contexts from which they emerged, assess the way in which they function in those contexts and, to the extent that it is possible, gauge how they were influenced by, and impacted on, their respective literary systems. In the last case, this involves an evaluation of how the translations resisted or accommodated the dominant poetics of the period in which they were published, although it is difficult to determine the effect of the translated poetry separately from that of the saga as a whole, and it is debatable whether in either country these texts have had a wide enough circulation to influence modern poetics. We can see, however, how Lie was influenced by psychoanalytic criticism in giving a new psychological profile of Egill, and as the poetry of the saga is the principal vehicle for Egill to express his emotions, an awareness of this is crucial. Bernárdez's emphasis on the cinematic quality of the saga narrative may be seen as an attempt to attract a modern readership by reading the saga in terms of contemporary media, but at the same time his translations frequently evoke Spanish medieval poetry and the baroque poetry of Spain's 'Golden Age'. I also point out that by virtue of its pioneering status, Bernárdez's translation of *Egils saga* was used as a model of translation for other Spanish translators of sagas, and played a significant role in increasing awareness of Old Norse literature in Spain. As both translators are professional philologists, and learned in Old Norse studies, I will assess briefly how these translations addressed issues often debated about *Egils saga*, such as its authorship, authenticity of its verses and so on.

Examining the historical context of the Norwegian translation reveals that even as late as 1951, Norway was a very young state, still in the throes of a national identity crisis. Having been subject to Danish rule for four hundred years and to Sweden for another hundred, Norway had enjoyed its freedom for only thirty-five years before it was invaded by the German army in the Spring of 1940. Lie's translation of *Egils saga* forms part of a long tradition of Norwegian saga translation dating back to the sixteenth century, but it was in the eighteenth- and nineteenth centuries in Norway that translation of Old Norse literature began in earnest. Norwegian nationalists, like Irish nationalists, looked to their ancient past for inspiration in the struggle for independence, and this medieval literature, with its stories of a glorious period of Norwegian history,

contained exactly what they were looking for. The only way to ‘recover’ these treasures for the Norwegian nation was through translation, which was duly carried out.

While the works that dealt directly with Norwegian history, such as *Heimskringla* and *Sverris saga*, were translated at an early date, it took much longer for some of the Icelandic family sagas to be translated into Norwegian. This was mostly due to the fact that the sagas were already available in Danish translations which all educated Norwegians could read perfectly well. In the early nineteenth-century, however, a translation of *Egils saga* into *nynorsk* (or *landsmaal* as it was then known) appeared as part of a series published by the *nynorsk* publishing company Det Norske Samlaget. Lie’s publication of the *Islandske attesager* in *bokmål* (or *riksmaal*) was obviously a response to these publications and I will read Lie’s translation against the background of the Norwegian linguistic civil war, a postcolonial legacy, which was at its height in the 1950s. As I analyse the Norwegian translation of *Egils saga* it will become clear that it can be seen both as the product of a postcolonial context (in the broadest sense) and as a tool in the process of cultural colonisation.

The Spanish nation has also experienced several shifts of power in its history. At its imperial height it was one of the greatest powers in Europe, owning vast territories in the Americas. But Spain had also suffered various conquests, most notably from the Moorish invaders who came and settled in Spain for 800 years. The last of these were eventually expelled by the Catholic Monarchs, Isabella and Fernando, in 1492, but not before they had left a permanent mark on the landscape, language and culture of the country. Spain had left its own legacy, most notably its language, in South America and other territories. It is interesting that it was a citizen of one of Spain’s former colonies, the Argentinian Jorge Luis Borges, who was the first to publish in Spanish on the literature of the North. By 1898, Spain had relinquished Cuba, the last of its American colonies, but had embarked on a new project of colonization in Western Sahara, Spanish Morocco and Equatorial Guinea. The wars that ensued weakened the monarchy, thus giving rise to a period of dictatorial rule that lasted until the establishment of the Second Republic, the fall of which was followed by the civil war. The next thirty years, under the Franco dictatorship, was a period characterised by cultural and political oppression, stagnation and isolation which discouraged influence from abroad, and repressed minority languages and cultures from within. By the time that the Spanish translation of *Egils saga* was published in the 1980s, however, Spain was going through a tumultuous but exciting period of transition. I will read Bernárdez’s



translation against a background of a Spain with a 'glorious', colonial past and a Spain emerging from a period of censorship and tyranny, into a new era of optimistic uncertainty.

While the colonial experience was quite different for the Norwegian and Spanish cultures, we can use aspects of postcolonial theory to pose questions about the ways in which the translations construct an idea of the 'other' and of the self. In the Norwegian case, this will be more complicated, perhaps, than in the Spanish, because for Norwegian saga translators the Viking represents 'us' and 'other' simultaneously, bringing into play ideas about national and cultural identity. Modern Norwegian society certainly endorses the view that modern Norwegians are the descendants of the Vikings; they are keen to embrace this ethnicity and identify themselves with the more positive aspects of this culture as it is depicted in the Icelandic sagas, such as the Vikings' adventurous spirit, their bravery, their navigational and seafaring skills, while lightly dismissing the less attractive attributes of this heroic culture such as its propensity for savage violence, for example.

The use of postcolonial theory from the perspective of Medieval Studies can also show how the translation process may be read as a 'colonisation' of the text. In the Norwegian case, the translator obviously wishes to recover or 'recolonise' *Egils saga* for Norway, but in terms of linguistic power relations it is too simplistic to read *bokmål* as the conquering, and hence higher-status language in this equation. The place of the Icelandic sagas in any Scandinavian or indeed Anglophone culture is automatically one of cultural prestige, although as we shall see in chapter 1, it is only recently that the skaldic poetry contained in the sagas has been appreciated to the same extent as the prose. On the other hand, the Spanish translator feels he has to excuse the simplistic style of the prose narrative to a Spanish reader who might have expectations of an ornate 'medieval' style, which is to be found here only in the poetry.

We should also note that, in terms of the power that the source culture can exercise over the target one, there has been a very deliberate campaign on the part of the Icelandic (and Norwegian) governments to sponsor the promotion of Icelandic (or Norse) language and culture abroad. This is the case, for example, with regard to *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, and also Maria Pilar Fernández Álvarez's Spanish grammar of Old Icelandic, *Antiguo islandés. Historia y lengua* (Madrid: Ediciones clásicas, 1999), which was partly financed by the Icelandic Ministry of Science and Culture as was the *Antología*

*de la literatura nórdica antigua*, a bilingual anthology of Old Icelandic texts, edited by Fernández and Teodoro Manrique Antón.

An important aspect of a study of this kind, is an analysis of the physical ‘target text’ i.e. the book itself. I will use the terminology of Gerard Genette’s paratext theory to discuss the elements of the books outside the actual translated literary text itself.

According to Genette’s definition,

A literary work consists, entirely or essentially, of a text, defined (very minimally) as a more or less long sequence of verbal statements that are more or less endowed with significance. But this text is rarely presented in an unadorned state, unreinforced and unaccompanied by a certain number of verbal and other productions, such as an author's name, a title, a preface, illustrations... These accompanying productions, which vary in extent and appearance, constitute what I have called elsewhere the work's paratext [...].<sup>1</sup>

The paratexts that Genette refers to are, of course, crucial to any translation, especially in cases like skaldic poetry where the metonymic aspect is generally supplied to the reader by an apparatus including preface, footnotes, textual notes, indices, maps, family trees of the main characters, and so on. Of particular interest are the prefaces written by the translators that outline their own theories of translation, although I shall also consult articles by the translators which deal with this topic, such as Bernárdez’s article ‘Acerca de la traducción de los kenningar’.<sup>2</sup> Another significant feature of both translations is their use of illustrations. In the case of the Spanish text this is limited mostly to the front and back cover, but the Norwegian one is illustrated by scenes from the saga and can be expected to influence the reader’s interpretations. The picture on the Spanish cover and indeed the whole design of the book suggests it belongs to the fantasy genre.

A case study of this kind, I believe, should be neither completely source- nor target-oriented; this is a point where I depart from traditional target-oriented descriptive translation studies. Therefore, while chapter 3 will focus on the target culture of the translations, the central chapters of the thesis (4, 5, and 6) will consist in a close comparative analysis of Spanish and Norwegian translations of the skaldic poetry with the original and to a certain extent with each other. I have divided the material thematically. Chapter 4 is concerned with poetry of praise and slander and includes a discussion of *Hofuðlausn*, chapter 5 examines poems of a personal nature including

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<sup>1</sup> Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Enrique Bernárdez, ‘Acerca de la traducción de los kenningar y otros aspectos de la poesía escáldica’, *Filología moderna*, 68-70 (1980), 223-40.



*Sonatorrek*, and in chapter 6 I will analyse a number of *lausavísur* which depict scenes from what we might call ‘the viking experience’, and whose themes vary from smithying to magic. The analysis of the poetry will normally be arranged according to the following pattern: an analysis of the Icelandic text, succeeded by an analysis of the Norwegian translation of that stanza and then the Spanish translation. In the case of *Hofuðlausn* and *Sonatorrek*, I have chosen to arrange the analyses somewhat differently for reasons that I have explained in these chapters. The full texts of these poems, with their Spanish and Norwegian translations can be found in the appendix.

However, while an examination of a translation at microlevel necessitates a certain amount of linguistic discussion (on a morphological and syntactical level, for instance), and observations will be made about recurring patterns, this thesis does not aim to provide a systematic linguistic analysis, my approach is literary rather than linguistic but will combine elements of the two approaches. This is primarily a bi-cultural comparative study. I hope to show that by comparing translations from two languages we are forced to scrutinise the cultural contexts more carefully than otherwise and to take nothing for granted.

A translation does not happen in a vacuum; it is the product of a very particular set of circumstances. The cultural and political context, and the conditions in which a translation is produced, as well as factors such as the personality and education of the translator, are what give a translation its individual character and what differentiate it from other translations of the same source text. For the same reasons a translation will never be definitive, and no matter how authoritative or objective a translator pretends to be, a comparison with his source text will reveal the bias, tensions and anxieties inherent in the translation.

## CHAPTER ONE

### EGILS SAGA AND ITS POETRY

Both Hallvard Lie's and Enrique Bernárdez's translations are based on Sigurður Nordal's 1933 edition of *Egils saga*, which was the first volume to be published in the 'Íslenzk fornrit' series.<sup>1</sup> Nordal was general editor of the series and, as Hallvard Lie has pointed out, his ground-breaking edition of *Egils saga* provided a methodological framework for the other editions which were to follow.<sup>2</sup> According to Lie, a direct consequence of the publication of this series was the advancement of the 'bookprose theory' within Old Norse philology. Sigurður Nordal and his advocates, usually known as the 'Icelandic School' or even simply 'Nordal's School', were anxious to demonstrate that the Icelandic sagas were the literary products of a learned elite active in the 'golden age' of the Icelandic Commonwealth, 'rather than mere recorders who did little more than set down on vellum things that had been preserved in an oral tradition inherited from Norway' and the Íslenzk fornrit series served as what Gísli Sigurðsson terms 'the flagship' for this 'scholarly mission'.<sup>3</sup> While Lie appears to be slightly sceptical about

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<sup>1</sup> *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar*, ed. by Sigurður Nordal, Íslenzk fornrit, 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1933). Even though it was the first edition to be published in the Íslenzk fornrit series, *Egils saga* now occupies the second volume; the editions which comprise volumes 1.1 and 1.2, *Íslendingabók* and *Landnámabók* respectively, were published in 1968. To avoid confusion with other editions and translations of *Egils saga*, I will refer to Nordal's edition throughout the rest of this thesis as ÍF 2.

<sup>2</sup> Hallvard Lie, 'Noen metodiske overveielser i anl. av et bind av "Íslenzk fornrit"', *Maal og Minne*, 31 (1939), 97-138, p. 97. In the introduction to volume 1 of *Íslandske ættesagaer*, Lie repeatedly stresses the connection between the land, people and literature of Iceland, arguing that the Icelandic saga is a genre which can be as harsh and forbidding as the Icelandic landscape and climate and which also reflects the tough character of the first settlers, who were forced by the difficult circumstances in which they lived to conceal their true characters and even deliberately dissimulate in order to survive. In the same way, Lie maintains, the saga-narrator takes great care not to allow his characters to reveal themselves completely to the reader. See introduction to *Íslandske ættesagaer*, ed. by Hallvard Lie, 5 vols (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1951-54), 1 (1951), pp. 7-23 (pp. 10-12).

<sup>3</sup> Gísli Sigurðsson, *The Medieval Icelandic Saga and Oral Tradition: A Discourse on Method*, trans. by Nicholas Jones (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 20. *Buchprosa* (bookprose) and *Freiprosa* (freeprose) were terms first coined by the German scholar Andreas Heusler to define two emerging (and opposing) schools of thought regarding Icelandic saga origins. Broadly speaking, advocates of the bookprose theory, represented chiefly by the 'Icelandic school' as we have seen above, argued that the sagas were the works of individual authors who mostly relied on literary sources. The freeprose school, on the other hand, argued that the sagas were the result of oral composition and transmission. One of the chief exponents of this theory was Knut Liestøl, professor of Norwegian folklore at the University of Oslo from 1917-52. The nationalistic implications of this debate are obvious; the stance of the Icelandic



some aspects of this movement, for example an ‘unusually strong desire to track down “authors” of the different sagas’,<sup>4</sup> he is careful to acknowledge that the enthusiasm of these scholars is based in their affection for ‘the country which gave birth to the saga and to the people who inherited and own it’.<sup>5</sup>

It is important to remember, therefore, that the Norwegian and Spanish translations under investigation in this thesis are not simply translations of *Egils saga*, but of *Sigurður Nordal’s* edition of *Egils saga*, an edition which was constructed with a very deliberate political and cultural agenda in mind. For example, Nordal’s conviction that *Egils saga* was the original work of one author, i.e. Snorri Sturluson,<sup>6</sup> implies the existence of an original manuscript from which all the many variants of *Egils saga* are derived. In order to reconstruct this putative original, Nordal collated the ‘best’ manuscripts, namely the medieval codex *Möðruvallabók* (AM 132 fol.), the chief witness to the A-redaction; a copy (AM 461 4to) of *Wolfenbüttelbók* (Herzog August Bibliothek MS 9. 10. Aug. 4to), the chief witness to the B-redaction; AM 453 4to, one of the so-called *Ketilsbækir*, two nearly identical manuscripts of *Egils saga* written by the learned clergyman, Ketill Jörundsson (d. 1670), and the chief witnesses to the C-redaction; and the fragments collectively known as AM 162 A fol., which include the oldest written evidence of the saga.

The purpose of Nordal’s edition, like most editions, is not only to provide readers with an accessible text but also to explain and interpret it, a practice that can be highly manipulative, as we can see in the case of the explanatory notes and Modern Icelandic paraphrases that accompany the skaldic stanzas. Useful as these notes may be, they are bound to interfere with and influence the translator’s own reading, especially if he might not have had the time or resources to double-check Nordal’s interpretations, although we can safely assume that Lie and Bernárdez as professional philologists did

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school was naturally motivated by a desire to portray these great works as products of Icelandic scholarship and culture, while those who postulated an oral origin claimed that the sagas were rooted in a common Scandinavian tradition which also gave rise to Norwegian folktales and ballads and are therefore the cultural legacy of all of Scandinavia. See Andreas Heusler, *Die Anfänge der isländischen Saga* (Berlin: Königliche Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1914); Knut Liestøl, *The Origin of the Icelandic Family Sagas*, trans. by A. G. Jayne (Oslo: H. Aschebourg; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1930); Theodore M. Andersson, *The Problem of Icelandic Saga Origins: A Historical Survey* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1964) and Else Mundal, *Sagadebatt* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1977).

<sup>4</sup> Hallvard Lie, ‘Noen metodiske overveielser i anl. av et bind av “Íslensk fornrit”’, p. 97: ‘En noe usedvanlige sterk lyst til å opspore ‘forfattere’ til de forskjellige sagaverker’.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> ÍF 2, pp. lxx-xcv.

consult other sources and interpretations of the poetry, and it is clear that they did not follow Nordal's readings slavishly.<sup>7</sup>

Sigurður Nordal's decision to begin the Íslenzk fornrit series with an edition of *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar* was probably influenced by the fact that a more convincing argument had been made for *Egils saga* having an author, particularly a named author, than for any other saga. However, it is also true that *Egils saga* has long been considered by Old Norse scholars to be, if not the best, among the best representatives of this genre. According to Fredrik Paasche, for instance, it is 'one of the most detailed and excellent Icelandic family sagas' ('en av de utførligste og ypperste ættesager', 1926: 448); in the introduction to their 1976 translation, Pálsson and Edwards state that 'Egil's Saga is one of five major sagas dealing with native Icelandic figures on a scale akin to the epic novel' (1976: 7);<sup>8</sup> and Jónas Kristjánsson describes it as 'an outstanding work of art' (1988: 98). No less applauded is Egill's skill as a poet. Lee M. Hollander, for example, considers Egill to be 'the most original and also the most versatile of the skalds. His was the genius which may have composed some of the great poems of the Poetic Edda' (1945: 56); Gabriel Turville-Petre states that 'it is widely agreed that Egill (c. 910-90) was the most successful of the skalds. In the words of A. Olrik (*Viking Civilization*, rev. H. Ellekilde, 1930: 161), no other scald was able "to express his whole soul in a poem with lyric coloring."' (1976: 15); and most recently Diana Whaley maintains that Egill Skalla-Grimsson was 'arguably the most brilliant of the skalds' (2005: 491).

More poetry is attributed to Egill Skalla-Grimsson than any other skald. *Egils saga* contains around fifty-six *lausavísur* ('loose' or independent stanzas), forty-eight of which are said to be of Egill's composition; he is also said to be the author of three long 'verse-sequences', as Gabriel Turville-Petre puts it, namely *Hofuðlausn*, *Sonatorrek* and *Arinbjarnarkviða*, and of three *drápur*, of which only the opening stanzas (and one refrain) remain.

In *Egils saga*, as is customary in the *Íslendingasögur*, the skaldic verse is for the most part presented as spontaneous speech, composed and uttered on the spot by Egill or another character. It is possible that at least some of the stanzas did originate in the way described in the saga, and were preserved and transmitted orally over few hundred years, either as part of a longer poem, or as individual stanzas framed with accompanying prose. At some point, however, the poetry was worked into a long prose

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<sup>7</sup> Although Hallvard Lie's translation of *Egils saga* is mostly based on Nordal's edition, his translation of *Sonatorrek* reflects his own re-editing of the first four stanzas of that poem. See chapter 4.

<sup>8</sup> The other four they mention are: *Njáls saga*, *Laxdala saga*, *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Grettis saga*.



narrative, which evolved into the saga as we know it. Whether this was a slow process involving several individuals, or the work of a single author, as Sigurður Nordal and many others would have it, we will never know; all we can say for sure is that by the thirteenth century a fairly stable text of *Egils saga* had emerged, with a poetic corpus so thoroughly woven into the narrative that it is almost impossible to imagine *Egils saga* without its poetry, or indeed to imagine the poetry completely removed from its prose context.

This is not to suggest that prose and verse run seamlessly into one another and indeed they are not meant to. In both medieval and modern copies of *Egils saga* a poetic event is clearly signalled by textual and extra-textual markers. Within the narrative itself the quotation of a stanza is always introduced by prose formulas such as ‘þá kvað Egill vísu’, ‘hann kvað þá’ or ‘hon kvað’, which prepares the reader/audience for what is to follow, but there are also physical signs. For instance, although in *Möðruvallabók* the strophes are written out as continuous prose, they are readily identifiable by a large, capitalized initial letter and a small ‘v.’ for *vísa* (stanza) in the margin. In modern editions and translations the verse is even more clearly distinguishable, printed as it is separated from the main body of the text in eight-line stanzas, surrounded by an abundance of white space and often accompanied by copious annotative and explanatory material.

Even if it were not for these physical and textual indicators it would be impossible to come across a *dróttkvætt* stanza and mistake it for prose; indeed the two genres could scarcely be more different both in terms of form and content. In skaldic verse the syntax is normally so grotesquely distorted that it stretches the limits of comprehensibility. Superabundant in fanciful metaphors and surreal imagery, its language seems excessive and even decadent in contrast to the realistic, laconic style of the prose text with which it is surrounded.

While skaldic *lausavísur* are typically preserved embedded in prose, the situation is quite different regarding the longer poems of *Egils saga*, i.e. *Höfuðlausn*, *Arinbjarnarkviða* and *Sonatorrek*, none of which are to be found in their entirety in the earliest manuscripts. Not even the opening strophe of *Höfuðlausn* is preserved in *Möðruvallabók*, the main source of Nordal’s edition; it is, however, preserved in the *Ketilsbækir*, AM 462 4to (K1) and AM 453 4to (K2), and also in the *Wolfenbüttelbók* (W). Another early important witness for *Höfuðlausn* is fragment AM 162 A fol. ε, which has stanzas 18 and 19. *Möðruvallabók* (M) contains only the first strophe of *Sonatorrek*, but like *Höfuðlausn*, the whole poem is preserved in the *Ketilsbækir*, and stanzas 23 and lines

1-4 of stanza 24 are also found in manuscripts of the *Snorra Edda*. At the point in the narrative where Egill is supposed to have recited *Arinbjarnarkviða*, a blank space has been left for a stanza in *M*, but most of the poem has been written out at the end of the saga, on f. 99v, in a different hand. Stanzas 24 and 25 of *Arinbjarnarkviða* are only found in the *Third Grammatical Treatise* (preserved in the fourteenth century *Codex Wormianus*, AM 242 fol.), which also contains stanza 15 of *Arinbjarnarkviða*. Lines 5-8 of stanza 17 and lines 1-4 of stanza 8 also occur in *Snorra Edda*. Sigurður Nordal, like most other modern editors, presents these poems in their reconstructed form, and at their ‘rightful’ place in the narrative, thus giving the impression that they have always been an integral part of the saga, despite evidence to the contrary.

### *Reception of Skaldic Poetry: An Overview* ∞

The poetry of *Egils saga* belongs to a genre, which has traditionally been designated as ‘skaldic’, and is one of two principal categories into which the Old Norse poetic corpus has conventionally been divided; the other category is of course known as ‘Eddic poetry’.<sup>9</sup> Most scholars seem to find that skaldic poetry in particular is difficult to describe without reference to Eddic poetry and the tendency has been to define the two genres in terms of one another, a custom which frequently results in an antithetic approach. Eddic poetry is anonymous. Its mythological and heroic subject matter is rooted in a common Germanic tradition and, to the extent that it is historical, may deal with events from as early as the time of the great migrations. In comparison, most skaldic poetry has been attributed to named poets or skalds, such as Egill, who lived in Scandinavia between the ninth and the thirteenth centuries and who, although they certainly made reference to Norse mythology in their poetry, chiefly composed about or for contemporary persons, situations and circumstances.

It is not only the content but also the form of Eddic poetry which seems to indicate ancient origins. Most Eddic verse was composed using a type of metre called *fornyrðislag*, a measure which does not differ radically from that of the Old English poem *Beowulf*, the Old High German *Hildebrandslied*, or the Old Saxon *Heliand*. Bjarne Fidjestøl claims that Eddic poetry stands as the chief representative of an ancient Germanic kind of composition, ‘and that is one reason why we regard it as a witness to our oldest

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<sup>9</sup> Scholars use a variety of spellings: Eddic, Eddaic, eddic, eddaic and Skaldic, skaldic, scaldic.



literature, irrespective of the date of individual poems in the corpus'.<sup>10</sup> The majority of skaldic poetry on the other hand is in *dróttkvætt* (or *dróttkvæðr hátt*, 'Court Metre'), a syllable-counting metre which has no known equivalent in European verse forms; unlike *fornyrðislag*, *dróttkvætt* is considered to be uniquely Scandinavian, although it has been compared with early Irish syllabic poetry. The strict rules of *dróttkvætt* can often result in the word order of the poetry being unnatural and this, coupled with its abundant use of the poetic circumlocutions known as kennings, has led to accusations of skaldic poetry being complicated, obscure and difficult to understand. In order to decipher the meaning of a skaldic stanza, editors such as Nordal traditionally re-arrange the words into prose sentences which follow conventional syntactical rules, and are therefore more easily comprehensible. The kennings are usually explained in parentheses. In comparison, Eddic poetry does not usually need to be disentangled or deconstructed before it can be understood and its mode of expression is usually considered to be more straightforward than that of skaldic poetry.

The greater part of the surviving Eddic poetry is preserved in the so-called *Codex Regius* (CR),<sup>11</sup> a manuscript volume which has been dated to c. 1270. At some point before this date the thirty or so poems that this manuscript originally contained were collected and written down by an editor who arranged the poetry into two distinct categories: mythological and heroic.<sup>12</sup> The fact that a medieval scholar made such a compilation makes it tempting to define the poetry it preserves as belonging to one genre; the term 'Eddic' is in any case usually used to refer to the poetry in this collection. There are also a number of poems which do not belong to the CR but which are so like the poetry it contains that they are normally also classified as Eddic. Some of these poems have mythological subject matter, e.g. *Gróttasöngur*, *Baldur's draumar*, and *Rígsþula* (the last of which is preserved in a manuscript of Snorri Sturluson's *Edda* and treats of the origin and structure of human society). Heroic poetry in the Eddic style includes *Hljóðskviða* (a poem preserved in *Heiðreks saga* or *Hervarar saga*, which is believed to reflect historical events from the time of the great migrations), *Bjarkamál hin fornu*, from *Ólafs saga helga*, and even *Darraðarlióð* in *Njáls saga* which, although it was composed

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<sup>10</sup> Bjarne Fidjestøl, 'Norse-Icelandic Composition in the Oral Period', in *Bjarne Fidjestøl: Selected Papers*, ed. by Odd Einar Haugen and Else Mundal, and trans. by Peter Foote (Odense: Odense University Press, 1997), pp. 303-32 (p. 307).

<sup>11</sup> Árni Magnússon Institute, *Gammell Kongelig Samling* 2365 4to.

<sup>12</sup> One exception to this division is the poem *Völundarkviða* which, because of its subject matter, perhaps more properly belongs with the heroic poetry; its inclusion with the mythological poems was perhaps a mistake on the part of the copyist.

for a specific occasion in the manner of skaldic poetry, has a form characteristic of Eddic poetry, and is moreover anonymous, although it is ascribed to mythic beings.

The rest of the Old Icelandic poetic corpus, which spans five centuries and is scattered throughout more than five hundred manuscripts, was gathered together by Finnur Jónsson who published it between the years 1912 and 1915 under the title *Den norske-islandske skjaldedigtning*. This enormous collection is presented in two parts, each covered by an ‘A’ volume giving manuscript text and selected variants, and a ‘B’ volume with edited and normalised text, text re-ordered in prose, and Danish translations. Part one covers poetry from 800 to 1200, and part two from 1200 to 1400. Finnur Jónsson’s edition became, and indeed is still, the standard text used by skaldic scholars.<sup>13</sup> However, as Diana Whaley notes:

The arrangement of the volume embodies a myriad of decisions about the assignment of stanzas to poets, the reconstruction of fragments into extended poems, and the probable chronological sequence of the whole. Much of this is doubtless right, but any impression of canonical status is bound to be dangerously misleading, and some decisions may not stand up to detailed scrutiny.<sup>14</sup>

Finnur Jónsson subsequently published a revision in Danish of Sveinbjörn Egilsson’s Old Norse-Latin dictionary, *Lexicon poeticum*, to which title he added *Ordbog over den norske-islandske skjaldesprog* (‘Dictionary of the Norse-Icelandic Skaldic Language’). Not only did both these works contribute greatly to the field of Old Norse studies in general, but they were also instrumental in the establishment of the concept of skaldic poetry as a distinct genre and helped to make the use of this term, in its modern restrictive sense, widespread.

To recapitulate, then, Eddic poetry has been traditionally perceived as timeless, pagan and of mysteriously indeterminate origin. Of the poetry included in *CR*, only a fraction is preserved elsewhere, which means that most of the poems are unique examples.<sup>15</sup> Skaldic poetry does not have the same rarity value, as it is mostly preserved

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<sup>13</sup> This will change when the ‘Skaldic Poetry of the Middle Ages – A New Edition’ project is published (see the final section of this chapter). Other sources include the Karlevi stanza and some runic verses carved on wood from the twelfth century and later. The Karlevi stone was erected around the turn of the last millennium (in Öland, Sweden) to honour a Danish warrior and sea captain. It is carved on three sides with a long description in Danish runes. The inscription falls in two parts, the first of which explains why the stone is where it is, and the second of which is an eight-line stanza which adheres strictly to the *dróttkvætt* metre.

<sup>14</sup> Diana Whaley, ‘Skaldic Poetry’, in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. by Rory McTurk (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 478-502 (p. 489).

<sup>15</sup> There are, however, a number of sources of Eddic verse besides the *CR*, its ‘sister’ manuscript and Snorri’s *Edda*. *Vǫlsunga saga* and *Hauksbók* both contain new and duplicate material. Later, in the saga-period, new poems of the Eddic kind were composed for inclusion in *fornaldarsögur* on the model of *Vǫlsunga saga*.



in sagas of which multiple versions exist (a fact which makes it relatively hard to edit). Much of it is also presumed to postdate Eddic poetry, partly because it makes use of the mythological and heroic subject matter contained in *CR*, but also because of its highly developed metre and style. Another reason why skaldic poetry has traditionally had less appeal for certain readers is that a good deal of it shows Christian and other outside influences. It was not considered to be as 'pure' as Eddic poetry, particularly by post-medieval readers who were looking for expressions of primeval Germanic paganism. Therefore although the skaldic corpus is much larger than the Eddic, much more research has been done on Eddic poetry, proportionally, than on skaldic poetry, although the emphasis has begun to shift in recent years.

This prejudice in favour of Eddic poetry can be explained by a number of other factors, one of these being the intellectual climate in which the *CR* manuscript was received when it was rediscovered in Iceland in 1643. Up until this time Snorri Sturluson's *Edda* was the only comprehensive account of Norse mythology from the Middle Ages. In *Gylfaginning*, the first section of this treatise of Old Norse poetic diction and metre, Snorri explains the origin of Norse mythology, and in the second, *Skáldskaparmál*, he retells many of the old stories about the gods in order to explain the language of the kennings. Snorri's work, which is in prose, although it quotes frequently from Old Norse poetry, is preserved in four manuscripts, of which one, the *Codex Upsaliensis* (c. 1300), clearly states that its name is *Edda* and that it was composed by Snorri Sturluson. Although the word *Edda*, referring to Snorri's work, became synonymous in the Middle Ages with the ideal of traditional Icelandic poetry and was constantly alluded to by medieval Icelandic poets and authors, the name of Snorri as the person responsible for a text of that name was not remembered to the same extent, and by the time of the 'revival of learning' or Icelandic renaissance (in the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth centuries), scholars were confused as to its authorship and were uncertain as to whether the term *Edda* referred to Snorri's work, or to some work or works that pre-dated and informed it.<sup>16</sup>

Since the prose *Edda*, now attributed to Snorri, was obviously, and often explicitly, drawing upon a wealth of ancient tradition, it became a common supposition in Iceland that a larger *Edda* had formed a major source for it. Brynjólfur Sveinsson, Bishop of Skálholt (1605-75), for instance, lamented the loss of 'ingentes thesauri totius

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<sup>16</sup> There are several theories as to the etymology of the term 'edda'. For a discussion see Jónas Kristjánsson, *Eddas and Sagas: Iceland's Medieval Literature*, trans. by Peter Foote (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1988), p. 25.

humanæ conscripti a Sæmundo sapiente, et imprimis nobilissima illa Edda [...]’.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, when Bishop Brynjólfur acquired the great poetic codex around 1643, he called it *Edda*, recognizing it as part of the ancient material on which Snorri had based his work.<sup>18</sup> He mistakenly ascribed the newly discovered collection of poetry to a priest called Sæmundr Sigfússon (1056-1133), the pioneer historian from Oddi in the south of Iceland whose fame as a scholar and writer was almost legendary, with the result that this anthology of poetry continued to be referred to as *Sæmundar Edda* well into the nineteenth century. The bishop later sent the manuscript as a gift to the bibliophile king, Frederik III, in Copenhagen where, like his other manuscripts, it was referred to as *Codex Regius* and acquired the number 2365 4to. It remained in Copenhagen until it was returned to the Icelandic people by the Danish state in 1971.

Snorri was eventually established as the sole author of the prose work or *Snorra Edda*, and the theory that Sæmundr composed the poetry of the CR has since been discredited. The CR collection is now more commonly known as the *Poetic* or *Elder Edda* to distinguish it from Snorri’s *Prose* or *Younger Edda* (since the CR was generally considered to contain material from before Snorri’s time). Thus an Eddic/skaldic dichotomy was established in favour of Eddic poetry and to the disadvantage of skaldic. It is ironic, however, that the name *Edda*, which for generations of Icelanders evoked the poetics of *Skáldskaparmál*, ‘the language of (skaldic) poetry’, should in modern times come to represent the old mythological and heroic poetry.<sup>19</sup>

By the time Snorri was writing *Skáldskaparmál*, in the first half of the thirteenth century, he felt that the highly-wrought art of skaldic poetry was already in decline:

These things have now to be told to young poets who desire to learn the language of poetry and to furnish themselves with a wide vocabulary using traditional terms; or else they desire to be able to understand what is expressed obscurely. Then let such a one take this book as scholarly enquiry and entertainment. But these stories are not to be consigned to oblivion or demonstrated to be false, so as to deprive poetry of ancient kennings which major poets have been happy to use.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *The Poetic Edda: Volume I, Heroic Poems*, ed. by Ursula Dronke (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. xiii.

<sup>18</sup> Shortly afterwards he obtained a ‘sister’ manuscript to supplement the first. It is so called because it and the CR were in part copied from the same lost ‘mother’ manuscript. It is catalogued as AM 748 I 4to and contains five of the poems found in CR and one (*Baldur’s draumr*) for which it is our sole source.

<sup>19</sup> In *Gylfaginning* Snorri chiefly quotes from poems that exist in the *Poetic Edda*, but in *Skáldskaparmál* the quotations are for the most part from the works of named skalds.

<sup>20</sup> *Snorri Sturluson: Edda. Skáldskaparmál*, ed. by Anthony Faulkes, 2 vols (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1998), I, p. 5: ‘En þetta er nú at segja ungum skáldum þeim er girnask at nema mál skáldskapar ok heyja sér orðfjöldað með fornum heitum eða girnask þeir at kunna skilja þat er hult er kveðit: þá skili hann þessa bók til fróðleiks ok skemtunar. En ekki er at gleyma eða ósanna svá þessar sögur at taka ór skáldskapinum for[nar ke]nningar þær er höfuðskáld hafa sér líka látit’. Translation by Anthony Faulkes, *Snorri Sturluson: Edda* (London: Everyman, 1987), p. 64.



As skaldic poetry continued to be composed long after Snorri's death and well into the fifteenth century, his warnings about the deterioration of the skaldic art seem unnecessarily pessimistic. However, several Icelandic poets of the later Middle Ages admit that they are not following the rules of the (*Snorra*) *Edda* exactly in their compositions, and while some apologise for this, many make little secret of the fact that they consider traditional skaldic poetry to be decadent, outmoded and obscure. The author of the fourteenth-century Christian poem *Lilja*, for instance, is probably referring to the language of skaldic poetry when he writes:

Sá er óðinn skal vandan velja,  
 velr svo mǫrg í kvæði að selja  
 hulin fornyrði að trautt má telja,  
 tel eg þenna svo skilning dvelja.  
 Vel því að hér má skýr orð skilja,  
 skili þjóðir minn ljósan vilja,  
 tal óbreytilegt veitt af vilja.  
 Vil eg, að kvæðið heiti Lilja.

Whoever chooses to write poetry in the difficult manner chooses to deliver so many veiled ancient words that they can scarcely be counted. I declare that this hampers understanding. Therefore I choose that here plain words may be discerned and language in accordance with my intention so that all people clearly understand my will. I desire that the poem be named Lily.<sup>21</sup>

Thus skaldic poetry fell out of favour and, it could be argued, has only recovered the literary recognition it deserves in the last few decades.<sup>22</sup>

### *Skaldic Poetry: Authorship* æ

We have noted above that one of the chief distinctions between Eddic and skaldic poetry is that the latter is not anonymous. It is poetry composed by named skalds, and the adjective 'skaldic' is obviously derived from *skáld*, the Icelandic word for 'poet'. The problem with the use of this term to designate one particular type of poetry is that it excludes by definition the many verse utterances in the sagas recited by individuals not otherwise known as skalds. However, these may be regarded as 'accidental' poets, or even fictitious ones. Although the majority of the verses in *Egils saga* are recited by Egill

<sup>21</sup> Peter Hallberg, *Old Icelandic Poetry: Eddic Lay and Skaldic Verse*, trans. with a foreword by Paul Schach and Sonja Lindgrenson (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1975), p. 179.

<sup>22</sup> For an account of the demise of *dróttkvætt* poetry and the skaldic tradition, see Kari Ellen Gade, *The Structure of Old Norse Court Poetry*, *Islandica*, 49 (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 238-45.

himself, a small number are also attributed to other characters in the saga, such as his father and grandfather (see st. 1 in chapter 5, and st. 3 in chapter 6).

The first certain use of the word *skáld* meaning professional poet occurs in Eyvindr skáldaspillir's ('skald-despoiler/plagiarist') second lampoon on Haraldr gráfeldr's ('grey fur-cloak') greed, c. 965.<sup>23</sup> *Skáld* is a word whose etymology is disputed but which possibly originally had negative connotations and which scholars generally acknowledge to be cognate to German *schelten* (scold/reprimand) and English 'scold'.<sup>24</sup> By the tenth century *skáld* is used as a general term for a poet, but certain poets often abused their art to compose libels in verse. Even though the composition of such poetry was illegal and punishable by total outlawry or even death, this prohibition did not seem to deter the skalds and the composition of slanderous verses, or *níðvísur*, was widely practised. Egill Skalla-Grímsson was one of the early masters of deadly invective of this kind, as can be seen in one of the examples of his verse quoted below. The insult in skaldic *níð* focuses on the enemy's essential impotence and often carries a charge of sexual perversion or lack of masculinity.<sup>25</sup> The power of both slanderous and encomiastic poetry is excellently illustrated by the episode in chapter 60 of *Egils saga*, which is discussed in chapter 4.

Remains of verse attributed to over 250 named poets are still in existence, and many of these poets, although not all, bore the sobriquet *skáld* or a nickname referring to poetic activity, such as Arnórr jarlaskáld ('skald of the earls'), Gunnlaugr ormstunga ('serpent-tongue'), Eyvindr skáldaspillir, Jórunn skáldmær ('skald-maid') and Steinunn skáldkona ('skald-woman'), Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld ('troublesome-poet'), or the curiously named Þóroddr dráputúfr ('poem-stump').<sup>26</sup> Although poetic composition does not seem to have been a full-time occupation in medieval Scandinavia, many skalds spent extended periods of time at court. The Norwegian kings are believed to have had whole troops of poets in their entourage, whose job it was to provide entertainment and to compose praise-poetry in their honour. According to *Skáldatal*, King Haraldr harðráði ('the hard ruler') had no fewer than thirteen different skalds in his retinue at one time or another, and nearly all of them have left us longer or shorter pieces in praise of him. When skalds were not in the service of a king or earl, they farmed, traded, and

<sup>23</sup> Roberta Frank, *Old Norse Court Poetry: The Dróttkvætt Stanza*, *Islandica*, 42 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978), p. 82.

<sup>24</sup> See for example, Bjarne Fidjestøl, 'Norse-Icelandic Composition in the Oral Period', in *Selected Papers* (see Haugen, 1997), p. 326, and Stephen A. Mitchell, 'Performance and Norse Poetry: The Hydromel of Praise and the Effluvia of Scorn', *Oral Tradition*, 16 (2001), 168-202 (pp. 179-80).

<sup>25</sup> Roberta Frank, *Old Norse Court Poetry*, p. 82.

<sup>26</sup> Diana Whaley, 'Skaldic Poetry', p. 480.



fought. This was certainly true of Egill Skalla-Grímsson, as Jorge Luis Borges remarks: ‘he was skilled in his manipulation of the sword, with which he killed many men, and in his manipulation of metre and the intricate metaphor’.<sup>27</sup>

*Skáldatal* is an anonymous list of royal skalds preserved in two versions, the more extensive of which continues down to about 1300. It is basically a catalogue of Scandinavian rulers accompanied by the names of poets who composed in their honour. Covering a period of 350 years, it enumerates a total of 110 Icelandic court poets, from Egill Skalla-Grímsson to his descendant Jón murti (‘little fellow’) Egilsson (d. 1320). Most kings have a whole group of skalds attached to their names and such a list must have been a very useful aid for any author of the *konungasögur* (kings’ sagas), since for the earliest reigns poems on Northern rulers were the best sources of information available to them. Unfortunately names are all we have of the skalds listed in *Skáldatal* whose poetry has not survived to modern times, but their sheer number gives us some idea of the extent of a once-existing great corpus of which we have now but a fragment.

The first named skald on record is the Norwegian Bragi Boddason, or ‘Bragi the Old’, to whom the poem *Ragnarsdrápa* is attributed. However, whether Bragi ever actually existed is open to question, as Bjarne Fidjestøl points out:

The name Bragi is derived either from a word meaning ‘the first’, or ‘the outstanding’, or from a word meaning ‘poetry’; and we meet Bragi again in myths where he figures as the god of poetry. Possibly the name belongs to a historical person and efforts have been made to demonstrate that it did [...] at all events, we can say that as a historical personage Bragi stands in a very dim light.<sup>28</sup>

Another early Norwegian poet is Þjóðólfr of Kvin. His cognomen links him to the region around Kvinesdal but there is not much else we can know about Þjóðólfr. This is chiefly because he belongs to the interim period between pre-history and history in the Norwegian past, a period which coincided with, and was connected with, the migration to Iceland.

Thus the first poets we know of were Norwegian, but it was the Icelanders who became the kings’ poets at court, as the Norwegian gift for skaldic poetry waned in the face of Continental European cultural influences. The Icelandic poets – Egill, incidentally, is the first known native Icelandic skald – were seen as being especially

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<sup>27</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, ‘Snorri Sturluson: Saga de Egil-Skallagrimmson’, in *Biblioteca personal* (Buenos Aires: Alianza, 1986), p. 128: ‘Fue diestro en el manejo de la espada, con la que mató a muchos hombres, y en el manejo de la métrica y de la intrincada metáfora’.

<sup>28</sup> Bjarne Fidjestøl, ‘The King’s Skald from Kvinesdal and his Poetry’, in *Selected Papers* (see Haugen, 1997), pp. 68-92 (p. 68).



skilled in the art of poetic composition, but unfortunately we have very little information about how poets were trained or how their skills were developed. According to one story, Sighvatr Þórðarson's prodigious fluency in poetry came as a result of his eating a particular fish-head. Some skalds were related to each other and therefore possibly had the gift of poetry passed on to them within the family, such as Þórðr Kolbeinson and his son Arnórr, for instance, in the early eleventh century, or Snorri Sturluson and his nephews Sturla and Ólafr in the thirteenth. In *Egils saga* the gift of poetic composition also appears to be a family trait passed down from one generation to another. In chapter 3, for instance, it is related that Egill's granduncle Qlvir hnúfa ('hump') became a poet after he was refused the hand of Sólveig in fagra ('the fair'), daughter of the earl Atli. Qlvir composed many love poems about her and was so taken with her that he even gave up going on raids, but he went on to become a highly-esteemed poet in the court of King Haraldr. In chapter 24 of the saga, Egill's grandfather Kveld-Úlfr takes to his bed, overcome with grief, when he hears about the death of his son Þórolfr. When his other son Skalla-Grímr tries to convince him that a more honourable course of action would be to take revenge, Kveld-Úlfr recites a verse saying that he is no longer able to fight (see st. 1, chapter 5). Just one verse obviously does not make a poet but he, Skalla-Grímr, and Egill all have personalities and physical characteristics of a kind that is typical of other poets in the Icelandic family sagas, such as Kormákr and Gunnlaugr.

### *Skaldic Poetry: Form and Content* ∞

The verse-form makes a text easier to remember and to remember accurately. Metre has aesthetic functions over and above this: it lends a text dignity and beauty. These however may be regarded as derivative qualities. If a text is put into verse-form, it is because it is a text thought to be worth remembering. In dealing with oral composition and transmission in a history of literature, the question of form is central to the theme.<sup>29</sup>

According to this definition the format of the text has two functions. One is aesthetic; as Fidjestøl says, metre 'lends a text dignity and beauty'. The oral recitation of poetry was a form of entertainment and although we know little about the delivery of such poetry, the placing of stresses and the internal rhyme must have played an important

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<sup>29</sup> Bjarne Fidjestøl, 'Norse-Icelandic Composition in the Oral Period', in *Selected Papers* (see Haugen, 1997), pp. 303-32 (p. 303).

part in the performance. The other purpose of skaldic poetry was, in a bookless environment, to record and preserve information, and the strict metres employed by Icelandic poets meant that it would be remembered word for word.

Snorri devotes one full section, the third and final part of his *Edda* to listing and giving examples of the different metres available to the poet. Over a hundred different metrical and rhetorical forms and types are enumerated in *Háttatal*; it must, however, be recognized that many of these are variant forms rather than distinct types. About a century before, Rognvaldr kali, Earl of the Orkneys, and the Icelander Hallr Þórarinnsson had composed *Háttalykill* (key of metres), a work based on the Latin model of the so-called *clavis metrica*. Metre was clearly seen as fundamental to the composition of good quality poetry. One interesting aspect of Old Icelandic metre is that certain forms were apparently deemed suitable for certain subjects, and in the case of what is considered to be the oldest Old Icelandic poetic metre, *fornyrðislag*, that function is contained within the name. Literally translated, *forn-yrðis-lag* means ‘lay of old words/sayings’ or, as Turville-Petre has translated it, ‘Old Story Measure’. The earliest use of the term occurs in *Háttatal*, otherwise the word or word-element *forn* is usually used to refer to the ancient heathen times and to old mythical lore, e.g. *hið forn-kveðna* is a set phrase for an ‘old saw’, ‘proverb’. In the *Poetic Edda* it was used to refer to days of yore in poems such as *Völuspá*. The problem with categorising *fornyrðislag* as an Eddic metre is that it was also used in some poetry that is considered to be skaldic. Many of the verses spoken by personages in the *fornaldarsögur* are in this format and it was also employed by the author of *Merlínusspá*, Gunnlaugr Leifsson. This form is more often associated with insults and *níðvisur* than with praise-poetry. As Russell Poole observes, this may be because it was ‘considered beneath the dignity of magnates, since its comparatively simple format would not have greatly tried the poet.’<sup>30</sup>

*Fornyrðislag*, as it is used in the *Poetic Edda*, is a relatively free measure. In poems composed in such a measure, syllables and line endings are not counted strictly, nor, according to Turville-Petre, are the earliest Eddic poems really strophic, i.e. the poems are not broken up into stanzas of eight half-lines, a feature which is considered to be essential in skaldic poetry. He attributes syllable counting and strophes in the later Eddic poems to skaldic influence. Eddic poetry has neither internal nor end rhyme. A *fornyrðislag* line breaks up into two half lines which are linked by alliteration and broken by a metrical caesura. The single initial consonant in a stressed syllable suffices for the

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<sup>30</sup> Russell Poole, ‘Metre and Metrics’, in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Language and Culture*, ed. by Rory McTurk (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 265-84 (p. 264).



purposes of alliteration, except in the case of *st*, *sp* and *sk*, where the entire consonant cluster is required to participate in the alliteration. Initial vowels in stressed syllables alliterate with each other and with *j*. Unstressed syllables do not enter into the schema. The first half-line of each line can have either one alliterating syllable or two. If the primary stresses are both on nouns or adjectives, it is the first primary stress that must carry alliteration. The second half-line is always limited to a single alliteration which must coincide with the first strongly stressed syllable. Broadly speaking, we can say that *fornyrðislag* has usually no fewer than four syllables in a line, whereas *málhátt*, another Eddic metre which has practically the same rules of alliteration as *fornyrðislag* and is often used in poems where *fornyrðislag* also occurs, has no fewer than five. A third type of metre used in Eddic poetry is *ljóðahátt*. It occurs along with *fornyrðislag* in, among other poems, *Grímnismál* and *Hávamál*. *Ljóðahátt* differs from all other Old Icelandic metres in that it has a three-part rather than a two-part structure.

*Kviðuhátt* is the metre of what was long regarded as one of the oldest skaldic poems extant, the *Ynglingatal* attributed to Þjóðólfr of Hvin, and, according to Jónas Kristjánsson, ‘since it is so close to the common Germanic form one might be tempted to conclude that it was the earliest of skaldic verse-forms, but the syllable counting and the use of kennings relate it to verse in *dróttkvæðr hátt*, and it is just as likely that it is a subsequent development’.<sup>31</sup> Other poems composed in *kviðuhátt* include Egill Skallagrímsson’s *Sonatorrek* and *Arinbjarnarkviða*. Syllable counting is much stricter in *kviðuhátt* than in *fornyrðislag*. Syllables may be weighed as long or short, and in cases of what is called resolution, two syllables of which at least the first is short count as one long syllable, e.g. *sonar* (gen. sing. of *sonr*, ‘son’) in stanza 6 of *Sonatorrek*. In chapter 5, I provide a more detailed treatment of the *kviðuhátt* metre. However, the metre most closely associated with skaldic poetry is *dróttkvætt*.

With *dróttkvætt* we arrive at the most distinctive, prestigious, and arguably splendid of all Old Icelandic metres. Regularly used in both extended poems and *lausavísur*, the loose, random verses of the kind scattered throughout the sagas, it forms the metre of some five-sixths of the skaldic corpus. The metre derives its name from *drótt*, ‘the following of the king or warlord’ and *kveða*, ‘to recite’, indicating a style appropriate for compositions recited in the presence of a comitatus. It seems to have been practised and appreciated to some extent among all the Scandinavians of the Viking Age, but the evidence for it comes almost exclusively from Norway, Orkney and Iceland. Around 21,000 lines of *dróttkvætt* verse survive, attributed to poets who lived between about 850 and 1400.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Jónas Kristjánsson, *Eddas and Sagas*, p. 85.

<sup>32</sup> Russell Poole, ‘Metre and Metrics’, p. 269.



The *lausavísur* quoted below are examples of *dróttkvætt* verses from *Egils saga*. The first is one of a pair of stanzas in which Egill calls down the wrath of the gods on his enemies King Eiríkr blóðøx ('blood-axe') and Queen Gunnhildr, and asks for them to be banished from Norway. The second strophe describes a storm at sea.

*Stanza 28*

Svá skyldi goð gjalda,  
 gram reki bōnd af lōndum,  
 reið sé rōgn ok Óðinn,  
 rōn míns féar hōnum;  
 folkmygi lát flýja,  
 Freyr ok Njōrðr, af jōrðum,  
 leiðisk lofða stríði  
 landóss þanns vé grandar.<sup>33</sup>

*Manuscript variants<sup>34</sup>*

2 gram] so *W*, gramr *M*, grōm *K*; reki] reka *K*; bōnd] baund *K*, lynd *indistinct M*, lōndum]  
 hondum *W*

3 reið] reid *K* (*AM* = *W*, *M*); sé] so *K* (*AM* = *M*, *W*), se *Skj.*; rōgn] so *K*, reginn *W*

4 rōn] ráns *W*; míns] minniz *K*

5 folkmygi] fiolkyngi *W*, *K*, folkmygi] fiolkyngi *W*, *K*; lát] lattu *W*; flýja] fylgia *W*

6 Freyr...Njōrðr] frei...niōrð *K* (*AM* = *M*, *W*); jōrðum] iorðv *W*, *AM* in *K*

7 leiðisk] leiðis *W*; stríði] so *W*, styri *M*

*Prose word order*

Svá skyldi goð gjalda hōnum rōn féar míns. Bōnd reki gram af lōndum. Rōgn ok Óðinn sé reið. Freyr ok Njōrðr, lát folkmygi, þann's grandar vé, flýja af jōrðum. Landóss leiðisk stríði lofða.

*Translation*

Thus should the gods repay him for the robbery of my property. May the gods drive the king from his lands. May the gods and Óðinn be angry. O Freyr and Njōrðr, make the oppressor of men who destroys sanctuaries flee from the estates, may the landgod/spirit be (make himself) hateful to the enemy of the people.

<sup>33</sup> ÍF 2, p. 163.

<sup>34</sup> According to *Skj.* AI, and ÍF 2.

*Stanza 32*

Þél høggr stórt fyr stáli  
 stafnkvígs á veg jafnan  
 út með éla meitli  
 andærr jötunn vandar,  
 en svalbúinn selju  
 sverfr eirar vanr þeiri  
 Gestils ǫlpt með gustum  
 gandr of stál fyr brandi.<sup>35</sup>

*Manuscript variants*

1 stáli] stalinn *K*, (nn deleted *AM*); 2 kvígs] kn'gz *K*, (knys *AM*).

3 éla] iola *K*; meitli] meili *W*, meite *AM* in *K*.

4 andærr] aundur *W*, *K*; jötunn vandar] fiotur grundar *W*; iotun ok andar *K*

5 sval] sealf *W*; búinn] buín *W*; selju] selia *AM* in *K*.

6 sverfr] suefr *W*, *AM* i *K*; þeiri] þeirar *W*, *AM* in *K*.

7 gestils] gellis *W*; gistils *K* (gestis *AM*); ǫlpt] alfr *W*, gialfr *K* (gi deleted *AM*); með gustum] áðr gustu *M*, giste *K* (*AM* = *M*, *W*); 8 gandr] grand *W*, *K*; of] so *W*, ok *K* (from *AM*)

*Prose word order*

Andærr jötunn vandar høggr stórt þél með meitli éla á jafnan veg stafnkvígs fyr stáli, en svalbúinn gandr selju – vanr eirar – sverfr þeiri ǫlpt Gestils fyr brandi of stál með gustum.

*Translation*

The *adverse giant of the tree* [giant = enemy, the enemy of the tree = wind, which is adverse = STORM] massively carves a file with the chisel of snowstorms onto the *smooth-path of the prow-bull* [prow-bull = ship, whose smooth path = SEA] in front of the prow, and the coldly clad *enemy of the willow* [STORM], lacking in mercy, files with it (i.e. with the file) *the swan of Gestill* [Gestill = name of a sea-god, whose swan = SHIP] in front of the ornament around the prow with gusts.

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<sup>35</sup> ÍF 2, p. 172.



The most obvious feature of these verses is that like all skaldic poetry they consist of stanzas of eight lines or, more correctly, half-lines. The stanzas are divided into two half-stanzas which are metrically independent and often syntactically so, and which in the sagas are sometimes preserved as separate entities called *helmingar*. As we have mentioned above, another fundamental requirement of skaldic poetry is that it is syllable-counting. In *dróttkvætt* poetry this syllable-counting is very strict and the number of syllables is usually limited to six per line. In the above examples we can see that apart from the second line of the first verse the number of syllables in each half-line adds up to six. However, as is the case in *kviðuhátt*, two syllables, of which the first is short, may ‘resolve’, i.e. count as one long one, the word *reki* here constituting one syllable for metrical purposes.

As in *fornyrðislag* and the other measures described above, in *dróttkvætt* lines are linked in pairs by alliteration. There are two alliterating sounds (*stuðlar*) in each odd line and one (the *hofuðstafr*, ‘chief stave/post’) in the first stressed syllable of each even line. Any vowel or diphthong alliterates with any other (or with ‘j’ and a following vowel), though preferably an unlike one. In the verses above the alliterating letters are indicated in bold font. Thus, for example, in the first two lines of st. 28, the alliterating sound is **g**, in the following pair of lines it is **r**, and then **f** and **l**. In lines 3-4 of the second example we can see an instance of the (unlike) vowels **ú** and **é**, and also **a** and **jo** alliterating.

Individual lines also contain pairs of internal rhymes, or *hendingar*, which link the sounds in stressed syllables. The second stress is always on the penultimate syllable. There are two types of internal rhyme: odd lines normally have *skoðending* (half-rhyme) in which the vowels/diphthongs are different but the postvocalic consonants or consonant groups are identical.<sup>36</sup> Even-numbered lines (and sometimes also odd lines) have *aðalending* (‘full’ or ‘chief’ rhyme) in which vowels/diphthongs and the postvocalic consonant(s) are identical. In the above examples internal rhyme is indicated by underlining. In st. 28, for instance, the penultimate syllable in line 1 is gjald-, which therefore carries a primary stress (in this case it is also the alliterating syllable). The postvocalic consonants are *ld*, which rhyme with those in another stressed syllable in the line: skyld-. The following line has full internal rhyme in that the vowel and consonant group ond in the penultimate syllable, rhymes with bond. In line 3 it is simply the sound ð which rhymes; in line 4 ón provides *aðalending*, but in line 5, although *skoðending* would

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<sup>36</sup> However, it is not quite clear how many of the postvocalic consonants must participate in the internal rhyme. See Kari Ellen Gade, *The Structure of Old Norse Court Poetry*, *Islandica*, 49 (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 5.

be expected assonance is present instead. It is the adherence to these strict constraints in the composition of a skaldic stanza which results in an unnatural word order and clause-arrangement, or at least a word order very unlike that of prose.

We have seen in the examples of the two verses above that the different manuscripts show many variant forms, and the editor's choice will depend on the interpretation he/she finds appropriate. In some cases this choice will be motivated by metre and in others by meaning. For example, in the first of the two examples above, line 7, Eiríkr is described as being *lofða stríði(r)* (enemy of men/people).

Both *W* and *K* have *stríði*, whereas *M* has *stýri*, which is the alternative Finnur Jónsson opts for in *Skj. AI. Lofða stýri* (steerer/leader of men) makes equally good sense in the context and does not change the number of syllables in the half-line. However, whereas *stríði* fulfills the rhyme-scheme (*skothending*) required by the odd line, *stýri* does not. There is no other *r* in the line with which the *r* in *stýri* can rhyme. Furthermore, as Eiríkr has been referred to as *folkmygi(r)* (oppressor of men) in line 5 perhaps *lofða stríði(r)* is also preferable semantically. In order to achieve the requisite six syllables in line 8, Sigurður Nordal emends *þann er* to *þanns* (an abbreviated form of *þann es*), which, as it happens, has no effect on the meaning. In general, however, the tendency to emend texts in such a way as to fit the requirement of the metrical form is declining and increasingly frowned upon. These are some, although by no means all, of the problems that editors of medieval manuscripts must address before arriving at a fixed text (even though no such fixed text is stable for very long as multi-interpretations continually suggest themselves).

We have so far mostly looked at the form and structure of the *dróttkvætt* stanza, but the poetic diction of the stanzas quoted above is another distinguishing factor. In Old Icelandic poetry the most prominent devices for achieving artistic effect, and which are found in abundance, are *heiti* and kennings. *Heiti* are the less unique of the two; they can be found in poetry all over the world and in Old Norse the word refers to the practice of replacing common nouns with unusual or 'poetic' appellations. Typical examples in English are 'steed' or 'mount' for 'horse'. *Heiti* appear frequently in skaldic poetry, but relatively rarely in the *Poetic Edda*, and virtually never in prose. 'Particularly rich sources of *heiti*,' as Turville-Petre points out, 'are the so-called *þulur*, lists of synonyms or near-synonyms for objects, people, or mythological beings such as man, woman, battle, beasts, sun, moon, as well as gods, goddesses, giants and many more'.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> E.O. Gabriel Turville-Petre, *Scaldic Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. xli.



These anonymous poetic texts are preserved in manuscripts of *Snorra Edda* and form two main groups, one dating from before 1200 and the other from the thirteenth century.<sup>38</sup> The main purpose of such synonyms was to avoid monotonous repetition. In our first example, for instance, Egill uses four different terms to refer to the gods or to a god apart from using proper names: *goð*, *boṇd*, *rogn* and *–óss*. The word *boṇd* (nom.sing. *band*) in line 2 of st. 28 has the meaning ‘bonds’, ‘fetters’ or ‘confederacy’ in everyday speech, but when it is used in poetry it is endowed with a special meaning ‘gods’. Similarly *gram(r)*, also in line 2, which normally denotes a ‘fiend’ or ‘demon’, when used in a poetic context can mean ‘warrior’, ‘prince’, or even ‘king’. As Turville-Petre notes, ‘A king or prince may be designated by many different words. He leads the army, and so he is called *fylkir* (cf. *folke*, ‘army’); he is generous to his men and is, therefore *mildingr*, he is *vörðr*, for he is the protector’.<sup>39</sup> In this stanza Egill in fact uses kennings (see below) to reverse these stock terms of praise; he calls Eiríkr *folkmygir* (oppressor of men), and *lofða stridir* (enemy of men). Another type of *heiti* occurs when a part of the object designated may be used metonymically for the whole, e.g. *kejl* (keel) may mean ‘a ship’, as may *rá* (sail-yard).

The kenning is an even more striking feature of skaldic diction. It consists in its simplest forms either of two nouns, one of them in the genitive case, or of two nouns combined to form a compound word. These two elements are called the ‘base-word’ (German *Grundwort*, Mod. Icelandic *stofnord*) and the ‘determinant’ (*Bestimmung*, *kenniorð*). In the case of a two-noun kenning it is the noun in its genitive case that constitutes the determinant; in the case of a compound-word kenning, it is the first element in the compound that does so. In stanza 32, for example, *jötunn vandar*, a kenning for ‘storm’, consists of two substantives: *jötunn* means ‘giant’, and by extension, as the giants were traditionally enemies of the gods, it can mean ‘enemy’ in general; *vöndr*, or *vandar* as it appears here in its genitive form, means a ‘wand’ or ‘post’. *Jötunn*, as the base-word of the kenning, takes the place of the sense-word (in this case ‘storm’) in the sentence, and consequently the case as required by the clause (in this example, nominative). *Vandar* (of wand/ pole), as the determinant, qualifies what type of ‘enemy’ is being referred to. The enemy of an upright post, possibly a mast in this context, is the wind or storm because the wind could cause a mast or tree to be knocked down or uprooted. In line 7 in *Gestils*

<sup>38</sup> For a discussion of *pulur* see Rory McTurk, *Studies in Ragnars saga Loðbrókar and its Major Scandinavian Analogues*, Medium Ævum monographs, new series, 15 (Oxford: Society for the Study of Mediæval Languages and Literature, 1991), pp. 23-24.

<sup>39</sup> *Scaldic Poetry*, p. xliii.



*ǫlpt*, a kenning for ‘ship’, the word *ǫlpt* (swan) is the base-word. *Gestill* is a mythological king of the sea, and the ‘swan of Gestill’ is the ship. As for compound word kennings, *folkmygir* (st. 28, line 5) may be taken as an example. There *mygir* (oppressor) is the base-word and *folk-* (people) is the determinant, specifying what kind of ‘oppressor’ the king was.

As we have noted above, skaldic poetry was oral in character. It was composed to be uttered aloud and, bearing in mind the complexity of the language, it is fair to ask, before we begin to appreciate it ourselves, what the expectations of the medieval audience were and how they understood it. We can assume that a contemporary audience expected, and was used to, the skewed word order and clause-arrangement. Many kennings, although not exactly clichés, would have been known and immediately recognizable to the listeners of the day, everyone would have understood, for instance, that ‘Gestill’s swan’ was a ship. The fact that these strophes have been remembered and recorded means that they must have been learned and repeated by others. The medieval audience would have understood, then, the message or content of the verse, adorned as it is with kennings and complicated word order. What is more uncertain is whether the skalds deliberately selected specific kennings to create particular images or moods, or how conscious their choice of vocabulary was.

In their respective Norwegian and Spanish translations, both Lie and Bernárdez manage to retain the formal features of skaldic poetry to a surprising extent, as we shall see in the central chapters of this thesis. Looking briefly at Hallvard Lie’s translation of stanza 28, for example, we can see that he has linked the lines in pairs by alliteration (alliterative letters are indicated in bold), and has managed to do so without greatly affecting the overall significance of the stanza.<sup>40</sup> He has also achieved *skothending* in lines 1 and 8, partial internal rhyme in lines 5 and 7, and *aðalhending* in lines 4 and 6.

<p><b>Driv</b> <b>d</b>ådri<b>k</b>e ma<b>k</b>ter  <b>d</b>rotten fra land og <b>r</b>i<b>k</b>e!  <b>H</b>evn, Odin og <b>h</b>øye æser,  i <b>h</b>arme, at <b>h</b>an meg <b>r</b>ante!  La <b>f</b>olkplageren <b>f</b>ly<b>k</b>te,  <b>F</b>røy og <b>N</b>jord, fra <b>N</b>orge!  <b>T</b>ungt, <b>T</b>or, du <b>t</b>uk<b>t</b>e  <b>T</b>inghelgs usle <b>k</b>renker!<sup>41</sup></p>	<p>Drive, glorious [divine] powers,  the king from land and realm  Avenge, Óðinn and exalted gods  in anger, [the fact] that he robbed me!  Make the people-plaguer flee,  Freyr and Njörðr, from Norway!  Severely, Þórr, may you punish  the miserable violator of the thing-sanctuary!</p>
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<sup>40</sup> For a more detailed discussion of this translation see chapter 4.

<sup>41</sup> *Islandske ættesagaer*, vol. 1, p. 133.

While the Spanish translator has not been able to achieve quite the same effect, it is clear that he has also tried to produce some internal rhyme and alliteration in his version, and even accomplishes *skothending* in line 5 and *aðalhending* in line 8 of the stanza, despite his claim that the form of the *dróttkvætt* stanza is ‘casi imposible de reflejar en una traducción’ (almost impossible to reflect in a translation).<sup>42</sup>

<p>Que los <b>d</b>ioses castiguen a Eirík, <b>d</b>el país le arroj<u>en</u>, que también Odín se <b>i</b>rrite, pues <b>m</b>is riquezas robó; que <b>h</b>uir hagan de sus <b>t</b>ierras al <b>t</b>irano, Njörð y Frey, dé Thor la esp<u>al</u>da <b>a</b>l abyecto violador del thing sagrado.<sup>43</sup></p>	<p>May the gods punish Eiríkr, may they drive him out of the country, may Óðinn also be angry, for he stole my property; May Njörðr and Freyr make the tyrant flee from his lands Þórr, turn your back on the abject violator of the sacred ‘thing’.</p>
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Specific problems for the translation of Icelandic poetry into ‘Castilian verse’, which Bernárdez identifies, are the non-existence of alliteration, and the difficulty of applying the Germanic metrical stresses to Castilian, which has a totally different stress-pattern. Bernárdez compares this difficulty on the one hand, with the facility on the other, of languages such as German and Faroese to accommodate this feature. He concludes, that the only permissible option for a Spanish translator of skaldic poetry is the reproduction of the content without trying to achieve ‘an unattainable fidelity’ (*una inalcanzable fidelidad*) to the original forms. At the same time, however, Bernárdez feels it is essential to preserve something of the poetic character of the original verse in order to maintain the contrast between the prose text of the saga, and the poetic strophes intercalated throughout it. He suggests that skaldic poetry should be reproduced as free verse which is ‘más o menos rítmico según las posibilidades y la intención del traductor’ (relatively rhythmic according to the translator’s ability and purpose).<sup>44</sup>

Of course translating any Old Icelandic text into Spanish presents far greater challenges than translating into Norwegian. Norwegian and Old Norse-Icelandic both belong to the Germanic language family, indeed *bokmål* (and to a greater degree, *nynorsk*) is a descendant of Old Norse, and therefore it is logical that the two languages share many features. The vast majority of Norwegian vocabulary, for example, is derived from

<sup>42</sup> Enrique Bernárdez, trans., *Snorri Sturluson: Saga de Egil Skallagrímsson* (Madrid: Miraguano, 1988), p. xiii. Henceforth I will refer to this volume as *Saga de Egil Skallagrímsson*.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 201-02.

<sup>44</sup> Enrique Bernárdez, ‘Acerca de la traducción de los kenningar y otros aspectos de la poesía escáldica’, *Filología moderna*, 68-70 (1980), 223-40 (p. 226).



Old Norse,<sup>45</sup> while Spanish terms derive from Latin, and whereas in Norwegian these words tend to be short and monosyllabic, words with a Latin derivation are far more likely to be polysyllabic and hence more difficult to fit into the six-syllable line of the *dróttkvætt* stanza. This difficulty is compounded by the fact that as a primordially analytical language, Spanish cannot be as concise as more synthetic languages like Icelandic and Norwegian, which sometimes results in clumsy, lengthy clauses such as *la fiera que las heridas causa* (the wild beast who causes the wounds) to translate a kenning like *undvargr* (wound-wolf > AXE), or *el que alimenta a los cuervos* (he who feeds the ravens) for *gunnvala bræðir* (prey-feeder of battle-hawks > WARRIOR).<sup>46</sup> There are, however, some features of the Spanish language which are advantageous for the translation of skaldic verse, such as the versatility of its syntax, or its complex verbal system which can occasionally reproduce an Icelandic verbal ending more precisely than Norwegian which has a simpler morphology. We can also see in the above examples how the Spanish translation better accommodates the subjunctive mood of the verbs in the original (*skyldi*, *reki*, *sé*, etc.) than the Norwegian translation, which mostly employs the imperative, transforming Egill's curses into commands.

#### *Overview of Recent Research on Skaldic Poetry* ↻

Until the 1970s, research on skaldic poetry was relatively scarce, and of the books and articles which were published, the vast majority were written in Scandinavian languages. Major publications in the first half of the twentieth century include Finnur Jónsson's monumental Danish edition of skaldic poetry, *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning* (1912-15), which we have already referred to above, Ernst Albin Kock's revised Swedish edition of that work, *Den norsk-isländska Skaldediktningen* (1946-49), and Finnur Jónsson's reworking of Sveinbjörn Egilsson's *Lexicon Poeticum*.<sup>47</sup> Between the years 1923-44, Kock also produced his *Notationes Norræne: Anteckningar till Edda och Skaldediktning*, which consisted in a series of twenty-eight volumes of detailed notes and commentary on

<sup>45</sup> In the Norwegian stanza above, for example, almost every word presents an Old Norse etymology, e.g. 'driv' (*drifa*), 'dåd' (*dáð*), 'rike' (*rikr*), 'makter' (*makr*), 'drotten' (*dróttinn*), 'fra' (*frá*), 'land' (*land*), 'hevn' (*hefnd*), 'og' (*ok*), 'æser' (*æsir*), 'harme' (*harmr*), 'han' (*hann*), 'meg' (*mik*), 'rante' (*rán*), and so on.

<sup>46</sup> See stanzas 6 and 19 in chapter 4.

<sup>47</sup> Ernst Albin Kock, ed., *Den norsk-isländska Skaldediktningen*, 2 vols (Lund: Gleerup, 1946-49); Finnur Jónsson, *Lexicon Poeticum Antiquae Linguae Septentrionalis: Ordbog over det Norsk-Islandske Skjaldesprog Oprindelig Forfattet af Sveinbjörn Egilson*, 2nd edn (Copenhagen: Møller, 1931; repr. 1966).



skaldic and Eddic poetry.<sup>48</sup> In 1921, Rudolph Meissner published *Die Kenningar der Skalden: Ein Beitrag zur skaldischen Poetik*, one of the standard works on kennings.<sup>49</sup> Meissner's influential study is particularly useful for his categorisations of kennings based on their sense-words. In a later monograph in Dutch, *De skaldenkenningen met mythologischen inhoud* (1934), Jan de Vries examines the mythological content of kennings.<sup>50</sup> Other significant publications from around this period include Hallvard Lie's extended articles, 'Jorvikferden: Et vendepunkt i Egil Skallagrimsson's liv' (1946), 'Skaldestil-studier' (1952), and 'Natur og unatur i skaldekunsten' (1957),<sup>51</sup> and Odd Nordland's monograph, *Hofuðlausn' i Egils saga: Ein tradisjonskritisk studie* (1956). In the first fifty years of the twentieth century, however, only one publication on the subject of skaldic poetry was published in English. This was Lee M. Hollander's *The Skalds: A Selection of Their Poems, With Introductions and Notes* (1945), which, as the title suggests, comprises a selection of skaldic poetry (including a rendering of Egill's *Sonatorrek*) translated and with a commentary.

From the late 1960s onwards, however, there was a considerable increase in the number of English-language publications on skaldic poetry, of which the two most important are Gabriel Turville-Petre's *Scaldic Poetry* (1976) and Roberta Frank's study, *Old Norse Court Poetry: The Dróttkvætt Stanza* (1978).<sup>52</sup> Like Hollander's book, *Scaldic Poetry* provides a selection of skaldic verse translated by the author, but Turville-Petre also supplies the original text, as well as detailed explanatory notes and full, stanza-by-stanza commentary. Frank's work, like Klaus von See's *Skaldendichtung: Eine Einführung* (1980),<sup>53</sup> provides a detailed introduction to the genre, but also includes detailed interpretations of selected *lausavísur*. Bjarne Fidjestøl's dissertation on skaldic praise-poetry, *Det norrøne fyrstediktet* (1982) was also a landmark publication in the field, as was Hans Kuhn's major work *Das Dróttkvætt* (1983).<sup>54</sup>

By the time Roberta Frank surveyed the history of skaldic research in 1985, therefore, considerable progress had been made in the field, although she also identified

<sup>48</sup> Ernst Albin Kock, *Notationes norrønæ: Anteckningar till edda och skaldediktning* (Lund: Gleerup, 1923-41).

<sup>49</sup> Rudolf Meissner, *Die Kenningar der Skalden: Ein Beitrag zur Skaldischen Poetik* (Bonn/Leipzig: Schroeder, 1921).

<sup>50</sup> Jan de Vries, *De skaldenkenningen met mythologischen inhoud* (Haarlem: Tjeenk Willink, 1934).

<sup>51</sup> These articles were later published in a collection by Hallvard Lie entitled *Om Sagakunst og Skaldskap: Utvalgte avhandlinger* (Øvre Ervik: Alvheim and Eide, 1982). For individual references see bibliography.

<sup>52</sup> E. O. Gabriel Turville-Petre, *Scaldic Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976); Roberta Frank, *Old Norse Court Poetry: The Dróttkvætt Stanza* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978).

<sup>53</sup> Klaus von See, *Skaldendichtung: Eine Einführung* (Munich: Artemis, 1980).

<sup>54</sup> Bjarne Fidjestøl, *Det norrøne fyrstediktet* (Øvre Ervik, Bergen: Alvheim and Eide, 1982); Hans Kuhn, *Das Dróttkvætt* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1983).

several areas which had been neglected or where new investigation was needed.<sup>55</sup> For example, in her survey she challenges the traditional rigid lines of demarcation between Eddic and skaldic poetry which results in the former being viewed as that ‘simple-yet-passionate, rude-but-grand, close-to-nature poetry of the old Germanic folk’, whereas skaldic poetry is considered ‘recondite’, ‘unnatural’, ‘other’.<sup>56</sup> For Frank this ‘crude and imprecise’ categorisation is partly responsible for the relative shortage of research into skaldic verse.

One area of skaldic studies that has generated much scholarship both before and after 1985, as we have seen, is the unique nature of verse in the *dróttkvætt* metre.<sup>57</sup> Like Kuhn’s study, Kari Ellen Gade’s book focuses on the formal aspects of *dróttkvætt*, while others have looked for parallels in Old Irish syllabic poetry, but always with inconclusive results.<sup>58</sup> The enigmatic kenning so intrinsic to the style of skaldic poetry has also kept scholars such as Bjarne Fidjestøl and Elena Gurevich busy looking for systems, patterns, and explanations.<sup>59</sup> A vast amount of skaldic scholarship has been devoted to deciphering and reconstructing corrupt verses. As regards the poetry of *Egils saga* this is particularly true of attempts to interpret the more difficult passages of *Sonatorrek*, whose extreme ambiguity allows for a myriad of different readings.<sup>60</sup>

The ‘raw material’ also makes the study of skaldic poetry difficult. As we have pointed out above, skaldic poetry, unlike Eddic, is not collected neatly in any one manuscript, but is scattered throughout the sagas, Snorri Sturluson’s *Edda*, and Icelandic medieval grammatical treatises; a few verses have even survived as runic inscriptions on stones and sticks. The one comprehensive edition of skaldic poetry today is still Finnur Jónsson’s *Skjaldedigtning*. As we have noted above, the other main edition, that of Ernst

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<sup>55</sup> Roberta Frank, ‘Skaldic Poetry’ in *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*, ed. by Carol J. Clover and John Lindow, *Islandica* 45 (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 157-96. Reprinted with a new preface by Theodore M. Andersson, *Medieval Academy Reprints for Teaching* 42 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005).

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*, p. 159.

<sup>57</sup> Roberta Frank, *Old Norse Court Poetry: The Dróttkvætt Stanza* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978).

<sup>58</sup> Kari Ellen Gade, *The Structure of Old Norse Dróttkvætt Poetry*, *Islandica*, 49 (Cornell University Press, 1995); E.O. Gabriel Turville-Petre, ‘On the Poetry of the Scalds and of the Filid’, *Ériu*, 22 (1971), 1-22; Bridget Gordon Mackenzie, ‘On the Relation of Norse Skaldic Verse to Irish Syllabic Poetry’, in *Speculum Norrenum: Norse Studies in Memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre*, ed. by Ursula Dronke and others (Odense: Odense University Press, 1981), pp. 337-56.

<sup>59</sup> Bjarne Fidjestøl, ‘The Kenning System: An Attempt at a Linguistic Analysis’, in *Selected Papers* (see Haugen, 1997), pp. 16-67; Elena Gurevich, ‘Skaldic Variation and the Evolution of Kenning Patterns’, *Skandinavistisk*, 32 (2002), 31-37.

<sup>60</sup> See for example, Richard North, ‘The Pagan Inheritance of Egill’s *Sonatorrek*’, in *Atti del 12. Congresso Internazionale di Studi sull’Alto Medioevo/Poetry in the Scandinavian Middle Ages: Seventh International Saga Conference, Spoleto 4-10 September 1988*, ed. by Teresa Pàroli (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull’Alto Medioevo, 1990), pp. 147-67, and Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson, ‘Religious Ideas in *Sonatorrek*’, *Saga-Book of the Viking Society*, 25 (1999), 159-77.



Albin Kock, follows Finnur's edition in form, and the other two main reference tools available to scholars of skaldic poetry, Finnur Jónsson's *Lexicon Poeticum* and Rudolph Meissner's *Die Kenningar der Skalden*, are also based on Finnur's editions, so that one scholar dominates the field. It has long been felt that these books are outdated and in need of emendation. Jón Helgason, Bjarne Fidjestøl, and Roberta Frank, among others, have called for a new edition to further the progress of skaldic studies.<sup>61</sup> As Clover and Lindow have noted, 'new editions, new reference tools, perhaps even a computer concordance to the corpus: these are some of our consumer needs in the years to come'.<sup>62</sup>

Of major significance, then, is the new project 'Skaldic Poetry of the Middle Ages – A New Edition', which is being published online as an ongoing process and is expected to be completed by 2008. This project was first conceived in 1994 by the current five editors-in-chief, who, when they realised that they would not be able to edit the entire corpus themselves, agreed to invite other researchers to participate as contributors to the edition.<sup>63</sup> At the moment approximately fifty scholars from Australia, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Iceland, New Zealand, Russia, Sweden, the U.K., and the U.S. have responded and agreed to contribute to the project. A new 'Lexicon Poeticum' and a collection of *kenningar* and *heiti* (poetic words) will be prepared in conjunction with the new edition, which will appear both in hard copy and in electronic form.<sup>64</sup>

One of the interesting features of the new edition will be the way in which the huge skaldic corpus is divided into eight categories. The second of these, 'Poetological works', includes poetry from the *Snorra Edda* and the grammatical and poetological treatises. This is an area in which interest has increased sharply in recent years. In 1988 Bjarne Fidjestøl noted a 'buzz of activity' on the 'Snorri front'.<sup>65</sup> Scholars are taking a new look at the intellectual background of Snorri's thirteenth-century works and are searching for answers in contemporary European literature. According to Fidjestøl, 'The main tendency in recent work has been to the effect that Snorri, as the enlightened

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<sup>61</sup> Jón Helgason, 'Planer om en Ny Udgave of Skjaldedigtingen', *Acta Philologica Scandinavia*, 19 (1950), 130-32; Bjarne Fidjestøl, 'On a New Edition of Skaldic Poetry', in *The Sixth International Saga Conference Workshop Papers* (Copenhagen: n.pub, 1985), pp. 313-35.

<sup>62</sup> *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*, ed. by Clover and Lindow, p. 184.

<sup>63</sup> The five editors-in-chief are: Kari Ellen Gade, University of Indiana; Diana Whaley, University of Newcastle; Edith Marold, University of Kiel; Guðrún Nordal, University of Iceland; Margaret Clunies Ross, University of Sydney. See <http://skaldic.arts.usyd.edu.au/db.php> [accessed 15 May, 2007].

<sup>64</sup> Kari Ellen Gade, 'Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages', *Skandinavistik*, 32 (2002), 3-16.

<sup>65</sup> Bjarne Fidjestøl, 'Snorri Sturluson, Humanist and Rhetorician', in *Selected Papers* (see Haugen, 1997), p. 343.



humanist he was, took a rather positive view of the heathen mythology', and that he was able to see the past in a historical perspective.<sup>66</sup> In her book, *Skáldskaparmál: Snorri Sturluson's ars poetica and Medieval Theories of Language* (1987),<sup>67</sup> Margaret Clunies Ross shows how closely the various sections of the *Edda* are interrelated, and demonstrates the kind of *ars poetica* Snorri intended *Skáldskaparmál* to be. She also demonstrates a unity in Snorri's religious theory and his views of language.

'Snorri fever' was not just confined to the English-speaking world. In 1993, to commemorate the 750th anniversary of Snorri Sturluson's death, a collection of essays, edited by Alois Wolf, was published. These included an examination of the relationship between verse and prose in Snorri's *Heimskringla* by Bjarne Fidjestøl,<sup>68</sup> a discussion of the sources of *Skáldskaparmál* and Snorri's intellectual background by Anthony Faulkes,<sup>69</sup> and a treatment of *Háttatal* (the third section of *Snorra Edda*) by Stephen Tranter.<sup>70</sup> Also greatly increasing the prospects for research in skaldic studies has been the publication of Anthony Faulkes's edition of *Skáldskaparmál* in two volumes (text and glossary).<sup>71</sup> This work completes Faulkes's edition of the *Snorra Edda* and is of crucial importance to skaldic scholars as the unique repository of a great amount of skaldic verse. Snorri Sturluson also provided modern skaldic scholarship with most of its terminology and principles of analysis and interpretation, and, as Clover and Lindow note, 'it is because of him and his Icelandic disciples that the study of skaldic verse kept an impressive lead over that of other European vernacular poetries down to at least 1850'.<sup>72</sup>

In his latest article, Klaus von See refutes Clunies Ross's 'theologising' of the *Snorra Edda* and rejects the Prologue as the work of Snorri at all. He believes that *Gylfaginning* and *Skáldskaparmál*, as well as *Heimskringla*, are written with a completely different aim in view: 'they attempt to integrate genuine pagan tradition into the high-medieval world picture in as unprovocative a way as possible, and to exploit it in terms

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<sup>66</sup> *ibid.*, p. 349.

<sup>67</sup> Margaret Clunies Ross, *Skáldskaparmál: Snorri Sturluson's ars poetica and Medieval Theories of Language* (Odense: Odense University Press, 1987).

<sup>68</sup> Bjarne Fidjestøl, 'Skaldic Stanzas in Saga-Prose: Observations on the Relationship between Prose and Verse in Snorri's Heimskringla', in *Snorri Sturluson, Kolloquium Anlässlich der 750. Wiederkehr seines Todestages*, ed. by Alois Wolf (Tübingen: Narr, 1993), pp. 77-98.

<sup>69</sup> Anthony Faulkes, 'The sources of Skáldskaparmál: Snorri's Intellectual Background', in *Snorri Sturluson* (see Wolf, 1993), pp. 59-76.

<sup>70</sup> Stephen Tranter, 'Das Háttatal von Snorri Sturluson', in *Snorri Sturluson* (see Wolf, 1993), pp. 179-92.

<sup>71</sup> Anthony Faulkes, ed., *Snorri Sturluson: Edda. Skáldskaparmál*, 2 vols (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1998).

<sup>72</sup> *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*, p. 165.

of a specifically “Norse” cultural identity’.<sup>73</sup> Taking a step sideways, the very latest investigation into Old Norse medieval poetics has not focused exclusively on the works of Snorri Sturluson. In *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, no fewer than seven essays deal with medieval Icelandic poetics. In the fourth of these, for example, Gísli Sigurðsson tries to glean what information he can from Óláfur Þórðarson’s *The Third Grammatical Treatise*, as regards the extent of the knowledge of skaldic poetry among thirteenth-century literary enthusiasts in Iceland.<sup>74</sup> A new edition of this treatise, edited by Tarrin Wills, is now available online.<sup>75</sup> Guðrún Nordal in her study *Tools of Literacy* (2001), shows us how the composition and citation of skaldic poetry in the thirteenth century was a political act and how its study was incorporated into the schoolroom study of ‘grammatica’ and, in parts three and four of her book, examines changes in the theory and practice of skaldic poetry under the influence of the Christian tradition.<sup>76</sup> An interesting article by William Sayers describes his theory of how the form and structure of a skaldic verse can be compared to that of a ship.<sup>77</sup>

Prompted by the interest in the impact of medieval literary theory upon Icelandic treatises on poetics and an increased interest in literary theory in general, a number of Old Norse scholars met in Copenhagen in 1989 to discuss the possibility of starting a new international research project on the reception and interpretation of Old Norse poetics in the Western literary tradition (see chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion of this trend). The ‘Norse Muse Project’, as it was called, gave rise to a number of publications on the subject. *Northern Antiquity: The Post-Medieval Reception of Edda and Saga*, a collection of essays edited by Andrew Wawn, was published in 1994.<sup>78</sup> It was followed two years later by another collection, this time edited by Lars Lönnroth, which comprises nine essays on Old Icelandic poetry and the way that this poetry was

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<sup>73</sup> Klaus von See, ‘Snorri Sturluson and the Creation of a Norse Cultural Ideology’, *Saga-Book of the Viking Society*, 25 (2001), 367-93 (p. 368).

<sup>74</sup> Gísli Sigurðsson, ‘Óláfr Þórðarson hvítaskáld and Oral Poetry in the West of Iceland c.1250: The Evidence of References to Poetry in The Third Grammatical Treatise’, in *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, ed. by Margaret Clunies Ross, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature, 42 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 96-139.

<sup>75</sup> *The Third Grammatical Treatise in the Codex Wormianus: Óláfr Þórðarson hvítaskáld*, edition, commentary, and annotated translation by Tarrin Wills, <http://www-personal.arts.usyd.edu.au/tarwills/thesis/> [accessed May 2007]. Wills will also be responsible for the electronic editing of the skaldic corpus in the project mentioned above.

<sup>76</sup> Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy: The Role of Skaldic Verse in Icelandic Textual Culture of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).

<sup>77</sup> William Sayers, ‘Scarving the Yard with Words (*Fostbræðra saga*): Shipbuilding Imagery in Old Norse Poetics’, *Scandinavian Studies*, 74 (2002), 1-18.

<sup>78</sup> *Northern Antiquity: The Post-Medieval Reception of Edda and Saga*, ed. by Andrew Wawn (Enfield Lock, Middlesex: Hisarlik, 1994).



later used and interpreted in the Scandinavian tradition.<sup>79</sup> In 1998 Margaret Clunies Ross published an article which treats of the reception of Old Norse poetry and poetics in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain.<sup>80</sup> This was followed by Andrew Wawn's *The Vikings and the Victorians: Inventing the North in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, and the latest title on the same theme is an edition (with commentary) of translations of Old Norse poetry by the eighteenth-century scholar Thomas Percy.<sup>81</sup>

Interest in the skald's world and role in society is also reflected in several recent publications. Bjarne Fidjestøl provides a fascinating and wide-ranging discussion on the financial affairs of court skalds and their patrons.<sup>82</sup> Margaret Clunies Ross describes the transformation from simple rural boy to urbane court poet in her discussion of the Icelandic poet Sighvatr Þórðarson. Her article also examines Norwegian-Icelandic relations and the status of Icelandic poets abroad.<sup>83</sup> Other studies on individual skalds include Diana Whaley's 1998 edition, *The Poetry of Arnórr Jarlaskáld*, a book which is almost unique in skaldic studies in its presentation of the oeuvre of a single skald.<sup>84</sup> The poetry and poetic techniques of Egill Skalla-Grímsson have also lately come under the scrutiny of Laurence de Looze, and Russell Poole has attempted to shed some light on compositional, transmissional, and performance processes in his close readings of the first ten *lausavísur* of *Kormáks saga*.<sup>85</sup>

Who the skalds and their patrons were obviously influenced the content of their poetry. Most often they wrote praise-poetry about princes for princes, and as we have seen in Fidjestøl (1984), skalds could be economically dependent on the kings or earls, with whom they could also have had close emotional ties. This male bonding is examined by Jenny Jochens, who also pursues the evidence for heterosexual love especially in the *lausavísur* of the skald-sagas (i.e. those of Kormákr Ógmundarson, Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld, Björn Hítðœlakappi, and Gunnlaugr ormstunga). In these sagas the narratives' focus is not on the poets' allegiance to the king, but on their

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<sup>79</sup> *Skaldemjödnet i Berget: Essayer om Fonisländsk Ordkonst och dess Återanvändning i Nutiden*, ed. by Lars Lönnroth (Stockholm: Atlantis, 1996).

<sup>80</sup> Margaret Clunies Ross, 'The Norse Muse in Britain, 1750-1820', *Hesperides, Letterature e Culture Occidentali*, 9 (Trieste: Parnasso, 1998).

<sup>81</sup> Margaret Clunies Ross, *The Old Norse Poetic Translations of Thomas Percy: A New Edition and Commentary, Making the Middle Ages*, 4 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001).

<sup>82</sup> Bjarne Fidjestøl, "'Have you Heard a Poem Worth More?': A Note on the Economic Background of Early Skaldic Praise-Poetry", in *Selected Papers* (see Haugen, 1997), pp. 117-32.

<sup>83</sup> Margaret Clunies Ross, 'From Iceland to Norway: Essential Rites of Passage for an Early Icelandic Skald', *alvissmál*, 9 (1999), 55-72.

<sup>84</sup> Diana Whaley, *The Poetry of Arnórr jarlaskáld: An Edition and Study* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998).

<sup>85</sup> Laurence de Looze, 'Poet, Poem and Poetic Process in *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*', *ANF*, 104 (1989), 123-42; Russell Poole, 'Composition Transmission Performance: The First Ten *lausavísur* in *Kormáks saga*', *alvissmál*, 7 (1997), 737-60.



relationships with their Icelandic mistresses.<sup>86</sup> On the topic of heterosexual love, 'Why skalds address women' was the subject of Roberta Frank's paper at the seventh saga conference in Spoleto, Italy, and in chapter 5 of his book on 'finding the right one', Bjørn Bandlien argues that it was in skaldic poetry that medieval Norsemen begin to voice their feelings of grief and love.<sup>87</sup>

According to the Old Icelandic law-compilation *Grágás*, to compose love poetry (*mansöngur*) was punishable by outlawry or even death. Little wonder then that the poet Bjørn Hítðlakappi encoded his mistress's name in puns in verses addressed to her. These puns in fact incorporated elements with overt sexual references, explored by Kari Ellen Gade in her paper, 'Penile Puns: Personal Names and Phallic Symbols in Skaldic Poetry'. Gade shows how the skalds 'in their composition of injurious poetry, drew on a stereotyped inventory of sexual puns and that this erotic meta-language may enable us to shed new light on hitherto unexplained stanzas'.<sup>88</sup> As most critical editions and translations of skaldic poetry are based on nineteenth- and early twentieth-century research, it is only recently that scholars have become aware that apparently innocuous stanzas contain sexual innuendoes that were unheard of in earlier scholarship. Judith Jesch's study of runic inscriptions also opens up new perspectives on texts which were formerly only available in *Skj.* and is a mine of information on material which was previously difficult to access.<sup>89</sup>

In the field of skaldic studies it is the early, pagan poetry which has traditionally drawn more attention, but that has been changing, in that more and more scholars are now paying attention to post-conversion poetry. In 1994 Judy Quinn wrote about the transformation of skaldic poetry from an oral into a literary *ars poetica* and the difficulty of incorporating 'pagan' kennings into new verse-forms influenced by Latin poetics.<sup>90</sup> Bjarne Fidjestøl offers a discussion based on skaldic poetry of the hypothetical part played by Haraldr hárfagri in the major change in the religious dispensation of tenth-

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<sup>86</sup> Jenny Jochens, 'From Libel to Lament: Male Manifestations of Love in Old Norse', in *From Sagas to Society: Comparative Approaches to Early Iceland*, ed. by Gísli Pálsson (Enfield Lock, Middlesex: Hisarlik, 1992), pp. 247-64.

<sup>87</sup> Bjørn Bandlien, *Å finne den rette: Kjærlighet, individ og samfunn i norrøn middelalder* (Oslo: Norske Historiske Forening, 2001).

<sup>88</sup> Kari Ellen Gade, 'Penile Puns: Personal Names and Phallic Symbols in Skaldic Poetry', in *Essays in Medieval Studies: Proceedings of the Illinois Medieval Association* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), pp. 57-67 (p. 58).

<sup>89</sup> Judith Jesch, *Ships and Men in the Late Viking Age: The Vocabulary of Runic Inscriptions and Skaldic Verse* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2001).

<sup>90</sup> Judy Quinn, 'Eddu list: The Emergence of Skaldic Pedagogy in Medieval Iceland', *alvíssmál*, 4 (1994), 69-72.

century Norway,<sup>91</sup> and Russell Poole discusses the ‘conversion verses’ of Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld and how they ‘explore the situation of a catechumen at baptism, where the liturgy demands that an affirmation of belief in Christianity be complemented with a renunciation of the heathen gods’.<sup>92</sup>

Another area of skaldic studies which has seen an upsurge in interest is a re-examination of skaldic verse in the prose context in which it has mostly been preserved. This was the subject of a chapter by Joseph Harris in 1997, for example, and of Heather O’Donoghue’s book *Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative*, which explores the interplay between verse and prose in a number of Icelandic sagas.<sup>93</sup>

In 2002 John Lindow made the following complaint regarding the scarcity of available material on the interpretation of skaldic poetry:

The case is all but hopeless for skaldic poetry. There are, to be sure, the commentaries accompanying Turville-Petre’s and Hollander’s translations, but the texts presented are very limited. There are also, of course, monographic treatments of various important skaldic poems, but these texts are so difficult that such treatments tend generally to limit themselves to comment on language and grammar rather than on content.<sup>94</sup>

As we have noted above with regards to the Norse Muse project, scholars are increasingly interested in the contemporaneous and post-medieval reception of Old Norse literature, which, as we shall see in the following chapter, has given rise to a number of studies on translations of Icelandic sagas. Unfortunately, comparable research on translations of skaldic poetry is practically non-existent. Considering the lack of interpretative commentary on skaldic verses, it seems somewhat strange that such detailed readings as translations provide have been so entirely neglected. As I hope the central chapters of this thesis will show, comparative analyses of translations (which in themselves are the most detailed commentary on their sources) and their source texts can provide new insights into the beauty and complexity of skaldic poetry, as well as revealing a wealth of information on Old Norse culture and society.

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<sup>91</sup> Bjarne Fidjestøl, ‘Skaldic Poetry and the Conversion: With Some Reflections on Literary Form as a Source of Historical Information’, in *Selected Papers* (see Haugen, 1997), pp. 133-50.

<sup>92</sup> Russell Poole, ‘The “Conversion Verses” of Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld’, *Maal og Minne*, 1 (2002), 15-37 (p. 15).

<sup>93</sup> Joseph Harris, ‘The Prosimetrum of Icelandic Saga and some Relatives’, in *Prosimetrum: Crosscultural Perspectives on Narrative in Prose and Verse*, ed. by Joseph Harris and Karl Reichl (Woodbridge: Brewer, 1997), pp. 131-64; Heather O’Donoghue, *Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>94</sup> John Lindow, *Norse Mythology: A Guide to Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 335.



## CHAPTER TWO

### READING TRANSLATIONS OF SKALDIC POETRY IN A POSTCOLONIAL CONTEXT

In this chapter I aim to position my research at a point where the disciplines of Medieval Studies/Old Norse Studies, Translation Studies and Postcolonial Studies converge, showing how my work contributes to the small but growing number of studies that encompass these fields. At first glance these three areas may not seem to share much common ground, but it was in fact the same developments in contemporary literary theory (particularly structuralist and post-structuralist theory) that had led to the emergence of translation theory and postcolonial theory in the 1980s, which also laid the basis for the theoretical ‘turn’ Medieval Studies took in the form of the ‘New Philology’ as we shall see below. A new-found interest in the reception of medieval texts, not only in the age in which they were produced, but also in a post-medieval context, consequently led scholars to query and explore the role translations of medieval literature played in its reception, and it was at this point that Medieval Studies and Translation Studies began to overlap. At around the same time (i.e. in the early 1990s), Translation Studies and Postcolonial Studies were both gradually moving towards the realisation (albeit from quite different perspectives) that ‘translation stands as one of the most significant means by which one culture represents another’ and can therefore be ‘particularly instructive for an understanding of the relations between colonial powers and their colonies’.<sup>1</sup>

As Maria Tymoczko demonstrates in her study of modern translations of medieval Irish texts (which we shall discuss further below), the scope of postcolonial literature does not have to be restricted to writings from Africa, the Indian sub-continent or South America, but can be expanded to include European ex-colonies such as Ireland. By examining Norwegian and Spanish translations, I analyse the less obvious but equally complex relationships between the target cultures and the source culture as

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<sup>1</sup> Maria Tymoczko, *Translation in a Postcolonial Context: Early Irish Literature in English Translation* (Manchester: St Jerome, 1999), pp. 17-18.



reflected in the poetry, with the aim of evaluating the extent to which, through a process of translation (or rewriting), skaldic poetry has been appropriated and manipulated in such a way as to help construct ideas of national identity. I argue that one strategy employed by ex-colonial powers to accommodate the notion that another culture or literary tradition is equal or superior to their own is by appropriating it through what I call ‘retrospective colonization’.

The cultural and historical context in which the Norwegian and Spanish translations were produced will be examined in more depth in chapter 3. In the pages that follow, I will provide a comprehensive overview of the theories that frame my discussion, incorporating a review of translation studies on Icelandic and medieval literature comparable to my own. While the number of case-studies on translations of Icelandic sagas is relatively plentiful, my study forms part of what is, as yet, a very limited number of works which analyse translations of skaldic poetry in any way, and is the only one (to my knowledge) which employs a framework of investigation based on postcolonial translation theory.

*The New Philology and the Post-medieval Reception of Old Norse Literature* ↻

In his epistle on the art of printing, father Holberg also touches upon, with his vivid mind, the profession of the philologist. “If this science – he writes – (i.e. the art of printing) had been older, we would have had old texts in correct form, and learned men would have been spared the slavish task of unravelling copyist errors, and of collating all written exemplars, in order to find a tolerably correct text; I say tolerably, since despite all the effort applied and all variant readings no absolute certainty can be acquired” (Epistola III).<sup>2</sup>

Hallvard Lie cites Ludvig Holberg’s remarks in the introduction to his 1946 article on the editing of *Sonatorrek*. He is sympathetic to the dismay these comments might evoke on the part of ‘den hederlige fagfilolog’ (the honest professional philologist). What philologist would not feel some discomfort at hearing his life’s work referred to dismissively as ‘Trældoms Arbejde’ (slave labour)? Especially one who has relished the

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<sup>2</sup> Hallvard Lie, ‘Sonatorrek str. 1-4’, *ANF*, 61 (1946), 182-207 (p. 182): ‘I sin epistel om boktrykkerkunsten streifer fader Holberg med sin friske tanke også det filologiske yrke. “Hvis dette Videnskab – skriver han – (sc. Bogtrykkerkonsten) havde været ældere, havde vi haft gamle skrifter *correcte*, og lærde Mænd havde været forskaanede for det Trældoms Arbejde at udleede Copiist-Fejl, og at *conferere* alle skrevne Exemplarier sammen, for nogenleedes at finde den rette Text: Jeg siger nogenleedes, saasom efter all anvendet Umage og alle Variantes Lectiones ingen ret Vished kand erhverves”. Usually referred to as a ‘Dano-Norwegian’ writer, Ludvig Holberg was born in Bergen but like many of his compatriots, attended university in Copenhagen, the city where he spent most of his adult life.

quiet, pleasant hours spent poring over corrupt texts ‘while the intellect, happily stretched, busied itself in a flock of variants’ and who has felt a thrill of victory when suddenly ‘the penny dropped [lit. the spark caught] and the copyist mistake became clear’.<sup>3</sup> To wish the copyist errors away, Lie acknowledges, would be to remove the basis for the philologist’s very existence, although it is a sacrifice he would gladly make, it seems, if the reward were an error-free, authentic text of *Sonatorrek*. However, although Lie and Holberg might have disagreed on the delights of philological detective work, they certainly both saw the painstaking labour of the philologist as a means to an end and not as an end in itself.

This positivistic approach, which had characterised philological activity on European medieval literature since the nineteenth century, remained unchallenged until the emergence in the late 1980s of what became known as the ‘New Philology’.<sup>4</sup> In what was to become one of the most emblematic publications of this movement, *Eloge de la variante*, Bernard Cerquiglini avowed that the variability of manuscripts was a cause for celebration, not exasperation:

Now, medieval writing does not produce variants; it is variance. The endless rewriting to which medieval textuality is subjected, the joyful appropriation of which it is the object, invites us to make a powerful hypothesis: the variant is never punctual [i.e. precise].<sup>5</sup>

Influenced by developments in contemporary literary theory, the New Philologists suggested new lines of investigation for the discipline of Medieval Studies, including an interrogation of the framework of enquiry itself. Scholars began to question the premises for the establishment of Medieval Studies and the extent to which that was determined by the socio-political context from which it emerged.

The way in which medieval writings function/ed in their receiving cultures has also come under increasing scrutiny lately, and research into the post-medieval reception of Old Norse-Icelandic literature has resulted in a considerable number of publications and research projects on the topic. ‘The Norse Muse’, for example, was an international research project instituted in 1989 and mostly funded by the Joint Committee of the

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<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 182: ‘mens tanken, lykkelig spent, syslet omkring i variantenes flokk’; ‘gnisten tentes [lit. the spark caught] og gjorde Copiist-Fejlen klar’.

<sup>4</sup> In 1990, *Speculum*, a journal for Medieval Studies, devoted a special issue to ‘The New Philology’.

<sup>5</sup> Bernard Cerquiglini, *In Praise of the Variant: A Critical History of Philology*, trans. by Betsy Wing (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), pp. 77-78. Bernard Cerquiglini, *Eloge de la variante* (Paris: Seuil, 1989), p. 111: ‘Or l’écriture médiévale ne produit pas de variantes, elle est variance. La réécriture incessante à laquelle est soumise la textualité médiévale, l’appropriation joyeuse dont elle est l’objet, nous invitent à faire une hypothèse forte: la variante n’est jamais ponctuelle’.



Nordic Research Councils for the Humanities.<sup>6</sup> The principal aim of the project, starting with the idea of the ‘Nordic renaissance’ introduced by the Swedish literary historian Anton Blanck in 1911, was to conduct an investigation into the reception of Old Norse poetics from the Middle Ages to the present day. In their report on the results of ‘The Norse Muse’ project,<sup>7</sup> Margaret Clunies Ross and Lars Lönnroth broadly outline some general conclusions the collective research has produced, and provide a brief stage-by-stage summary of the reception history. They reject the idea that Old Norse poetics was ‘rediscovered’ by the Nordic renaissance movement of the eighteenth century; in Iceland, and later Scandinavia, they argue, Old Norse literature ‘remained an active force’ from the Middle Ages on. The second major observation highlighted by the project is that the reception of Old Norse poetics, or ‘Eddas’, depended on the function of this literature as determined by the various writers who made it available in editions or translations, or ‘rewritings’, as the translation scholar André Lefevere might call them. As we will see in the next section of this chapter, the analysis of the function of ‘rewritings’ in their target cultures is a key concern in modern translation theory, but the fact that Ole Worm’s *Literatura runica*, for example, was a translation, and that the revival of interest in this literature which began in the Nordic countries in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and rapidly spread throughout the rest of northern Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, was largely facilitated by translations of Icelandic sagas and the ‘Eddas’ (both in Latin and the vernacular) is not over-emphasized in ‘The Norse Muse’ project. While it is fair to say that a criticism and appreciation of Old

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<sup>6</sup> Nordiska samarbetsnämnden för humanistisk forskning.

<sup>7</sup> Margaret Clunies Ross and Lars Lönnroth, ‘The Norse Muse: Report from an International Research Project’, *alvíssmál*, 9 (1999) 3-28. The project resulted in numerous books, articles and conference papers, many of which are detailed in this report. See for example: *Northern Antiquity: The Post-Medieval Reception of Edda and Saga*, ed. by Andrew Wawn (Enfield Lock, Middlesex: Hisarlik Press, 1994) – a collection of essays, partly based on papers read at the Eighth International Saga Conference in Gothenburg; Lars Lönnroth, *Skaldemjödet i berget: Essayer om fornisländsk ordkonst och dess återanvändning i nutiden* (Stockholm: Atlantis, 1996) – a collection of nine essays about Old Icelandic poetry and the way this poetry was later used and interpreted in the Scandinavian tradition. The last five essays in particular were produced within the project or are related to its main theme; Mats Malm, *Minervas äpple: Om diktsyn, tolkning och bildspråk inom nordisk göticism*, Ph.D. diss., Göteborgs universitet (Stockholm: Symposion, 1996) – a dissertation, closely related to the project, about central problems of poetics within the Nordic Gothicism movement of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries; *Gudamjöður og arnarleir: Safn ritgerða um eddulist*, ed. by Sverrir Tómasson (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 1996) – a collection of essays, produced within the project, about the reception and literary use of *Snorra Edda* in Iceland from the thirteenth to the nineteenth century, including contributions by Sverrir Tómasson, Margrét Eggertsdóttir, Viðar Hreinsson, Bergljót Kristjánsdóttir, Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir, and Sveinn Yngvi Egilsson; Margaret Clunies Ross, *The Norse Muse in Britain, 1750–1820*, Hesperides, Letterature e culture occidentali, vol. 9 (Trieste: Edizioni Parnasso, 1998) – produced as part of the project, this book treats the reception of Old Norse poetry and poetics in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain; Gerd Wolfgang Weber *Mythos und Geschichte: Sechs Essays zur Geschichtsmithologie Skandinaviens in Mittelalter und Neuzeit*, Hesperides, Letterature e culture occidentali, vol. 10 (Trieste: Edizioni Parnasso, 2001) – this book is based partly on work done for the project.

Norse literature continued in an unbroken tradition in Iceland, this could not have been the case in other countries except through the medium of translation. Indeed, the very act of translating literature into modern Swedish, Danish and later Norwegian paradoxically marked the difference between these languages and their ancient literary heritage even as the translators sought to disavow it. Even in a pre-nationalistic era, Worm's work was a response to the Swedish 'cultural colonialism' of the runic monuments, and the principal agenda behind his translation was 'to demonstrate to the learned world that the runes and the Old Norse poetic language were of Danish rather than Swedish origin, thus bearing witness to the ancient literary culture of Denmark'.<sup>8</sup>

Clunies Ross and Lönnroth divide the reception history of Old Norse poetics, as researched in the project, into five stages, summarizing the developments that have taken place under the following headings:

1. From *Snorra Edda* to *Laufás Edda* (ca. 1230–1600)
2. The Era of Scandinavian Gothicism and Baroque (ca. 1600–1750)
3. The Nordic Renaissance and Preromanticism (ca. 1750–1800)
4. National Romanticism (ca. 1800–1870)
5. The Decline of National Romanticism (ca. 1870 onwards)

The role of *Snorra Edda* in the tradition of skaldic scholarship is particularly pertinent to this study, as we have seen in the preceding chapter. However, as I have already stressed, as the Icelandic language became more and more distinct from its Scandinavian relatives, scholarship in Old Norse literature was increasingly only possible outside Iceland through translation. In chapter 3 we shall see how even by the sixteenth century, texts such as *Heimskringla* had become unintelligible to the average Norwegian and had to be translated. As the movement of Nationalist Romanticism in Europe grew, Swedes, Danes, Norwegians, Germans, and the English in particular, eagerly seized on the texts that they believed contained the treasures of their ancient Germanic heritage and translated them for the masses. The role these translations played in the cultural nationalism of the aforementioned cultures has been well researched in 'The Norse Muse' project and elsewhere, although the focus so far has mostly been on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century texts. An obvious omission in the list above, and one the 'Norse Muse' scholars readily acknowledge, is the relative neglect of the twentieth century in

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<sup>8</sup> Margaret Clunies Ross and Lars Lönnroth, 'The Norse Muse: Report from an International Research Project', p. 11.



their history of reception. Their description of the fate of Old Norse literature in the twentieth century charts its fall from 'high' to 'low' or popular culture (again through translations and rewritings); its appropriation by the 'nationalistic mass movements of northern Europe'; and its exploitation by National Socialists of Germany, with the result that 'the Norse myths and the poetic heritage of the skalds became tainted with racist ideas that made them virtually impossible to use in the leading intellectual and literary circles of Europe after the fall of the Third Reich'.<sup>9</sup> Clunies Ross and Lönnroth also comment on (but perhaps underestimate) the popularity of Old Norse mythology today in the genre of fantasy literature,<sup>10</sup> among New Age sects and various sub-cultures 'hostile to modern civilization' (p. 24). Therefore, while Old Icelandic literature may have ceased to be an influential force in contemporary *belles-lettres*, it has continued to be an inspiration for more popular art forms. In the past twenty years, for example, variants of the musical genre 'Black Metal' such as 'Viking Metal' and 'Troll Metal', whose ideological and lyrical base is greatly influenced by Old Norse lore, have emerged.<sup>11</sup> The popularity of this music (particularly in the Nordic countries, Germany, Britain, the United States and Canada) has in turn led to an increase in interest in Old Norse language and literature amongst its fans. Other activities which have been similarly influenced include role-playing games and computer games.

Popular culture and academia, are the two areas where Old Norse literature has received the most attention in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, a development that is certainly mirrored in the fluctuating fashions of saga translation. Political concerns, literary fashions and tastes change, and as the translation of sagas went from being (generally speaking) an amateur enterprise to becoming a professional one, early translations were deemed unsatisfactory and were replaced, a process which could be repeated several times. *Egils saga*, for instance, has been translated into English a total of

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<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

<sup>10</sup> In chapter 3 we shall see how some Spanish translations of Icelandic sagas have been marketed by their publishers as fantasy literature.

<sup>11</sup> The Norwegian band 'Einherjer' is a typical example. The song 'Einherjer' on their 1996 Album 'Aurora Borealis' includes the lyrics: 'Fra sin sjels side han vandret / Over heden han gikk / Med valkyriene ved sin side / Til Valhall der han ære fikk / Inn i haller av sten han entret / Her inne bak livets speil / Tyr trådte frem og tok ham med / For å lære ham opp og en einherjer han ble...' (From his soul's side he went / He departed from this life / With valkyries by his side / To Valhalla where he was honoured / Into halls of stone he entered / Inside here behind the mirror of life / Tyr stepped forth and took him away / to train him and an 'einherjer' he became...). *Einherjer*, a Norwegian translation of Icelandic *einherjar*, is actually the plural form of the noun. The *einherjar* were the dead warriors who were chosen from the battlefield by the valkyries and brought to reside with Óðinn in Valhöll.

six times between 1893 and 1997;<sup>12</sup> *Njáls saga*, a total of four times between 1861 and 1997;<sup>13</sup> *Laxdæla saga*, five times between 1899 and 1997;<sup>14</sup> and *Völsunga saga*, as we shall see, has been rendered into English five times between 1870 and 1990. The vast majority of Norwegian translations of sagas were also carried out within this time frame, and the translation of Old Norse literature into Spanish began only twenty-five years ago. The period of the ‘The Decline of National Romanticism (ca. 1870 onwards)’ as delineated by Clunies Ross and Lönnroth clearly coincides with ‘The Rise of the Translation’, and the study of translations therefore, as part of the reception process of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, is one of the areas where (as the authors of the report themselves acknowledge) ‘much research remains to be done’.<sup>15</sup>

This process had, in fact, already begun as part of the research of ‘The Norse Muse’ project.<sup>16</sup> In 1994, a comparative case study of translations of an Icelandic saga appeared in the form of a chapter in *Northern Antiquity* edited by Andrew Wawn. This chapter, ‘The English Translations of *Völsunga Saga*’, by John Kennedy, compares five English-language translations of *Völsunga saga*, from William Morris and Eiríkur Magnússon’s version in 1870 to the most recent by Jesse Byock published in 1990. Identifying four types of passage (narrative, descriptive, direct speech, and skaldic verse), Kennedy contrasts examples from each of the five translations, evaluating them according to accuracy, style (archaic/modern, free/literal) and scholarly qualities. He clearly favours Byock’s translation over the others as the one which has most successfully ‘captured the spirit’ of the Icelandic text but does not elaborate on what this version tells us about the receiving culture – or not as much as his own statement might lead us to expect: ‘if a text is significant enough to have been translated several times

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<sup>12</sup> The first complete translation available to English speakers was in that of W.C. Green in 1893, followed by E.R. Eddison’s version of 1930, and those of Gwyn Jones in 1960, Christine Fell in 1975, Pálsson and Edwards in 1976 (William Morris’s partial translation was published in 1936), and Bernard Scudder in 1997. For a descriptive analysis of these translations see S.V.P. Capildeo, ‘Reading *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*. Saga, Paratext, Translations’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 2000) and Judith Jesch’s entry on *Egils saga* in *Encyclopedia of Literary Translation into English, Vol. 1*, ed. by Olive Classe (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2000), pp. 398-99.

<sup>13</sup> See Robert Cook, ‘On Translating Sagas’, *Gripla*, 13 (2002), 107-45.

<sup>14</sup> For a discussion of the first four translations see Keneva Kunz, *Retellers of Tales: An Evaluation of English Translations of *Laxdæla saga**, *Studia Islandica*, 51 (Reykjavík: Bókmenntafræðistofnun Háskóla Íslands, 1994).

<sup>15</sup> ‘The Norse Muse: Report from an International Research Project’, p. 24.

<sup>16</sup> See, however, Egil Eiken Johnsen’s comparative case study of three early Norwegian saga-translations, *Sagaspråk og stil: En undersøkelse av språk og stil i de tre eldste norske sagaoversettelser* (Oslo: Gyldendahl, 1942). My research has been mostly limited to English, Norwegian and Spanish language publications, but as far as I am aware, this is the earliest work of its kind. Johnsen’s aim is to prove by a detailed comparative analysis that these sixteenth-century renderings are in Norwegian and not Danish. This text is dealt with more thoroughly in the next chapter.



into a certain language over an extended time span, comparison of the translations may reveal something of the varying reception of the text in the cultural history of the users of that target language'.<sup>17</sup> Kennedy's partiality to Byock's translation is predictable according to André Lefevere's theory of the role the dominant poetics of a receiving culture play in determining the appearance of a translation.<sup>18</sup> Lefevere claims that the success of a translation is largely dependent on the extent to which the poetics of that translation is compatible with the literary system of the receiving culture. Thus while it is perfectly natural that Kennedy should have a preference among the five translations he surveys, we should be aware that the basis for his decision is not objective, but rather reflects his personal bias about how a saga should read within the literary norms of the day. Despite locating his work in 'the study of translations', Kennedy makes no direct reference to Translation Studies or modern translation theory, although his methodology does correspond to some extent with the models of Descriptive Translation Studies, which we shall examine below.

Keneva Kunz, on the other hand, in her book-length analysis of four English language translations of *Laxdæla saga*, published in the same year as *Northern Antiquity*, is quite explicit about her use of 'criteria derived from modern translation theory'.<sup>19</sup> Like Kennedy, Kunz contrasts the translations with the source text, and although she too wishes to attempt to evaluate the translations' respective quality, her purpose is prescriptive rather than descriptive. She is not concerned with what comparisons of the translations can reveal about the source-cultures but rather with ascertaining 'the functional similarities of specific language features presented by the two texts' (p. 198). Her 'guiding principle for assessment is a functionalist one' because she believes that the demand for functional adequacy is more modest and less likely to disappoint than a demand for equivalence,<sup>20</sup> and her overall aim is to suggest ways of improving saga translation: 'one of the claims made in support of translation criticism is that it can be

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<sup>17</sup> John Kennedy, 'The English Translations of *Völsunga Saga*', in *Northern Antiquity* (see Wawn, 1994), pp. 284-303 (p. 285). See also John Kennedy, *Translating the Sagas: Two Hundred Years of Challenge and Response*, Making the Middle Ages 5, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007).

<sup>18</sup> André Lefevere, *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* (London: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>19</sup> Keneva Kunz, *Retellers of Tales: An Evaluation of English Translations of 'Laxdæla saga'*, *Studia Islandica*, 51 (Reykjavík: Bókmenntafræðistofnun Háskóla Íslands, 1994), p. 9.

<sup>20</sup> This approach is in line with the 'skopos' theory of Reiss and Vermeer which is defined by Ian Mason as follows: 'the function of the translated text, including the institutional factors surrounding the initiation of the translation, is a crucial determinant of translator's decisions. In this functional view of translation, any notion of equivalence between a source text and a target text is subordinate to the *skopos*, or purpose which the target text is intended to fulfill. Adequacy with regard to *skopos* then replaces equivalence as the standard for judging translations'. Ian Mason, 'Communicative/functional approaches', *Encyclopaedia of Translation Studies*, ed. by Mona Baker (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 29-33 (p. 32).

used to justify demands for higher quality in translation. It is hoped that the investigation here has indicated numerous areas of saga translation where improvement is both possible and necessary, and others where it would be at least desirable' (p. 205).

S.V.P. Capildeo's unpublished doctoral thesis 'Reading *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*. Saga, Paratext, Translations' (2000) also consists of a comparative analysis of six English language translations. Her general concern, as she states in her abstract, is with 'how a set of different texts, all titled with various English or Icelandic versions of *Egils saga*, exists, can be interrelated, and may be read,' and the theoretical basis for her comparisons principally lies in two areas of theory.<sup>21</sup> Firstly, she analyses the six English translations of *Egils saga* together with their Icelandic source texts, in terms of *paratext*, a concept developed by Gérard Genette;<sup>22</sup> the second part of her analysis uses both traditional translation criticism, as well as methods established by Translation Studies scholars such as Susan Bassnett. Part of Capildeo's argument involves challenging the traditional 'direction of the vector' between source text and target text, pointing out that the target texts operate 'in some senses' as source texts for the source texts. In other words, the interest inspired in the reader by the target text may direct him or her back to the source text, which in this case would entail learning Old Icelandic. However, while it is certainly true that the target text can be the source of inspiration or activity for a reader, it would only become a 'source text' according to the terminology of Literary Translation Studies (see below) if it were the source upon which a 'rewriting', such as a poem, play, song, or painting, were based. As we shall see below, the premise of target-oriented investigations is that the target text is neither more nor less than 'the text' as it functions in the receptor culture, independently of the source text. Translation Studies scholars consciously eschew the terms 'original text' and 'translated text' which they feel emphasise the interdependency and the symbiotic nature of their relationship to the disadvantage of translations. While of course it is true that a translation is what engenders an original, in the sense that a text is never seen as an original until it is translated or rewritten, and that a translation cannot come into existence (except as a pseudo-translation) unless there is a text to translate, the terms 'original' and 'translation' are avoided because they imply a hierarchical relationship in which the original text is privileged, and translation is seen as a derivative, second-class activity. Even so,

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<sup>21</sup> S.V.P. Capildeo, 'Reading *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*. Saga, Paratext, Translations' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 2000).

<sup>22</sup> See Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge University Press, 1997).



Capildeo's point perhaps identifies a flaw in the conventional usage of the terms 'source text' and 'target text' in Translation Studies – a pair of terms that can be more easily misread than 'original text' and 'translated text'.

While Kunz, Kennedy and Capildeo adopt a strategy of evaluating saga translations from a diachronic, monolingual point of view, Jón Karl Helgason's publication *The Rewriting of Njáls Saga: Translation Politics and the Icelandic Sagas* (1999), like my own study, takes a synchronic, cross-cultural approach.<sup>23</sup> Written in response to the Belgian theorist André Lefevere's challenge that the study of 'rewriting' ought not to be neglected, in a series of six case studies, Helgason focuses on the variable constraints and influences under which the medieval text of *Njáls saga* was translated or edited and hence 'rewritten' in Britain, the United States, Denmark, Norway and Iceland in the period between 1861 and 1945. Unlike Kunz, Kennedy, Capildeo, and myself, Helgason does not provide close textual comparisons, focusing instead on the role the translations played in the cultural nationalism of the above-named countries. He builds on the scholarship not only of Translation Studies but also takes into account the work of postcolonial scholars such as Edward Said. Of particular relevance to this thesis is Helgason's fifth chapter, 'Norwegian Liberation: Language and Nationality', which describes the way in which translations of *Njáls saga* have reflected the linguistic politics of a new nation trying to shake off its Danish colonial heritage.

Although all belong within the field of Literary Translation Studies, the case-studies discussed above display a variety of quite different approaches in their examinations of saga translations, but what is striking is that in all cases the emphasis is almost exclusively on translations of prose texts, largely ignoring the skaldic stanzas embedded in them (apart from Kennedy's examination of one skaldic stanza). Kunz, for example, focuses entirely on the prose text of *Laxdæla saga*, summarily dismissing the significance of the skaldic poetry: 'the saga text contains only four single verses of the simplest sort, thus all but eliminating *problems roused by the presence of such elements* and their significance for the narrative [my emphasis]; in this case they do not affect to any significant degree the modern reader's comprehension of the story'.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, she does not hesitate (somewhat contradictorily) later to condemn translators for their neglect of other 'key features' of saga-narrative, such as style and syntax, a neglect which she attributes to 'a lack of appreciation on the part of the translators as to the

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<sup>23</sup> Jón Karl Helgason, *The Rewriting of 'Njáls Saga': Translation, Politics and Icelandic Sagas*, Topics in Translation, 16 (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1999).

<sup>24</sup> *Retellers of Tales*, p. 65.

expressive potential and significance of syntax'.<sup>25</sup> This stance is not unusual: despite widespread recognition of prosimetrum as the genre in which the majority of the sagas are written, skaldic poetry is not (or was not until recently) generally seen as an integral or 'key' constituent in the saga-narrative and it is unproblematic, it seems, to separate the *lausavísur* from the prose in otherwise comprehensive analyses.<sup>26</sup> In the case of *Laxdæla saga*, in which there are only four complete stanzas, this is perhaps comprehensible, but in *Egils saga* which has a total 132 stanzas, the poetry is crucial to an understanding of the saga as a whole.

Although skaldic verse forms part of the prosimetrum of the Icelandic sagas it does of course constitute a genre in itself, the nature of which I described in the previous chapter and, admittedly, an analysis of translations of skaldic poetry requires a different set of criteria to one of prose. The reason why analyses of translations of skaldic poetry have been neglected is to a large extent the traditional lack of interest in this genre in general, which we have discussed at length in chapter 1. In his article 'The Translation of Skaldic Poetry', one of a very small number of tracts which deal exclusively with this subject, Lee M. Hollander readily acknowledges his disengagement from skaldic poetry which he viewed as an annoying hindrance to his reading of the sagas.

My first acquaintance with Icelandic literature began with an absorbed reading of the sagas translated by William Morris and Magnússon in their Saga Library; and I can very well remember and understand, why I consistently skipped the skaldic verses, which so often and annoyingly broke the smooth flow of those unsurpassed narratives with words that made little sense and added nothing to the story. Now, I have not the least doubt that this impression is shared by most readers of the sagas – the amazing Icelanders excepted. What is more, alas! this unconscious verdict is likely to stand: skaldic poetry is perhaps the most artificial verse ever composed by man, and also the most time-bound. In its more typical efforts it is so obscure that justifiable doubts may be entertained whether at the very time it was composed it was readily grasped by persons who did not themselves have a high degree of training in the art; though we may concede as likely that in those simpler times – so infinitely less pulled hither and yon by the insistent distractions and seductions of modern times – that in those times a considerable proportion were so trained.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, p. 205.

<sup>26</sup> See for example Andrea van Arkel-de Leeuw van Weenen, *Möðruvallabók AM 132 Fol. Volume 1: Index and Concordance* (Leiden: Brill, 1987), p. xli: 'The text covered in the index is the whole of the original *Möðruvallabók* with the exception of the chapter headings, *verses* [my emphasis] and dittographs'. In volume 2 of the transcribed text, however, she does include the text of the verses and the chapter headings.

<sup>27</sup> Lee M. Hollander, 'The Translation of Skaldic Poetry', *Scandinavian Studies*, 18 (1945), 233-40 (p. 234). Hollander does not consider that the problem might have been Morris's esoteric translations of the poetry.



Hollander also raises an obvious but important issue here on the issue of reading and understanding skaldic poetry, namely that it requires a certain level of proficiency and special training. This is a point upon which there is a great deal of consensus among scholars of Old Norse prose and poetry. Kunz, for example, states that ‘comparisons of translations with the original text reveal the absolute necessity of a very high level of expertise on the behalf of the translator if he is to come anywhere near to representing the features of the original’;<sup>28</sup> similarly, Einar Haugen claims that ‘it requires true scholarship and deep devotion to produce good English versions of the Eddas and the sagas, not to speak of the tortured skaldic verse’.<sup>29</sup> While these comments refer specifically to the task of the translator, they could be equally well applied to the task of analysing translations. A comparison of a translation of a skaldic stanza with its source text necessitates a thorough understanding of the workings of skaldic poetry in order to appreciate fully the translator’s treatment of it.

Prefaces to translations, reviews, and the occasional article make up a reasonably substantial body of work on the subject of how to translate Old Icelandic literature. Specific references to the translation of skaldic poetry are somewhat more rare, however, and tend to be of the prescriptive variety. One exception is Margaret Clunies Ross’s edition and commentary on Thomas Percy’s eighteenth-century anthology of Old Icelandic verse, *Five Pieces of Runic Poetry*.<sup>30</sup> Like John Kennedy’s chapter on *Völsunga saga*, Clunies Ross’s study grew out of reception theory rather than translation theory, although again her work fits the pattern of a typical descriptive translation study. For instance, she evaluates the effect Percy’s volume had on British culture and society when it first appeared in 1763 and (along with Thomas Gray’s translations) ‘triggered a fashion in British literary circles for Old Norse poetry’ (p. 2).<sup>31</sup> This ‘new edition’ not only provides a fascinating account of the reception of Percy’s translations, it also details the process which shaped its outcome, such as the negotiation of the publishing contract, other economical, familial and social pressures Percy was under, and the translation procedure itself, which is particularly apparent in some draft translations of other poems preserved in a scrapbook of his notes. Clunies Ross believes that ‘there is considerable value in publishing the translations in his notebook at the present time,

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<sup>28</sup> *Retellers of Tales*, p. 198.

<sup>29</sup> Einar Haugen, ‘On Translating from the Scandinavian’, in *Old Norse Literature and Mythology: A Symposium*, ed. by Edgar C. Polomé (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969), pp. 3-18 (p. 6).

<sup>30</sup> Margaret Clunies Ross, *The Old Norse Poetic Translations of Thomas Percy: A New Edition and Commentary, Making the Middle Ages*, 4 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001).

<sup>31</sup> Clunies Ross discusses the intellectual and literary background to all these works in *The Norse Muse in Britain, 1750-1820*, *Hesperides, letteratura e culture occidentali*, vol. 9 (Trieste: Parnasso, 1998).

when scholars are preparing a new edition of the corpus of skaldic poetry and there is so much interest in the reception of Old Norse literature in Britain and other parts of Europe' (p. 5).

In her 'Note on the Translation of Skaldic Verse' (pp. xi-xiii), Clunies Ross briefly mentions some of the problems encountered by Percy, such as, in the first place, being able to understand a kenning, and in the second, the oft-cited dilemma of being able 'to translate the poetry so that the non-specialist reader who lacked a knowledge of Norse mythology and early Scandinavian culture, could understand what was meant without being overwhelmed with notes' (p. xii). Percy acknowledged that he had to compromise between providing too much additional information and at the same time preserving some of its more authentic features. In a letter to his friend William Shenstone he wrote: "you will be disgusted to see it so encumbered with Notes; Yet some are unavoidable, as the Piece would be unintelligible without them" (p. 7).

In the section 'Annotated facsimile of the 1763 edition of *Five Pieces of Runic Poetry*', Clunies Ross's detailed notes contrast Percy's translations with his main (Latin) sources and with the original Icelandic text, although she does not supply either source in full, preferring only to quote the relevant words or phrases.<sup>32</sup> The discrepancies between these sources and Percy's text reveal his authorial presence, but Clunies Ross refrains from extensive analysis of Percy's choices, limiting her observations to brief comments such as 'this curious expression' (p. 149). By not exploiting the palimpsestic quality of Percy's translation, Clunies Ross has missed an opportunity to gain increased insight into the dynamics of the translation process. As I have previously stated, this is an area which I prioritise in my own comparative analysis.

Another publication worth mentioning in this context is Karsten Friis-Jensen's account of *Saxo Grammaticus as Latin Poet*. Friis-Jensen's work describes the way in which this thirteenth-century Danish historian used material from Scandinavian, Medieval Latin and classical sources to create a 'powerful and convincing synthesis'.<sup>33</sup> This work is, of necessity, almost entirely target-oriented. Indeed, the scarcity of original sources for Saxo's translations, especially the vernacular sources, has led many scholars to

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<sup>32</sup> Percy's principal sources for this selection of Old Norse Poetry were: Olaus Verelius's 1672 edition of *Hervarar Saga på Gammal Götska*, Thomas Bartholin's *Antiquitates Danicae*, published in Copenhagen in 1689; George Hickes's *Thesaurus* (1703-05); Ole Worm's *Literatura Runica* (1636), his source for *The Ransome of Egill the Skald*; and Johan Peringskiöld's edition of Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla* (1697).

<sup>33</sup> Karsten Friis-Jensen, *Saxo Grammaticus as Latin Poet* (Rome: L'erma di bretscheider, 1987), p. 176.



question the existence of these sources at all.<sup>34</sup> However, in a few cases, fragments of the originals do exist, and in the final chapter of his work, ‘Saxo the Translator, Stylist, and Metrician’, Friis-Jensen provides a comparative analysis between Saxo’s Latin translation and extant vernacular source-texts, as in the following example:

Biarkamál en fornu 2, 4-8

Vekka yðr at víni  
né at vífs rúnum,  
heldr vekk yðr at hqrdum  
Hildar leiki

*I do not wake you to wine nor to dalliance with women, I wake you, on the contrary, to Hild’s hard game.*

Saxo 53, 18-23 (Bj. Vv. 7-12)

Non ego uirgineos cognoscere ludos  
Nec teneras tractare genas aut dulcia nuptis  
Oscula conferre et tenues astringere mammas,  
Non liquidum captare merum tenerumue fricare  
Femen et in niueos oculum iactare lacertos.  
Euoco uos ad amara magis certamina Martis.

*I do not ask you to learn to sport with young girls and stroke their tender cheeks, or give a bride sweet kisses and squeeze her delicate breasts, drinking bright wine as you rub your hand on her smooth thigh and cast your glance at her snow-white shoulders. I rouse you, on the contrary, to Mars’s bitter contests.<sup>35</sup>*

Friis-Jensen provides a detailed analysis of Saxo’s translation technique, which he feels responds to the spirit if not the letter of the original. Saxo’s elaborate expansion of the first two lines followed by his close rendering of the second pair, serves to emphasise the contrast between love-making and war. In his Latin version Saxo retains some of the original features of the Icelandic text such as the kenning for war (*hqrdum Hildar leiki*, ‘Hildr’s hard game’), although he replaces the valkyrie Hildr with the Roman god Mars, and succeeds in representing the alliteration of the Norse text as ‘a free but pervasive recurrence of the sounds *a* and *m*’ (p. 153); the metres Saxo uses, however, are classical ones which bear no resemblance to Germanic alliterative verse. The way in which Saxo uses ‘parallelism’ (as in this example), his use of poetic vocabulary and his metrical technique are the three aspects Friis-Jensen chooses to focus on in this chapter. Having analysed the verse corpus in the *Gesta Danorum*, he concludes that we ‘can speak of a poetical language of Saxo’s own, showing strong links with the traditional poetical

<sup>34</sup> Axel Olrik, on the other hand, felt that it was possible to use Saxo’s translation to reconstruct the ‘original’ text of *Bjarkamál*, which he published in his *Danmarks helteedigtning: En oldtidsstudie* (Copenhagen: Gad, 1903-10).

<sup>35</sup> *Saxo Grammaticus as Latin Poet*, p. 152.

language of antiquity, and with clearly marked differences from his prose language' (p. 169).<sup>36</sup> Although it does not refer explicitly to either translation theory or reception theory, this final chapter of *Saxo Grammaticus as Latin Poet* clearly echoes many of their concerns. The fact that, according to Friis-Jensen, 'Saxo was the official literary spokesman of an expanding nation on the periphery of a Europe dominated by a common literary culture' (p. 176), for instance, and was translating his native literary tradition into a relatively high-status language and culture, echoes the dilemma that postcolonial writers sometimes find themselves in when they are forced to write in a modern *koine* such as English, Spanish or French in order to reach a wider audience.

It will be clear to the reader by now that comparative analyses of translations of Old Norse literature by no means constitute a new or a rare phenomenon. Indeed, long before the emergence of 'Translation Studies', scholars of Old Norse were realising the potential of translations to provide valuable information about the context in which they were produced. Egil Eiken Johnsen's study, for instance, used early translations of *Heimskringla* as evidence in his attempt to prove that there had existed a written form of Norwegian that was distinct from Danish as early as the sixteenth century.<sup>37</sup> And Karsten Friis-Jensen's study reveals the attitude of one thirteenth-century Danish scholar to his native literature and Latin tradition. As Old Norse scholars increasingly turn to translation as a locus of cultural enquiry, many, such as Kunz and Helgason, are using recent theories of translation to inform their investigations. In the section that follows I will chart the development of the discipline of Translation Studies, especially with regard to the descriptive approach to literary translation, from its inception in the 1970s to the point in the late 1990s where it begins to converge with Postcolonial Studies and Medieval Studies.

### *Translation Studies: An Evolving Discipline* ∞

Most scholars would agree that Translation Studies was, in effect, founded at the Louvain Colloquium on Literature and Translation in Belgium in 1976. That is not to say that there had previously been no translation scholarship. On the contrary, the methods of translation and the ways of evaluating the quality of translations have been

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<sup>36</sup> This reflects a similar situation in Old Norse prosimetrum.

<sup>37</sup> Egil Eiken Johnsen, *Sagaspråk og stil: En undersøkelse av språk og stil i de tre eldste norske sagaoversettelser* (Oslo: Gyldendahl, 1942). See chapter 3.



discussed since classical times,<sup>38</sup> but it was not until this conference that scholars began to recognize Translation Studies, not as a mere offshoot or branch of another subject such as linguistics, literary theory or comparative literature, but as an independent discipline which deserved to be studied for its own sake. The papers presented at the Louvain conference were collected and published in 1978 under the title *Literature and Translation* and included contributions by scholars now recognized as key specialists in the field.<sup>39</sup> In a brief appendix to this volume, André Lefevere proposed that the name 'Translation Studies' (first suggested by James Holmes in 1972 in his seminal paper 'The Name and Nature of Translation Studies') should be adopted for the discipline 'that concerns itself with the problems raised by the production and description of translations' and that the goal of this new discipline should be to 'produce a comprehensive theory which can also be used as a guideline for the production of translations'.<sup>40</sup>

Two years later, Susan Bassnett-McGuire, one of the original contributors to the Louvain conference and widely seen as a founder of Translation Studies along with André Lefevere, went on to publish *Translation Studies*, a work which is still widely viewed as one of the definitive texts in the field.<sup>41</sup> The aim of this book was to outline the scope of the newly established discipline, to give some indication of the kind of research that had been done up until then, to suggest directions in which further investigation might proceed, and to attempt to formulate a theory of literary translation. In this work, Bassnett laments the slowness with which a theory of translation has emerged in Western Europe and the English-speaking world, a situation she attributes to two factors: the low status traditionally accorded to both translators and translations, and the 'Anglo-Saxon anti-theoretical tradition', although this is a situation which she acknowledges is beginning to change:

Since the early 1960s significant changes have taken place in the field of Translation Studies, with the growing acceptance of the study of linguistics and

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<sup>38</sup> For an account of the history of translation theory see for example, chapter 2: 'History of Translation Theory' in Susan Bassnett-McGuire, *Translation Studies*, rev. edn (London: Routledge, 1988), and *Western Translation Theory: From Herodotus to Nietzsche*, ed. by Douglas Robinson, 2nd edn (Manchester: St Jerome, 2002).

<sup>39</sup> *Literature and Translation: New Perspectives in Literary Studies*, ed. by James S. Holmes, José Lambert & Raymond van den Broeck (Leuven: Acco, 1978). Contributors included Itamar Even-Zohar and Gideon Toury.

<sup>40</sup> André Lefevere, 'Translation Studies: The Goal of the Discipline', in *Literature and Translation*, ed. by James S. Holmes, José Lambert and Raymond van den Broeck (Louvain: ACCO, 1978), pp. 234-35 (p. 234); James Holmes 'The Name and Nature of Translation Studies', in *Translated: Papers on Literary Translation and Translation Studies*, ed. by James Holmes, 2nd edn (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988), pp. 67-80.

<sup>41</sup> Bassnett-McGuire, Susan, *Translation Studies* (London: Methuen, 1980).

stylistics within literary criticism that has led to developments in critical methodology and also with the rediscovery of the work of the Russian Formalist Circle. The most important advances in Translation Studies in the twentieth century derive from the groundwork done by groups in Russia in the 1920s and subsequently by the Prague Linguistic Circle and its disciples. Vološinov's work on Marxism and philosophy, Mukařovský's on the semiotics of art, Jakobson, Prochchazka and Levý on translation have all established new criteria for the founding of a theory of translation and have shown that, far from being a dilettante pursuit accessible to anyone with a minimal knowledge of another language, translation is, as Randolph Quirk puts it, 'one of the most difficult tasks that a writer can take upon himself'.<sup>42</sup>

The recognition that translation is a high- rather than low-status activity, and that a translation is an original text with its own intrinsic value, has resulted in a shift in interest from evaluating the quality, or fidelity, of translations to analysing and understanding the process or processes undertaken in the act of translation. Furthermore, the growing acceptance of the theory that language is culturally bound (as argued by the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis), and therefore incapable of perfectly representing the world, or in this case the original text, clearly carries implications for a translator. A 'very high level of expertise' in a language is not enough; a translator must also be aware of the cultural context of the text s/he is translating, and of the cultural context of the language into which s/he is translating. While this might be relatively unproblematic for the translation of a modern French novel into another European language, it poses a real challenge to the translator of a medieval text because the translator can only ever have a partial knowledge of the source culture.

Translation and Linguistics is one of four categories into which Bassnett divides the field, the others being: History of Translation; Translation in the Target Language (TL) culture; and Translation and Poetics. The first two categories examine the historical and cultural context in which a translated text is situated and how it operates in the TL system. In the last-named category, which is dealt with in the third section of her book, 'Specific Problems of Literary Translation', Bassnett shows by the examination of a number of poetic, prose, and dramatic texts in translation how comparative analysis can be instructive for the practice of translation.

Several of the ideas discussed in this ground-breaking work were developed in a number of essays published in *The Manipulation of Literature* in 1985. Like Bassnett's

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<sup>42</sup> *Translation Studies*, p. 5. Bassnett-McGuire later stresses that 'it would be wrong to see the first half of the twentieth century as the Waste Land of English translation theory' and names Ezra Pound and Hilaire Beloc as exceptions. Curiously enough, she only makes a passing mention to Walter Benjamin, whose influential essay 'The Task of the Translator' is still inspiring translation theorists.



*Translation Studies*, this collection aimed to ‘establish a new paradigm for the study of literary translation, on the basis of a comprehensive theory and ongoing practical research’,<sup>43</sup> and its contributors include many of the same scholars who gave papers at Louvain, such as Susan Bassnett herself, André Lefevere, Raymond van den Broeck, Hendrik van Gorp and José Lambert. This group of scholars, which later came to be known as the ‘Manipulation School’, had been meeting and publishing for nearly a decade, and although their individual interests remained diverse, the book shows a fundamental coherence of perspective and goal-orientation.

At the time *The Manipulation of Literature* was published, it was felt that Translation Studies still occupied a marginal position in the study of literature. The editor of the collection, Theo Hermans, claims that the reason for this marginalization is rooted in naïve romantic concepts such as ‘artistic genius’ and ‘originality’ which can lead to the work of an author being viewed as ‘hallowed’ or ‘exalted’.<sup>44</sup> If the works of such an author happen to form part of the literary canon of a nation this literature can even assume ‘an aura of sacred untouchability’. Herman’s points out that ‘in such circumstances, any attempt to tamper with a literary text by rendering it into another language must be condemned as a foolhardy and barely permissible undertaking, doomed from the start and to be judged, at best, in terms of relative fidelity, and at worst as outright sacrilege’.<sup>45</sup> Herman’s use of the words ‘hallowed’ and ‘sacred’ call to mind the most translated text of all in Western culture: the Bible. The first translators of the Bible, such as St Jerome, established a model by which the text should be translated with the utmost fidelity, ideally word for word, but as this was obviously not always possible, they constantly strove for equivalence. Equivalence remained the ideal, not just for Biblical translation, but also for translations of other texts.

The approaches and principles of this group of scholars were quite distinct, but there is broad agreement among them on certain basic tenets that could be used to establish a new paradigm for the study of translations. These are:

1. A view of literature as a complex and dynamic system.
2. A conviction that there should be a continual interplay between theoretical models and practical case studies.

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<sup>43</sup> *The Manipulation of Literature: Studies in Literary Translation*, ed. by Theo Hermans (London: Croom Helm, 1985), p. 10.

<sup>44</sup> This line of thinking is clearly influenced by Barthes’s and Foucault’s theories of authorship.

<sup>45</sup> *The Manipulation of Literature*, p. 11.

3. An approach to literary translation that is descriptive, target-oriented, functional and systemic.
4. An interest in the norms and constraints that govern the production and reception of translations.

The first point grew out of the work of ‘The Tel Aviv group’, whose principle exponents were Itamar Even-Zohar and Gideon Toury. In a series of essays between 1978 and 1979, Even-Zohar developed the notion of literature as a ‘polysystem’ that is dynamic in the sense that its constituent elements are in a constant state of flux. He saw literary translation itself as a system, one element among many in the constant struggle for domination among the polysystem’s various layers and subdivisions. According to Even-Zohar’s model, literary translations may occupy a central or a peripheral position within the polysystem, and may be either conservative or innovative depending on the polysystem in question. For example, some translations might bolster certain traditional values in the target culture and would thus be (in terms of that culture) conservative, but translations are often the source for transferring ideas from one culture to another and can thus be innovative. Even-Zohar’s suggestion that a marginal, new, insecure or weakened culture tends to translate more texts than a culture in a state of relative centrality and strength may be one explanation for the genesis of the two translations under examination in this study. At the time Bernárdez’s translation of Egils saga was published, Spain, formerly one of the great imperial powers of Europe, was a weakened nation just beginning to emerge from a long period of censorship, cultural oppression and isolation into an era of optimism but of great uncertainty. Even before the end of the Franco dictatorship, the statistics regarding book publications indicate a fairly constant growth in translations from the 1960s onwards, but in post-1975 Spain the stream began a flood: ‘If the statistics can be believed, high levels of translation had for some time been preparing the Spain that, from 1985, would become one of the European Union’s most enthusiastic members’.<sup>46</sup> Lie’s translation was published in Norway in the 1950s, at a time when that country was also trying to recover after the Nazi occupation and resume its programme of establishing itself as a nation on equal footing with the rest of the world. Hallvard Lie’s translation was not only published

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<sup>46</sup> Anthony Pym, ‘Spanish Tradition’, in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, ed. by Mona Baker (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 552-63 (p. 558).



against a background of foreign occupation, however, but also very much in the context of a linguistic 'civil war', which I will examine in the following chapter.

The second point of the descriptive model of this 'Manipulation School' emphasizes the need for translation theory not to be merely conceptual but to be a practical framework for collecting, ordering and explaining data. Ideally, the process should work both ways, with the theory providing the schema for practical applications and the results of the research informing the theory. Thirdly, the approach based on the systems concept of literature is descriptive rather than prescriptive, which entails accepting the translated text for what it is and trying to determine the various factors that may account for its particular nature. A researcher following the descriptive method should work without preconceptions of what a translation comprises and the investigation of translational phenomena should start from the empirical fact of the book itself. It tries to account in functional terms for the textual strategies that determine the way a given translation looks, focusing primarily on translational norms and on the various constraints and assumptions that may have influenced the methods of translating that produced the final result. The descriptive approach also examines the way translations function in the receptor (or target) literature, and explanations are sought for the impact the translation has on its new environment. From the point of view of the target literature, all translation implies a degree of manipulation of the source text for a certain purpose. An analysis of a translation can reveal the prejudices and ideologies of the translator, or any agenda s/he might have. Once we have acknowledged this, we can begin to analyze the manipulative effect a translation may have on its target culture.

In order to provide a broad contextual framework for individual phenomena, the descriptive model advocates going beyond isolated occurrences or texts and taking into consideration larger wholes (collective norms, audience expectations, period codes, synchronic and diachronic cross-sections of the literary system or parts of it, interrelations with surrounding literary or non-literary systems, etc.). At the same time the goal of the descriptive model is to widen the scope of findings bearing on particular instances in such a way as to include relatively substantial corpora, and thus be able to discover large-scale and long-term patterns and trends.<sup>47</sup>

Over the last twenty years, interest in translation theory has grown rapidly. A number of new books on the subject were published, journals such as *Target* and

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<sup>47</sup> *The Manipulation of Literature*, pp. 13-14.

*Translation and Literature* were started, conference activity has increased and several universities have established new programmes and departments of Translation Studies. Since 1985, the scope of Literary Translation Studies may have expanded and developed in many different directions, but it is clear that the theoretical framework of these studies is rooted in the conceptual model for case-studies of translation outlined in *The Manipulation of Literature*. Herman's observation, for instance, that translation represents an instance of what happens at the interfaces between different linguistic, literary and cultural codes, is one aspect which was taken and developed by Bassnett and Lefevere, who announced a 'cultural turn' in Translation Studies with the publication of *Translation, History and Culture* in 1990.<sup>48</sup>

In this collection Bassnett and Lefevere redefined the object of study 'as a verbal text within the network of literary and extra-literary signs in both the source and target cultures', believing that such a redefinition of the field could offer a way of understanding how the complex manipulative textual practices first identified by the 'Manipulation School' operated. Processes they thought should be addressed and analyzed in any study of literary translations were: the methods behind the selection of texts for translation; what role the translator plays in that selection; what role an editor, publisher, or patron plays; what criteria determine the strategies that will be employed for the translators; and how the translated texts are received in the target system. This move away from Even-Zohar's polysystem hypothesis and polysystem terminology reflects a tendency in Translation Studies to put increased focus on the 'external politics' of translated literature; it was becoming clear that the development of a polysystem model was hampered by confining itself to the literary/linguistic system and by neglecting socio-cultural factors.

In *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, André Lefevere again redefined the object of study, viewing translation as one of the many types of rewriting which are crucial in shaping our understanding of other cultures:

Translation is, of course, the rewriting of an original text. All rewritings, whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and a poetics and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way. Rewriting is manipulation, undertaken in the service of power, and in its positive aspect can help in the evolution of a literature and a society. Rewritings can introduce new concepts, new genres, new devices and the history of translation is the history also of literary innovation, of the shaping power of one culture upon another. But rewriting can also repress innovation, distort and contain, and in an age of ever increasing

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<sup>48</sup> *Translation, History and Culture*, ed. by Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere (London: Pinter, 1990).



manipulation of all kinds, the study of the manipulation processes of literature as exemplified by translation can help us towards a greater awareness of the world in which we live.<sup>49</sup>

One of the most significant issues Lefevere pursues here is the role played by the dominant poetics of a receiving culture in determining the image of literature as projected by a translation. He argues that the literary system in question acts as a series of 'constraints' on the reader, writer, and rewriter who can either adapt to it or try to operate outside it. In some cases, however, literature produced by one literary system proves highly incompatible with the poetics of the receiving culture, as Lefevere demonstrates in his discussion of translating *qasidahs*.<sup>50</sup> This verse form, which originated in pre-Islamic Arabia, presented the translator with problems that are remarkably similar to those occasioned by skaldic poetry. The *qasidah* is highly allusive and yet its stylistic force is in its economy and compactness, 'a concise, dynamic quality, [which] enabled the listener to perceive the image quickly and easily' (p. 86). The translator is then faced with the dilemma we so often hear repeated by translators of skaldic poetry: how to translate this poetry in a way that will be attractive to a reader unacquainted with the original tongue and civilization associated with it.

According to Lefevere, in the case of the *qasidah* the translator usually deals with the problem in a number of ways: by smuggling wordy explanations into the text; by relying on footnotes; or by offering the reader a scholarly introduction, a literal translation, notes, and in one case, photographs that 'attempt to capture the mood presented in each verse' (p. 56).

On the whole, most translators do not try to convey the literary allusions, except in an 'explanatory note'. Maybe because allusions point to the final, real aporia of translation, the real untranslatable, which does not reside in syntactic transfers or semantic constructions, but rather in the peculiar way in which all cultures develop their own "shorthand", which is what allusions really are. A word or phrase can evoke a situation that is symbolic for an emotion or a state of affairs. The translator can render the word or phrase and the corresponding state of affairs without much trouble. The link between the two, which is so intricately bound up with the foreign culture in itself, is much harder to translate.<sup>51</sup>

The other types of rewriting Lefevere discusses in the final four chapters are historiography, anthologising, criticism, and editing, showing how these too are types of

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<sup>49</sup> André Lefevere, *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. vii.

<sup>50</sup> See Lefevere's chapter 4, 'Translation: Poetics, the Case of the Missing Qasidah', in *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, pp. 73-86.

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 56-57.

manipulative practice. We have already looked at some of the issues underlying Sigurður Nordal's edition of *Egils saga* in chapter 1; and in the following chapter we will examine Hallvard Lie's Norwegian translation in the context of historiography, Norwegian literary history, and anthologies of Norwegian literature.

One omission from Lefevere's book, which seems so obvious as to make one wonder whether he was deliberately avoiding the issue, is any mention of postcolonialism. Despite references to Edward Fitzgerald's cavalier attitude to 'these Persians' in his rewriting of the *Rubayyat* in chapter 1, for instance; a description of the acculturation of the *qasidah* by Western poetics in chapter 4; and explicit references to the colonial context in his discussion of the politics and problems of compiling anthologies of African poetry in chapter 10,<sup>52</sup> Lefevere does not refer to Postcolonial Studies at all. It is not until 1998, with the publication of *Constructing Cultures: Essays in Literary Translation*, that Bassnett and Lefevere make explicit reference to Postcolonial Translation Studies, even though they had certainly been aware earlier of work being done in the field.

For example, *Rethinking Translation: Discourse, Subjectivity, Ideology*, a collection of essays edited by Lawrence Venuti and published in 1992, was enthusiastically endorsed by Bassnett. In the 'blurb' on the back cover of the book she is quoted as saying '...quite simply superb. It is a marvellous achievement, a first-class piece of editing'.<sup>53</sup> Two of the essays included in *Rethinking Translation* deal directly with translation as part of the colonial experience. Samia Mehrez's essay uses as a starting point the autobiographical statement George Steiner makes in *After Babel* about his plurilingual experience, contrasting it with a similar statement by the Moroccan poet Abdelkebir Khatibi in order to highlight the limitations of translation theory that developed only within a European humanist tradition. Mehrez points out that in his account Steiner fails to address the 'political context and power relations within which language acquisition takes place', a factor which postcolonial plurilingual writers cannot ignore. She argues that recent so-called 'hybrid' literature produced by ex-colonies, because of the 'culturo-linguistic layering' that exists within it, 'defies the very notion of a "foreign"

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<sup>52</sup> *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, p. 126: 'Translations from African literature written in French were usually available for inclusion in anthologies of African poetry published in English, but the same cannot be said for translations from the Portuguese. These began to surface on a larger scale only when the *anti-colonial* [my emphasis] struggle in Angola and Mozambique began to be mentioned in White liberal newspapers and on the evening news with some regularity'.

<sup>53</sup> *Rethinking Translation: Discourse, Subjectivity, Ideology*, ed. by Lawrence Venuti (London: Routledge, 1992).



text' which can be translated into another language.<sup>54</sup> Richard Jacquemond also focuses on the Maghreb countries (particularly on French-Arabic translation) in his investigation of translation in a context of cultural and economic hegemony-dependency.<sup>55</sup> Like Mehrez, he maintains that,

because translation theory (as well as literary theory in general) has developed on the almost exclusive basis of the European linguistic and cultural experience, it relies on the implicit postulate of an egalitarian relationship between different linguistic and cultural areas and has yet to integrate the recent results of the sociology of interculturality in the colonial and postcolonial contexts. (p. 140)

Mehrez and Jacquemond thus identify a new direction for Translation Studies and the challenge articulated by Jacquemond above is one that André Lefevere and Susan Bassnett take up in *Constructing Cultures*, as we shall see. However, it is worth mentioning at this point that while Mehrez and Jacquemond might be correct in their assertion that translation theory (at the time they were writing) assumed an egalitarian relationship between cultures, this is not reflected in European history. European nations did not only conquer and colonize the Americas, India, and Africa; they also colonised each other. Indeed many European nations have had experience both as coloniser and colonised at different points in their history. For Spain, the year 1492 not only signified the beginning of its colonisation of the Americas, but also signalled the end of the *reconquista*: the struggle to recover Spanish territory from the Moors which had gone on for more than 800 years. Similarly, Norway, which had been an empire of sorts in the Middle Ages, was subsequently to experience a four century long period of cultural and political dominance under Danish rule that some called the '400-year night'. It goes without saying that these colonial situations had linguistic implications for both cultures, whether viewed in terms of hegemonic language-culture or of dominated language-culture, concepts which we will explore in the following chapter.

As I have observed above, Bassnett and Lefevere's recognition of the contribution of Postcolonial Studies to Translation Studies was first broached in *Constructing Cultures* as part of a wider project to promote Translation Studies as a site of interdisciplinary research:

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<sup>54</sup> Samia Mehrez, 'Translation and the Postcolonial Experience: The Francophone North African Text', in *Rethinking Translation*, pp. 120-38 (p. 121).

<sup>55</sup> Richard Jacquemond, 'Translation and Cultural Hegemony: The Case of French-Arabic Translation', in *Rethinking Translation*, pp. 139-58.

In the 1970s, translation was seen as it undoubtedly is, as 'vital to the interaction between cultures'. What we have done is to take this statement and stand it on its head: if translation is, indeed, as everybody believes, vital to the interaction between cultures, then why not take the next step and study translation, not just to train translators, but precisely to study cultural interaction?<sup>56</sup>

With this statement they move Translation Studies definitively from its traditional place on the margins of literary studies or applied linguistics to centre stage, illustrating how far they had come since the time when scholars in the field were asking 'preposterous' questions such as 'is translation possible?' or 'is equivalence possible?' In this book Bassnett and Lefevere propose a whole series of new questions and elaborate on new tools and models for the investigation of translations. One such development is the recognition that different types of texts require different types of strategies.<sup>57</sup>

The authors identify four main types of texts, which may overlap but can be generally defined as: texts that are designed to convey information, texts that are designed to entertain, texts that are designed to persuade, and finally those texts which are considered to belong to the 'cultural capital' of 'world' or national culture, for example the works of Shakespeare or Cervantes's *Don Quijote de la Mancha*, or the plays of Henrik Ibsen. The term 'cultural capital' was coined by the French sociologist and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu, who maintained that 'culture' could be acquired and transmitted in the same manner as economic capital, for instance, through inheritance, education, the acquisition of actual works of art, etc. As a result, our society encourages us to believe that the more cultural capital we acquire, the more prestige we can expect. However, Bourdieu argued that our cultural tastes are not 'natural', but are social constructs located in the context of a class-oriented *habitus*, and that the distinction between 'high' and 'low' culture is deliberately engineered and maintained in favour of a privileged elite. In terms of literature, the texts that signal cultural capital are those texts which have been 'canonized' by a national or world culture. These are the books of which a knowledge is deemed necessary in order to succeed in certain circles or systems, but which, to continue the economic metaphor, have little or no value as currency in others.

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<sup>56</sup> Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere, *Constructing Cultures: Essays on Literary Translation*, Topics in Translation, 11 (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1998), p. 6.

<sup>57</sup> The theories concerning text type and translation are mostly based on the work done by Karl Bühler in the 1930s who defined texts according to their function, categorising them into three types: conative, expressive and representative. Bühler's work was later developed by Katharina Reiss. See Katharina Reiss, 'Text types, Translation Types and Translation Assessment', in *Readings in Translation Theory*, ed. by Andrew Chesterman (Helsinki: Oy Finn Lectura Ab, 1989), pp. 105-15.



That *Egils saga* or any Icelandic saga falls within the category of ‘cultural capital’, for Icelanders at least, seems clear from Björn Bjarnason’s (Icelandic Minister of Education, Science and Culture) statement in his foreword to *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders (CSI)*: ‘The Sagas of the Icelanders are monumental works, an important pillar in the huge edifice which we call European culture’.<sup>58</sup> In fact, this publication is endorsed by no fewer than *three* forewords: one by the President of Iceland, another by the Icelandic Minister of Education, as already indicated, and the third by the former Director of the Manuscript Institute of Iceland, all of whom stress the necessity of making the sagas of Icelanders accessible to the wide readership that they rightly deserve and applaud the achievement of this publication in doing so. The prestigious nature of this literature is also suggested by the physical characteristics of this collection: everything about it implies that it belongs in the European, or indeed the international, canon. The five beautifully (and no doubt expensively) produced volumes in hardback, the extensive apparatus of reference materials in the final volume, including such useful aids as a glossary of recurrent key concepts, maps, diagrams of Viking ships, the layout of the typical farm, chronological lists of kings and so on,<sup>59</sup> all suggest that this is a substantial chunk of culture which would lend prestige to any bookshelf. Unlike the *CSI*, the saga translations for Hallvard Lie’s *Islandske ættesagaer* were not specially commissioned, and it cannot therefore be claimed for them, as the editors of *CSI* claim for theirs, that they are ‘new’, ‘standardised’, or free from the inconsistencies and archaisms that have ‘rendered some earlier translations inaccessible to modern readers’.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, the publication of these translations in a four-volume collection alone implies that it is the standard, ‘definitive’ collection and gives it authority. The Norwegian translation, obviously, is not aimed at a worldwide readership, but the implication is that every household in Norway which values its national heritage should possess a copy. The Spanish translation of *Egils saga*, as we shall see in chapter 3, is marketed as ‘world literature’, and forms part of a numbered series of other examples of world ‘classics’.

Bassnett and Lefevere claim that it is in the domain of cultural capital that translation can most clearly be seen to construct cultures, and it is translations of such texts which form the basis for the case studies in *Constructing Cultures*, which themselves

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<sup>58</sup> See Björn Bjarnason’s foreword in *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, ed. by Viðar Hreinsson and others 5 vols (Reykjavík: Leifur Eiríksson, 1997), 1, p. ix.

<sup>59</sup> Genette refers to these features as the ‘peritext’ of a book.

<sup>60</sup> *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, vol. 1, p. xv.

include translations of the *Aeneid*, the Finnish epic poem *Kalevala* and Bertolt Brecht's *Mutter Courage*. Bassnett and Lefevere advance in addition the concept of 'textual grids', also based on the work of Bourdieu and his ideas of cultural capital, and involving the 'collection of acceptable literary forms and genres in which texts can be expressed' (p. xiii).

In the introductory chapter to *Constructing Cultures* Bassnett reviews the latest work in the field and sums up 'where we are now' in Translation Studies: she confirms approaches which were relatively tentative ten years before and tracks the progress that has been made on these. She announces, 'we have discovered the history of translation' (p. 1), having come to realise that 'translations are never produced in a vacuum, and that they are also never received in a vacuum', that is, we have come to acknowledge the importance of historical and cultural context in matters of translation (p. 3). Studying the history of translation, she believes, is key to understanding the attitudes we have today.

Bassnett outlines two models which have been critical in influencing translators over the years. The first, which she calls 'The Jerome Model', is based on an idea of translation which prioritises faithfulness to the source text above all else, as St Jerome advocated when translating the Bible. When translating the word of God, St Jerome considered it imperative to remain as true as possible to the source text, even at the expense of sense or style. Of course, absolute fidelity in translation is an impossible (and we might now say an undesirable) goal, but that did not prevent it from being accepted as an ideal or translators from striving to achieve it. Their inevitable 'failures' resulted in their translations being seen to a greater or lesser extent as betrayals, which in turn contributed to a perception of translating as a second-class activity, 'a necessary evil'.

The second traditional model for translators (although it pre-dates St Jerome) has been 'The Horace Model'. Bassnett reminds us that the poet's famous phrase *fides interpretes* referred not to being faithful to a *text*, as it is often understood, but to the translator's *customers*. Accordingly, the translator is a sort of go-between who is faithful to his client, that is, the one who holds the purse strings. Bassnett points out that in the Horatian model, while there is no sacred text, there is definitely a privileged language (i.e. Latin), which implies that negotiation will always be biased toward that privileged language and that the negotiation does not take place on absolutely equal terms. This last comment raises the question of the power relations between languages and the way that they might be reflected in a translation. The more 'dominant' the language, the



more likely it is, according to Bassnett, that everything foreign and exotic in the source text will be standardised in translation, especially with regard to ‘texts that can be considered to build the “cultural capital” of a civilization’ (p. 4). This can be seen in the *CSI*, where, in order to give an idea of the uniqueness of the saga world, certain concepts and the vocabulary belonging to specialised fields have been rendered in a consistent way throughout and names have been standardized. With a small number of exceptions, the translations were especially commissioned for this edition and were made to conform to this editorial policy of standardization.

The third model Bassnett introduces as an alternative to the other two is ‘The Schleiermacher Model’. In his famous lecture ‘On the Different Ways of Translating’, the German theologian and philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher demands, among other things, that translations from different languages into German should read and sound different from each other as well as from standard German; for example, the reader should be able to guess the Spanish behind a translation from Spanish and the Greek behind a translation from Greek. If all translations read and sound alike (as they were soon to do in Victorian translations of the classics), the identity of the source text has been lost, levelled in the target text. ‘The Schleiermacher Model’ emphasises the importance of ‘foreignising’ translation.<sup>61</sup> The privileged position of the receiving language or culture is denied, and the alterity of the source text needs to be preserved.

The authors of *Constructing Cultures* do not advocate any one of these models but rather suggest that all three may be useful frameworks for the study of translations. The influence of these models, and of relatively new concepts like ‘cultural capital’, is evident throughout the book, as are recent poststructuralist and postcolonial theories, along with well-known translation theories. In his chapter ‘Chinese and Western Thinking on Translation’, for example, Lefevere says ‘translational practice is one of the strategies a culture devises for dealing with what we have learned to call “the Other”’ (p. 13). In ‘Translation Practice(s) and the Circulation of Cultural Capital: Some Aeneids in English’, the influence of Walter Benjamin is clear: ‘Poetics also includes the use of diction, a diction that should, ideally, match both that of the original and that of the audience the translator is writing for’.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> The most prominent translator who advocates this method today is Lawrence Venuti; see for example Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (London: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>62</sup> *Constructing Cultures*, p. 50. Walter Benjamin, ‘The Task of the Translator’, in *Illuminations*, pp. 70-82, p. 70: ‘The task of the translator consists in finding that intended effect [*Intention*] upon the language into which he is translating which produces in it the echo of the original’.

Bassnett's chapter, 'Transplanting the Seed: Poetry and Translation' also reflects the influence of Benjamin: 'as Benjamin points out, translation secures the survival of a text, and it often continues to exist only because it has been translated' (p. 59). She goes on to discuss various strategies for translating poetry, including those of James Holmes's set of categories for verse translation:

1. Mimetic form: the translator reproduces the form of the original in the target language.
2. Analogical form: the translator determines what the function of the original form is and then seeks an equivalent in the target language.
3. Content derivative/Organic form: the translator starts with the semantic material of the source text and allows it to shape itself. 'In this kind of translation, the form is seen as distinct from the content, rather than as an integral whole' (p. 63).
4. Deviant or extraneous form: the translator utilises a new form that is not signalled in any way in the source text, either in form or content.

By conflating Holmes's organic and extraneous forms Bassnett suggests an alternative model for the translation of poetry, citing two primary conditions. The first, based on the theories of Ezra Pound and Octavio Paz, is that the translator must first be a reader, because 'the translation of poetry requires skill in reading every bit as much as skill in writing'. The second is 'that a poem is a text in which content and form are inseparable. Because they are inseparable, it ill behoves any translator to try and argue that one or the other is less significant' (p. 69). In order to recreate a poem in another language Bassnett advocates breaking free from the source text and 'reliving' the act that gave rise to it. As the title of her chapter suggests, her metaphor for this process is taking the 'seed' of a poem and replanting it in another soil where it will flower again. What is patently obvious here, although not explicitly stated by Bassnett, is that if a translation of a poem is to be a work of art in its own right as 'time and again Pound reminds us' (p. 64) the translating can be undertaken only by another poet.

This is an experiment which has been repeatedly advocated for translations of skaldic poetry and carried out with varying degrees of success. For instance, the Japanese translator and scholar Kunishiro Sugawara writes,



it goes without saying that every translator should be well versed in Old Icelandic and have a tolerable knowledge of Old Scandinavia as a whole. For the future it is to be desired translations of the so-called “great” sagas, and an improvement of the [Japanese] translations already existing. In this connection the first desideratum is a happy combination of poet and translator in one person. For the moment, however, a co-operation between poet and a linguistic specialist is more realistic and secure in order to produce translations passable [*sic*].<sup>63</sup>

Eiríkur Magnússon and William Morris are probably the best-known example of a poet and linguist collaborating to translate Icelandic poetry, but poets have also tried their hands at translating the verse of *Egils saga*. In Christine Fell’s 1975 translation, for instance, the skaldic verse is translated by the poet John Lucas, although Fell provides literal translations in the textual notes at the end of the book. In his prefatory note ‘The Translations of Egil’s Poems’, Lucas does not mention that he has any acquaintance with the Old Norse language, but his approach is in line with Bassnett’s suggestions above: ‘it is a fact that a poet comes much nearer to making a poem worthy of the original if he writes in a manner that feels natural to himself.’<sup>64</sup> The poems Lucas produces are original but, to my mind at least, do not succeed as works of art in their own right, although they perhaps do so more than those of translator and poet Bernard Scudder.<sup>65</sup> It is not the purpose of this thesis to analyse English language translations of the poetry of *Egils saga*, but for illustrative purposes I shall quote an example of one stanza here as translated by Lucas, Fell and Scudder.

Hrammtangar lætr hanga  
hrynvirgil mér brynju  
Hǫðr á hauki troðnum  
heiðis vingameiði;  
rítmœðis knák reiða,  
ræðr gunnvala bræðir,  
gelgju seil á galga  
geirveðrs, lofi at meira.<sup>66</sup>

It was the warrior’s  
work, to hang this gold band  
round an arm where hawks ride  
ready to do my will.  
And see how I make my sword  
summon the ring to *its*  
arm. There’s skill in this. But  
the prince claims greater praise.<sup>67</sup>

The god of the armour hangs  
a jangling snare upon my clutch,  
the gibbet of hunting birds,  
the stamping-ground of hawks.  
I raise the ring, the clasp that is  
worn  
on the shield-splitting arm,  
on to my rod of the battle storm,  
in praise of the feeder of ravens.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Kunishiro Sugawara, ‘A Report on Japanese Translations of Old Icelandic Literature’, *Scripta Islandica*, 27 (1976), 24-37 (p. 29).

<sup>64</sup> *Egils Saga*, trans. and ed. by Christine Fell (London: Dent, 1975), p. xxix.

<sup>65</sup> Personally, of all the English translations of the poetry of *Egils saga*, I prefer Gwyn Jones’s.

<sup>66</sup> ÍF 2, p. 144. My own translation of this stanza is: Hǫðr (god) of mailcoat > WARRIOR has a clinking-noose of a gripping-tong (hand) > RING hung on my hawk-trodden swinging-tree of hawk > ARM; I do put the band of the pole of the shield-wearer (sword) > [arm] > RING onto the gallows of the spear-storm (battle) > SWORD; the prey-feeder of battle-hawks (ravens/eagles) > WARRIOR does not have more praise. For a discussion of the stanza see chapter 4.

<sup>67</sup> *Egils saga* (see Fell, 1975), pp. 84-85.

<sup>68</sup> Bernard Scudder’s translation is from, *The Sagas of Icelanders: A Selection*, ed. by Örnólfur Thorsson (London and New York: Viking Penguin, 2000), p. 90.

which Fell translates as:

Hod of the mailcoat lets the halter of the arm hang on my hawk-trodden hawk-gallows. I know how to make the pin-string of the shield-tormentor ride the gallows of the spear-storm. The feeder of the battle-hawk enjoys the greater praise (p. xxiv).

In the final essay of *Constructing Cultures*, 'The Translational Turn in Cultural Studies', Bassnett announces a new era of interdisciplinary research. She traces the history of Translation Studies from the 1970s, when scholars were still talking about 'definitive' translations, 'faithfulness' and 'equivalence'; through the turning point of the Louvain seminar in 1976; the subsequent adoption of the descriptive/polysystems approach in the 1980s; and finally the 'cultural turn' in the early 1990s. Bassnett maintains that these stages in the development of Translation Studies mirror the Culturalist, Structuralist and Post-Structuralist phases in Cultural Studies as identified by Anthony Easthope.<sup>69</sup> In its new internationalist phase, Cultural Studies is turning toward sociology, ethnography and to history, which are precisely the directions Translation Studies is taking 'to deepen the methods of analysing what happens to texts in the process of what we might call "intercultural transfer"' (p. 132). Bassnett feels that Cultural Studies and Translation Studies are fields which have much to offer each other, but while the 'translation studies world has been slow to use methods developed within cultural studies, the cultural studies world has been even slower in recognising the value of research in the field of translation' (p. 136). Translation Studies has taken the cultural turn; now Cultural Studies, Bassnett argues, needs to take the translation turn.

The next turn Bassnett's own research was to take emerged in the following year (1999), with the publication of a collection of essays edited by herself and Harish Trivedi, entitled *Post-colonial Translation: Theory and Practice*. The aim of this book was to redress the balance of Translation Studies which had previously been almost exclusively Eurocentric (as noted by Mehrez, Jacquemond and Niranjana) and to explore new perspectives on translation in relation to postcolonial societies. Essays by Maria Tymoczko and Vinay Dharwadker included a response to Niranjana's work (see below), challenging her notion of translation as a metaphor for colonisation and her vehement criticism of A. K. Ramanujan's translation practices.

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<sup>69</sup> See Anthony Easthope, 'But What is Cultural Studies?', in *Studying British Cultures: An Introduction*, ed. by Susan Bassnett (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 3-18.



In the previous section we looked briefly at the ways in which scholars have used the postcolonial context to read translations. In the following discussion we will examine the work of a number of scholars who made the journey from the opposite direction – from Postcolonial Studies to Translation Studies.

Mary Louse Pratt's study *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, which investigates the role of travel writing as part of a colonial discourse, uses the term 'contact zone' to refer to,

the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict.<sup>70</sup>

'A "contact" perspective', she argues, 'emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other' (p. 7). Pratt explains that she has derived the term 'contact' from its use in linguistics: 'where the term *contact language* refers to improvised languages that develop among speakers of different native languages who need to communicate with each other consistently, usually in the context of trade' (p. 6).

An activity that Pratt does not mention here, but which also takes place in the 'contact zone' and has a strong affinity with travel writing, is translation. In both cases, initially at least, the writing is being done by the dominant culture who 'interprets' or even constructs the colonized or 'native' culture for a domestic audience in terms that they can comprehend. An analogous practice occurs when translations of Icelandic sagas function as a type of travel guide for the target audience; in the nineteenth-century, and indeed today, they are instrumental in attracting tourists to Iceland who wish to see at first hand the sites described in the sagas. In order to explain elements from the medieval 'saga world' which might be unfamiliar to the target audiences, Lie and Bernárdez often resort in their translations of the skaldic poetry, to strategies such as importing a term from the source text (explained in a footnote) or using an archaic term from the target language or even creating a hybrid word, practices which sometimes results in a very particular idiom or idiolect in a way that is reminiscent of Pratt's notion of a 'contact language'.

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<sup>70</sup> Mary Louse Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 6.

However, while the travel writer usually records a first-hand account of what he believes to be of interest in the actual, i.e. the daily observable, phenomena of a foreign society, culture or landscape, a procedure which Roman Jakobson calls ‘intersemiotic transposition’, the translator takes writings which have been produced by the source culture which she then attempts to ‘bring across’ to the target language and culture; Jakobson refers to this process as ‘interlingual transposition’. However, in a colonial context the process of translation is rarely that simple, as Tejaswini Niranjana points out: ‘Revealing the constructed nature of cultural translations shows how translation is always *producing* rather than merely reflecting or imitating an “original”’.<sup>71</sup> While Pratt’s book provides a critique of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European imperialist ideology through the genre of travel writing, Niranjana’s work, *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism and the Colonial Context*, centres on translation as the contact zone or, as she puts it, ‘a significant site for raising questions of representation, power and historicity in a post-colonial context’.<sup>72</sup>

At the same time as translation scholars were gradually realising the implications of postcolonial theories for their research, postcolonial scholars such as Niranjana, with their concern for culture and cultural difference, were also becoming aware that:

Culture is mediated by language, and that one of the most significant intercultural phenomena they should have been studying all along has been translation. One of the most influential articles in this process is Talal Asad’s ‘The Concept of Cultural Translation in British Social Anthropology’, which traces the evolution of anthropological thinking about ‘the translation of cultures’, which increasingly since the 1950s has become an almost banal description of the distinctive task of social anthropology.<sup>73</sup>

Niranjana employs post-structuralist theory, in particular Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man’s readings of Walter Benjamin’s influential essay ‘The Task of the Translator’, to deconstruct colonial texts and help us to see how ‘translation brings into being notions of representation and reality that endorse the founding concepts of Western philosophy as well as the discourse of literary criticism’. She maintains that ‘the drive to study, to codify, and to “know” the Orient employs the classical notions of representation and reality criticized by poststructuralists like Derrida and de Man. Their work offers a related critique of traditional historicism that is of great relevance in a post-colonial

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<sup>71</sup> Tejaswini Niranjana, *Siting Translation: History, Post-structuralism, and the Colonial Context* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 87.

<sup>72</sup> *Siting Translation*, p. 1.

<sup>73</sup> Douglas Robinson, *Translation and Empire: Postcolonial Theories Explained* (Manchester: St Jerome, 1997), p. 3.



context'.<sup>74</sup> For Niranjana, translation can be read as a metaphor for the unequal power relationship which defines the condition of the colonized. She argues that the native Indians were represented as poor copies of Europeans, always doomed as they could never be 'the original'. She sees translation as problematic in a colonial context because of the 'asymmetrical relations of power that operate under colonialism'; arguing that a representation of the native by the colonizer will always be biased as long as translation uses/perpetuates classical Western concepts such as editing texts into "standard versions" based on classical Western notions of unity and coherence' (p. 19).<sup>75</sup>

Following Derrida, Niranjana challenges the notion of a 'transcendental signified' or an 'original' to be represented. She wants to formulate a complex notion of historicity which would include the 'effective history' of the text, addressing the questions such as: who uses/interprets the text? How is it used, and for what? Why the text was/is translated, and who did/does the translating? (p. 37). These mirror some of the questions posed by Bassnett and Lefevere in *Constructing Cultures*, but for Niranjana, the problem is that throughout the history of translation theory the debate rarely addresses issues other than those of faithfulness/betrayal and presumes the existence of a transcendental signified, an unproblematic 'meaning' which can be transferred. Although she acknowledges Bassnett-McGuire's book *Translation Studies* (1980), citing, for instance, Bassnett's remark that it is 'pointless [...] to argue for a definitive translation, since translation is intimately tied up with the context in which it is made' (p. 35), she laments the fact that this is not taken further and especially criticizes the lack of writing on the political aspects of translation: 'A search for references to "politics" by writers on translation would yield a poor haul' (p. 60). She provides a brief overview of such studies as she has been able to locate and blames 'Translation theory's obsession with the humanistic nature of translation' for 'blind[ing] writers to their own insights into the complicitous relationship of translation and the imperialistic vision' (p. 61).

For another postcolonial translation scholar, Eric Cheyfitz, the languages of the coloniser and colonised 'are organized into a hierarchy according to which the colonizer's language is somehow inherently superior (richer, more civilized, etc.) and the

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<sup>74</sup> *Siting Translation*, p. 35.

<sup>75</sup> This Western idea of a 'standard' text was a direct result of the invention of the printing press. Before this, as we have seen in the previous chapter, the medieval literature of Western Europe characteristically had many different variants whether preserved in hand-written manuscripts or in oral versions. Niranjana does not provide any information here on native book production in India, although it is interesting to note that printing as a technology was introduced in India by Portuguese missionaries in 1556, no doubt in order to print and circulate religious Christian texts.

colonized language is thus inherently inferior'.<sup>76</sup> In the translations under investigation in this thesis, the situation is slightly more complex. While it may be true that the editor might want to 'civilise' the unruly mess of original manuscripts, it is doubtful whether Lie or Bernárdez see their languages as superior to Icelandic – on the contrary, I suspect Icelandic figures as the prestige language in this equation. However, according to Cheyfitz's reading of the story of translation, the coloniser sees the savages and the civilised as standing at opposite ends of an evolutionary history, and the 'primitive' people must be brought up to date to eradicate these differences. In the next section we will see how anthologies of Norwegian literature place Icelandic literature at the beginning of a teleological continuum which ends in the present, and it is clear that Hallvard Lie wishes to *explain* Egill as a character to his audience and perhaps emphasize the similarities between the saga people and contemporary Norwegian society rather than the differences.

If we think of an Icelandic medieval text in the terms Cheyfitz uses in his discussion of property and possession, we might make an analogy about the 'ownership' of that text, and who has the right to lay claim to it. It can be claimed to be part of Icelandic and Norwegian literary history simultaneously, for although it was written in Iceland, the language used is the same (or practically the same) as that used in Norway at the time. This is ironic given that many scholars read *Egils saga* in the context of the native reaction to the annexation of Iceland to the Kingdom of Norway at the time of writing, and see it as a tale of New World versus Old, republican against monarch. *Egils saga* cannot be claimed as part of Spanish cultural heritage, except perhaps in the sense that Icelandic literature and Spanish literature belong to a wider framework of 'European Culture', a notion which is encouraged by European institutions today, notably the European Union.<sup>77</sup> There seems to have been a proliferation of projects that focus on Europe as a cultural entity of late, although these may be within or without the political boundaries of the EU. The Centre for Medieval Studies at the University of Bergen, a research institution funded by the Norwegian Research Council, is one such example. The 'CMS vision', according to its website, is to 'enhance our understanding of

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<sup>76</sup> *Translation and Empire*, p. 64. See also Eric Cheyfitz, *The Poetics of Imperialism Translation and Colonization from 'The Tempest' to 'Tarzan'* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

<sup>77</sup> 'An area without frontiers' is how the Single Europe Act of 1987 describes its aim for a pan-European identity. The European Commission asserts that the strength of Europe is its cultural wealth and diversity, promoting a cultural policy that aims 'to help the wide variety of national and regional cultural traditions flourish, whilst reinforcing the sense that despite their differences European citizens share a common cultural heritage and common values'. See *Our Cultural and Architectural Heritage* (London: European Commission, 1997), p. 1.



Europe as a whole, in the Middle Ages as well as today, from a peripheral point of view'.<sup>78</sup> A great deal of the research produced by the CMS is designed to show how much the 'peripheral' countries (such as Scandinavian states, Britain, Ireland, the Baltic states) formed an integral part of medieval European culture and were crucial in the formation of the modern entity of Europe. As we have mentioned above, at the time the Spanish translation of *Egils saga* was first published (1984), Spain was emerging from a period of isolation and marginalization and was anxious to forge stronger links with the rest of Europe (it joined the EEC in 1986). This aspiration was reflected in an increase in the importation and translation of works from Europe and the rest of the outside world. As we will see in the next chapter, the publication of Bernárdez's translation was one of the first of its kind in Spain, but the trend has increased steadily since.

The desire to belong to a common European culture implies a form of 'supranationalism' in itself. It implies a belief that the European nations possess a certain common heritage in terms of genetic or ethnic background, history, ideology, culture, language, etc., especially as defined by current or historical geopolitical boundaries. This is a view perpetrated from 'inside' as well as from 'outside', from postcolonial writers who often overlook the cultural plurality of Europe portraying it instead as a monolithic whole, a fact that has been noted by the Irish translation scholar Michael Cronin:

One of the shortcomings of certain contemporary writings on translation and post-colonialism such as those by Cheyfitz and Tejaswini Niranjana is the simple opposition of Europe and the New World or Europe and the Colony. The translation experience of Europe is not homogenous, and the intense pressures on language resulting from internal colonialism in Europe itself are ignored in analyses which posit a common European historical experience and attitude to language.<sup>79</sup>

It is true that most European languages belong to the various branches of the Indo-European language family, Celtic, Germanic, Romance and so on, but we do not generally consider Hungarians, Finns or Basques to be any less European on the grounds that their languages do not belong to this family. Similarly, it is unlikely that Iran will ever form part of the European Union despite its linguistic heritage.

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<sup>78</sup> [www.uib.no/cms/research/documents/CMS\\_Annual\\_Report\\_2006.pdf](http://www.uib.no/cms/research/documents/CMS_Annual_Report_2006.pdf), p.1, [accessed October, 2007].

<sup>79</sup> Michael Cronin, *Translating Ireland: Translation, Languages, Cultures* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996), p. 3.

The number of conflicts in Europe, both past and present, which are justified on ethnic or religious grounds also belies the notion of an unproblematic common ethnic identity. The ‘troubles’ in the six counties of the North of Ireland, for instance, had its roots in a colonial legacy, and grew out of a situation where one white, Christian group was discriminated against and dominated by another on ethnic and ideological grounds. In the first half of the twentieth century, the language and culture of the Sami people suffered dramatically as a result of forced assimilation at the hands of the Norwegian government. In Spain, Basque and, to a lesser extent, Catalan separatists campaign for independence mainly on the basis of their languages, which were repressed under the Franco regime. It would be hard to find a nation or people in Europe who have not at some stage been either victims or perpetrators of colonisation, be that cultural or political; Spain and Norway have experience of both roles.

*Medieval Studies, Postcolonial Studies, Translation Studies Converge* ∞

It is the postcolonial experience in a European context that forms the basis of Maria Tymoczko’s study of translations of medieval Irish literature. She echoes Michael Cronin’s statement above in alleging that ‘as an approach [postcolonial theory] is still in its infancy, inclined to subsume difference between postcolonial peoples under broad generalizations about cultural oppression that do not necessarily hold for all nations that have been colonized or even all types of colonization’,<sup>80</sup> however, she fully recognises the fact that it has opened up useful perspectives on the literatures of postcolonial nations.

Tymoczko’s approach is obviously heavily influenced by the ideas elaborated on in *Constructing Cultures*. For instance, she articulates the view that ‘the investigations of translations is an essential aspect of the investigation of culture’ (p. 18), that a comparison between a source text and its translation will reveal valuable information about both the source culture and the receiving culture, and that an investigation of the choices and decision procedures used by translators to make decisions reveal a translator’s strategy, the cultural pressures exerted on the translator, and the functions of

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<sup>80</sup> Maria Tymoczko, *Translation in a Postcolonial Context: Early Irish Literature in English Translation* (Manchester: St Jerome, 1999), p. 15.



the translation in the receiving culture. 'From that understanding', Tymoczko argues, 'it is a short step to using translations as a tool for deconstructing cultural representations' (pp. 24-25).

Her (diachronic) analysis of translations of early Irish literature into English focuses mostly on the ancient Irish 'epic' *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (Cattle-raid of Cooley), a choice of text which falls firmly into the 'cultural capital' category, and her study shows the ways in which this text was manipulated to suit various nationalist agendas, particularly in the nineteenth century. She identifies three strategies used by the translators – an assimilationist strategy, a dialectical strategy, and an ostensive strategy – which she believes reflect three stages in the process of decolonization. *Translation in a Postcolonial Context* does not focus solely on the context in which these translations were produced, however, but also examines the translations at microlevel, unveiling the strategies used by the translators to deal with specific literary elements of genre and style in the *Táin*. As Tymoczko observes, the differences between modern English literature and early Irish literature are profound, and the lack of correspondence in styles presents the translator with a particular challenge.

Tymoczko therefore employs many of the tools and concepts from the latest developments in Literary Translation Studies with which we are by now familiar, but in this study she introduces the idea of the 'metonymic', as it was developed by Roman Jakobson, David Lodge and others, as a framework for the discussion of translations. She contends that metonymy is a basic feature of rewritings and retellings, particularly in the case of oral or mythic literature, arguing that for an audience to appreciate a retelling of a traditional story they must have knowledge of the 'whole' that the tale is part of, i.e. the tradition the tale belongs to, the mythology, the genre, the metre, the formulas and so on. The cultural elements within a literary work, such as references to its material culture, history, economy, law, customs, values and so on, also function as metonymic evocations of the culture as a whole, but present serious problems for the translator as Tymoczko points out: 'The way in which a literary text represents metonymically features of its literary system and ultimately features of its whole culture is what makes translating a text of a marginalized culture so difficult' (p. 47), and the political implications of so-doing can be highly charged in a postcolonial context. Tymoczko then proceeds to evaluate the usual strategies the translators use, and the extent to which they preserve the metonymic aspects of the source text. She believes that, faced with an 'excessive' amount of literary information to be conveyed, the translator has two

choices: either to be selective about which ‘facets’ of the text to translate, or to ‘seek a format that allows dense information transfer through a variety of commentaries on the translation’.<sup>81</sup> These ‘epitextual’ devices, as Genette would call them, are what serve to explain many of the metonymies of the source text and are present in both the Spanish and Norwegian translations in the form of prefaces, footnotes, endnotes and so on. However, it would be impossible to convey all the metonymic aspects of the text in textual notes and translators often employ a strategy of ‘assimilat[ing] the unknown to the closest known pattern’, for example by choosing ‘metonymies to evoke other than those of the source text, specifically the metonymies of the receptor literary system and language’ (p. 50). We have seen an example of this above with Saxo replacing the Norse valkyrie Hildir with the Roman god of war Mars in his Latin translation of *Bjarkamál*, but there are also instances in the Spanish translation of, for example translating *Hel* (the realm of the dead in Old Norse mythology) with *infierno* (‘Hell’ in the Christian sense), and *hidromiel* (with its classical connotations) for *mjóð* (‘mead’). Tymoczko’s use of the metonymic framework may not be as far removed from the old binary oppositions debated in Literary Translation Studies (literal/free; foreignizing/domesticating; dynamic equivalence/functional equivalence) as she claims, but it is certainly useful.

As far as I am aware, *Translation in a Postcolonial Context: Early Irish Literature in English Translation* is unique in the sense that it is the only published translation study which examines a medieval text in the context of Postcolonial Studies, and in that respect has been a most useful model for this thesis. However, there are some areas which Tymoczko has left unexamined. For example, while she skilfully navigates the various ways in which translations were used to resist the colonial legacy, and obviously treats of the power relations between the two cultures, Tymoczko does not examine in much detail power relations between the two languages, nor does she analyse how the very fact of translating into such a dominant, prestige language as English affected the translations. The sort of translation activity that was happening in Ireland occurred all over Europe; in the next chapter we will see how translations of medieval literature in Norway became part of a discourse whose aim was to forge a national identity for Norway which was clearly distinct from Denmark. Writing the nation in the coloniser’s language is a process which is most familiar in the literatures commonly thought of as postcolonial, but, as I have noted, mining the past for a cultural heritage was not particular to Ireland and it has strong links with the European colonial era.

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<sup>81</sup> *Translation in a Postcolonial Context*, p. 48.



*'The Past is Another Country. They Do Things Differently There': Retrospective Colonisation* ↻

Almost one hundred years before the emergence of reception theory or Literary Translation Studies, Friedrich Nietzsche had observed that 'the degree of the historical sense of any age may be inferred from the manner in which this age makes *translations* and tries to absorb former ages and books'.<sup>82</sup> He cites a number of examples but focuses particularly on the manner in which the Roman poets (such as Horace or Propertius) translated Greek antiquities into the 'Roman present', disregarding the metonymic aspects of the original texts without compunction:

They seem to ask us: 'Should we not make new for ourselves what is old and find ourselves in it? Should we not have the right to breathe our own soul into this dead body? For it is dead after all: how ugly is everything dead!'. They did not know the delights of the historical sense: what was past and alien was an embarrassment for them: and being Romans, they saw it as an incentive for a Roman conquest. Indeed translation was a form of conquest. Not only did one omit what was historical: one also added allusions to the present and, above all, struck out the name of the poet and replaced it with one's own – not with any sense of theft but with the very best conscience of the *imperium Romanum*.<sup>83</sup>

This prescient paragraph has a number of echoes in later works on translation, including some of the theories under discussion here. The idea that the Greek texts were dead, and could only be revived or given new life, recalls to Walter Benjamin's theory that, thanks to translations, ancient texts had an afterlife. In addition, it reminds us of Susan Bassnett's recommendation for poetic translation, that a translator should take the 'seed' from the original poem and transplant it to grow a new poem. Furthermore, it evokes Bassnett's comments on linguistic power relations in her discussion of the 'Horace Model', which she felt was always in favour of Latin. However, we should not forget Horace's famous phrase: *Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit*,<sup>84</sup> which provides an interesting case of the colonised culturally conquering their political conqueror. The Romans were eager to import Greek culture, but even while acknowledging the superiority of Greek culture, Horace was romanising it, and I argue that this is one instance of what I have referred to at the beginning of this chapter as 'retrospective colonization'.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Translation as Conquest' (from *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, 1882), trans. by Walter Kaufman in Douglas Robinson ed. *Western Translation Theory: From Herodotus to Nietzsche* (Manchester: St Jerome, 1997, 2002), p. 262.

<sup>83</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> 'Captive Greece took captive her savage conqueror', *Epistulae*, Book 2, epistle i, line 156.

<sup>85</sup> The title of this section is the opening sentence of the prologue to L. P. Hartley's, *The Go-Between* (London: Hamilton, 1953).

By ‘retrospective’, I refer to the practice of retrieving and appropriating ‘cultural capital’ from the past, and ‘colonising’ it through a process of rewriting. To continue the metaphor, in this model the medieval manuscript (or other cultural artefact) is comparable to virgin territory that is discovered or rediscovered by the (usually nineteenth-century) philologist-explorer. Depending on his knowledge of the source culture and language, he will spend many hours deciphering the text before he can make it available in printed form. Once the text has been edited/colonised, the process of translation can begin in order to make this discovery available to a wider audience, and the translation will quickly become part of a larger discourse or the narrative that is ‘our story’, or that explains ‘us’, whether at a national or European level. For this reason, a Spanish translator of an Icelandic medieval text, for example, might be tempted to include semiotic markers that call up modes of Spanish medieval literature. By so doing he would not only make the text more acceptable than otherwise to members of the receptor culture, who in general will respond more positively to a system they recognise than to an alien one, but he would also give the impression that medieval Icelandic and medieval Spanish literature share more common ground than they actually do, hence exaggerating the extent to which they both represent a larger European system of medieval poetics/culture.

In *Decolonizing the Viking Age: Volume 1*, Fredrik Svanberg traces a similar process in Sweden from an archaeological point of view.<sup>86</sup> Like Tymoczko, Svanberg shows how postcolonial theory can be usefully applied to analyse cases of European nations that do not fall into the more traditional categories. He views the ‘The Viking Age’ as a construct which was created ‘under heavy influence of the doctrines of nationalism’ and as a ‘specific discourse, or world of representations, that can be understood as a colonialism of the past’ (p. 11). His aim is to deconstruct the idea of the ‘Viking Age’ through a process of decolonisation.

The use of postcolonial theories in Medieval Studies is gaining ground and has resulted in a growing number of publications on the subject such as Ananya Kabir’s and Deanne Williams’s edited collection of essays *Postcolonial Approaches to the European Middle Ages: Translating Cultures*. In the introduction, the editors also describe the phenomenon by which ‘the medieval past can be colonized, like a distant continent, to further the

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<sup>86</sup> Fredrik Svanberg, *Decolonizing the Viking Age: 1* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2003).



interests of modernity'.<sup>87</sup> Kabir notes that it was as a direct result of colonial expansion that European colonial powers began to rediscover their medieval culture and the origins of their languages. At the very time that 'Orientalists' were translating exotic texts from India for the domestic market, philologists were rediscovering (or sometimes inventing) and translating lost treasures of native culture, as exemplified by the craze for national epics. The medieval past that had been viewed as 'the dark ages' during the period of the Enlightenment was now seen as an exotic territory that could be colonized, exploited and moulded in a way very similar to the 'dark continent' of Africa. It was in the Middle Ages that most European nation-states as we know them began to emerge, and it is no coincidence that so many of the modern sciences and subjects were born at the height of European colonial expansion. Modern Archaeology, Ethnography/Anthropology, Philology, Geography, History were all by-products of nationalism and colonialism.

Taking one of the most famous examples of medieval manuscript illumination, the *Trés riches heures* of Jean, duc de Berry, illuminated by the Limbourg brothers, as a starting point, Kabir and Williams show how 'the history of the manuscript's reception highlights the extent to which modernity casts the medieval past as a "foreign country," aligning it with the binaries of East and West, Europe and abroad'.

As postcolonial scholars have sought to dismantle the notions of modernity upon which colonialism was predicated, medievalists have, in turn, challenged the binaries of medieval and modern (or early modern) that bracket off the Middle Ages, and keep it as exotic and foreign – and also as domitable – as any orientalist fantasy. As critiques of colonialism work in tandem with critiques of modernity, medieval studies and postcolonial studies have sought to undermine a series of western myths of origin, history, identity, and temporality.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> *Postcolonial Approaches to the European Middle Ages: Translating Cultures*, ed. by Ananya Jahanara Kabir and Deanne Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 1.

<sup>88</sup> *ibid.* pp. 1-2.

## CHAPTER THREE

### NORWEGIAN AND SPANISH TRANSLATIONS OF *EGILS SAGA* IN CONTEXT

In this chapter I aim to give an idea of the historical and cultural contexts in which the Norwegian and Spanish translations of *Egils saga* were produced, assess the approach of the translators based on the prefaces to the translations and other work they have published, and to a lesser extent assess the impact these translations have or may have had on the target cultures. As I have argued in the previous chapter, I believe that the postcolonial legacy in both Norway and Spain is an influential factor in their relations with other cultures, and in their representations of other cultures – a fact which I believe is manifest in the translations. Postcolonial theory can be used to illuminate the strategies of the translators in this context and to show that the act of translating a medieval text can itself be an act of colonisation (although a retrospective one) comparable to the colonising process of countries.

#### NORWEGIAN CONTEXT

*Writing the Nation: In the beginning was the word... ↻*

Anyone who undertakes to write a history or compile an anthology of Norwegian literature necessarily presupposes the existence of such a phenomenon, but on closer inspection the term ‘Norwegian’ proves to be infinitely problematic. What does ‘Norwegian’ refer to exactly? Can it be used to designate all the peoples who ever lived within the boundaries of the modern state of Norway? Is it an appropriate term to use about the language(s) of these peoples? Should a study of Norwegian literature be restricted to literature produced in Norway? Is literature written in the Norwegian language but produced in another state properly Norwegian? Is literature produced in Norway or by Norwegians but written in another language Norwegian? Trying to arrive at a definition of ‘literature’ for this purpose is similarly complicated. If we take a broad



definition such as the ‘body of writings produced in a particular country or period’ (*OED*), then should we incorporate *all* writings? If we restrict this definition to ‘writing which has claim to consideration on the ground of beauty of form or emotional effect’ (*OED*), is it appropriate to include in a survey of national literature, ‘writings’ such as an isolated word scratched on a weapon? While these questions are not always explicitly posed by the editors/compiler of such histories, they are certainly either explicitly or implicitly addressed.

In one anthology, *The Oxford Book of Scandinavian Verse* (1925), the section devoted to Norwegian poetry begins squarely in the nineteenth century with Johan S. C. Welhaven (1807-73), because although the editor, Sir Edmund Gosse, does acknowledge that some of the best eighteenth-century poets in Denmark were ‘Norsemen’ by birth ‘it was not, indeed, until after nearly a generation of independence [from Denmark] that Norway began to produce a poetry which can still be said to have national importance’.<sup>1</sup> For Gosse, evidently, Norwegian literature only comes into existence after the political separation of Norway from Denmark and the establishment of the Norwegian constitution in 1814. The express aim of this collection was to provide an English reader with ‘a rapid outline of the progress of *modern poetry* [my emphasis] in the Scandinavian countries’ which would also justify Gosse’s starting point in the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> Despite this ‘modern’ approach, W. A. Craigie begins his section on ‘The Poetry of Iceland’ much earlier, that is, with the poet Stefán Ólafsson (c. 1620-88), and indeed in the introduction to that section traces the evolution of Icelandic poetry from the medieval period.<sup>3</sup> In this collection skaldic, Eddaic, and all other Old Icelandic medieval poetry is considered to belong exclusively to an Icelandic tradition and is not viewed as the shared heritage of the Scandinavian countries.

Histories and anthologies produced by Norwegians adopt a decidedly different approach. In *A History of Norwegian Literature* Harald Beyer claims that ‘the history of Norwegian literature begins with the history of Norway and encompasses a thousand years of her national growth’, a logical place to start, since the late Viking Age has been traditionally viewed as the time when the states of Norway, Sweden and Denmark emerged.<sup>4</sup> However, by the first chapter, ‘From Antiquity to the Vikings’, Beyer has

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<sup>1</sup> *The Oxford Book of Scandinavian Verse: xvii<sup>th</sup> Century - xx<sup>th</sup> Century*, ed. by Sir Edmund Gosse and W. A. Craigie (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925), p. 141.

<sup>2</sup> *The Oxford Book of Scandinavian Verse*, p. v.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 333.

<sup>4</sup> Harald Beyer, *A History of Norwegian Literature*, trans. and ed. by Einar Haugen (New York: New York University Press, 1956) originally published as *Norsk litteraturhistorie*, (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1952), p. 1.

considerably extended the chronological parameters of his survey. The chapter opens with the sentence: 'The beginnings of Norwegian literature are veiled in the mists of time',<sup>5</sup> and goes on to explain that 'although we know that people were living in Norway in the Paleolithic age, at least 10,000 years before the birth of Christ, we have no recorded word from them until 200 AD'.

As this book was first published (in Norwegian) within a year of the first volume of *Islandske ættesagaer*, it is of particular interest to this study, if it may be assumed that it is fairly representative of contemporary attitudes to Norwegian literature.<sup>6</sup> It was certainly granted a sort of canonical status when it was chosen by the American-Scandinavian Foundation to represent Norway in its series of Scandinavian histories of literature and was translated by Einar Haugen into English for this purpose. Haugen's English translation is a 'rewriting' if ever there was one. In the preface to his translation Haugen claims that he was given 'carte blanche to adapt, rearrange, or even *rewrite* [my emphasis] the book in order to produce a volume that might be most useful for introducing Norwegian letters to an American public'.<sup>7</sup> It is indeed a rewriting of a rewriting, according to Lefevere's definition:

Whether they produce translations, literary histories or their more compact spin-offs, reference works, anthologies, criticism, or editions, rewriters adapt, manipulate the originals they work with to some extent, usually to make them fit in with the dominant, or one of the dominant ideological and poetological currents of their time.<sup>8</sup>

Where Beyer has tried to construct one idea of Norway for a domestic audience, Haugen has supplemented and omitted information, 'in the conviction that an international point of view requires a re-evaluation of the contributions of some, if not all, writers'.<sup>9</sup> The translation was well received, and as late as 1983 John Hoberman claimed that it remained 'by far the best survey available in English' to date.<sup>10</sup> Four decades later it was superseded by a new version (issued by the University of Nebraska

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<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>6</sup> It was later expanded (in 1963) by Harald's son Edvard into *Norges litteraturhistorie*, a work of six volumes, despite the fact that Bull and Paasche's monumental *Norsk litteraturhistorie* was already widely viewed as the standard. Fredrik Paasche, *Norges og Islands litteratur: indtil utgangen av middelalderen*, vol. 1 of *Norsk litteraturhistorie* ed. by Francis Bull and others (Oslo: Aschehoug 1924-37 (1924)).

<sup>7</sup> Harald Beyer, *A History of Norwegian Literature*, p. vii.

<sup>8</sup> André Lefevere, *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, p. 8.

<sup>9</sup> Harald Beyer, *A History of Norwegian Literature*, p. viii.

<sup>10</sup> See John Hoberman, 'Bibliographical Spectrum', in *Review of National Literatures: Norway*, ed. by Sverre Lyngstad (New York, Griffon House: 1983), pp. 185-207 (p. 189).



Press in cooperation with The American-Scandinavian Foundation) in the form of a collection of variously-authored articles edited by Harald Næss.<sup>11</sup>

In the opening section of this latter version, 'Old Norwegian Literature', written by James Knirk, the starting-point for a history of Norwegian literature is also situated in the remote past:

When the giant glacier of the most recent Ice Age melted and contracted, the coastal areas of Norway gradually became fit for habitation by plants and animals, and in their wake came humans, ca. 10,000 BC. It is not known who these *first Norwegians* [my emphasis] were or what their language was like...<sup>12</sup>

For Knirk it is possible to view these people as 'Norwegians' (even though we know nothing about their ethnic or linguistic origins), purely because they inhabited the area of land which now constitutes the modern political state of Norway. Thus Knirk is doing the reverse of what he appears to be doing. While it seems as though he is starting from the very beginning, in fact he is starting from the modern state and working backwards to construct a 'Norway' which has existed from time immemorial. By calling these aboriginal inhabitants 'Norwegians' he identifies them with the modern population of Norway, creating a line of ancestry which continues up until the present day. As Knirk points out, people began to inhabit the Scandinavian peninsula about 10,000 years ago (or 10,000 BC according to Beyer), but we have to wait until 3000 BC before we see any signs of self-expression: 'The thoughts and intellectual endeavors of these [*same?*] early Norwegians are best revealed in their rock carvings, which date largely to 3000-400 BC'.<sup>13</sup> Knirk does not venture quite so far as to suggest that these rock carvings constitute the first Norwegian literature: like Beyer, he accords that privilege to the first recorded word in a recognizably Scandinavian (or Proto-Scandinavian) language.

The word in question, 'raunijaR', is inscribed in runes on a spearhead found in a man's grave on the Øvre Stabu farm in Eastern Toten, Oppland, and dated to c. 200 AD. It is commonly interpreted as *reynir*, i.e. 'one who tries' or 'tester', and is probably the name of the spear, although it is also likely that the runes had a magical function (to increase the power of the weapon, for example). This and other contemporary

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<sup>11</sup> *A History of Norwegian Literature*, ed. by Harald S. Næss (Lincoln, NE, and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1993).

<sup>12</sup> James E. Knirk, 'Old Norwegian Literature', in *A History of Norwegian Literature* (see Næss, 1993), pp. 1-38 (p. 1).

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, p. 1. According to Einar Haugen, *The Scandinavian Languages: An Introduction to their History* (London: Faber and Faber, 1976), p. 97: 'Not until the Neolithic Age, from about 3000 B.C., can we be reasonably sure that Indo-European was spoken in Scandinavia'.

inscriptions may be the earliest 'writings' in a Scandinavian language, but whether it is appropriate to include them in a history of Norwegian literature is questionable.<sup>14</sup> Ivar Havnevik, author of *Dikt i Norge: Lyrikkehistorie 200-2000* has no doubt, however, that this early inscription forms part of the Norwegian poetic canon. When questioned in an interview about the cut-off dates for his book (200-2000) he replied:

From the beginning I wanted to write an account which covered all poetry on Norwegian soil, and therefore it was interesting to discover that the oldest word which is to be found in Proto-Scandinavian is written in runes on a spearhead from the 3rd century. This is not a complete poem, but that single word, this oldest of all words, is an example of lyrical word usage, neither scientific nor 'ordinary'. And from the 3rd century on we have a continuous poetic tradition in Norway, i.e. either in what is today a Norwegian environment, or in a Norwegian state or nation, or in Norwegian language.<sup>15</sup>

The attempt to trace the history of Norwegian literary expression as a teleologically determined historical narrative, ordered chronologically from the first recorded utterance in the 3rd century to their respective present days, is one which Beyer, Knirk and most recently Havnevik all subscribe to, and indeed present as an approach which is natural if not inevitable. In recent years this type of historiography has come to be seen as a major contributor in the process of nation building by those who view the nation as the product or invention of nationalism.<sup>16</sup>

Like so many other emergent European nation-states in the nineteenth century, Norway was anxious to create an image of national homogeneity and a common national heritage. This is not to say that before this time there was no sense of national identity, but that, as the modern state emerged, culture and politics were bound together as they had never been before. It was crucial to the establishment of a national identity for an advanced, civilized and modern nation to have a past which showed a process of cultural evolution, and a key element in the writing of such a past is continuity.<sup>17</sup> As

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<sup>14</sup> Of course certain more lengthy runic inscriptions are quite rightly viewed as literary documents. See Judith Jesch, *Ships and Men in the Late Viking Age: The Vocabulary of Runic Inscriptions and Skaldic Verse* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2001) and Patrick Larsson, 'Runes', in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. by Rory McTurk (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 403-26 (p. 404).

<sup>15</sup> 'I utgangspunktet ønsket jeg å skrive en framstilling som dekket all diktning på norsk grunn, og da var det artig å oppdage at det eldste ordet som forekommer på urnordisk språk, er skrevet med runer på en spydspiss fra 200-tallet. Dette er ikke et helt dikt, men det ene ordet, dette aller eldste ordet, er et eksempel på lyrisk språkbruk, hverken vitenskapelig eller "hverdagslig". Og fra 200-tallet av har vi en sammenhengende dikttradisjon i Norge, dvs. enten på det som i dag er norsk område, eller i en norsk stat eller nasjon, eller på norsk språk'. In an interview with Marit Borkenahagen, [www.bokklubben.no/SamboWeb/side.do?dokId=52420](http://www.bokklubben.no/SamboWeb/side.do?dokId=52420)

<sup>16</sup> Ernest Gellner, *Thought and Change* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964), p. 169: 'Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist'.

<sup>17</sup> The writing of the history of a nation along the lines of an evolutionary model which described the progress of a people from a primitive to an advanced society, also helped these nations to view



Fredrik Svanberg observes: ‘Nationalistic narrative conveys an illusion of continuity (the people, invested with an unchanging essence, may change in technological means, even politically, but not in collective identity), and expands *us* in time as well as morally’.<sup>18</sup>

Starting earlier, but particularly in the nineteenth century, historians, anthologists, folklorists, linguists, lexicographers, archaeologists, authors, poets and of course translators all worked hard to fill in the gaps in the story of Norwegian language and literature and produced a discourse which to this day informs notions of Norwegian cultural identity. Works like Harald Beyer’s tried to shape the story of Norwegian literature (and by extension the history of Norway) into a seamless linear narrative which begins, as we have seen above, in the ‘mists of time’.

A passage from the introduction to this work (‘Norway and her Literature’) illustrates the extent to which it conforms to the pattern described above:

One of the many paradoxes about Norway is that it is at once a young and an old nation. In point of fact Norway has been a modern nation with all organs of government only since 1905. But there are dates behind this one which represent stages in the long progress of a people. There is a constitution that has been in force since 1814, inspired in form and content by the American and French which preceded it. The present King Haakon bears the number VII [the current king (2007) is Harald V] to emphasize that he belongs to a line of kings which had been *interrupted* [my emphasis] since 1387. The most famous of his preceding namesakes claimed dominion in the thirteenth century over parts of present-day Sweden, over several island groups off the coast of Scotland, over Iceland and Greenland. There were suggestions of an imperial air about Norway in those days, and even earlier, when viking chieftains had hopped from island to island and even reached the American coast. For three centuries Norwegian vikings maintained a solid dominion in Ireland, and a slender but flourishing Christian colony in Greenland, with a bishop and a dozen churches. The kings of Norway tried to follow the fashions of the French court since King Olaf, their first Christian saint, named his son Magnus after the great Charlemagne. They had just sworn off a paganism which had remained in these parts long after the Anglo-Saxons and the Franks had forgotten that they had ever bent knees to Odin and Thor. In the colony of Iceland a peculiarly tough breed of Norwegians preserved these traditions until the world was ready to rediscover them once more.

Modern literature in Norway is deeply marked by this combination of the old and the new. There is a freshness and vigor which only youth can give, but also the mature perspective of a thousand years of background. If one compared the literature of modern times to a tree whose roots are to be explored, one would find that like the Yggdrasil of ancient Norse myth it has three principal roots. There is that oldest one which reaches back into the pagan and early Christian past. This has meant much to Norwegian writers even though they perforce must share it with Iceland. The poems of the *Edda* and the prose of the sagas are the threshold of Norwegian literature, though one cannot say that they are everyday reading among the people of today. But one of the books from this period is so important, though it was written in Iceland, that a modern Norwegian nation is almost unthinkable without it – Snorri Sturluson’s *History of the Kings of Norway*, written some centuries ago.

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themselves as superior to cultures which were ‘less evolved’ and justified the imposition of their culture on inferior ones.

<sup>18</sup> Fredrik Svanberg, *Decolonizing the Viking Age*: 1 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2003), pp. 19-20.



The second root arose in a friendlier but less lofty soil than that of the first; this is the world of the ballad and the folk tale. From the thirteenth century to the seventeenth century folk literature was almost the only form of literary composition open to the Norwegians. The international themes and forms of folk literature were here elaborated into a world of fantasy full of grotesque shapes and bizarre adventures. Somehow these came to mean far more in the modern literature of Norway than the sagas and the Eddas, for they came closer home to men's bosoms and liberated the forces of fancy. There was a special warmth in these plaintive songs and homely tales which endeared them to lay and learned.

But throughout all the rejoicing over the treasures of folk and faerie, the third root provided the hard core of day-to-day support in Norwegian cultural life. This was the root that extended from Norwegian urban culture back into the centuries of union with Denmark. The transition from medieval to early modern life took place under the ægis of Denmark, with all the revolutionary changes suggested by such words as Reformation, Renaissance, and Rationalism, the three R's which are as fundamental in Norway as in most other western nations. The Danish root has been much neglected in recent years, but it has not withered away even though some Norwegians would ignore it or even amputate it. At least from 1660 to 1814 the capital of Norway was Copenhagen, where her citizens went to complain of mistreatment, her sons to gain their higher learning, and her ambitious men to win preferment.<sup>19</sup>

What is interesting about this passage is how it so clearly reveals the instability of the premise of a Norwegian nation. For Beyer, Norway is simultaneously the 'modern nation' which emerged in 1905, but also the Norway of 1814 which had its own constitution, and lastly the 'empire' of Norway in the Middle Ages. In this version he fondly recalls a golden era where he implies that the Norwegian 'empire' extended from parts of Sweden to America. In Norway (*note: not Scandinavia*) Germanic culture was preserved until the introduction of Christianity and the importation of foreign culture; happily the ancient pagan traditions had by then been transported to 'the colony of Iceland', where they were not forgotten but carefully guarded by 'a particularly tough

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<sup>19</sup> Harald Beyer, *A History of Norwegian Literature*, pp. 2-3. With regard to Beyer's observation that King Haakon VII belonged to a line of kings which had been interrupted since 1387, it is interesting to find a similar sentiment expressed on the official website of the Royal House of Norway: 'The tradition of Norwegian kingship *in various forms* [my emphasis] stretches back more than a thousand years', see [www.kongehuset.no](http://www.kongehuset.no). 'In various forms' is one way of putting it. In the 14th century the old royal lines in all three Scandinavian kingdoms ended with the death of Olav IV. His mother, Margrete Valdemarsdatter, the only queen-regnant Norway has ever had, succeeded in forging the Kalmar Union, with her nephew as king of Norway, Sweden and Denmark. The current Norwegian Royal House is a branch of the princely family of Glücksburg, originally from Schleswig-Holstein in Germany. The Danish King Frederik VII (1808-63) was childless. By as early as the 1840s it was clear, that the Oldenburg royal families in Denmark were going to die out, but a careful study of the family trees revealed an heir to the throne: Prince Christian of Glücksburg (1818-1906). He was descended from King Christian III's son, Hans the Younger (1545-1622). Therefore to emphasise the genealogical links between Haakon VII and Olav IV is quite misleading. It is also worth pointing out here that the website of the Royal House of Norway features several 'viking' emblems. On the 'monarchy page', for example, the Oseberg ship is depicted twice, in a large photo beside a painting of the Royal family.



breed of Norwegians' and kept 'until the world was ready to discover them once more'.<sup>20</sup>

He hints that the attempt by the Norwegian court to imitate the French was unsuccessful (and perhaps unworthy?), ignoring as he does, the innovative influence foreign texts had in generating new writing in medieval Norwegian literature such as saints lives, *strengleikar* or *riddarasogur*. Beyer circumvents the problem of a lack of continuous tradition from the 'poems of the *Edda* and the prose of the sagas' to modern literature by explaining that it temporarily went to Iceland for safe-keeping until the world was ready for it again. In the meantime the only truly Norwegian literature, which was certainly not as 'lofty' as the ancient pagan literature, was that of the ballad and folk tale. These were popular because of their homeliness and 'special warmth'. But lest we get the impression that the Norwegian cultural expression during the period 1400-1800 was reduced to peasant songs, Beyer acknowledges some positive aspects from Danish domination. Norwegians had access to European thought through the cultural life in Copenhagen, where Norway's 'sons' could find all the advantages of a 'typical West European capital'. Beyer admits that for some of these men the distinction between being Danish or Norwegian was pretty meaningless (Holberg would be a good example), but struggles to maintain these distinctions nevertheless.

The metaphor of the tree used by Beyer to emphasise his reading of the development of Norwegian literature as some kind of organic process which evolved naturally from three roots, is in fact vitiated by his own admission that the Old Norse literature which preserved the pagan Germanic tradition survived only in Iceland until it was 'rediscovered' in the sixteenth century. No doubt early Danish and Dano-Norwegian translations of *Heimskringla*, *Snorra Edda*, and the *Poetic Edda* helped to inspire the Norwegian national romantic movement, but the main stimulus came from 'outside'. As the interest in Old Norse-Icelandic literature increased in the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, more and more of these texts were translated and grafted onto the tree of Norwegian literary history.

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<sup>20</sup> Beyer does not allude to the fact that it was due to the introduction of writing which came with Christianity that these old traditions (principally in the form of the *Poetic Edda*) were recorded and that the very fact of writing this literature down was due to a 'renaissance' in the north in the mid-twelfth century. According to Gro Steinsland, with the arrival of learning in the North, the need was felt to write themselves into a common European history, which led to a renewed interest in the pagan past. See '*V'oluspá*' og andre norrøne helligtekster, selected and introduced by Gro Steinsland (Oslo: De norske Bokklubbene, 2003), p. ix. From this perspective, historical texts such as *Heimskringla* could be considered to have been inspired by foreign rather than native influences.

A certain nationalistic bias is revealed in Beyer's subsequent treatment of Old Norse literature, which is illustrated by repeated reaffirmations of the connections between the ancient Norsemen and modern Norway/Norwegians. In *The Lay of Rig*, for example, he sees 'a direct reflection of Norwegian social structure';<sup>21</sup> regarding the Edda he feels that 'it seems wisest to conclude that poems describing a clearly Norwegian background are of Norwegian origin, even though it is strange that none of the poems generally assumed to be Icelandic have any peculiarly Icelandic allusions'.<sup>22</sup> The quite detailed discussions of Eddic and skaldic poetry provided in this history imply an audience which is already at least partly familiar with those genres and the mentioning of certain poems presumably reflects a general interest in them, or even their popularity. In the chapter on the 'Poetry of the Skalds', Beyer represents skaldic poetry with lines from Einarr Helgason's *Vellekla*, Þorbjörn hornklofi's *Haraldskvæði*, Øyvind Skaldespiller's *Hákonarmál*,<sup>23</sup> and Egill Skalla-Grímsson's *Sonatorrek*, poems which he no doubt feels have a special resonance for a Norwegian audience. *Hákonarmál* is repeatedly included in selections of Old Norse poetry. It is even enshrined in the national anthem ('dette landet Håkon verget / medens Øyvind kvad', 'Håkon defended this land while Øyvind recited') and seems to be perceived as Norway's answer to the *Chanson de Roland*.

Throughout the first chapter of the book Beyer stresses time and again the role the Eddas and sagas have played in the development of Norwegian literature and the formation of the state ('a modern Norwegian nation is almost unthinkable without [...] Snorri Sturluson's *History of the Kings of Norway*') but not surprisingly he barely registers the fact that this literature was available to Norwegians only in translation. Not only were these translations instrumental in shaping Norwegian literature and society (and also language, as we shall see below), as part of the discursive apparatus we have outlined above, but they also reflect the dominant poetics and politics of the society in which they were produced.

During all that time [the last three hundred years during which sagas have been read in Scandinavia] translations of Old Norse works have played an important role in the

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<sup>21</sup> Harald Beyer, *A History of Norwegian Literature*, p. 9.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid*, p. 13.

<sup>23</sup> The second verse of the Norwegian national anthem, 'Ja vi elsker dette landet', written by Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson in the 1860s, contains a reference to Øyvind's recital of *Hákonarmál*: 'Dette landet Harald berget/ med sin kjemperad/ dette landet Håkon verget/ medens Øyvind kvad' (This country Harald saved with his rows of champions, this country Håkon protected while Øyvind sang). Translations of *Hákonarmál* [*Hákonarmál*] and *Sønnetapet* [*Sonatorrek*] are also two of the three poems Gro Steinsland chooses to represent skaldic poetry in '*V'oluspá*' og andre norrøne helligtekster.



development of a modern Nordic literature and in the formation of a Nordic consciousness – occasionally also with consequences far across Europe. If one wants to paint a correct picture of the true literary development, this literature must therefore be taken into account.<sup>24</sup>

As might be expected, the Old Norse texts which were first translated by Norwegians were predominantly those which were most closely related to Norwegian history, such as *Heimskringla* and *Sverris saga*. Despite the fact that this epoch is often characterized as a particularly dull period in Norwegian history ('In the sixteenth century Norway was at her lowest point, not only politically and economically, but also culturally'),<sup>25</sup> thanks partly to the fact that Danish replaced Norwegian as the written language and partly to the Reformation, which resulted in the loss of valuable manuscripts and other cultural artefacts, it was not entirely untouched by the currents of humanism prevailing in the rest of Europe. The revival of interest in classical literature and history generated by the arrival of humanism contributed to an increase in the study of local historical writings which for sixteenth-century Norwegians meant the old sagas of the kings. As Jon Gunnar Jørgensen points out, it was the combination of the new philosophy and the availability of manuscripts of the kings' sagas in Bergen which led to the translation activities and historical work of the so-called 'Bergen humanists' or 'Bergen circle'.<sup>26</sup> The chief products of this circle were: 'Christiern Pedersen's Excerpts', a selection from various sources translated into Danish for the Danish priest Christiern Pedersen by a Norwegian c. 1516-26;<sup>27</sup> Mattis Størsson's translation *Norske Kongers Krønike* (1594), which extends from *Ynglingasaga* to *Hákonssaga Hákonarsonar*,<sup>28</sup> Laurents Hanssøn's translation of *Heimskringla* written c. 1550;<sup>29</sup> Absolon Pedersen Beyer's *Om Norgis Rige* (1567); a history of Norway chiefly based on Snorri;<sup>30</sup> and Peder Claussøn Friis's translation written around 1599 but not appearing in print until 1633, under the title

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<sup>24</sup> Bjarne Fidjestøl, ed. *Saga-litteraturen: Eit utval ved Bjarne Fidjestøl* (Oslo: Det Norske Samlaget, 1984), p. 7: 'Gjennom heile denne tida [last 300 years] har omsetjingar av norrøne verk spela ei stor rolle i framvoksteren av ein moderne nordisk litteratur og i utforminga av eit nordisk medvit – til sine tider også med verkned langt utover i Europa. Dersom ein vil teikne eit rett bilete av den roynlege litterære vokstergangen, må denne litteraturen derfor takast med'.

<sup>25</sup> Harald Beyer, *A History of Norwegian Literature*, p. 77.

<sup>26</sup> Jon Gunnar Jørgensen, 'Sagaoversettelser i Norge på 1500-tallet', in *Collegium Medievale*, 6 (1992-93) 169-97.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, p. 170.

<sup>28</sup> Mattis Størsson, *Norske Kongers Krønike oc bedriff, indtil vnge Kong Haagens tid, som døde: Anno Domini 1263: Vdset aff gammel Norske paa Danske* (Copenhagen, 1594).

<sup>29</sup> According to Jørgensen, it was Laurents Hanssøn who identified Snorri Sturluson as the author of *Heimskringla*. See Jon Gunnar Jørgensen, 'Sagaoversettelser i Norge på 1500-tallet', p. 173.

<sup>30</sup> Absalon Pedersson Beyer, *Om Norgis rige*, edited by Harald Beyer (Bergen: F. Beyer, 1928).

*Norske Kongers Chronica*.<sup>31</sup> According to Harald Beyer, ‘in a revised edition of 1757 [this last translation] came to be the favorite reading of the Norwegian people. More than any other single work it prepared Norway for the resumption of national existence which was thrust upon it in 1814’.<sup>32</sup>

While most of these texts were prepared in Norway by Norwegians, it is stretching the truth slightly to call them the oldest Norwegian saga translations.<sup>33</sup> As the titles of Peder Claussøn and Laurents Hanssøn’s works clearly indicate, the language of translation was ‘Dansk’, the written language of learning for all Norwegians and Danes. In his study of 1942, however, Egil Eiken Johnsen argues that the language used in these translations contains a sufficient number of Norwegianisms to support that claim.<sup>34</sup> Johnsen’s study is remarkable for its pioneering nature, a situation that the author himself is very much aware of.<sup>35</sup> This book, which precedes *Descriptive Translation Studies* by four decades, consists in a detailed comparative analysis of the language and style of ‘the three oldest Norwegian saga translations we have preserved’,<sup>36</sup> although, unlike modern models of *Descriptive Translation Studies*, Johnsen’s begins with a very clear and prescriptive idea of what a saga-translation should be (pp. 16-18). It is the only study of its kind that I have been able to uncover (related to Norwegian literature) although there has been more research recently on Norwegian saga-translations, particularly by Jon Gunnar Jørgensen. Like my own study, Johnsen’s seeks to establish the extent of Norwegianness in his chosen examples, through a detailed analysis of language and style and by comparison with contemporary Danish texts. He concludes that these early translators wrote in ‘their own language’ which differed significantly from the Danish of their time (p. 240). Even though Laurentz Hanssøn claims to write Danish, for Johnsen, ‘the Norwegian tradition shines through’ his translation (p. 240). Johnsen feels that the native tradition is particularly obvious in cases where the translator is not sure how to write a word and has resort to his own dialect. It also emerges clearly in the translators’ use of paratactic sentences, which

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<sup>31</sup> *Snorre Sturlesøns Norske Kongers Chronica udsat paa Danske aff Peder Claussøn*, edited by Ole Worm (Copenhagen: Martzan, 1633).

<sup>32</sup> Harald Beyer, *A History of Norwegian Literature*, p. 83.

<sup>33</sup> Of course the earliest Norwegian translations, if we can include Old Norwegian, were those commissioned by Hákon Hákonarson in the thirteenth century.

<sup>34</sup> Egil Eiken Johnsen, *Sagaspråk og stil: En undersøkelse av språk og stil i de tre eldste norske sagaoversettelser* (Oslo: Gyldendahl, 1942).

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, p. 7: ‘Så vidt meg bekjent er det ikke tidligere foretatt undersøkelser av den art som jeg her legger fram resultatet av’.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*: ‘I denne avhandlingen undersøker jeg språk og stil i de tre eldste norske sagaoversettelsene vi nå har bevart’.



Johnsen feels ignore classical writing traditions, harking back instead to an indigenous 'saga-style' (unlike the Danish writers which he refers to for comparative purposes):

One might perhaps have expected, with regard to style in that time, that Latin style and religious style would have made a strong impression; that is something we have not been able to establish. It is neither the style of the Latin authors nor that of the religious authors which plays the greatest role (for style) in the works under discussion. It is the Old Norse style, the saga-style, which determines style in the translations. It is the stylistic tradition from the saga period which continues in more recent times; the language and style of the saga are still alive. This provides a solid basis to build on for those who in the subsequent centuries will lead Norwegian language and Norwegian style to victory.<sup>37</sup>

Johnsen's attitude is unmistakable. Anticipating Bjarne Fidjestøl's words (see footnote 25), he quite rightly acknowledges the role that these translations have played in the development of Norwegian culture and their right to a place in the Norwegian canon, but before that can happen he needs to ascertain that they have been written in Norwegian. As Johnsen says, some of these translators were aware of a difference between the way people spoke in Denmark and Norway, but at this stage, although there was obviously national pride involved in some cases in the rewriting of their glorious past, this did not seem to be connected with language.

It was not until the nineteenth century that Norwegians began to feel the lack of a national language acutely. Until then Danish (or Dano-Norwegian as it was sometimes known) had been the common written language for educated Norwegians and Danes alike. However, with the dissolution of the Dano-Norwegian union and the spread of romantic nationalism, many Norwegians felt that the time had come for them to reassert themselves linguistically. With the end of the Napoleonic campaigns across Europe, Norway was handed over from Denmark to Sweden in 1814, at the Treaty of Kiel. Norwegians took advantage of the confusing period that followed to write their own constitution, which was signed by the constitutional assembly at Eidsvoll on May 17, 1814.<sup>38</sup> The new government selected the Danish Crown Prince Christian Fredrik to be king, but his rule was short-lived once the Swedish government asserted its right to Norway. However the Swedes elected to accept the Norwegian constitution and thus

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<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*, p. 243: 'Det som man kanskje skulle vente i denne tiden når det gjelder stilen, at latinsk stil og religiøs stil hadde satt sterke spor etter seg, det har vi ikke kunnet konstatere. Det er hverken de latinske forfatteres stil eller de religiøse forfatteres stil som spiller den største rollen for stilen i de foreliggende arbeider. Det er den norrøne stilen, sagastilen, som bestemmer stilen i oversettelsene. Det er stiltradisjonen fra sagatiden som fortsetter i den nyere tid. – Sagaens språk og sagaens stil er ennå levende. Det gir et fast grunnlag å bygge på for dem som i de kommende hundreår skal føre norsk språk og norsk stil fram til seier'.

<sup>38</sup> This date (normally referred to by Norwegians simply as 'syttende mai') is now the national day of Norway.

began Norway's new era as a state with its own democratically elected government but without the right to decide foreign policy. Jon Gunnar Jørgensen argues that this turn of events took most Norwegians by surprise:

Apart from a few [politically]-conscious, prominent citizens, people were quite unprepared for the newly-won democracy. For the democracy to work and become consolidated, the people had to be educated. An important means of achieving this was to develop national feeling, which had to be built up and strengthened. The notion of Norway as an independent state had to be established, and the kings' sagas made it possible to build this idea on a solid, historical basis. Therefore it became a political policy, both nationally and democratically motivated, to make the kings' sagas, and especially *Heimskringla*, known to the people. They had to be translated and made available to all. The many translation projects in the nineteenth century bear witness to great eagerness for the implementation of this policy.<sup>39</sup>

N.F.S. Grundtvig published in Denmark in 1818-22 a popular translation of *Heimskringla*, which was well received there but not in Norway.<sup>40</sup> This was not because of any difficulty in understanding the language; Danish was the written form used by both Danes and Norwegians alike. Jørgensen maintains that the problem was not that it was *in* Danish but that it *was* Danish. It was difficult to accept that a text which contained such national meaning for Norwegians was presented in a Danish publication. This situation prompted the appearance of two 'Norwegian' translations: the first by Jacob Aall in 1838;<sup>41</sup> and the second by P. A. Munch (1859-71).<sup>42</sup> Both Aall and Munch felt that Grundtvig's translation was 'neppe [...] passende for menig Mand i Norge' ('hardly suitable for the average man in Norway'), and was 'unorsk' (unnorwegian), but as Jørgensen points out, they found it hard to justify these claims.<sup>43</sup> Exception was taken on reasonable grounds to Grundtvig's abandonment of the skaldic

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<sup>39</sup> Jon Gunnar Jørgensen, 'Reisningsmagten i vort folk. Om norske Heimskringla-oversettelser på 1800-tallet', in *Artikler: udgivet i anledning af Preben Meulengracht Sørensen's 60 års fødselsdag 1. marts 2000*, ed. by Pernille Hermann and Trine Buhl (Århus: Norrønt Forum, Århus Universitet, 2000), pp. 64-77 (p. 65): 'Bortsett fra noen få bevisste, fremstående borgere, var folk altså ganske uforberedt på det nyvunne demokrati. For at demokratiet så skulle fungere og konsolideres, måtte folket oppdras. Et viktig virkemiddel for å oppnå dette var å utvikle nasjonalfølelsen. Den måtte bygges opp og styrkes. Forestillingen om Norge som en selvstendig stat måtte etableres, og kongesagaene gjorde det mulig å tuftte denne på fast, historisk grunn. Derfor ble det et politisk program, både nasjonalt og demokratisk motivert, å gjøre kongesagaene, og spesielt Heimskringla, kjent for folket. De måtte oversettes og gjøres tilgjengelig for alle. De mange oversettelsesprosjektene på 1800-tallet vitner om stor iver etter å gjennomføre dette programmet'.

<sup>40</sup> *Norges Konge-Kronike af Snorro Sturleson*, trans. by [fordansket ved] N. F. S. Grundtvig, 3 vols (Copenhagen: Schultziske Officin, 1818-22).

<sup>41</sup> *Snorre Sturlesons norske Kongers Sagaer*, trans. by Jacob Aall, 3 vols (Oslo: Guldberg & Dzwonkowski, 1838-39).

<sup>42</sup> *Norges Konge-Sagaer* trans. by P.A. Munch, 2 vols (Oslo: Fabritius 1859-71). The first section was issued in 1833, but the rest was delayed until 1859 for financial reasons.

<sup>43</sup> Jon Gunnar Jørgensen, 'Reisningsmagten i vort folk', p. 66.



style in favour of a ballad-style in his translation of the stanzas, but his prose style was also criticised for leaning too much towards the ‘dansk Folkesprog’.<sup>44</sup> Another reason for Grundtvig’s poor reception in Norway probably has its basis in a number of cutting remarks he made about the Norwegian Gerhard Schøning’s Danish-Latin translation (1777-83), and also in the fact that he criticised Norwegians for calling their language ‘Norsk’ when in fact it was ‘Dansk’ as ‘Snorro himself’ admitted (‘som Snorro selv indslutter baade Norsk og Engelsk under Navnet af den Danske Tunge!’, Jørgensen: 2000, p. 67; Grundtvig: 1818, p. lvi). He thus put his finger on what was a sore point for Norwegians, i.e. the fact that they had not, as yet, a language they could call their own:

It was embarrassing to some Norwegians that their written language should be the same as Danish. Ideas from German Romantics like Herder were spread into Norway: language should be an expression of the national character, or soul.<sup>45</sup>

By this time the idea of a separate national language had been written into the new constitution. After the attempt at complete Norwegian independence failed, the May constitution was revised. Among the number of amendments was the addition of three new references to ‘det Norske Sprog’ (the Norwegian Language), whereas the previous document had only mentioned ‘Landets Sprog’ (the National Language). The articles amended were 47, regarding the king’s education, which should be through Norwegian, and 81, that all laws should be prepared in Norwegian. Article 33, which had previously dealt with foreign policy, was now rendered redundant by the reinstatement of the union with Sweden and was replaced with the following wording: ‘Alle Forestillinger om Norske Sager, saavel som de Expeditioner, som i Anledning deraf skee, forfattes i det Norske Sprog’ (All representations of Norwegian matters, as well as the documents which result there from, are to be composed in the Norwegian language). As a result, translators were constitutionally obliged, quite literally, to give their renderings of ancient works relating to Norwegian history in the Norwegian language. These amendments were obviously made in a slightly rebellious spirit, to prevent a recurrence of what had happened four hundred years before. Having just recently been released from the yoke of Danish rule, Norwegians did not want Swedish replacing Danish as the new language of administration or of culture. The only problem was, as we have mentioned above, that in 1814 no one was exactly sure what the

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<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*, p. 66. Jørgensen observes that for a Norwegian reading Grundtvig’s translation today, the style is actually reminiscent of Asbjørnsen and Moe’s *Norske Folkeeventyr*, 2 vols (Oslo: Dahl, 1843-44).

<sup>45</sup> Harald Beyer, *A History of Norwegian Literature*, p. 115.

Norwegian language was or if it even existed. The written language of administration and culture was unarguably Danish or Dano-Norwegian, and when Norwegians began to refer to this language as 'Norsk', the Danes (such as Grundtvig above) protested vociferously. Linguists like Molbech and Rask pointed out that the only truly Norwegian language was that which the country people spoke in their dialects.<sup>46</sup> And indeed one approach used by early saga translators, such as Jacob Aall, was to make their translations more Norwegian-sounding by interspersing them with Norwegian dialect words.

Norwegian intellectuals were divided as to how to approach the language problem. Some, most famously Ivar Aasen, advocated a language based on the rural dialects, but as most of the Norwegian intelligentsia had been educated in Denmark, they were not so willing to dispose of the only language which was equipped to express culture and science. These conflicting attitudes were also reflected in literary circles (which experienced a dramatic burst of literary activity around this time), most notoriously characterised by the Welhaven-Wergeland feud.<sup>47</sup> As Beyer puts it, 'This was the first struggle in the history of Norway in which poetry became a spiritual force in social life'.<sup>48</sup> But it was certainly not the last. By the time Hallvard Lie's first volume of *Islandske ættesager* appeared in 1951, both *landsmaal* ('country language', based on the rural dialects) and *riksmaal* ('official language', the form of Danish spoken in Norwegian cities, and used for official purposes) had strongly established themselves and Norway was in the grip of a linguistic civil war that was to continue throughout the twentieth century; indeed the issue is still capable of generating heated argument to this day.

*Landsmaal*, or *nynorsk* as it later became known, saw its roots not only in the folk dialects of rural Norway, but also as a spoken descendant of Old Norwegian and the norm Aasen established in his *Norsk Grammatik* (1864) and *Norsk Ordbog* (1873) 'may be regarded as a reconstruction of an ideal form for the dialects, one which Old Norwegian might have attained if it had not died out'.<sup>49</sup> In 1868 a publishing company called Det Norske Samlaget was set up with the purpose of promoting and developing

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<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Sverre Lyngstad, 'Modern Norwegian Literature: An Overview', in *Review of National Literatures: Norway*, ed. by Sverre Lyngstad (New York, Griffon House: 1983), pp. 29-51 (p. 32): 'These two leading poets, debated at length, in prose and verse, the direction Norwegian literature and culture were to take: whether to build on the Danish tradition (Welhaven's position) or to eschew the four hundred years of obeisance to alien modes and, reconnecting Norwegian cultural aspirations to the traditions of the great Norse past, bring forth a new literature on native grounds'.

<sup>48</sup> Harald Beyer, *A History of Norwegian Literature*, p. 119.

<sup>49</sup> Einar Haugen, *Language Conflict and Language Planning* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), p. 35.



the *nynorsk* language. Considering the strong cultural links which *nynorsk* speakers felt towards the Old Norwegian language, it is not surprising that they quickly set about translating the great works of Old Norse literature into *nynorsk*. *Laksdøla, elder Soga um laksdølerne*, translated by Stefan Frich, was published in 1899, and this was quickly succeeded by others issued in a series of translations called 'Norrøne bokverk'. At least forty titles were issued in this series between 1907 and 1962, including the first Norwegian translation of *Egils saga* in 1914 by Leiv Heggstad. Heggstad was the son of Marius Hægstad, the first professor of *landsmaal* at the University of Oslo, and the person responsible for establishing the official written standard for *landsmaal*. Leiv Heggstad himself was a schoolteacher, Old Norse scholar, and an active campaigner for the promotion of *landsmaal*. His publications include *Norsk grammatik* (1914) and a *Gamalnorsk ordbok* (with interpretations in *nynorsk*, 1931).

As an evitable reaction against the establishment of Det Norske Samlaget, an opposing group, Riksmålsforbundet, for the supporters of the *riksmål* cause was instituted in 1907 on the initiative of Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson. A similar organisation, Riksmålsvernet, set up twelve years later, sponsored the publication over the period 1922-28 of a six-volume edition of translations of eleven Icelandic family sagas.<sup>50</sup> This collection did not include *Egils saga*, however, and until Lie's translation was published in 1951, the only versions available to Norwegian-speaking readers were Heggstad's *nynorsk* translation and N.M Petersen's old Danish one (1862).

The Riksmålsvernet's edition was replaced in 1951-54 by the collection in four volumes, edited by Hallvard Lie. This edition, also termed *Islandske ættesagaer*, includes the sagas of the Riksmålsvernet's edition as well as another eight sagas and four *þættir*. *Egils saga* is the very first saga in volume 1, followed by *Sagaen om Gunnlaug Ormstunge*, *Sagaen om Hallfred vandrådeskald* and *Sagaen om Bjørn hitdølakjempe* (all trans. by Charles Kent); *Sagaen om fostbrødrene* (trans. by Sigrid Unset); and *Kormaks saga* (trans. by Anne Holtsmark). Apart from *Egils saga*, the other translations in this volume are identical with the versions in the 1922-28 edition.

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<sup>50</sup> *Islandske ættesagaer*, sponsored by Riksmålsvernet.

Hallvard Lie's 'Egil Skallagrímsson's saga' 

In the introduction to his Norwegian translation of *Egils saga*, Lie states:

In a series of Icelandic Family Sagas translated into Norwegian it was almost a matter of course that *Egils saga* should come first. By virtue of both its content and its form, it should seem more immediately familiar to Norwegian readers than some of the other Family Sagas and on these grounds it is the natural starting-point for readers new to the sagas [...] The content of *Egils saga* is linked to Norwegian soil like no other saga.<sup>51</sup>

This echoes the views of Leiv Heggstad who, in 1914, claimed that: 'For us Norwegians this saga is especially interesting and valuable because it mostly portrays events that took place in this country, in the western, eastern and northern districts'.<sup>52</sup> That *Egils saga* has a particular resonance for a Norwegian audience is clear from these statements, and the popularity of these translations is evident from the numerous editions and reprints of them (the latest edition of Lie's translation was published in 2003; the tenth edition of Heggstad's translation came out in 2004). What is intriguing about Lie's statement is the way in which he represents *Egils saga* as quasi-indigenous literature whose domestic qualities speak 'directly' (*umiddelbart*) to the contemporary Norwegian reader, completely bypassing the reality that this text is removed from the reader not only chronologically, but also linguistically, and therefore can only be accessed through the medium of translation.

Lie goes on to explain how many of the scenes and events in *Egils saga* take place in Norway and how the plot involves the Norwegian royal family;<sup>53</sup> then he takes it a step further by claiming that due to its setting and 'manner' *Egils saga* is a sort of hybrid between a king's and family saga and that because of this, those readers who are 'at home' with *Heimskringla* will find it easier to adapt to *Egils saga*. He finds the similarities between the two impossible to ignore and goes on to suggest, as many others have done, that the author was one and the same: Snorri Sturluson.

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<sup>51</sup> *Islandske ættesager*, vol. 1, p. 22: 'I en oversettelsesserie av islandske ættesager til norsk var det nærsagt en selvfølge å la Egils saga komme først. Den skulle nemlig både gjennom sitt innhold og sin form kunne virke mer umiddelbart "hjemlig" på norske lesere enn noen av de andre ættesagaene, og av den grunn være det naturlige utgangspunkt for alle begynnende sagalesere her i landet', and 'Som ingen annen ættesaga er Egils saga innholdsmessig knyttet til norsk jord'.

<sup>52</sup> Leiv Heggstad, trans., *Egils saga* (Oslo: Det Norske Samlaget, 1965), p. 5: 'for oss nordmenn er denne saga sær forvitneleg og gild, med di ho for det meste skildrar hendingar som har gått for seg her i landet, på Vestlandet, Austlandet og i Nordland'.

<sup>53</sup> The links between *Egils saga* and Norway are further emphasised by chapter headings such as 'I gamlandet' (in the old country). See fig. 1. As we can see in fig. 2, the artist has drawn his inspiration for the illustration from the lid of the Frank's Casket.





Fig. 1 'In the Old Country'. Illustration on the first page of Hallvard Lie's translation. See *Egil Skallagrimssons saga*, trans. by Hallvard Lie, in *Islandske ættesagaer*, ed. by Hallvard Lie, 5 vols (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1951-54), I (1951), pp. 25-211 (p. 29).



Fig. 2 The Franks Casket, Lid, London, British Museum. A whalebone box, covered in carvings and runes, this casket is considered to have been made in the North of England in the seventh century. The scene on the lid depicts an archer (commonly identified as Egill, brother of Vǫlundr/Weyland) defending his home with a bow.



Snorri's 'dramatic dialogue' was the subject of Lie's first academic publication, a theme which he later expanded for his master's dissertation 'Studier i Heimskringlas stil,' printed in 1937. Lie's approach in these studies, was to attempt to develop an understanding of Snorri's thought processes through an analysis of his style; this 'psychological approach' was one he subsequently applied to much of his research. For instance, Lie believed that Egill's poetry provided an excellent opportunity to gain access to the mindset of the poet, and to explain his actions. In his 1948 article on the subject of Egill's journey to York, he says:

I can only make sense of the central event in Egill's life [i.e. the journey to York] by viewing it in relation to a range of greater and lesser episodes in which he is involved, and by using Egill's own poetry as a psychological commentary, as far as that is possible.<sup>54</sup>

It is very likely that Lie's psychological approach was influenced by the work of Hans E. Kinck (1865-1926),<sup>55</sup> one of a group of neoromantic writers who in the search for a specific Norwegian identity after the end of Danish rule, looked to find it in the 'folk soul'.

In his novels, plays and essays, Kinck carried out a kind of 'psychohistory' of the country, probing into the layers of the national unconsciousness for the residues of the unresolved conflicts of history. He showed them to be layered in strata, from pagan to Christian, according to group and locality. Though profoundly patriotic, Kinck was not interested in delivering a conventionally idealistic or sentimental picture of Norway. Indeed what he saw as particularly Norwegian was the bizarre, the idiosyncratic, the tough and gnarled viking root that neither Christianity nor modern times had succeeded in extirpating.<sup>56</sup>

Similarly, in his introduction to the first volume of *Islandske ættesager*, Lie makes a lengthy analogy between the Icelandic character and its landscape. Focusing particularly on the phenomenon of the glacier-covered volcano, Lie explains that just as the 'cold, immutable calm' of the glacier-surface can belie the existence of the seething volcano underneath, so the apparent coldness in Icelandic saga character conceals a smouldering interior, which, under a certain amount of pressure will explode with the same force as the volcano: 'And the sagas themselves are the most logical artistic expression for a

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<sup>54</sup> Hallvard Lie, 'Jorvikferden. Et vendepunkt i Egil Skallagrimsson's liv', in Hallvard Lie, *Om sagakunst og skaldskap: Utvalgte avhandlinger* (Oslo: Alvheim and Eide, 1982), pp. 5-108 (p. 56): 'Jeg får mening i denne sentrale tildragelsen i Egils live bare ved å se den i sammenheng med en rekke større og mindre opptrinn som Egil er innblandet i, og ved å bruke Egils egen diktning som psykologisk kommentar så langt råd er'.

<sup>55</sup> Lie cites a long quotation from Kinck on the inside flap of the dust jacket of *Islandske ættesager*, vol. 1.

<sup>56</sup> William Mishler, 'Norwegian Literature 1910-50', in *A History of Norwegian Literature*, ed. by Harald Næss (Lincoln, NE, and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), pp. 200-77 (p. 227).



human form of life [*livsform*] which contained the same antagonism between a smouldering interior and a chilly exterior'.<sup>57</sup> Lie sees the saga as the perfect vehicle for the expression of this conflict between the interior and exterior, but cautions the reader who for the first time sets out in the world of the Icelandic family sagas that this is a genre which can be as harsh and forbidding as the Icelandic landscape and climate; he predicts that many will recoil from the first cold blast of this genre and redirect their course of reading toward 'milder shores' [*blidere egne*] or towards 'worlds of literature/literatures' [*bokheimer*] where one is more likely to be met with emotional and warm-hearted characters.<sup>58</sup>

#### SPANISH CONTEXT

##### *Spanish: The Language of Empire* ∞

In 1492, Antonio de Nebrija (1441-1552), one of the 'great humanists' of the Spanish Renaissance, published his *Gramática de la lengua castellana*. In this pioneering work Nebrija established the grammatical rules of Spanish (or Castilian) language for the first time and is generally credited with the introduction of grammatical terminology in the vernacular.<sup>59</sup> In the opening sentences of the prologue to his grammar, which is addressed to Queen Isabella of Spain, Nebrija makes the observation that 'language has always been the companion of Empire [...], that together they began, grew and

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<sup>57</sup> *Islandske ættesager*, vol. 1, p. 8: 'Ingensteds på jorden finnes så megen varme under så kald en overflate som på "sagaenes oy". Og sagene selv er det mest konsekvente kunstneriske uttrykk for en menneskelig livsform som innbefattet det samme motsetningsforhold mellom ulmende indre og kjølig ytre'.

<sup>58</sup> Harald Beyer characterises the Norwegian landscape in a similar way and also suggests it has a direct influence on Norwegian literature: 'In no European country are the contrasts of nature so overwhelming as in Norway. It rises steeply from the sea, surrounded only by naked reefs and skerries, is cracked into narrow fjords and channels, which lead gradually into the "dark, church-still valleys," the desolate mountain wastes, the endless forests, and the open smiling country. It is a country, in Bjørnson's words, "toward the eternal snows," lacking often in surface warmth, with a sharp blowing wind over it. Rarely have the poets been able to cultivate the blue flower of beauty, the art for art's sake'. See Harald Beyer, *A History of Norwegian Literature*, p. 5.

<sup>59</sup> According to Emilio Ridruejo there is evidence for this which precedes Nebrija. See his 'Notas romances en gramáticas latino-españolas del siglo XV', *Revista de Filología*, 59 (1997), 47-50. The earliest grammar in a non-classical European language is most likely the *Auraicept na n-Éces* (see Calder, 1917), an Irish text which treats primarily of the Ogham alphabet and grammar but also of poetry; it is claimed to have been composed in the seventh century, although the only surviving manuscript was written in 1390. Other early vernacular grammars include the twelfth-century First Grammatical Treatise on the Icelandic language.

flourished, and afterwards the downfall of both was together'.<sup>60</sup> Nebrija goes on to compare the evolution of Castilian with that of the classical languages of learning, particularly Hebrew, Greek and Latin, and comes to the conclusion that the language which was born at the decline of the Roman Empire and grew out of the ashes of Latin, is now, like the nation itself, enjoying a period of unprecedented power and prosperity.

In 1469, the crowns of the Christian kingdoms of Castile and Aragon had been united by the marriage of Isabella and Ferdinand, bringing almost the whole peninsula under their control, and by 1492 the armies of the Catholic Monarchs had captured the city of Granada thus bringing the *Reconquista*, and almost 800 years of Moorish rule in the Iberian peninsula, to an end. In the same year Queen Isabella expelled from Spain all the Jews who refused to convert to Christianity (the Moors were expelled ten years later). This period of peace and affluence, according to Nebrija is the moment when the arts should flourish and to that end he has written his grammar, so that 'our Castilian language' which has hitherto been allowed to wander 'unhampered' (*suelta*) and 'undisciplined' (*fuera de regla*) can be standardised and elevated into an art form worthy of immortalising the memory of Spain's 'praiseworthy deeds', its learning and culture.

The ennobling and 'artificialization', or standardization, of the Castilian language was the first of Nebrija's purposes. The second was that the grammar might serve as an aid to those who wished to learn Latin, but it is the third purpose which is perhaps the most striking, at least to the modern ear:

The third use of this my work is that which, when in Salamanca I gave the sample of this work to your royal majesty, and you asked me what it could be used for, the very reverend father, Bishop of Avila, took the answer from me, and answering for me said that after your Highness had put under your yoke many barbarous peoples and nations of foreign languages, and who because of those victories would have the necessity of receiving the laws which the conquerer imposes on the conquered, and with those our language, then, because of this my work/art, they could get knowledge of it, as we now learn from the art of the Latin grammar in order to learn Latin. And it is certainly so that not only the enemies of our faith will need to learn the Castilian language, but also the Basques, Navarrese, Italians, and all those others who have some dealings or business in Spain.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Antonio de Nebrija, *Gramática de la lengua castellana*, ed. by Ignacio González-Llubera (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1926), p. 5: 'siempre la lengua fue compañera del imperio; y de tal manera lo siguió, que junta mente comenzaron, crecieron y florecieron, y después junta fue la caída de entrambos'.

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*, p. 8: 'El tercero provecho deste mi trabajo puede ser aquel que, cuando en Salamanca di la muestra de aquesta obra a vuestra real majestad, y me preguntó que para qué podía aprovechar, el mui reverendo padre Obispo de Avila me arrebató la respuesta; y respondiendo por mi dixo que despues que vuestra Alteza metiesse debaxo de su iugo muchos pueblos bárbaros y naciones de peregrinas lenguas, y conel vencimiento aquellos ternían necesidad de recibir las leies quel vencedor pone al vencido, y con ellas nuestra lengua: entonces por esta mi Arte, podrian venir enel conocimiento della, como agora nos otros deprendemos el arte de la gramática latina para deprender el latin. I cierto assi es que no sola mente



When Nebrija published his grammar on August 17 1492, Christopher Columbus was still at sea. Therefore, although Nebrija may have been aware of the possibility that Columbus would conquer new lands for the Spanish crown, the barbarous peoples he refers to here are most likely the recently vanquished Moors – the so-called ‘enemies of our faith’. At the time of publication Nebrija could hardly have imagined the extent to which Spanish territory would expand in the succeeding years; nevertheless, as Thomas Harrington observes:

That Nebrija and the Castilian elite for whom he spoke had stumbled on a winning geopolitical formula was made abundantly clear over the ensuing two centuries. The bundled combination of linguistic fundamentalism, religious fervour and hegemonic ambition, fuelled the creation of the largest empire that the world had ever seen. There can be no doubt that the Castilian emphasis on linguistic standardization and explicit cultural hierarchies greatly facilitated the task of extending and managing the vast and far-flung empire.<sup>62</sup>

The year in which Nebrija’s grammar was published saw the beginning of the most prosperous era Spain had ever, and would ever, experience. The period that became known as the ‘Golden Age’, which incorporated the Spanish Renaissance and later the Baroque, was the age of Cervantes, Velázquez, Lope de Vega and Quevedo; the age in which plastic arts, literary arts, science, mathematics and philosophy flourished; the time at which Spain was at its highest point culturally and politically. One consequence of the heightened cultural activity was the emergence of a number of literary innovations and developments in Spain during this time, such as the picaresque novel, the *entremés*, and the modern novel. Masterly as these genres became, they had grown out of popular and anti-classical tradition and their language was in stark contrast to the literary language as employed by the baroque poets.

Luis de Góngora y Argote (1561-1627) is widely acknowledged as being the exponent *par excellence* of the Spanish literary baroque style. A master of *culteranismo* and *conceptismo*, the two most important stylistic devices of baroque literature, Góngora was the first to developing a style fusing both, a technique which became known as ‘Gongorismo’. His intention was, in part, to confer on Spanish poetry the perfection and prestige that Latin possessed for sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe. He did

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los enemigos de nuestra fe, que tienen ia necesidad de saber el lenguaje castellano, mas los vizcainos, navarros, franceses, italianos, y todos los otros que tienen algún trato y conversacion en España’.

<sup>62</sup> Thomas Harrington, ‘Rapping on the Cast(i)le Gates: Nationalism and Culture-Planning in Contemporary Spain’, in *Ideologies of Hispanism*, ed. by Mabel Moraña (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005), pp. 107-37 (p. 113).

this by pushing the limits of the *culto* tradition, approximating Spanish to Latin in vocabulary and syntax far beyond the limits permissible in normal literary style, and infusing his verse with a profusion of Latinisms and classical allusions.

Another important aspect of Góngora's style is its use of *conceptismo* (i.e. the use of conceits, roughly corresponding to Elizabethan 'Wit'). While *conceptos* were seen as distinct from ordinary metaphors and similes, *conceptismo* proved notoriously difficult to define; Gracián, in his manual of wit, *Agudeza y arte de ingenio* (1648), wrote that it consisted in an 'exquisite concordance, in a harmonious correlation between two or three perceptible extremes, expressed by an act of understanding' or 'an act of understanding which extracts the correspondence which is to be found between things'.<sup>63</sup> For the Spanish *conceptistas* the greater the dissimilarity between the objects, the better the conceit.

The resonances between the styles of Góngorismo and skaldic poetry will be clear even from the brief description given above. Both are composed in a highly ornate style, laden with obscure language, mythological allusions, complex metaphors and conceits. Gracián's definition of *conceptismo* could quite accurately be applied to Egill's conceit of the gallows and the arm in stanza 19 for instance (see chapter 4), and as we shall see in the example below, *Las soledades*, the poem generally considered to be the quintessence of Góngora, abounds in poetic circumlocutions which could just as well be called kennings.

<p>Era del año la estación florida  en que el mentido robador de Europa  – media luna las armas de su frente,  y el Sol todos los rayos de su pelo –  luciente honor del cielo,  en campos de zafiro pace estrellas;<sup>64</sup></p>	<p>It was of the year the flowery season  in which the deceitful robber of Europa  – a half moon the weapons of his  forehead,  and the sun all the sunbeams of his hair –  brilliant honour of the sky,  in fields of sapphire grazes on stars;</p>
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'The deceitful robber of Europa' here refers to Jupiter who (belying his true form), took the form of a bull in order to abduct Europa. The bull alluded to here, however, is Taurus, because it is the time of the year when the sun is in Taurus (which it enters

<sup>63</sup> Baltasar Gracián y Morales, *Agudeza y arte de ingenio*, ed. by Evaristo Correa Calderón, 2 vols (Madrid: Editorial Castalia, 1969), I, p. 55: 'Consiste, pues, este artificio conceptuoso, en una primorosa concordancia, en una armónica correlación entre dos o tres cognoscibles extremos, expresada por un acto del entendimiento'; 'Es un acto del entendimiento, que exprime la correspondencia que se halla entre los objetos'.

<sup>64</sup> *Soledad Primera* (The First Solitude), ll. 1-6, in *Poems of Góngora*, ed. by R. O. Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 40.



around April 21). In this flowery season of the year, this celestial bull, his forehead armed with the horns of the half (or crescent) moon, sunbeams streaming from his hide, appears to graze on stars in fields of sapphire (i.e. the sky).

The similarities to skaldic poetry are remarkable. Particularly striking are the periphrases so reminiscent of kennings: *el mentido robador de Europa* (the deceitful robber of Europa > JUPITER); *las armas de su frente* (the weapons of his forehead > HORNS); and *en campos de zafiro pace estrellas*, where the sky is envisioned as a blue meadow in which Taurus grazes upon stellar corn. Another characteristic feature of Góngora's verse, is the constant use of hyperbaton; the word order of his poetry is frequently inverted, sometimes so much so as to obscure meaning, as is often the case with Egill Skalla-Grímsson's verse. Indeed, Góngora's poetry is so complex that many editions provide the reader with comprehension aids in the form of notes, prose paraphrases of his poems, or, reconstruct the syntax of the verses into more 'normal' word order (which parallels Sigurður Nordal's treatment of the skaldic verses in ÍF 2). In the endnotes to his edition, R. O. Jones, for example, rewrites lines 15-17,

Del siempre en la montaña opuesto pino al enemigo Noto, piadoso miembro roto – breve tabla [...]	Of the forever on the mountain opposed pine to the enemy Notus, pitiful broken limb – short plank [...]
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as: 'breve tabla – piadoso miembro roto del pino siempre opuesto en la montaña al enemigo Noto (the South wind)', i.e. 'short plank – pitiful broken limb of the pine forever opposed on the mountain to the enemy Notus'.<sup>65</sup> The idea of the wind as enemy of the tree is a common kenning in skaldic poetry and indeed is echoed in one of the examples of Egill's stanzas (st. 32) which we examined in chapter 1, where he refers to wind as *jötunn vandar*, 'giant of the tree' (giant = enemy).

It is not hard to imagine how Jorge Luis Borges (and later Bernárdez) was quick to draw analogies between the aesthetics of skaldic poetry and that of the baroque poets of the 'Golden Age', such as Góngora and Gracián, who he greatly admired.<sup>66</sup> Borges's appreciation for the *culteranismo* style might even be partly responsible for his fascination with skaldic poetry and kennings; it certainly provided Bernárdez with a model for his translations of skaldic verses within the tradition of Spanish poetics.

<sup>65</sup> *Poems of Góngora*, p. 132. The plank referred to in the poem is a board to which a shipwrecked youth is forced to entrust his life.

<sup>66</sup> See Jorge Luis Borges, in collaboration with Delia Ingenieros, *Antiguas literaturas germánicas* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1951).

*The Reception of Old Norse literature in Spain* ∞

In 1983, while his translation of *Egils saga* was still in the press, Enrique Bernárdez published an article reviewing the position of the Icelandic sagas and Old Norse literature in Spain. In this essay he laments the almost total ignorance of Icelandic literature which prevailed at the time of writing, and is fiercely critical of the ‘scandalous’ inaccuracies of the handful of references to be found in Spanish encyclopedias and literary histories. He cites, for example, the *Diccionario Enciclopédico Espasa*, which defines ‘saga’ as:

Each of the poetic legends mostly contained in the two collections of early heroic and mythological traditions of ancient Scandinavia. One of these is the *Eddas* [...], which deals with gods and heroes; and the other, that of the [pl.] *Skald*.<sup>67</sup>

The two texts alluded to here are most likely the *Poetic* or *Elder Edda* and the *Prose* or *Younger Edda* (in Spanish *Edda Mayor* and *Edda Menor*), although this entry rather confusingly goes to say that these ‘sagas of the Skald’ include *Sturlunga saga*. Such misleading information, according to Bernárdez, is due to the widespread ignorance regarding the sagas in Spain, an ignorance he attributes to various factors such as: the lack of Castilian (or Spanish) translations of medieval Icelandic texts; the non-existence of any studies on the subject (with the notable exception of Jorge Luis Borges’s); and the ‘disdain’ with which literatures, which have no tradition of being studied in Spain, are regarded. Bernárdez points out that this neglect of Icelandic literature is not paralleled among neighbouring European countries, such as England, Germany, Italy and France, all of which have a relatively strong tradition in Icelandic studies. We can deduce from Bernárdez’s tone that he feels Spain is somewhat behind in this respect and, although he does not allude to it directly, it would appear that he blames the attitude of indifference traditionally shown to those literatures ‘which we do not know’ in Spain, as opposed to the aforementioned countries, on the atmosphere of cultural conservatism, anti-intellectualism, and distrust of foreign culture which was fostered under the Francoist regime. The language in which this statement is made is cautious and rather vague (‘various causes of a sociological nature, which I would prefer to

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<sup>67</sup> Enrique Bernárdez, ‘Las sagas islandesas: Ensayo de síntesis’, *Revista de la Universidad Complutense* (1983), 1-11 (p. 1): ‘Cada una de las leyendas poéticas contenidas en su mayor parte en las dos colecciones de primitivas tradiciones heroicas y mitológicas de la antigua Escandinavia. Una de ellas es los *Eddas* [...], que trata de los dioses y de los héroes; a la otra, la de los *Skald*.’ The first sentence of this quotation is the definition the dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy gives for ‘saga’ in its latest edition (2001).



refrain from commenting on”), however, making it difficult to know for certain.<sup>68</sup> While Bernárdez does not elaborate further on these ‘sociological causes’, it is obvious that he feels that they have now been removed, at least to the extent that the Spanish readership of the journal will be receptive to his essay and will be interested in his comprehensive and informative description of the meaning of the term ‘saga’, the origin of the sagas and the saga as a literary genre.

Although it is true that Spanish scholarship specifically on the Icelandic sagas prior to this article was limited, it is not entirely accurate to say that they were absolutely unknown in Spain in 1983, as Bernárdez implies.<sup>69</sup> He refers to Jorge Luis Borges and Delia Ingenieros’s *Antiguas literaturas germánicas* (1951) here as a unique exception to the dearth of critical literature in Spanish on the sagas, and in a later article claims that neither this book, nor Borges’s earlier article ‘Las Kenningar’,<sup>70</sup> served to palliate the utter lack of knowledge of Old Norse literature as exhibited by Spanish literary historians in particular.<sup>71</sup> Bernárdez felt that Borges himself doubted anyone shared his interest in this culture, citing his comment from the prologue to *Historia de la Eternidad* in the 1989 edition of his complete works as evidence: ‘the unlikely or practically inexistent reader of ‘Las Kenningar’ can investigate the handbook *Literaturas germánicas medievales* which I wrote with María Esther Vásquez’.<sup>72</sup> By the time Borges made this comment, however, *Antiguas literaturas germánicas* had been reprinted at least three times (1965, 1975, 1982), and his later reworking of this text in collaboration with María Esther Vásquez, *Literaturas germánicas medievales*, had been reprinted three times in Argentina (1966, 1978, 1986) and issued in Spain in 1978 where it had been reprinted twice (and later also in 1998 and 1999), which signifies at least some interest in the topic among Spanish speakers. Borges’s passion for Old Norse and Scandinavian culture was also apparent in a multitude of references scattered throughout his writings and in entire poems dedicated to the theme, such as: ‘Snorri Sturluson’ (*El Otro, el mismo*, 1964), ‘En Islandia el alba’, ‘Einar Tambarskelver’ (*La Moneda de hierro*, 1976) and ‘A Islandia’ (*El Oro de los tigres*, 1972), from which the following lines are taken:

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<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*, p. 3: ‘En cuanto al desdén hacia las literaturas “que no conocemos”, se debe probablemente a causas varias, de tipo sociológico, que prefiero abstenerme de comentar’.

<sup>69</sup> *ibid.*, p. 1: ‘En nuestro país, el desconocimiento de las sagas puede considerarse absoluto’.

<sup>70</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, ‘Las kenningar’, in *Historia de la eternidad* (Buenos Aires: Vieu y Zona, 1936), pp. 35-36.

<sup>71</sup> Enrique Bernárdez, ‘Jorge Luis Borges y el Mundo Escandinavo’, *Cuadernos hispanoamericanos*, 505-07 (1992), 361-70 (p. 361).

<sup>72</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, *Obras completas*, ed. by Carlos V. Friás, 3 vols (Barcelona: Emecé, 1989), I, p. 351: ‘El improbable o acaso inexistente lector de *Las kenningar* puede interrogar el manual *Literaturas germánicas medievales*, que escribí con María Esther Vásquez’.

<p>Islandia, te he soñado largamente  Desde aquella mañana en que mi padre  Le dio al niño que he sido y que no ha  muerto  Una versión de la <i>Völsunga Saga</i>  Que ahora está descifrando mi penumbra  Con la ayuda del lento diccionario.  Cuando el cuerpo se cansa de su hombre,  Cuando el fuego declina y ya es ceniza,  Bien está el resignado aprendizaje  De una empresa infinita; yo he elegido  El de tu lengua, ese latín del Norte  Que abarcó las estepas y los mares  De un hemisferio y resonó en Bizancio  Y en las márgenes vírgenes de América.</p>	<p>Iceland, I have dreamt of you for a long  time  Since that morning when my father  Gave the child who I have been and who  has not died  A version of the <i>Völsunga Saga</i>  Which my shadow is now deciphering  With the help of the slow dictionary.  When the body gets tired of its man,  When the fire dies down and is ash,  Befitting is the resigned learning of an  infinite undertaking; I have chosen  That of your language, this Latin of the  North  Which took on the Steppes and the seas  Of one hemisphere and resounded in  Byzantium  And on the virgin margins of America.</p>
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As Borges attests in this poem, he first came into contact with the Icelandic sagas through a translation of *Völsunga Saga*, William Morris's English translation to be precise, but he did not publish any translations of sagas himself. After *Literaturas germánicas medievales*, his only other direct contribution to Old Norse studies in Spanish was his 1984 translation, *Snorri Sturluson: La Alucinación de Gylfi*, with Maria Kodama. However, his interest in Old Norse culture had a direct effect not only on his subject matter but also in his poetic style, often directly quoting kennings or imitating them; for example, in the lines quoted above, he refers to the Icelandic language as *ese latín del Norte* (this Latin of the North).<sup>73</sup> It is difficult to believe that any serious admirer of Borges could not have been aware of the influence of medieval literature of Scandinavia (or indeed England and Germany) on his work, and it is therefore reasonable to assume that in at least some cases his enthusiasm for the culture of the North generated a similar interest among his readers.

Enrique Bernárdez does not state whether or not this was his own case, nor does he explain how he himself became interested in Old Norse literature. In 1976 he completed his doctoral thesis *Las conjunciones coordinativas en islandés moderno* (Coordinate Conjunctions in Modern Icelandic) at the University Complutense in Madrid, under the supervision of Professor Emilio Lorenzo who held the chair in Germanic and English.

<sup>73</sup> For a more detailed discussion on the influence of Icelandic culture on Borges's poetry see Sigrún Á. Eiríksdóttir, "El verso incorruptible": Jorge Luis Borges and the Poetic Art of the Icelandic Skalds', *Variaciones Borges*, 2 (1996), 37-53.



In 1978 Bernárdez published his first article on the Icelandic language,<sup>74</sup> followed in 1980 by an article on the difficulty of translating kennings into Spanish.<sup>75</sup> In 'Las sagas islandesas: Ensayo de síntesis' he mentions no fewer than three translations of his own in the press at the time of writing: *Snorri Sturluson: Textos mitológicos de las Eddas* (pub. 1983), *Snorri Sturluson: Saga de Egil Skallagrimsson* (pub. 1983), *Sagas islandesas* (comprising *Saga de Gunnlaug*, *Saga de Hrafnkel* and *thaettir*, pub. 1984), and one, *Textos heroicos escandinavos* 'in preparation', which does not appear to have ever been published. This fact also suggests that there was some interest in Icelandic literature in Spain; the publishers would hardly have undertaken to invest in these translations unless they felt there was a market for them.

Bernárdez was not the only Spanish scholar publishing on Icelandic literature at this time. In 1982 José Antonio Fernández Romero (now Professor Emeritus of the Universidad de Vigo) who had spent several years in Iceland in the 1950s and early 1960s both as a student and lecturer, brought out his *Lendas islandesas*, a Galician translation of *Sagnakver Skúla Gíslasonar* (a collection of Icelandic sagas and folktales),<sup>76</sup> and in the same year printed an article (also in Galician) whose subject was the Iberian peninsula 'in sagas and skalds'.<sup>77</sup> Vicente Almazán and Luis Lerate were two other Spanish scholars working in the field. Bernárdez was certainly a pioneer in that his translation of *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* was the first ever complete translation of an Icelandic saga into Spanish, and this text (along with Bernárdez's later translations) certainly became a model for those who followed his lead. In the introduction to his translation of *Völsunga saga*, for example, Javier Díaz Vera acknowledges the role Bernárdez's translations have played as models for other translators and in the dissemination of medieval Icelandic literature in Spain:

The consultation of Spanish translations of other medieval Icelandic works has been extremely useful, both with regard to the arrangement of the notes and to the style used in my own translation. Among these translations I would like to

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<sup>74</sup> Enrique Bernárdez, 'Sobre el uso del artículo pospuesto en antiguo islandés', *Filología moderna*, 63 (1978), 13-37.

<sup>75</sup> Enrique Bernárdez, 'Acerca de la traducción de los kenningar y otros aspectos de la poesía escáldica', *Filología moderna*, 68-70 (1980), 223-40.

<sup>76</sup> *Sagnakver Skúla Gíslasonar*, ed. by Sigurður Nordal (Reykjavík: Helgafell, 1947; 2nd edn, 1984); Skúli Gíslason, *Lendas islandesas*, trans. by José Antonio Fernández Romero, Montes e fontes (Vigo: Edicións Xerais de Galicia). Fernández Romero's first translation from Icelandic to Spanish was of two Halldor Laxness novels, see Halldor K. Laxness, *Novelas escogidas*, trans. by José Antonio Fernández Romero y Miguel Chamorro (Madrid: Aguilar, 1959). A number of Laxness's novels, namely *Sjálfstætt fólk*, *Heimsljós*, *Íslandsklukkan*, *Atómstöðin*, and *Paradisarheimt*, were translated into Spanish after he won the nobel prize for literature in 1951, see bibliography for details.

<sup>77</sup> José Antonio Fernández Romero, 'A Península Ibérica en sagas e escaldas', *Grial*, 76 (1982) 129-45.

particularly emphasise those carried out by Professor Enrique Bernárdez whose important and pioneering work in the field and whose translating of Old Norse, begun around the year 1980, has ensured that the Spanish-speaking reader today can have access to a relatively high number of Icelandic works, which continue to increase thanks to the work of, among others, Luis Lerate and Santiago Ibáñez.<sup>78</sup>

As Díaz Vera points out, from the early 1980s on the number of translations grew steadily. While this was certainly due in part to the pioneering work of Enrique Bernárdez, the change in the political climate in Spain also played an important role. After the transition to democracy, and especially after becoming a member of the EC, Spain was eager to imprint and enhance a sense of Europeanness onto its cultural fabric in an attempt to overcome the feeling of ‘lagging behind’ that accompanied the Francoist period. As Parvati Nair notes:

An emphasis on Europeanisation has been a key feature of the cultural climate of post-Franco Spain. Although this was to some extent part of the spirit of *apertura* (openness) in the latter part of Francoist rule, the accelerated liberalisation that took place during and after the transition to democracy aimed to construct a strong sense of identification with the neighbouring, more advanced, nations of western Europe.<sup>79</sup>

Part of this process included a wholesale importation of European literature usually through the medium of translation, and is it certainly within the framework of ‘European’ or even ‘World Culture’ that Spanish translations of Icelandic literature were published, as we shall see in the following section.

### *Saga Translation in Spanish* ➤

That the Icelandic sagas are and were considered ‘cultural capital’ in Spain was immediately apparent from the outset. Of the 24 translations of Old Norse literature into Spanish which have been published (this number includes partial translations of

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<sup>78</sup> *Saga de los Volsungos*, trans. by Javier Díaz Vera, Clásicos medievales, 12 (Madrid: Editorial Gredos, 1998), p. 22, note 36: ‘Finalmente ha sido extremadamente valiosa la consulta de las traducciones de otras obras medievales islandesas al español, tanto en lo referente a la redacción de las notas como al estilo utilizado en mi propia traducción. Destaco entre éstas las realizadas por el profesor Enrique Bernárdez, cuya importante y pionera labor docente y traductora de antiguo nórdico, iniciada hacia el año 1980, ha permitido que el lector hispanohablante pueda hoy acceder a un número de obras islandesas relativamente elevado, que sigue aumentando gracias a los trabajos de, entre otros, Luis Lerate y Santiago Ibáñez’. Santiago Ibáñez also acknowledges his indebtedness to Bernárdez’s translations in his article ‘Consideraciones generales sobre algunos problemas de traducción del antiguo islandés al español’, *Terminologie et traduction*, 1 (2002), 185-205 (p. 187).

<sup>79</sup> Parvati Nair, ‘Homing the Other: The Immigrant as New European in David Planell’s *Bazaar*’, in *Beyond Boundaries: Textual Representations of European Identity*, ed. by Andy Hollis, Yearbook of European Studies, 15 (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 2000), p. 29.



sagas, translations of poetry, and anthologies), practically all have been issued in collections whose titles emphasise the ‘cultural capital’ aspect to a greater or lesser extent, and whose purpose is generally stated as being to put classics of world literature within the reach of the general reader.<sup>80</sup> The collections in which translations of Icelandic sagas are published range from the extremely wide-ranging, ‘Biblioteca Universal’ and ‘Biblioteca de la literatura y el pensamiento universal’ to the more specific ‘Clásicos Medievales’ and ‘Biblioteca Medieval’. By their names, such as ‘Colección Pegasus’ or ‘Colección Gorgona’, some of the titles imply a classical theme, although the former example is little misleading in that most of the titles in this collection seem to belong to the genres of fantasy, science fiction or adventure.<sup>81</sup> To summarise, the Icelandic sagas and Old Norse literature are perceived, by Spanish publishers at least, to belong to an one of a number of categories, from ‘world literature or culture’, ‘medieval literature’ and ‘classics’, to ‘folklore’, ‘fantasy’ or even ‘nature’, and the stated purpose of publishing these translations is to make these gems of world literature accessible to a general audience.

The website ‘blurb’ on these collections often emphasises their comprehensiveness, some assuring the reader that with such a collection they will have an example of every genre and style of world literature: ‘en la [colección austral] no falta ninguna de las figuras destacadas de la literatura universal’ (in the Austral Collection none of the distinguished figures of world literature is absent). The fact that the Icelandic sagas are included in series alongside celebrated works such as Aristotle’s *Poetics*, or ‘Tristan and Iseult’, lends them authority in a context where they are not so widely known and, marketed as they are, that is as ‘cultural capital’, ensures moderate but reliable sales (approximately 100 copies in the first year of publication, and thereafter about 30 copies per year),<sup>82</sup> which are presumably profitable enough for the publishers to keep them in print. Apart from one or two examples, all of the translations

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<sup>80</sup> For example, Gredos, the publishers of Javier Díaz Vera’s *Saga de los Volsungos*, explains on its website that a fundamental purpose of its Medieval Classics collection, is to put the works of the Middle Ages which can be considered essential for Literary History, within the reach of a wide audience, (‘Clásicos Medievales tiene como propósito fundamental poner al alcance de un público amplio las obras de la Edad Media que se pueden considerar esenciales para la Historia de la Literatura’). <<http://www.editorialgredos.com/cmedievales.asp>> [accessed 1 October 2007].

<sup>81</sup> ‘Pegasus: Mundos fantásticos, nacidos del magisterio de J.R.R. Tolkien, poblados de seres extraños, misterios insondables y aventuras sin fin. Sumérgete en las historias más trepidantes de los mejores maestros de la literatura fantástica de todos los tiempos’ (Pegasus: Worlds of fantasy, created by the mastery of J.R.R. Tolkien, populated with strange beings, unfathomable mysteries and adventures without end. Immerse yourself in the most exciting stories of the greatest masters of fantastic literature of all times). See ‘Colección Pegasus’ on the Ediciones Minotauro website: <http://www.edicionesminotauro.com> [accessed 1 October 2007]

<sup>82</sup> Thanks to Javier Díaz Vera, Teodoro Manrique Antón, and Santiago Ibáñez Lluch for this information.

of Old Norse literature into Spanish appear to be still in print and some have been reprinted more than once (e.g. *Saga de Egil Skallagrimson* in 1983, 1984, 1987, 1988; and *Saga de Nial* in 1986, 1996, 2003).<sup>83</sup> It is worthy of note that the only Spanish translation of an Icelandic saga which seems to be out of print is the one containing *Saga de los Groenlandeses* and *Saga de Eirik el Rojo*.<sup>84</sup> This could possibly be due to a lack of interest in Spain regarding accounts which attribute the discovery of America to the Vikings rather than to Christopher Columbus.

Over the last twenty-five years almost all Old Norse literature translated into Spanish has been published in this format, i.e. a paperback edition in a collection of 'classics' by commercial publishers. The only exceptions are *Antología de la literatura nórdica antigua: Edición bilingüe* (2002) and *Las Leyes del Gulathing* (2005) by María Pilar Fernández Álvarez y Teodoro Manrique Antón, which were published by the University of Salamanca Press. This reflects a growing trend in Spain towards viewing Old Icelandic literature as a serious subject of study but Icelandic is still not offered at undergraduate level in Spain and the experts in this country remain few and far between.<sup>85</sup>

Although Spanish translations do not top the best-seller lists in Spain, the steady stream of translations of sagas and other Icelandic literature appearing in print reveals an interest which is perhaps surprising in a country which has traditionally few historical or cultural links with Scandinavia and almost no tradition of teaching Icelandic as a subject. One reason as we have noted above, is a general increase in interest in European culture, but there are other cultural-historical links between Spain and Scandinavia in the Middle Ages which have been the subject of historical and cultural research since the nineteenth century.<sup>86</sup> Reinhart Dozy relates that the first relations between the Arabs of Spain and the 'Normans' were friendly, at least the poet Yahyâ Ibn-Hacâm, sent on a diplomatic mission to the Norse king at Constantinople in 821 by Abderraman I, recounts how he won the favour of the empress with his flattering verses

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<sup>83</sup> In the latest reprint of Bernárdez's translation of *La saga de Egil Skallagrimson* (2004), the publishers have changed the cover to the seventeenth-century image of Egill from the manuscript AM 426, which was used on Pálsson and Edwards 1976 Penguin translation and later on Bernard Scudder's Penguin Classics translation (2004).

<sup>84</sup> *La saga de los groenlandeses*, trans. by Antón and Pedro Casariego Córdoba (Madrid: Siruela, 1983).

<sup>85</sup> The study of Old Icelandic by Spanish students has become more accessible since María Pilar Fernández Álvarez, lecturer in Indo-European languages at the University of Salamanca, published her grammar (including a short Old Icelandic-Spanish dictionary) in 1999. See María Pilar Fernández Álvarez, *Antiguo islandés: Historia y lengua* (Madrid: Ediciones clásicas, 1999).

<sup>86</sup> For a comprehensive bibliography see Mariano González Campo, 'Bibliographia Normanno-Hispanica', *Saga-Book of the Viking Society*, 26 (2002) 104-13.



as well as the sympathy of the wife of the Norman king.<sup>87</sup> By 844 however, the Arabic sources record a number of attacks by Vikings on the Spanish coast. When the first attack was repelled (844), they continued south, stopping at Lisbon, Seville, Cádiz and Algeciras. The result of a second attempt in Galicia was the removal of the diocesan seat, along with the remains of the Apostle, to Santiago de Compostela. Forty years later Ólafr Haraldsson (later King Ólafr of Norway, 995-1030) sacked Tui (a town on the Galician border of Portugal), burning the town and taking the bishop and a good part of his chapter captive. This story forms the basis of a ‘historical novel’ *Olav II Rey de Noruega: El Vikingo que asoló Galicia y supo pasar del pillaje a la santidad*, ‘Olaf II King of Norway: The Viking who Ravaged Galicia and Knew How to Change from Pillaging to Sanctity’.<sup>88</sup> The novel, written in a quasi-saga style, complete with dreams, verses etc., is a hotch-potch of Old Norse mythology, literature and a few historical facts, but although it does not have any great literary value it is worth mentioning in the context of the reception of Enrique Bernárdez’s translation of *Egils saga*. Sierra appropriates various stanzas from Bernárdez’s translation (as well as other Old Norse and Old English sources), and modifies them in order to put them into the mouths of the characters in his novel, presumably intending that his technique will lend his ‘saga’ an authentic air, for example, ‘that night I did not have nightmares. I only dreamt that a woman came close to me intoning a song which she repeated without cease. I still remember her refrain’:<sup>89</sup>

<p>Fui <i>como</i> la hoja ensangrentada,  el cuervo me acompañaba  y fui con lanza <i>muy larga</i>  <i>a luchar en una armada</i>  irritados combatimos  y les quemamos las casas,  sangre en los cuerpos, caían  ante <i>nuestra</i> empalizada.</p>	<p>I went <i>like</i> the bloodied blade,  the raven accompanied me  and I went with a <i>very long</i> spear;  <i>to fight in an ‘armada’</i>  angry we fought  and we burned their houses  blood on the bodies, they fell  in front of <i>our</i> palisade.</p>
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This is actually a reworking of st. 14 in *Egils saga*; it is Egill’s response to Earl Arnfinnr’s daughter’s scornful accusation that he has not seen battle (see chapter 5). The words Sierra has changed are indicated by italics, for example *a luchar en una armada* (to fight in an armada) for Bernárdez’s *bien luchaban los vikingos* (the vikings fought well).

<sup>87</sup> See Reinhart Dozy, *Les normands en Espagne* (1860), trans. by Antonio Machado y Álvarez as *Los vikingos in España* (Madrid: Ediciones Polifemo, 1987), p. 14.

<sup>88</sup> Vicente Sierra Ponce de León, *Olav II Rey de Noruega: El Vikingo que asoló Galicia y supo pasar del pillaje a la santidad* (Pontevedra, Galicia: Diputación Provincial de Pontevedra, Servicio de Publicaciones, 2000).

<sup>89</sup> *ibid.*, p. 57: ‘Aquella noche no tuve pesadillas. Sólo soñé que una mujer se acercaba a mí entonando una canción que repetía sin cesar. Todavía recuerdo su estribillo, que decía [...]’.

*Enrique Bernárdez's Saga de Egil Skallagrímsson: The Paratexts* ⚔

Like Hallvard Lie, Bernárdez has based his translation, *Saga de Egil Skallagrímsson*, on Sigurður Nordal's edition of *Egils saga* in the *Islensk fornrit* collection, vol. II. This translation was first published in Madrid in 1983 by Editora nacional, but later reprinted in 1988 in a series called *Libros de los Malos Tiempos* by Miraguano Ediciones. It is the twenty-seventh volume in the series which now boasts seventy-eight titles and purports to 'recuperate books which have been forgotten or condemned, whose origins are to be found in the popular wisdom of all the continents'. These are books containing legends or stories by indigenous peoples, romances, oriental traditions, accounts of travel, Spanish classics and works by 'condemned' authors. It is unclear what the title of the series, 'Books of the Bad Times', refers to exactly, though something like 'hard times' seems to be meant. The nature of the literature included in this series means that most of it will be in translation. This is not actually mentioned on the Miraguano Ediciones website although books such as *Bajo la Jaima: Cuentos populares del Sáhara* and *Haiku de las Cuatro Estaciones* obviously had their beginnings in languages other than Spanish.

*Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, or *Saga de Egil Skallagrímsson* as it is entitled in Spanish, is presented as being written by Snorri Sturluson both on the front cover of the book and in the list of titles in the series, while the first mention of the translator's name is on the title page. Thus by merely looking at the front cover, and without even opening the book, we can establish three things. The first is that the translator/editor and/or publisher subscribe(s) to the theory that *Egils saga* was written by Snorri Sturluson, a view that is shared by many scholars but still cannot be stated with absolute certainty. The second is that the translator has chosen not to translate the title literally, an absolutely faithful translation would be 'Saga de Egil, hijo de Grim (Grím) el calvo', i.e. The Saga of Egil, son of Bald-Grim. As it is, 'Skallagrímsson' is presented as a surname and for a reader who understands only Spanish, gives no hint that Grím is Egil's father or that his nickname is Bald Grim. The third item on the front cover, apart from the title and the name of the author, is an image of a Viking, presumably Egill, holding a shield in one hand, a sword aloft in the other and wearing a helmet with horns.<sup>90</sup> The picture is drawn in comic-book style. If we examine the picture more closely we can see features that are clearly reminiscent of Celtic art. Egill is standing in

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<sup>90</sup> There is no archeological evidence to suggest that Vikings ever wore horned helmets although in modern times it has become part of the stereotypical image of a Viking.



front of a large circle which seems to contain the sky and on more careful inspection we see that the border of the circle is decorated with Celtic knotwork patterns and is inscribed with words that look suspiciously like Irish. As if that were not enough, to the right of 'Egill' there is a standing stone carved, not with runes, but rather with ogham! The picture is actually by the Irish artist Jim Fitzpatrick and represents the mythological figure, Nuada, king of the Tuatha Dé Danann, although the authorship is not credited by the publisher.<sup>91</sup> While this image may seem an odd choice for the cover of a translation of an Icelandic saga, King Nuada, as he is depicted here, looks much more like a stereotypical Viking than a Celtic king from ancient times and it was obviously assumed by the publisher that a Spanish audience would not spot this anachronism.

The choosing of such a comic-book hero as an image is surely calculated to have a popular appeal and is consistent with the mission of Miraguano Ediciones to recuperate or recover forgotten or condemned texts, although as *Egils saga* has not been published in Spanish before it is being not so much rescued from obscurity as presented to a Spanish readership for the first time. The back cover of the book simply has the same picture (as described above), below which are the names of the publisher and of the series, and there is also a vaguely Nordic-looking design. There is no blurb anywhere on the cover, not even on the inside flaps, so although we can guess from the front illustration that Egill is a Viking warrior of some type, the reader is obliged to open the book before he/she can get any more information. The publisher/bookseller makes virtually no attempt to encourage a potential buyer who is unfamiliar with the book's subject-matter to purchase it.

This translation, like all of the books in the 'Libros de los Malos Tiempos' series is published with an introduction which takes the form of a separate pamphlet inserted inside the front flap. In his introduction Bernárdez begins by qualifying the statement on the cover by now saying that Snorri *probably* wrote *Egils saga*. He explains the genre 'saga' and the type of saga to which *Egils saga* belongs, i.e. The Icelandic Family Sagas. I will not provide a detailed discussion of this introduction here, but I think it is important to point out that Bernárdez stresses the differences between this genre and contemporary medieval literature and also implies that a cultured Spanish reader expecting a great work of literature may be taken aback by what Bernárdez presents as the humble nature of the rhetorical devices in the text.

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<sup>91</sup> Jim Fitzpatrick, 'Nuada The High King', 1978. <http://www.jimfitzpatrick.ie/gallery/highking.html> [accessed 1 October 2007]. According to tradition, the Tuatha Dé Danann were an ancient people of Ireland.





Fig. 3 Jim Fitzpatrick, 'Nuada The High King', 1978.



Detailed descriptions of the characters are not given in this introduction except for a short character sketch of the protagonist, Egill, and a mention of those attributes of his that are most relevant to his status as a great poet. Bernárdez points out that not all of the verses in *Egils saga* were in fact composed by Egill but that the most notable poems *Sonatorrek*, *Arinbjarnarkviða*, and *Hofuðlausn*, most definitely were.<sup>92</sup> He, like many others including Snorri Sturluson, believes that skaldic verses were the sources for much of the saga narrative but, as well as having this functional aspect, are great works of literature in themselves.

Other paratextual devices in Bernárdez's edition include: footnotes, maps, an appendix ('Skallagrím [*sic*] en el Landnámabók', p. 343), an index of names and a chronological table. The footnotes are crucial to the understanding of the poetry. In particular they explain the kennings, and provide information on the mythological and historical background. There are 270 in all, and while the vast majority relate to the verses, a number also supply historical and cultural information and occasionally reveal aspects of the translator's approach.

Bernárdez's chronological table (pp. 357-58) is a modification of Sigurður Nordal's table (ÍF 2, pp. lii-liii) but includes some additions, as Bernárdez explains: 'I have added some facts regarding non-Scandinavian events, particularly Spanish ones, which may serve to better locate the events of the saga, in a historical framework'.<sup>93</sup> These additions are presented in square brackets.

c.	863	nace Skallagrím Kveld-Úlfsson (Skallagrím Kveld-Úlfsson is born)
	[866	Alfonso III, rey de León] (Alfonso III, King of León)
c.	910	nace Egil Skallagrímsson (Egill Skalla-Grímsson is born)
		Björn Brynjólfsson llega a Islandia; nace Ásgerd (Björn Brynjólfsson arrives in Iceland; Ásgerðr is born)
	[911	los vikingos daneses se establecen en lo que será el Ducado de Normandía (the Danish Vikings establish themselves in what will be the Duchy of Normandy)
c.	927	Egil parte de viaje con Þórolf (Egill departs on a voyage with Þórólfr)
	[929-1031	Califato de Córdoba] (Caliphate of Córdoba)
	[943	rebelión del conde Fernán González contra Ramiro III] (rebellion of Count Fernán González against Ramiro III)
	948	composición del <i>Rescate de la Cabeza</i> (composition of <i>Ransome of the Head</i> )
c.	960	Thorgerd se casa con Ólaf Pái (Thorgerd marries Ólaf Pái)
	[960	Fernán González consigue la independencia de Castilla] (Fernán González secures the independence of Castile)
c.	961	composición de la <i>Pérdida irreparable de los hijos</i> (Bödvar nació hacia 943) (composition of the <i>Irreparable Loss of Sons</i> , Bøðvarr is born around 943)
	962	composición del poema en honor a Arinbjörn (composition of the poem in honour of Arinbjörn)

<sup>92</sup> *Saga de Egil Skallagrímsson*, p. xii: 'con toda seguridad' (with absolute certainty).

<sup>93</sup> *ibid.*, p. 357: 'Añado algunos datos referentes a sucesos no escandinavos, especialmente españoles, que pueden servir para ubicar mejor en el marco histórico los sucesos de la saga'.



	[966	ataque vikingo a Galicia (Viking attack in Galicia)
c.	975-978	pleitos de Thorstein y Steinar (lawsuit of Þorsteinn and Steinarr)
	[977	Almanzor derrota a los cristianos en Rueda (Almanzor defeats the Christians in Rueda)
	[985	saqueo de Barcelona por Almanzor (looting of Barcelona by Almanzor)
	990	muerte de Egil (death of Egill)

It is interesting to note that of the Spanish historical references which are not related to Viking attacks in Spain, many refer to the Moorish occupancy. By locating the action of *Egils saga* within a Spanish historical framework Bernárdez makes a connection between the two cultures.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### POEMS OF PRAISE AND SLANDER

The present chapter provides a selection of poetry that represents two of the strongest motivations for skaldic composition, the impulse to praise and to slander.<sup>1</sup> Like all skalds Egill was adept at the composition of praise-poems, indeed as we have seen in chapter 1, this was the means by which professional court poets earned their living. A skald would compose a poem in honour of a lord, chief or king and in return would expect to be rewarded handsomely in gold or costly gifts. The lord would then have his reputation secured forever as an honourable, brave and generous man, and the skald would have his pay. This transaction occurs frequently throughout *Egils saga* in different permutations and variations, from occasional eight-line stanzas to a full-length *drápa* with refrains. An interesting aspect of skaldic praise-poetry, as we shall see in the examples that follow, is that it often contains self-conscious references to the act of poetic composition; indeed this feature occurs in the very first stanzas attributed to Egill which he (supposedly) composed at the tender age of three (see stanzas 4 and 5). Many critics have argued that the reader cannot be expected to believe that a three-year-old child would be capable of composing such verses, but if we take them at face value, we must concede that Egill has begun his poetic career by reciting a very respectable pair of *dróttkvætt* stanzas that adequately fulfill the requirements of metre and poetic diction. In these lines the young poet Egill praises his grandfather's generosity in traditional skaldic epithets, referring to him as 'þess's gefr drengjum lyngva fráþvengjar beð' (He who gives men the bed of the shining thong of heather (snake) > GOLD-GIVER) and 'þægir ljósundinna linns landa' (oppressor of brightly-twisted lands of serpent > GOLD-GIVER) and, in the following strophe, recounts how his grandfather rewards him for this 'praise' (*bróðr*) by giving him three conch shells and a duck-egg. The scene provides us with a fairly accurate, albeit childish, depiction of the

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<sup>1</sup> The discussion of stanzas 6, 8 and 28 in relation to *nið* and *ergi*, originally took the form of a paper presented at University College London, 6 May 2005. See Edel Porter, 'The Skald's Mead Can Leave a Bitter Taste in the Mouth: Villifying Verses in the Poetry of *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar*', in *Skáldamjödurrinn: Proceedings of the UCL Graduate Symposium in Medieval Scandinavian Studies, 2005-06*, ed. by Anna Zanchi (forthcoming 2008).



custom mentioned above; it also prefigures the most famous instance of this convention in *Egils saga* when Egill uses his poetic talent to save his own life.

The aforesaid episode occurs in chapters 59-61 of *Egils saga* where, according to the prose text, Egill has been blown off course on a journey from Iceland to Norway and his ship has run aground in the mouth of the river Humber.<sup>2</sup> Upon learning that the kingdom was being ruled by his deadliest enemies King Eiríkr blóðøx ('blood-axe') and Queen Gunnhildr, Egill decides that he has no option but to march to York and place himself at the King's mercy. When Egill arrives at the royal court to present his case, accompanied by his loyal friend Arinbjörn, Queen Gunnhildr advises that he be executed at once. She reminds her husband that not only has Egill killed many of their kinsmen, including their own son, but that he has 'nítt sjálfan þik' (slandered you yourself).<sup>3</sup> In medieval Scandinavian society to slander or defame the character of a person (verb *að níða*; noun *níð*) was a practice which was considered to be an extremely serious crime, a fact that is reflected in the numerous prohibitions against it in contemporary lawcodes and in the severity of the penalties it incurred. According to the medieval Norwegian law-code *Gulapingslög*,<sup>4</sup> for example, in the subdivision entitled 'Ef maðr niðir annan' (If a man slanders another) we are told: 'Engi maðr skal gera tungu nið um annan. ne trenið. En ef hann verðr at því kunnr oc sannr. at hann gerir þat. þa liggir hanom utlegð við' (No man shall make verbal *níð* nor timber-*níð* about another. And if he is accused of this and is found guilty, the penalty is outlawry).<sup>5</sup>

There are many occasions in the saga where Egill expresses his criticism of the King and Queen in libellous language, and Gunnhildr could be referring to some or all of these, but the most famous and most unambiguous instance of *níð* in *Egils saga* occurs in chapter 57. At this point in the narrative relations between Egill and the royal couple have deteriorated to such an extent that Eiríkr has declared Egill an outlaw in Norway, forcing him to flee the country. Just before he boards his ship to depart, however, Egill takes a hazel pole and fixes a horse's head to the top and, as the saga goes on to say:

Then he performed a formula and said: 'I set up here a *níð*-pole and direct this *níð* towards King Eiríkr and Queen Gunnhildr'. He turned the mare's head in towards land, 'and I direct this *níð* towards the land-spirits who inhabit this land, so that they

<sup>2</sup> *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar*, ed. by Sigurður Nordal, Íslensk fornrit, 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1933), p. 177.

<sup>3</sup> ÍF 2, p. 180.

<sup>4</sup> Laws (or law) of the Gula-'thing' or assembly. Hereafter referred to as the *Gulaping Laws*.

<sup>5</sup> *Norges gamle love indtil 1387*, ed. by Rudolph Keyser and others, 5 vols (Oslo: Grøndahl, 1846-95), 1: *Norges gamle love ældre end kong Magnus Haakonssöns regjerings-tiltrædelse i 1263*, ed. by R. Keyser and P.A. Munch (1846), p. 57. Throughout the rest of this chapter I will refer to this volume as *Norges gamle love indtil 1387*, vol. 1.

all go astray, and neither recognise home nor the way to it, until they drive King Eiríkr and Queen Gunnhildr out of the country'. He then thrust the pole into a cleft in the rock and let it stand there. He turned the head towards the land and carved runes on the pole which declared all of the formula.<sup>6</sup>

The gesture described above is an example of *trénið* (timber-*nið*), one of the two forms of *nið* referred to above in the passage quoted from the *Gulaping Laws*. Timber-*nið*, as the name suggests, involved the use of a wooden structure to slander a person, such as the *nið*-pole here,<sup>7</sup> but there are also examples in the sagas of carved figures being employed to defame a person, by representing him engaged in a sexual act with another man.<sup>8</sup> To suggest that a man had allowed himself to be treated in this way was probably the most slanderous allegation that one man could possibly make about another in the Old Norse world; although it does not go into any details about the nature of such symbolic wooden structures, the *Gulaping Laws* are very explicit regarding verbal insults which called into question a man's masculinity:

There are words that are called *fullréttisorð* [verbal offences for which full compensation must be paid]. One is if a man says to another man that he has borne a child. A second is if a man says he is *sannsorðinn*. The third is if he compares him with a mare, or calls him a bitch, or a harlot, or compares him with any kind of female animal.<sup>9</sup>

The term *sorðenn* (in *sannsorðenn*) referred to in the above clause is a participle form of the verb *serða* 'to have sexual intercourse with' or, more crudely, 'to mount' (the prefix *sann-*, from *sannr*, means 'demonstratively' or 'proven'). To say that a man had been *sorðinn* (or *stroðinn*) was equivalent to the insult implied by the carved figures i.e. it was to claim that he had taken a humiliatingly passive or 'female' role in an act of sexual intercourse. As this passage plainly states, it was equally bad to compare a man with a female animal (such

<sup>6</sup> ÍF 2, p. 171: 'Síðan veitti hann formála ok mælti svá: 'Hér set ek upp níðstong, ok sný ek þessu níði á hönd Eiríki konungi ok Gunnhildi dróttningu,' – hann sneri hrosshöfðinu inn á land, - 'sný ek þessu níði á landvættir þær, er land þetta byggva, svá at allar fari þær villar vega, engi hendi né hitti sitt inni, fyrr en þær reka Eirík konung ok Gunnhildi ór landi.' Síðan skýtr hann stonginni niðr í bjargrifu ok lét þar standa; hann sneri ok höfðinu inn á land, en hann reist rúnar á stonginni, ok segja þær formála þenna allan'.

<sup>7</sup> For another scene detailing the raising up of a *niðstong* see *Vatnsdæla saga*, ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson, Íslenzk fornrit, 8 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1939), pp. 1-131 (pp. 88-91).

<sup>8</sup> As illustrated in *Bjarnar saga Hítðalakappa*, ed. by Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson, Íslenzk fornrit, 7 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1936), pp. 109-211 (pp. 154-55), and chapter 2 of *Gisla saga Súrssonar*, ed. by Björn K. Þórolfsson and Guðni Jónsson, Íslenzk fornrit, 6 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1943), pp. 1-118 (p. 10).

<sup>9</sup> *Norges gamle love indtil 1387*, vol. 1, p. 70: 'Orð ero þau er fullrettis orð heita. þat er eitt ef maðr kveðr at karlmanne oðrom. at hann have barn boret. þat er annat. ef maðr kveðr hann væra sannsorðenn. þat er hit þriðia ef hann iamnar hanom við meri. æða kallar hann grey. æða portkono. æða iamnar hanom við berende eitthvert'.



as a mare), or to suggest that he possessed female attributes such as the ability to bear children.

In a similar clause, the thirteenth-century Icelandic law-code *Grágás* states that a man thus insulted was not only entitled to full compensation, but even had the right to kill in retaliation:

There are three words, if men's speech worsens so much, which all warrant outlawry: if a man calls a man *ragan* or *stroðinn* or *sorðinn*, and they shall be prosecuted like other *fullréttisorð*. Moreover, a man has the right to kill on account of these three words.<sup>10</sup>

Alongside *sorðinn* and *stroðinn*, *Grágás* lists the term *ragr*, an insult so powerful that its use could be avenged by killing. In his commentary on this passage Preben Meulengracht Sørensen gives a comprehensive definition of *ragr*:

*Ragr* (a metathesis of *argr*) is the most frequently used of the three abusive terms, and the one of the widest meaning. Related to the adjectives *argr* and *ragr* are the nouns *ergi* and *regi*, and the passive verb *ergjask* 'to become *argr*'. All these words are highly disparaging. Their basic meaning is sexual; but whereas the participles *sorðinn* and *stroðinn* merely signify that a person (or animal) has been sexually used by a man – willingly or not – the adjective *ragr* and the words related to it signify a quality or tendency. The man who is *argr* is willing or inclined to play or interested in [*sic*] playing the female part in sexual relations. It is characteristic of the idea that in this sense it can only be applied to a man. When the feminine form of *argr*, *ørg*, is applied to a woman, it does not mean that she is inclined to have sexual intercourse with a man in a normal sense, but that she is generally immodest, perverted or lecherous.<sup>11</sup>

He goes on to say that the most important meaning of the words *argr* and *ragr* is 'cowardly, unmanly, effeminate', based on the assumption that 'a man who subjects himself to another in sexual affairs will do the same in other respects'.<sup>12</sup>

By fixing a mare's head to the top of the *níð*-pole, Egill is probably implying that Eiríkr is, or is comparable to, a mare and, by extension, that he is *argr* i.e. sexually deviant or has a tendency to behave in a way proper only to a female nature.<sup>13</sup> The *níð*-pole not

<sup>10</sup> *Grágás: Efter det Arnamagnæanske haandskrift nr. 334 fol., Staðarhólsbók, udgivet af Kommissionen for Det Arnamagnæanske Legat*, ed. by Vilhjálmur Finsen (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1879), p. 392: 'Þav ero orð þriu ef sva mioc versna máls endar manna. er scog gang varða avll. ef maðr kallar man ragan eða stroðinn eða sorðinn. oc scal sva sokia sem avnot full rettis orð. enda a maðr vigt igegn þeim orðum þrimr'. See also Theodore M. Andersson's and William Ian Miller's translation in, *Law and Literature in Medieval Iceland* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), p. 166 (n. 76): 'There are three words, if discourse so degenerates, which are all punishable with full outlawry: when a man is called effeminate, screwed, or fucked [...] these three words give a man the right to kill'.

<sup>11</sup> Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, *The Unmanly Man: Concepts of Sexual Defamation in Early Northern Society*, trans. by Joan Turville-Petre, The Viking Collection, 1 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1983), p. 18.

<sup>12</sup> *The Unmanly Man*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>13</sup> As the *níð* is also directed at Gunnhildr, the contumely towards her could consist of the accusation of her being sexually voracious as reflected in her 'unnatural' desire to rule over her husband cf. stanza 29, ÍF 2, p. 165.

only contains an affront to Eiríkr's manhood which he would be legally entitled to avenge by killing, but as Gunnhildr is very well aware, it also represents a challenge to which Eiríkr must respond if he does not wish to become a figure of public ridicule and scorn.<sup>14</sup> As we shall see in the discussion of the poem *Hofuðlausn* below, Egill manages to avoid losing his head thanks to his talent as a poet, but also due to the skilful diplomacy of his faithful friend Arinbjörn.

'Verbal' *níð*, as opposed to *tréníð*, commonly took the form of a lampoon or slanderous verse called a *níðvísa*. Once composed, such verses could be learned and repeated and, like the example of *tréníð* above, were capable of doing great damage to a person's reputation. In this sense it is the antithesis to praise poetry. Despite the fact that medieval laws tried to restrict the practice of *níð* by imposing rigorous penalties, the skalds do not seem to have been much deterred by this and the composition of *níðvísur* was widespread. This could be due in some part to the fact that, as Margaret Clunies Ross points out:

The potential and often the actual obscurity of skaldic diction, with its complex kennings and fragmented word order gave a poet the advantage in the composition of *níð* verses in that he was able to veil his true meaning in seemingly innocent-sounding words, or to use a word or phrase with double meaning or to express himself in such a convoluted way that only a select few were able to understand the meaning of the verse.<sup>15</sup>

The first section of this chapter begins with an examination of two stanzas which are unequivocal praise-poems. This is followed by a detailed analysis of stanzas 6, 8 and 19, showing how, to a greater or lesser degree, these poems can contain veiled insults in the manner described by Clunies Ross above. In the discussion of stanza 28, I will show how it is a clear example of a *níðvísa*, whose performative powers perhaps even extended to expelling Gunnhildr and Eiríkr from Norway. The analyses of the translations will address the extent to which they reproduce the defamatory aspect of these verses, but also in general examine their treatment of other aspects of the *dróttkvætt* stanza. The second section of the chapter focuses on *Hofuðlausn* as an extended praise poem, or *drápa*; the analysis of the translations will mostly focus on the manner in which they reproduce the metre of the original and the use of specialised vocabulary to maintain the rhyme patterns.

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<sup>14</sup> Surviving manuscripts of *Grágás* and the *Gulaping Laws* are roughly contemporary with the earliest manuscripts of *Egils saga*, but we do not know how representative they are of laws current in tenth-century Iceland and Norway.

<sup>15</sup> Margaret Clunies Ross, *A History of Old Norse Poetry and Poetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 62-63.



## PART ONE: LAUSAVÍSUR

*Stanza 4*

This is the first stanza in the saga which is recited by Egill Skalla-Grímsson and the context is as follows: Skalla-Grímr has refused to allow Egill to accompany him on a visit to Yngvarr, Egill's maternal grandfather, because of Egill's increasingly difficult behaviour: 'you don't know how to behave in company where there's heavy drinking, you're difficult enough to deal with even when you're sober', he tells him.<sup>16</sup> Nothing daunted, the three-year-old Egill mounts a horse and follows his father's company to Yngvarr's farm, where he is warmly welcomed and seated beside his host. 'The men were in high spirits, drinking ale and reciting verses. Then Egill spoke his verse'.<sup>17</sup> If we accept this statement at face value, we are being provided with a relatively rare example of information about the composition and recitation of skaldic poetry, i.e. that poetry could be composed on the spur of the moment as a form of entertainment by non-professional poets or those not especially skilled in the art. Previously in the chapter we have been told that Egill 'became talkative at an early age and had a gift for words' and certainly on this occasion the precocious poet loses no time in joining the game with some verses of his own.

Kominn emk enn til arna  
Yngvars, þess's beð lyngva,  
hann vask fúss at finna,  
fránþvengjar gefr drengjum;  
mun eigi þú, þægir,  
þrévetran mér betra,  
ljósundinna landa  
linns, óðar smið finna.<sup>18</sup>

*Prose word order*

Emk kominn enn til arna Yngvars, þess's gefr drengjum lyngva fráþvengjar beð; vask fúss at finna hann; þú mun eigi, þægir ljósundinna linns landa, finna þrévetran óðar smið betra mér.

*Translation*

I am come again (moreover) to the hearths (i.e. homestead) of Yngvarr, of him who gives men the bed of the shining thong of heather (snake) > GOLD; I was eager to meet/visit him; you shall not, oppressor of brightly-twisted lands of serpent > RINGS-GIVER, find a three-year-old smith of poetry better than me.

<sup>16</sup> ÍF 2, p. 81: 'þú kannt ekki fyrir þér at vera i fjölmenni, þar er drykkjur eru miklar, er þú þykkir ekki góðr viðskiptis, at þú sér ódrukkinn'.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid*: 'Þat var þar ǫlteiti, at menn kváðu vísur; þá kvað Egill vísu'.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid*.

*Commentary & Analysis*

The stanza Egill recites is in praise of his host and kinsman Yngvarr, whom he describes principally in terms of his generosity. In the first of these epithets Egill calls him *þess's gefr drengjum lyngva fránpvengjar beð* (he who gives men the bed of the shining thong of heather). *Lyngva fránpvengja*, the 'shining thong of heather' refers to a serpent here. Because of the physical similarity between a thong and a snake, *pvengr*, 'thong' or 'cord', with such words as *reyrr* (reed) and *eitr* (poison) as determinants, or qualified by the adjective *fránn* (flashing, shining), is often used in kennings to denote 'snake'. This elaborate phrase thus evokes the image of a real snake, slim and elastic, its supple body glistening in the summer sun as it glides through, or lies coiled in, the heather. The *beðr* (bed/pillow) of a snake, or place where a snake rests, is a kenning for gold because of the story of Fáfnir who, after killing his father, 'fór upp á Gnitaheiði ok gerði sér þar ból ok brásk í orms líki ok lagðisk á gullit' (went up on to Gnita-heath and made himself a lair there and turned himself into the form of a serpent and lay down on the gold).<sup>19</sup> The entire phrase therefore means 'he who gives gold to noble men' i.e. a generous man. The second kenning of the stanza uses similar elements to create the same sentiment. This time Yngvarr is addressed as *þægir ljósundinna linn's landa* (oppressor of the brightly twisted lands of the serpent). The 'lands of the serpent', like the serpent's bed or lair, refers to gold which, when it is twisted, becomes a bright ring. He who oppresses rings does so by breaking them up in order to give them away and is therefore liberal.

The two main kennings of this strophe generate the concept that Yngvarr is a generous man by subtly different means. Both use the image of the snake's bed to refer to gold, but while in the first phrase the kenning for snake, *lyngva fránpvengja*, is elaborate and the snake's bed is referred to simply as *beð*, in the second just one word, the heiti *linnr*, is used for 'snake' and the focus is on its 'brightly-twisted' or '-coiled' lands i.e. gold rings. In the first example the action of giving is simply expressed by the verb *gefa* (to give) and Yngvarr is one who gives men gold. In the second the meaning 'giver' is generated more poetically: he is a giver of rings.

Praising his host's liberality in this way is a ploy Egill also uses again in the saga to get what he wants (in one case his life as we shall see later) and, sure enough, the next day Yngvarr rewards Egill for his poem with presents. Egill also uses this occasion to boast of

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<sup>19</sup> *Snorri Sturluson: Edda. Skáldskaparmál*, ed. by Anthony Faulkes, 2 vols (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1998), 1, p. 46. Translation from *Edda: Snorri Sturluson*, trans. by Anthony Faulkes, (London: Everyman, 1987), p. 101.



his precocious poetical prowess although he does not refer to himself yet as a skald, but as a ‘smith of poetry’.

*Stanza 4: Norwegian Translation*

<p>Her er jeg kommen, står staut i stuen hos Yngvarr, min frende, som gull gir til gjeve karer; gjerne ville ham jeg gjeste. Lenge og langt må du lete, du likesæle gulløder! før tungekjappere skald du blant treåringer treffer!<sup>20</sup></p>	<p>I am come here, standing strapping in the living-room of Yngvarr, my kinsman, who gives gold to noble men I eagerly wanted to visit him. Long and far must you seek, you indifferent gold-destroyer! before you meet a more quick-tongued skald among three-year-olds!</p>
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*Commentary & Analysis*

The rendering of the opening words of the Icelandic text *Ek em kominn* into Norwegian as *(her) er jeg kommen* exemplifies the proximity of the two languages, and the ease with which Icelandic can sometimes be translated word for word into Norwegian. Lie’s translation quickly departs from this initial literalness, however. For example, he chooses not to translate (*Yngvars*) *arna* directly, as he might do with a word such as *peiser* (hearths) or *eldsteder* (fireplaces); instead he tries to convey the concept of ‘home and hearth’ with the phrase *hos Yngvarr* (lit. ‘at Yngvarr’s’) and sets the scene firmly in Yngvarr’s *stue* or living-room, thus creating a cosy, intimate atmosphere.

In the edition on which this translation is based, the Sigurður Nordal suggests that although all extant manuscripts read *kominn emk enn til arna Yngvars* (I have come again to Yngvarr’s hearths), the line should be amended to *kominn emk ern til arna Yngvars* (I have come full of energy to Yngvarr’s hearths’), on metrical grounds, although in his Modern Icelandic paraphrasing of the stanza he provides both options.<sup>21</sup> Lie chooses the latter, rendering *ern* as *står staut* ‘standing strapping’ or ‘stoutly’ which evokes the image of a confident young Egill, fully conscious of his audacity, but nevertheless comfortably ensconced in the middle of the living room. Of course *står staut* also provides the two alliterating sounds in the odd-numbered line requisite in *dróttkvætt* poetry, which ‘catch’ the first stressed syllable of the next even line i.e. *stuen*.

<sup>20</sup> Hallvard Lie, trans. *Egil Skallagrímsson’s saga*, in *Islandske ættesagaer*, vol. 1, ed. by Hallvard Lie (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1951), pp. 25-211 (p. 79).

<sup>21</sup> ÍF 2, p. 82: ‘Eg er enn (eða: fyrir dugnað min) kominn til arna (heimkynna) Yngvars, sem gefur mönnum gull; örláti máður, þú munt eigi finna þrévetran hagrörðing betra en mig’ (I have again (or: because of my pluck/energy) come to Yngvarr’s hearths (homestead), he who gives men gold; generous man, you shall not find a three-year-old (skilled) verse-crafter better than me).

As in the Spanish translation below both of the ‘snake’s bed’ kennings are simply rendered *gull* (gold). However, in the second of these, the kenning is partially preserved as *þægir* is glossed *–oder* ‘destroyer’, a gold-destroyer being a kenning in its own right for a generous man. The idea of Yngvarr as a man so generous as to be completely indifferent to money is further conveyed by the adjective *likesæle*.

In general the second helming is quite a free translation. *Lenge og langt må du lete* is much more elaborate than the Icelandic *þú mun eigi* and in the final two lines Lie opts to translate *óðar smið* (smith of poetry) as *skald* instead of the more common *dikter* or *versmaker*. In the Icelandic strophe Egill boasts that Yngvarr will not be able to find a better (*betra*) three-year-old poet than him, but in the Norwegian text this becomes *tungekjappere skald* (a more quick-tongued skald), putting the emphasis on the speed of his composition and also alliterating with *treåringar* and *treffer* in the next line. As we have seen in chapter 1, *skald* is the Icelandic term used to denote professional poets, and although *skald* does exist as a Modern Norwegian word, one which Lie assumes will be understood by his audience, it has, of course, strong associations with ancient times and with *norrønt språk* (Old Norse language). However, it is clear from Lie’s endnote to this and the following stanza that he has a vested interest in convincing the reader that these stanzas are authentic and his reference to Egill already as a skald is calculated with this agenda in mind:

These verses, which Egill is supposed to have composed as a three-year-old, are in the original – despite their childish subject-matter – artistically complete and constructed in the correct skaldic form. It is therefore highly unlikely that Egill managed to compose them as a three-year-old. The most logical way of explaining them is to suppose that Egill, in his latter days when he amused himself by telling the deeds of his youth, also wanted to give an impression of his precocity as a skald, and so made these verses as ‘evidence’.<sup>22</sup>

This note is a response to a general tradition of rejecting these stanzas as spurious by scholars such as Finnur Jónsson who classifies them in *Skj.* as anonymous poetry from the 12th century under the heading ‘Uægte vers i sagaer’ (inauthentic verse in sagas).<sup>23</sup> Lie acknowledges the unlikeliness of a three-year-old composing such complex verse, but his ‘logical’ explanation is purely speculative and quite as unlikely.

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<sup>22</sup> *Islandske ættesagaer*, vol. 1, p. 486: ‘Disse versene, som Egil skald ha diktet i 3-årsalderen, er i originalen – tross sitt barnslige innhold – i formen kunstferdig of skaldisk korrekt oppbygde. Det er derfor høyst usannsynlig at Egil har klart å lage dem som 3-åring. Den rimeligste måten å forklare dem på, er å anta at Egil på sine eldre dager, da han moret seg med å fortelle om sin ungdoms bragder, også har villet gi inntrykk av sin bråmodenhet som skald, og da har laget disse versene for å ”dokumentere” seg.’

<sup>23</sup> *Skj.* AI, p. 603.



*Stanza 4: Spanish Translation*

He llegado al hogar de Yngvar que a la gente da valerosa rojo oro, yo ansiaba encontrarle; nunca hallará, señor, pródigo, mejor que yo un poeta de tres años en tierras de poetas. <sup>24</sup>	I have come to the home of Yngvarr who to the people gives valiant red gold* I was eager to meet him; You will never encounter, sir, generous [as you are], better than me, a three-year-old poet in lands of poets.
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\*Who gives the ‘valiant people’ (i.e. people of quality) red gold. Valiant (*valerosa*) here describes the people (*la gente*) rather than the gold (*oro*), as is clear from the feminine ending of the adjective.

*Commentary & Analysis*

The Spanish translation of this stanza runs in a continuous prose style apart from lines 2-3 where the normal word-order is disrupted. Instead of putting the adjective *valerosa* after the noun it qualifies (*la gente*), Bernárdez places it after the verb (*da*) and on the next line, alongside *rojo oro* (it is unusual in Spanish for the noun to precede the adjective). As this does not reflect the word order of the Icelandic version, it is not immediately apparent why the translator has elected to arrange the words thus. Perhaps it is because the strangeness of the word order recreates, to an extent, the distorted syntax of a typical skaldic stanza and to give the reader a taste of the difficulty of the Icelandic text without rendering it utterly incomprehensible. However, as we have seen in chapter 3, Bernárdez also has a model for such disordered syntax in the Baroque poetry of the sixteenth century.

The above stanza relays the same basic messages as the Icelandic, i.e. that Egill has arrived at Yngvarr’s home, that Yngvarr is generous, and that Egill is the best three-year-old poet around, but this version is devoid of the rich imagery of the Icelandic text. Neither of the kennings has been preserved. The phrase *lyngva fránpvengjar beð*, for example, becomes simply *rojo oro* (red gold) and *þægir ljósundinna linns landa* is rendered *señor, pródigo* (sir, generous). *Pródigo* means ‘generous’ or ‘munificent’ often in the sense of ‘excessively’, or even recklessly so, which is in keeping with the spirit of the term *þægir*, but like ‘red gold’ it is reductive and neither word does justice to the beautifully intricate images of shining snakes and bright bracelets in the Icelandic text. By removing the image of the snake’s bed,

<sup>24</sup> Enrique Bernárdez, trans., *Snorri Sturluson: Saga de Egil Skallagrímsson* (Madrid: Miraguano, 1988), p. 106, footnote 89: ‘Estos primeros poemas de Egil, de complejísima estructura formal, son evidentemente falsos. Véase la Introducción’ (these first poems of Egill, of a most complex formal structure, are obviously false. See the introduction).

the allusion to the legend of Fáfnir is also lost, although the translator may have had the story in mind when he translated the stanza.<sup>25</sup>

The word *hogar*, in the phrase *hogar de Yngvar* is an example of how occasionally (and coincidentally) the target language can accommodate multiple meanings contained in the Icelandic term. The Icelandic *til arna Yngvars* is literally ‘to Yngvarr’s hearths’ but of course that is a poetic way of referring to his homestead. *Hogar* is frequently used in the sense of ‘home’, but can also mean hearth, fireplace or family (specifically a group of people related by marriage who live together).

Some more subtle changes introduced by the translator serve to alter the tone of the stanza. For example, the second person form *þú* in the sentence *þú mun eigi, þægir ljósundinna linns landa, finna þrévetran óðar smið betra mér*, in the Spanish version is rendered (*usted*) *hallará*, rather than the more informal *tú hallarás*. This, along with the addressing of Yngvarr as *señor* (sir/lord), has the effect of making the relationship between the two kinsmen seem more formal than in the Icelandic text, as well as confirming Yngvarr’s status as a wealthy and powerful man. Bernárdez is also careful to preserve the idea that *drenjum* refers specifically to people of high standing.<sup>26</sup> However, the most original addition to this version is the phrase *en tierras de poetas*, a phrase which has no basis in the Icelandic text. The only mention of lands in stanza 4 is in the kenning *þægir ljósundinna linns landa* where it clearly refers to the serpent’s bed i.e. gold.

### Stanza 5

Síþogla gaf sǫglum  
sárgagls þría Agli  
herðimeidr við hróðri  
hagr brimrótar gagra,  
ok bekkþiðurs blakka  
borðvallar gaf fjorða  
kennimeidr, sás kunni,  
kørbeð, Egil gleðja.<sup>27</sup>

#### Prose word order

Hagr herðimeidr sárgagls gaf sǫglum Agli þría síþogla brimrótar gagra við hróðri, ok borðvallar blakka kennimeidr, sás kunni gleðja Egil, gaf fjorða, bekkþiðurs kørbeð.

<sup>25</sup> Hreiðmarr asks Óðinn to fill his son’s skin with red gold (*af rauðu gulli*) in compensation for his death.

<sup>26</sup> Hallvard Lie does the same, translating the word as *give karer* (noble men).

<sup>27</sup> ÍF 2, p. 82.



*Translation*

The skilful hardening-tree of the wound-gosling > WARRIOR/WEAPONSMITH gave eloquent Egill three perpetually silent dogs of the seabed > SHELLS for the praise-poem and the knowing-tree of the horses of the gunwale (ship)-field > SAILOR, he who knows how to make Egill happy, gave a fourth, a brook-grouse's choice-bed/bolster > DUCK-EGG.

*Commentary & Analysis*

Manuscript variations, as well as semantic ambiguity in the language of this stanza, have given rise to a number of different readings and interpretations among editors and translators, particularly with regard to the kennings *herðimeidr sárgagls* (hardening-tree of the wound-gosling > WARRIOR/WEAPONSMITH) and *þrjá síþogla brimrótar gagra* (three perpetually silent dogs of the seabed > SHELLS). In the first of these the debate mostly centres on the first element of the compound *herðimeidr*, or *hirðimeidr*, as it appears in some manuscripts.<sup>28</sup> The base-word in this kenning, *-meidr* (tree/post/pole), qualified by a determinant such as sword, very often appears in poetic circumlocutions for 'man' or 'warrior' in skaldic poetry.<sup>29</sup> If we read the compound as *herðimeidr* it could be translated as 'hardened-tree' or 'strengthened-tree' in the sense of a warrior who is battle-hardened or strengthened. Of course, 'hardened' here might also refer to tempered steel or, more specifically, a weapon, such as a sword, with the resulting interpretation 'sword-tree', also signifying warrior. A third explanation could be 'hardening tree' i.e. one who hardens or tempers weapons, such as a blacksmith or weaponsmith. In his Modern Icelandic paraphrase of the stanza, Sigurður Nordal renders the phrase *hagr herðimeidr sárgagls* as 'hinn hagi vopnasmiður' (the skilful weaponsmith), based on his reading of *herðimeidr* as 'hardening-tree' of the *sárgagl* (wound-gosling), which could refer either to a carrion-bird, such as a raven, or a *skotvopn* ('missile', such as a arrow).<sup>30</sup>

Jónas Kristjánsson agrees with the latter of these interpretations that 'en sárgagl er sá fugl sem veitir sár, þ. e. sverð eða spjót' (a wound-gosling is that bird which causes wounds, i.e. sword or spear), but chooses *hirðimeidr* over *herðimeidr*: 'Hirðmeidr [*sic*] sárgagls er sá viður sem hirðir vopn, þ. e. hermaður' (*hirð(i)meidr sárgagls* is that tree which herds/keeps weapons, i.e. warrior).<sup>31</sup> Bjarni Einarsson also renders *hirðimeidr* as 'herding-tree', but differs from Jónas Kristjánsson by interpreting *sárgagl* as 'raven' rather than 'weapon'. For Bjarni Einarsson, therefore, the *hirðimeidr sárgagls* is 'the man who takes care

<sup>28</sup> *herðimeidr* in *M*, *δ* and *ε*, but *W* and *K* have *hirðimeidr*.

<sup>29</sup> For example, *brodda-meidr* (sword-tree) > WARRIOR; *meidr malmþings* (tree of metal-assembly [battle]) > WARRIOR; *meidr boga* (tree of bow) > WARRIOR.

<sup>30</sup> ÍF 2, p. 82.

<sup>31</sup> *Kvæðakver Egils Skallagrímssonar*, ed. and trans. by Jónas Kristjánsson (Reykjavík: Almenna bókafélagið, 1964), p. 12.

of or feeds the wound-gosling (raven)', i.e. 'a warrior, a man'.<sup>32</sup> In their 1992 edition of the saga, Bergljót S. Kristjánsdóttir and Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir interpret *hirðimeidr sárgagls* as 'tré sem hirðir hrafn, þ.e. elur hann' (a tree which herds/keeps ravens, i.e. he feeds them).<sup>33</sup> To sum up, scholars agree that in this phrase Yngvarr's skill as either a warrior or weaponsmith is being lauded; it is clear, however, that they reach these conclusions by very different routes.

Egill's second poetic circumlocution for Yngvarr, *borðvallar blakka kennimeidr*, is much more straightforward. This kenning refers to Yngvarr's knowledge of seafaring. The first element of the first word *borð*, refers to the gunwale of a ship, and is an example of the type of *heiti* that occurs when a part of the object designated may be used metonymically for the whole, in this case 'ship'. According to this metaphor, the plain (*vollr*) of this 'ship' is the sea; the horse (*blakkr*) of the sea (*borðvallar*) is a ship, and the 'knowing-tree' (*kennimeidr*) of the ship (*borðvallar blakka*) is a sailor or seafarer.

The third kenning in the stanza is another one which presents problems of interpretation. It refers to one of the gifts that Egill receives from his grandfather Yngvarr: *þrjá síþogla brimrótar gagra*. In this kenning 'sea' may be read for *brim* (lit. 'surf'), the *rót* (root) of which seems to be the sea's 'deep' or 'bottom'. *Gagarr* is generally accepted to be a rare word for 'dog' and *síþogull* means 'perpetually mute' or 'ever-silent', but what are the 'ever-silent dogs of the bottom of the sea'? The prose context tells us that the presents Egill received from his grandfather in recompense for his verses were three conch shells and a duck-egg ('kúfunga þrjá og andaregg'),<sup>34</sup> but again scholars differ as to how this meaning can be deduced from the verse. According to the *Lexicon poeticum*, the sense-word for *síþogla brimrótar gagra*, 'konkylie' (conch shell), is produced by 'en dristig sammenligning der mulig beror på den snoende "hale"' (a daring comparison which possibly rests on the curling 'tail'). In other words, that the spiral form of a conch shell can be compared to a dog's curly tail. Sigurður Nordal, on the other hand, makes a comparison between a dog stretching out his neck and a *kuðungur* (sea-snail) thrusting up through the surf.<sup>35</sup> Bjarni Einarsson simply states: 'the dogs of the bottom of the sea, are sea-snails'.<sup>36</sup> Neither does Jónas Kristjánsson offer an explanation as to how 'hundur brimrótsins' (dog of the seabed) is a kenning for *kuðungur*, but he makes the interesting point that 'Egill calls the

<sup>32</sup> *Egils saga*, ed. by Bjarni Einarsson (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2003), p. 44.

<sup>33</sup> Bergljót S. Kristjánsdóttir and Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir, eds, *Egils saga*, 3rd edn (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 1992), p. 64. In other words, the warrior keeps the ravens by providing them with food in the form of corpses.

<sup>34</sup> ÍF 2, p. 82.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Egils saga*, ed. by Bjarni Einarsson, p. 44.



conch-shells ever-silent [*sþögla*] in contrast to himself, whom he calls eloquent [*söglan*].<sup>37</sup> In a discussion on the etymology of the word *kofa*, Anatoly Liberman suggests yet another explanation for the relationship between ‘dog’ and ‘snail’:

Although *kofa* was first recorded in the seventeenth century, it must be related to other nouns designating (young) animals, from OI *kobbi* ‘seal’ to Engl. *cub*, with the consonant frame *k-b*: cf. Dutch dial. *kabbe* ‘young pig’, Germ. dial. *Kibbe* ‘ewe’, Scottish *keb*, Engl. dial. *Kebber* ‘refuse sheep taken out of the flock’, Swed. dial. *kibb*, *kubbe* ‘cub’, and so forth. Most of such words have *-bb-* (expressive geminates are typical of hypocoristic names), but Magnússon 1989 is probably right in viewing *kofa* as part of this group; Icel. *kufungur* (or *kúfungur*, a variant of *kuðungur*) ‘young snail’, another seventeenth-century word, may belong here, too. I believe that *kofa(r)n* was simply a cub, that is, a whelp.<sup>38</sup>

Johan Fritzner offers an alternative derivation for *kúfungur*, glossing it as ‘Søsnegle, Strandsnegle, især dens Hus, som er kúfótt’ (Sea-snail, beach-snail, primarily its house, which is convex). A conch-shell which, when it is open at the point and blown into, produces a trumpet-like sound, therefore making an appropriate gift for a little boy. However, I think the suggestion given by *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, that ‘the ever mute surf-dog’ probably comes ‘from a custom of Icelandic children, who in play make shells represent flocks and herds, *kú-skeljar* (‘cow-shells’), *gymbr-skeljar* (‘lamb-shells’), and put one shell for a dog’, is the most likely.<sup>39</sup>

The other gift that Egill receives from his grandfather is *bekkiþúrs kørbedr*. To arrive at the meaning ‘duck-egg’ we need to examine the components of the kenning individually. *Þúrr*, ‘grouse’, is a word which is often used in combination with *ben-* (wound) or *val-* (slain) to mean raven or carrion bird (in the same manner as *sárgagl* above), but determined here with *bekkr* ‘brook’ obviously refers to a water-bird such as a duck. The second part of this kenning is also a compound word. The component *bedr* could be translated ‘bed’ but the latter is more commonly connoted in Icelandic by the word *sæng*, *bedr* being mostly used in the sense of ‘bolster’ or ‘pillow’. If *kør* is the neuter noun meaning, ‘choice’ or ‘election’, the whole phrase would mean ‘choice/favourite pillow of

<sup>37</sup> *Kvæðakver Egils Skallagrimssonar*, p. 12: ‘Egill kallar kuðungana *sþögla* í mótsetningu við sjálfan sig, sem kallar *söglan*, þ. e. málgefinn eða orðhvatan’.

<sup>38</sup> Anatoly Liberman, ‘Ten Scandinavian and North English Etymologies’, *alvíssmál*, 6 (1996), 63-98 (p. 90).

<sup>39</sup> I myself saw an example of this game ‘leggur og skel’ (‘bone and shell’) in the old farmhouse at Árbæjarsafn, Reykjavík in March 2005. It consisted of a collection of various animal bones and shells kept in a wooden box. I was assured by an Icelander on the same tour that he had played with bones and shells as a child and that the jaw-bones were used to represent cows (which they sometimes coloured), and the *kuðungar* (‘conch-shells’) were the dogs, because their spiral form resembled a dog’s curly tail. There is also an example of this game on exhibition at the National Museum of Iceland. See also David Koester, ‘Imagination and Play in Children’s Reflections on Cultural Life: Implications for Cultural Continuity and Educational Practice’, in *Bicultural Education in the North: Ways of Preserving and Enhancing Indigenous People’s Languages and Traditional Knowledge*, ed. by Erich Karsten (Münster: Waxman, 1998), pp. 29-45 (p. 34).

the duck', i.e. the egg on which it sits. However, *kör* is also a feminine noun meaning 'sick-bed' or 'couch', which would give the meaning 'couch/bed-pillow of the duck', also referring to an egg.

In this stanza Yngvarr has two qualities attributed to him which are expected of, and indeed essential for, a high-ranking man in medieval Icelandic society i.e. expertise in warfare (or possibly weapon-making) and knowledge of seafaring. His generosity as regards gift-giving is also acknowledged here, specifically his ability to please his grandson (*sás kunningi gleðja Egil*). Egill uses the occasion of these verses to allude once more to his own skill with words, by pointing out that the presents he received were a reward for the praise-poem he recited in Yngvarr's honour and also by describing himself as *soðgull* (eloquent). As Jónas Kristjánsson has noted (see above) there is perhaps an intentional word-play in the juxtaposition of the adjectives *síþogull* and *soðgull* which contrasts the muteness of the shells with the volubility of the speaker.

An aspect of this stanza which is particularly striking is the number of animals alluded to i.e. raven/eagle (*sár-gagl*), gosling (*gagl*), dog (*gagarr*), sea-snail (*síþogla brimrótar gagra*), horse (*blakkr*), grouse (*þiðurr*), duck (*bekkiþiðurr*). There are also many references, implied and overt, to the sea or water: sea-snail/shells (*síþogla brimrótar gagra*), sea-bed (*brimrótt*), surf (*brim*), sea (*borðvallar*), ship (*borðvallar blakka*), sailor (*borðvallar blakka kennimeidr*), brook (*bekki*), and duck (*bekkiþiðurr*).

#### Stanza 5: Norwegian Translation

<p>Tre tause sneglehus fikk taleferme Egil av våpensmeden, venn sin, for visen som han yrket; og hav-vante høvding hadde i hånden enda en gave: et ande-egg; alltid var Egil Yngvars yndling.<sup>40</sup></p>	<p>Three silent snailshells eloquent Egil got from his friend, the weapon-smith, for the verse that he wrought; and sea-accustomed chieftain had in (his) hand yet another gift: a duck-egg; Egil was always Yngvarr's darling.</p>
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#### Commentary & Analysis

In his translations of the kennings of this stanza, Lie follows Nordal's paraphrases almost to the letter. The original slipperiness of the kennings *hagr herðimeidr sárgagls* and *bekkiþiðurs korbodr* is not preserved in the Norwegian text, where they are rendered unequivocally as *våpensmeden* (weapon-smith) and *ande-egg* (duck-egg). In *þria síþogla brimrótar gagra* and *borðvallar blakka kennimeidr*, however, something of the enigmatic nature of the Icelandic

<sup>40</sup> *Islandske ættesager*, vol. 1, p. 79.



text is conveyed. By translating the first of these as *tre tause sneglebus* (three silent snailshells) Lie conforms to Nordal's interpretation, *þrjá þogula kuðunga* (three silent sea-snail shells). What is questionable here is the extent to which *síþogla* is intrinsic to the kenning. In the case of *hagr herðimeidr sárgagls*, the adjective *hagr* (skilful) is not essential to the sense-word signified and probably should not be presented as part of the kenning at all. However, in this case the adjective *síþogla* is crucial in differentiating between 'real' dogs which bark, and those primitive toy-'dogs' or shells which are ever-mute. In this sense the adjective *þogula* (nom. sing. *þogull*) in Nordal's paraphrase *þrjá þogula kuðunga* is somewhat redundant on the grounds that snails can reasonably be assumed to be mute animals, similarly Lie's description of the snailshells as silent seems to be stating the obvious. However, the positioning of *taleferme* underneath *tause*, as well as the fact that they alliterate, gives the two words an emphasis in much the same way as the Icelandic phrase *síþogla gaf seglum* does.

The translator has been quite innovative with the rest of this stanza. For example, *venn sin* (his friend) does not occur in the source text, indeed the relationship between Yngvarr and Egill is not alluded to at all, except perhaps in the clause *sás kunni gleðja Egil*, which implies a certain mutual understanding between the two kinsmen. There is evidence to support this in the prose context. When Egill arrives at Yngvarr's, the warm welcome he receives from his grandfather contrasts sharply with the harsh words of his father. Perhaps this special treatment of Egill by Yngvarr warrants the claim: *alltid var Egil Yngvars yndling*, but it is not a sentiment that is directly expressed in the stanza. It appears that Lie wants to emphasise the closeness between Yngvarr and Egill, and make their relationship sound less formal and more intimate than the source text. The phrase *hadde i hánden enda en gave* also contributes towards creating a familiar scene of a grandfather hiding a gift in his hand and then revealing it to the delight of his grandson. The same scene in the Icelandic text, in contrast, comes across as a relatively formal act of payment to a skald by his lord.

The natural imagery in this version is greatly diminished. Of the seven animals alluded to in the Icelandic text only two are retained here. The number of references to the sea is similarly reduced. The elimination of *sárgagls*, for example, distances the weaponsmith (if that is what he is) from the wound-inflicting nature of his spears, swords and arrows, or the gruesome image of the raven on the battlefield feeding on the carrion provided by the warrior. In the same way, the decision by the translator not to include the reference to 'horse' in his reshaping of *borðvallar blakka kennimeidr* ignores one of the most common metaphors in skaldic poetry. The comparison of a ship moving across the sea with a horse galloping across a plain is a conceit used so extensively that it could almost be said to have

become a cliché in Icelandic poetry, except that it is constantly reinvented, and hence kept fresh. The idea is that a ship fulfils the same purpose on the sea as a horse does on land, i.e. of carrying men and their possessions from one place to another. A sailor on a ship is thus comparable to a rider of a horse because a ship on the sea is like a wayward animal, which must be steered by an knowledgeable man, a meaning which is perhaps lost in Lie's translation of *borðvallar blakka kennimeidr* as *hav-vante hövding* (sea-accustomed chieftain), although the latter phrase does imply that the sailor is experienced. The action of the waves makes the ship (and hence its passengers) move in a way not dissimilar to horse-riding, and the Viking ships' physical resemblance to animals was reflected in names such as "The Long Serpent" or "The Crane" for a slender ship with a high prow, or "The Reindeer" for the fleetest of all ships'.<sup>41</sup> Lie's representation of the kenning retains one reference to the sea (*hav-*) as evoked by *borðvallar* (or *borðvoll*) but most of the other allusions to the sea have been omitted and with them such images the commotion of the surf breaking on the shore or reefs, as evoked by *brim*. It is not clear from Lie's translation that the *sneglehus* have any connection with the sea.

#### *Stanza 5: Spanish Translation*

<p>Dio mudas caracolas tres, a Egil elocuente como pago, el armero, el jinete de las olas aún un huevo de pato dio, fue un cuarto regalo, bien sabe alegrar a Egil.<sup>42</sup></p>	<p>He gave mute conch-shells three, to eloquent Egill as a reward, the weaponsmith/armourer, the rider/horse of the waves and further a duck's egg did he give, it was a fourth gift, he knows well how to gladden Egill.</p>
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#### *Commentary & Analysis*

The Spanish translation is almost an exact metaphrase of Sigurður Nordal's interpretation of the stanza apart from a few noteworthy exceptions. Bernárdez glosses Nordal's interpretation of the kenning *síþogla brimrótar gagra*, 'þogula kuðunga' (which it should be noted omits the prefix *sí-*), as *mudas caracolas*, which emphasises the fact that they are incapable of uttering a sound. He also names the 'shells' specifically as *caracolas* (conch shells). The contrast of *mudas* and *elocuente*, placed so closely together, creates the similar effect to that of *síþogull* and *sogull* in the Icelandic text. Bernárdez follows Nordal's rendering of *hagr herðimeidr sárgagls* ('hinn hagi vopnasmiður', the skilful weaponsmith)

<sup>41</sup> A. W. Brøgger and Haakon Shetelig, *The Viking Ships: Their Ancestry and Revolution* (Oslo: Dreyers forlag, 1951), p. 105.

<sup>42</sup> *Saga de Egil Skallagrímsson*, p. 106.



which he translates as *el armero* (the weaponsmith), although he disregards the adjective *hagr*. However, where Nordal explains *borðvallar blakka kennimeidr* as ‘farmaðurinn’ (the seaman/seafaring-man), the Spanish translator introduces a new kenning *el jinete de las olas* (the rider/jockey of the waves), which means ‘seafarer’, but which also preserves the idea of the horse, which is implied by the word ‘rider’. *Jinete* can also mean a type of horse, which would give us the more common kenning ‘horse of the waves’ for ship; it is clear from the context, however, that the kenning must refer Yngvarr. Bernárdez also introduces the adverb *bien* in the phrase *bien sabe alegrar a Egil*. Finally, where Nordal translates *við hróðr* (for the praise-poem) as ‘að bragarlaunum’ (as poem-rewards), Bernárdez simply says *como pago* (as a payment/reward) without mentioning what the payment is for.

As in the previous stanza, Bernárdez’s syntax is somewhat unnatural, although in this instance the sense does not suffer as a consequence. Indeed of the two translations, this is the one which, to the inexperienced reader, is the more logical.

### Stanza 6

The subject of this stanza is an axe, which Skalla-Grímr’s son Þórólfr has brought him as a present from King Eiríkr blóðøx. In the prose text the axe is described as a large *snaghyrnd* (horn-pointed) axe, ornamented with gold, and the shaft decorated with silver. Although it is described as ‘inn virðiligsti gripur’ (the most splendid possession),<sup>43</sup> when Þórólfr first presents the king’s gift to his father, Skalla-Grímr does not appear to be very impressed. He looks at it, and then, without saying anything, hangs it over his bed. In the autumn Skalla-Grímr takes down the axe and uses it to slaughter two oxen, but when the blade hits the stone, which he has placed under the necks of the beasts, it shatters.<sup>44</sup> Without saying a word Skalla-Grímr takes the axe and hangs it up in the *eldhús* under the rafters above the

<sup>43</sup> ÍF 2, p. 95.

<sup>44</sup> ÍF 2, pp. 95-96: ‘Hann tók hellustein vel mikinn ok skaut niðr undir hálsana. Síðan gekk hann til með øxina konungsnaut ok hjó yxnina báða senn, svá at höfuðit tók af hvarumtveggja, en øxin hljóp niðr í steininn, svá at muðrinn brast ór allr ok rifnaði upp í gegnum herðuna’. This scene is reminiscent of a similar incident which occurs in chapter 11 of *Eiríks saga rauða* when the ‘skrælingar’ (i.e. the Native Americans) experiment with one of the Icelander’s axes, a tool they have never seen before. At first they are impressed with its ability to cut wood but when one tries the same with a stone the axe breaks: ‘Síðan tók einn ok hjó í steinn, svá at brotnaði oxin, ok þá þótti þeim engu nýtt, er eigi stózk grjótit ok köstuðu niðr’ (Then one of them took the axe and struck a stone with the result that the axe broke and then it seemed to them that a thing which could not withstand stone was of no use and threw it down). See *Eiríks saga rauða* in *Eyrbyggja saga, Grænlandingsögur*, ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matías Þórðarson, Íslensk fornrit, 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1935), pp. 193-237 (p. 230).

door.<sup>45</sup> The next spring Þórólfr decides to go back to Norway, but before he leaves Borg, Skalla-Grímr takes down the axe from above the door in the *eldhús*. The haft is now black with smoke and the blade gone rusty. Skalla-Grímr gives the axe to Þórólfr and quotes the following verses:

Liggja ýgs í eggju,  
ák sveigar kǫr deiga  
fox es illt í øxi,  
undvargs flǫsur margar;  
arghyrnu lát árna  
aptr með roknu skapti;  
þorfgi væri þeirar,  
þat vas inga gjǫf, hingat.

*Prose word order*

Margar flǫsur liggja í eggju ýgs undvargs; ák deiga sveigar kǫr; illt fox es í øxi; lát arghyrnu með roknu skapti árna aptr; þorfgi væri þeirar hingat; þat vas inga gjǫf.

*Translation*

Many flaws lie/are in the blade of the fierce wound-wolf > AXE. I possess a blunt/soft sickbed of the switch > AXE. There is evil treachery in the axe. Let the cowardly-pointed thing (i.e. axe) with the sooty haft go back (i.e. to where it came from). There was no need of this (to be sent) hither [lit. there would be lack of need of it in this direction]. That was a king's gift.

*Commentary & Analysis*

While Þórólfr is on good terms with the king, Skalla-Grímr seems determined to antagonise him even though he has no personal quarrel with him, and indeed has never met him. Perhaps he is bitter about the fact that King Haraldr, the father of Eiríkr, had killed his uncle Þórólfr and driven the family from Norway. But Skalla-Grímr's actions, like those of his father and, later, of his second son Egill, are more often motivated by the trouble-making side of his personality than by any logical reasoning.

Skalla-Grímr's initial dismissive reaction to the king's gift turns to contempt when the axe proves to be weak and breaks on the stone. If Skalla-Grímr's almost superhuman strength is borne in mind this is not astonishing, but in this stanza he insists that the blade of the axe is flawed and that there is *illt fox* (evil treachery) in it. In skaldic poetry weapons are frequently referred to as animals, in terms of their ability to 'bite', but the kenning *jgr undvargr* (fierce wound-wolf), used to describe the king's present, must surely be sarcastic. The axe is insulted further when it is called *arghyrna*. In *Skáldskaparmál* this is one of the names Snorri lists for axe:

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<sup>45</sup> The *eldhús* (lit. 'fire-room' or 'fire-hall') was a special room or building whose primary function was that of a kitchen, although it was often used for eating, working or sleeping.



Þá er arghyrna,  
hon er œzt talið  
øxar heita.<sup>46</sup>

Then there is *arghyrna*; it is counted the most glorious of names for axe.

In the glossary to his edition of *Skáldskaparmál*, Anthony Faulkes glosses *arghyrna* as: ‘cowardly, useless point, (ironic?) name for an axe with long but weak points on the blade’.<sup>47</sup> The second part of the compound, *hyrna*, refers to the physical aspect of the axe, with its two points or ‘horns’ on the ends of the blade, but the ‘cowardliness’ or ‘uselessness’ of the weapon is denoted by *arg-* derived from the adjective *argr*. It is possible that the function of Eiríkr’s gift was purely ornamental and that it was never meant to be used as a weapon or tool, but Skalla-Grímr, by his actions and words, especially by his use of the derogatory appellation *arghyrna*, makes it clear that he has no time for such a present.

The rejection of Eiríkr’s gift is quite offensive in itself, but it could be that this stanza contains an even graver insult. It is quite likely that Skalla-Grímr is drawing a comparison between the axe and Eiríkr’s character, a correspondence which is even more apparent when we remember that the king’s sobriquet ‘blóðøx’ contains the word ‘axe’. If this is so then it is the king, metaphorically speaking, whom he is calling soft, cowardly or even effeminate. It is the king who is useless, treacherous, and full of flaws and who is not welcome in Iceland. Even if Skalla-Grímr does not dare to utter these insults directly about the king, he can use the analogy of the axe to do so. Either way this is an insolent verse, which, were Eiríkr to hear of it, would surely increase the enmity between his family and Skalla-Grímr’s, especially if Eiríkr recognised an accusation of *ergi*. Þórólfr, who has made a point of cultivating the king’s friendship, prudently ignores his father’s command to return the blackened, rusty weapon to the king and throws it overboard on his journey back to Norway.

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<sup>46</sup> *Snorri Sturluson: Edda. Skáldskaparmál*, ed. by Anthony Faulkes, 2 vols (London, 1998), 1, p. 121. All further references to *Skáldskaparmál* are from this edition.

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 235.

*Stanza 6: Norwegian translation*

Yrer i økse-eggen av ørsmå flass og filler; bile-beistet bærer bare fusket i seg! La skaftotet skrapøks med skam tilbake fare! Unødig var den her ute, uslere gave fikk ingen. <sup>48</sup>	The axe-edge teems with tiny flakes and shreds; the broadaxe-beast carries trickery in it! Let the sooty-handled junk (scrap) axe go back with shame! It was unnecessary out here, nobody (ever) received a more contemptible gift.
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*Commentary & Analysis*

The opening lines of Lie's translation can only be understood in the context of the situation, where we learn that the blade of the axe shattered into pieces. This information is not given in the stanza. Lie describes the shattering of the axe-blade into tiny fragments, but his use of the verb *å yre* ('to drizzle', used of rain or snow) and the words *flass* (flakes) and *filler* (shreds), conjure up the image of a snowstorm in a conceit reminiscent of the hailstorm as it is described in stanza 32,<sup>49</sup> and exemplifies the occasional influence of Egill's style on Lie's translation.

Lie's renders one of the axe-kennings in the Icelandic text, *undvargr* (wound-wolf), as *bile-beistet* (the broad-axe beast), a phrase which contains the sense-word of the Icelandic kenning but at the same time preserves the animal reference, although *beist* is also a more general term than *vargr*. The word *bile* (broad-axe) acknowledges that there is a particular type of axe in question, although not the *snaghyrnd* variety referred to in the source-text.<sup>50</sup> Although the word *argr* is not preserved *per se*, Lie says that the axe should be returned *med skam* is, I think, is a nod in the direction of *ergi*.

The final line of this translation departs from that which is given in the ÍF edition i.e. *þat vas inga gjöf*, which Nordal translates as 'þetta var konungsgjöf'. In a footnote Nordal explains why this reading, though not occurring in any of the manuscripts, is preferable to *bringa* or *ringa*, pointing out that *ringa gjöf* in the sense of 'miserable' or 'inferior gift' is hardly likely in such ancient language.<sup>51</sup> Lie appears to disagree, however, and translates the line as *uslere gave fikk ingen* (nobody (ever) received a more contemptible gift), thus removing the reference to the king and reinforcing the idea that Skalla-Grímr believed the gift to be

<sup>48</sup> *Íslandske ættesager*, vol. 1, p. 89.

<sup>49</sup> See chapter 1.

<sup>50</sup> In the prose text of the Norwegian translation the axe is described as being 'av den langeggete slaget' (of the long-bladed type). See *Íslandske ættesager*, vol. 1, p. 88.

<sup>51</sup> ÍF 2, p. 97: 'í hðrr. stendur: *bringa* M, W, K, *ringa* ð, ζ; *ingi* er heiti á konungi, og fer það hér vel, bæði vegna merkingar og hendingar (smb. *konungsgjöfina* í frásögninni á undan); *ringa gjöf*, vesæl gjöf (smb. þý. *gering*, dö. *ringe*), getur varla komið til greina í svo fömu máli'.



worthless. Lie must have arrived at this translation by reading *inga gjof* as *ringa gjof* but, despite the high frequency of words cognate with those to which they correspond in the Icelandic text in this version (egg – egg; fox – fusk; øx – økse; lát – la; flösur – flass; skapt – skaft; gjof – gave), he chooses *uslere* (comparative form of *usset*) to render it rather than the comparative of the Modern Norwegian word *ringe* (insignificant/trifling). One might have expected the resultant phrase to read something like ‘det var en usle gave’ (that was a miserable gift), but Lie introduces *fikk ingen*, which does not follow the Icelandic text, but echoes the sound ‘ing’ in *inga* and *hingat*.

*Stanza 6: Spanish translation*

<p>Muy abollada está el hacha, blanda, mala es el arma, engañoso es la fiera que las heridas causa; devolveré el hacha, pues, la de tan débil mango; de nada aquí me sirve del príncipe un regalo.<sup>52</sup></p>	<p>The axe is very dented, soft, the weapon is bad, treacherous is the wild beast who causes the wounds; I will return the axe, then, – the one with such a weak haft; it is of no use to me here – a present from the prince.</p>
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*Commentary & Analysis*

Bernárdez’s translation makes the implications of the Icelandic stanza explicit. For example, in this version it is clear that the axe is seen as a weapon (*arma*), which is ‘treacherous’, presumably because it might let the owner down in battle. Although we can only speculate, it is not unlikely that Eiríkr’s gift was an ornamental axe, and that Skalla-Grímr deliberately misinterpreted its function when he put the axe to use. Perhaps it is to be expected that a practical character like Skalla-Grímr would have no use for a ‘sissy’ weapon whose purpose was purely decorative.

In terms of the physical appearance of the axe, Bernárdez gives us very few clues in this stanza, which seems to contain a number of misinterpretations. While *blanda* (soft), one of the adjectives used to describe the axe, possibly corresponds to *deiga* here, *abollada* (dented) is less accurate. The impression given in the source text is that the blade is weak, due to poor materials or workmanship perhaps, which is why it breaks on contact with the stone. The weakest parts of this type of axe are the long thin ‘horns’ or points, which are called *argr*, but this meaning is lost in the translation *hacha*. Bernárdez does include the idea of weakness in the phrase *débil mango* (weak haft/handle) but this seems to be a

<sup>52</sup> *Saga de Egil Skallagrímsson*, p. 125.

misinterpretation of *rokinn*; (there is no precise word in Spanish for ‘sooty’ or ‘smoke-blackened’, the closest approximation would be ‘manchado de humo’, ‘stained with smoke’).

Bernárdez’s translation of the kenning *ygr undvargr*, the phrase *la fiera que las heridas causa* (the wild beast who causes the wounds), is explicatory, and in the context it is fairly clear that it must refer to the axe. *Fiera* is of course a more general term than *vargr*, but perhaps the translator felt that a literal translation such as ‘el lobo que las heridas causa’ (the wolf which causes the wounds) would be too easily confused with a real wolf. *Illt fox* is rendered by the terms *mala* and *engañososa*, which manage to convey both senses implied by the source text, i.e. that the axe is a poor weapon and that its weakness is deliberate.

In the second helming, the use of *devolveré* (I will give back/return) and *de nada aquí me sirve* (it is of no use to me here) is a departure from the more detached use of the passive in the original, and the latter phrase suggests a change of emphasis. The Icelandic text says that such a gift should never have been sent in the first place, whereas the Spanish says that, as it is broken, it is of no use. Unlike Lie, Bernárdez follows Nordal’s interpretation rendering *inga* (*ingi*) as *príncipe*.

### *Stanza 8*

Another stanza in *Egils saga* containing insults which could possibly constitute *níð* occurs in the context of Egill’s first trip to Norway with his brother Þórólfr.<sup>53</sup> When they arrive, the brothers stay with Þórir, whose niece, Ásgerðr, has travelled on the ship from Iceland with them. Þórólfr, with Þórir’s backing, asks Björn, Ásgerðr’s father, for her hand in marriage. Björn agrees and the wedding date is set for autumn. However, when the time comes for Þórólfr to depart for the wedding feast, Egill falls ill and has to be left behind. After a while he recovers from his illness and, feeling a bit bored, asks to accompany Qlvir, one of Þórir’s men, on a trip to collect rent. The weather is bad and by the time they arrive at the island Atley they are soaked through. They seek shelter at the farm of a man called Atleyjar-Bárðr, a steward of King Eiríkr who was very well thought of by both Eiríkr and Gunnhildr.

When Qlvir and his men arrive at Bárðr’s house, he leads them into an *eldhús* away from the other buildings where they dry their clothes in front of a large fire. Bárðr feeds his guests with bread and butter and gives them curds and whey to drink but claims that he has nothing better to offer them, saying: ‘Harmr er þat nú mikill, er ql er ekki inni, þat er ek

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<sup>53</sup> ÍF 2, chapters 42-45.



mega yðr fagna sem ek vilda' ('It is a great misfortune that there is no ale in the house so that I could entertain you as I would have wished'), and later, 'Fúss mynda ek', kvað Bárðr, 'at gefa yðr betra drykk, ef til væri' ('I would willingly', said Bárðr, 'have given you better drink if there were any.').<sup>54</sup> Meanwhile, in the main hall, Bárðr is hosting a *dísablót* with Eiríkr and Gunnhildr as the guests of honour. His deceit is revealed when Eiríkr invites Egill and his companions to participate in the feast, and they see that there is more than enough to drink. However, if Bárðr has not fulfilled his duties as host, neither is Egill an exemplary guest. Horn after horn of ale is served and Qlvir and his men become increasingly drunk, so much so that many of them vomit in the hall, but they keep on drinking regardless. When Bárðr remarks on Egill's apparently insatiable thirst, Egill responds by reciting the following stanza:

Sögðuð sverri flagða  
sumbleklu ér, kumbla,  
því telk, brjótr, þars blétuð,  
bragðvísan þik, dísir;  
leynuð alls til illa  
ókunna þér runna,  
illt hafið bragð of brugðit,  
Bárøðr, hugar fári.

*Prose word-order*

Ér sögðuð sverri flagða sumbleklu, þars blétuð dísir; því telk þik, brjótr kumbla bragðvísan; leynduð alls til illa runna, ókunna þér, fári hugar; hafið of brugðit illt bragð, Bárøðr.

*Translation*

You (pl.) told the enemy of the trollwomen about a shortage of drink (at the banquet) when you were sacrificing to the *dísir* (goddesses). Therefore I consider you, breaker-into-graves crafty; you concealed all too evilly, from men who were unknown to you, your enmity/hostility of mind; you have played a bad trick, Bárðr.

*Commentary & Analysis*

In this stanza Egill openly accuses Bárðr of foul play. He calls him *bragðvísan* (crafty); says that he *leynuð alls til illa* (concealed all too badly) his *fári hugar* (enmity of mind) and that he has *brugðit illt bragð* (played a bad trick). He also expresses his contempt for Bárðr in the insulting expression *brjótr kumbla* (breaker of graves/monuments) but styles himself as *sverri flagða* (enemy of trollwomen). According to Sigurður Nordal the latter phrase is a kenning for 'góður drengur' (gentleman) and simply represents 'man'. However, a closer examination may reveal another affront to Bárðr concealed in it.

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<sup>54</sup> ÍF 2, p. 107.

Dictionaries, editors and translators variously define *flagð* as a ‘trollwoman’, ‘giantess’, ‘ogre’, or even ‘witch’.<sup>55</sup> Of course, an enemy of something bad or evil such as a troll is an obvious epithet for ‘brave or noble man’ in a general sense, the god Þórr for instance, is often referred to as ‘enemy of giants’;<sup>56</sup> but as Egill is using this stanza to declare his personal enmity for Bárðr, it is not inconceivable that the term *flagð* is expressly directed at him.

Bárðr’s behaviour towards Ólvir, Egill and company has certainly been dishonourable according to contemporary etiquette. Not only has Bárðr not fulfilled his obligations as host by providing his guests with poor fare in an outlying building, but out of meanness, or cowardice, or a combination of both, he has also lied about a shortage of drink even as a feast was taking place in the main hall. It is not surprising then that in his anger Egill would equate the deceitful Bárðr with a treacherous figure such as a troll, and by calling him a *female* troll, cast aspersions on his masculinity as well. As we have seen above, the comparison of a man with ‘any kind of female animal’ was prohibited by law and was a verbal offence for which full compensation must be paid, as was calling a man a troll: ‘þat er oc fullrettis orð ef maðr þræler karlmann frialsan. æða kallar hann troll. æða fordæðo’ (It is also a *fullréttisorð* if a man calls a freed/freeman a slave, or calls him a troll, or ‘doer of (evil) magic’).<sup>57</sup>

The other insult that Egill levels at Bárðr in this stanza is that of *brjótr kumbla*.<sup>58</sup> The term *kumbl* (also *kuml*, *kubl*) refers to a monument erected in memory of the dead, which could be a mound or stone, or indeed a burial compound including both, and the word occurs in many runic inscriptions throughout Scandinavia.<sup>59</sup> For example, the inscription on the Glavendrup stone in Fyn, Denmark reads:

<sup>55</sup> See for example Johan Fritzner’s definition: ‘Væsen som har menneskelig Skikkelse men overmenneskelig Størrelse og Styrke, Trolld’ (A being which has a human appearance but superhuman size and strength, a troll). Johan Fritzner, *Ordbog over det gamle norske sprog*, 4th edn, rev. by Finn Hødnebo, 4 vols (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1973).

<sup>56</sup> cf. *jötna ótti* (dread of giants), *jötna dolgr* (enemy of giants), in Rudolf Meissner, *Die Kenningar der Skalden: Ein Beitrag zur skaldischen Poetik* (Bonn: Kurt Schroeder, 1921; repr. Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1984), p. 254; *Skáldskaparmál*, vol. 1, ed. by Anthony Faulkes (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1998), p. 14: ‘bani jötna ok tröllkvinna’.

<sup>57</sup> *Norges gamle love indtil 1387*, vol. 1, p. 70.

<sup>58</sup> Finnur Jónsson interprets the phrase as *herkumbla brjótr*, ‘helmet-breaker’, i.e. warrior. See *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*, B I, p. 42.

<sup>59</sup> Nielsen defines a *kuml* as a monument consisting of several erected stones, normally one or more rune stones in association with one or more uninscribed stones. See Karl Martin Nielsen, *Jelling-Studier. Og andre afhandlinger* (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1977), pp. 160-67 (first publ. in *Årbog for jysk arkæologisk selskab* (1953), 7-14); Erik Moltke maintains that while *kumbl* in the plural means ‘a monument complex which might consist of several items’, used in the singular ‘as at Gørlev and Nærå (and probably at Starup too), it must signify a single element, viz. the grave (grave-mound) marked by a rune stone’. See Erik Moltke, *Runes and their Origin: Denmark and Elsewhere*, trans. by Peter Foote (Copenhagen: National Museum of Denmark, 1985), pp. 215-16.



rakhiltr sati stainþansi auft ala sauluakupa uial(i)þshaiþuiarþanþiakn  
 ala suniR karþu kubl þausi aft faþur sin auk hañs kuna auft uar sin in suti raist  
 runaR þasi aft trutin sin þur uiki þasi runaR  
 at rita sa uarþi is stainþansi ailti iþa aft añañ traki.<sup>60</sup>

Ragnhildr placed this stone in memory of Alle, *goði* of the Sølver, honour-worthy thegn of the *uia*-host. Alle's sons made this *kubl* (monument) in memory of their father, and his wife in memory of her husband, and Soti carved these runes in memory of his lord. May Thor hallow these runes. May he become a *riti* who 'ailti' (?damages) this stone or drags it (away to stand) in memory of another.<sup>61</sup>

The final part of the inscription which threatens: **at rita sa uarþi is stainþansi ailti iþa aft añañ traki**, has been called a 'formulaic curse' or 'protective formula' and is found in various forms on a number of Scandinavian rune stones.<sup>62</sup>

It is clear from these inscriptions that 'riti' or 'rati' must be an insulting term although its exact meaning has been much debated. The dictionary in *Danmarks runeindskrifter*, under the entry '?rati', provides a comprehensive list of the many and varied suggestions by scholars which include: 'one who moves quickly from one place to another', based on an identification with the Old Ice. *rati*, 'wretch'; 'troubled wandering villain'; and 'outlawed deadman, ghost'.<sup>63</sup> More recently, Niels Åge Nielsen has postulated *trollmand* (sorcerer, wizard) on the grounds of an etymological connection with Indo-European *\*(s)ker*,<sup>64</sup> and Eric Christiansen has even offered the interpretation 'passive sodomite'.<sup>65</sup>

All of these interpretations of *rati* are quite plausible in the context. A curse-formula involving the threat of eternal 'restlessness' or 'wandering', for example, could be considered an appropriate one for a person who destroys or disturbs the last resting-place of the dead.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, it calls to mind the curse Egill directed at the land-spirits when he

<sup>60</sup> DR 209, in *Danmarks runeindskrifter: Text*, ed. by Lis Jacobsen and Erik Moltke (Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1942), p. 251.

<sup>61</sup> My translation is based on Niels Åge Nielsen's interpretation in *Danske runeindskrifter. Et udvalg med kommentarer* (Copenhagen: Hernov, 1983), pp. 82-85.

<sup>62</sup> For example, the Tryggevelde stone in Sjælland, Denmark (DR 230, *Danmarks runeindskrifter: Text*, p. 283), which seems to have been erected by the same Ragnhildr of the Glavendrup stone, has an almost identical formula: **sauarþi at rita isailtistainþansi iþahipantraki** (May he become a 'riti' who ?damages this stone or drags it from here.); and the Glemminge stone from Skåne, Sweden (DR 338, *Danmarks runeindskrifter: Text*, p. 383), has a similarly phrased warning: **uirþi at rata huas ub briuti** (May whoever breaks [this stone] become a 'rati').

<sup>63</sup> *Danmarks runeindskrifter: Text*, ed. by Jacobsen and Moltke, p. 702.

<sup>64</sup> Niels Åge Nielsen, *Danske runeindskrifter*, p. 87.

<sup>65</sup> Eric Christiansen, *The Norsemen in the Viking Age* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), p. 32. It is also worth mentioning here that 'Rati' was the name of the auger Óðinn used to bore a hole through Hnitbjörg to gain access to Gunnlǫð and Suttung's mead. Bearing in mind Óðinn's seduction of Gunnlǫð, it is possible that the word might have some phallic connotations in this context. See *Skáldskaparmál*, vol. 1, p. 4.

<sup>66</sup> It should be noted that none of the stones which bear these protective formulas can be located with absolute certainty in the vicinity of a grave. On the contrary, some of them were definitely not erected in connection with a grave. See Klaus Düwel, 'Grabraub, Totenschutz und Platzweihe nach dem Zeugnis der Runeinschriften', in *Zum Grabfrevel in vor- und frühgeschichtlicher Zeit; Untersuchungen zu Grabraub und 'haugbrod' in Mittel- und Nordeuropas vom 14. bis 16. Februar 1977*, ed. by Herbert Jankuhn and others, *Abhandlungen der*

said: ‘sný ek þessu níði á landvættir þær, er land þetta byggva, *svá at allar fari þær villar vega, engi bendi né hitti sitt inni* [my emphasis], fyrr en þær reka Eirík konung ok Gunnhildi ór landi’ (‘and I direct this *níð* towards the land-spirits who inhabit this land, so that they all go astray, and neither recognise home nor the way to it, until they drive King Eiríkr and Queen Gunnhildr out of the country’),<sup>67</sup> and may even have a parallel in two runic inscriptions from the Stentofte and Björketorp stones.<sup>68</sup>

On the Saleby stone from West Gotland in Sweden we find an actual instance of the word *argr* appearing in a formulaic curse connected with *kumbl*-breaking. The inscription reads:

**fraustin karþi kubl \* þausi aftiR þuru kunu sino su .....(s) tutiR bast miþ  
altum uarþi at rata auk at arkRi kunu saR ias haukui krus -... uf briuti<sup>69</sup>**

Freysteinn made these *kubl* (*kuml*, *kumbl*) in memory of Þóra, his wife. She was ... daughter, the best of her generation. May he become a *rati* and an *argri* (*ørg*) woman who cuts to pieces ... breaks ...

The number of stones that carry such warnings is comparatively small. Nevertheless they bear witness to the fact that the breaking up of *kumbl* or the damaging of memorial stones in Medieval Scandinavia (and earlier) was considered to be an extremely base act, as indeed would be the case in most societies today, and the mere fact that this was not always recorded more often in stone, does not mean it was a sentiment which was not widespread. If this were the case, is not inconceivable that the phrase *brjótr kumbla* might have emerged as an insult in spoken language.<sup>70</sup> Whether such an insult would constitute *ergi* or even *níð* cannot be stated with absolute certainty, but Bárðr is clearly offended by the mocking stanza: ‘Bárðr bað hann drekka ok hætta flimtun þeiri’ (Bárðr bade him drink and leave off that lampooning).<sup>71</sup> He also tells Queen Gunnhildr that Egill was a man who ‘skömm færði

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Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen Philologische-Historische Klasse 3. Folge, CXIII (1978), pp. 229-43.

<sup>67</sup> ÍF 2, p. 171.

<sup>68</sup> The Stentofte and Björketorp stones have been dated to c. 650 and they differ from the Viking Age stones in many respects; however, both inscriptions conclude with prohibitive warnings not unlike the ones quoted above. The relevant phrase on the Stentofte stone (DR 357) is:

**herAmAlAsARArAgeuwe(l)AdudsApAt bAriutiþ** (restless, *ergi*, death by treachery, he (who) breaks this) and the corresponding text on the Björketorp stone (DR 360) is: **ArAgeu hAerAmAlAusR utiARwelAdAude sARþAtbArutR** (*ergi*, restless, ?drive away, death by treachery, he who breaks this).

<sup>69</sup> Vg 67, *Samnordisk runtextdatabas*, <http://www.nordiska.uu.se/forskn/samnord.htm>.

<sup>70</sup> The only other example of this phrase in the corpus of Old Icelandic literature occurs as *kumbla brjótr* in a stanza recited by Kormákr the skald. See *Kormáks saga* in *Vatnsdala saga, Hallfreðar saga, Kormáks saga, Hrómundar þátr halta, Hrafnar þátr Guðrúnarsonar*, ed. by Einar Ól. Sveinsson, Íslensk fornrit 8 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1939), pp. 201-302 (p. 228).

<sup>71</sup> ÍF 2, p. 108.



at þeim' (would bring dishonour on them) and indeed they are so provoked by Egill's behaviour that they try to poison him.<sup>72</sup>

*Stanza 8: Norwegian Translation*

<p>Om ølskort du ymtet, usling! – enda ødselt til diseblot opp var disket; dumfrekk jeg deg kaller! For ukjent folk altfor ille din ondskap du dulgte. Bare fusk og falskhet, Bård min! i din usle framferd fant jeg.<sup>73</sup></p>	<p>You hinted at ale-shortage wretch! – although it was lavishly served up for the <i>dísablót</i>; I call you stupid-shameless! Before unknown people you all too ill/badly hid your wickedness. Only trickery and falsehood, my Bård! did I find in your miserable behaviour.</p>
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*Commentary & Analysis*

Hallvard Lie's adherence to *dróttkvætt*-style alliteration is one reason for the discrepancies that arise between the Icelandic and Norwegian texts. *Sogðuð* becomes *ymtet*, for instance, which has the effect of making the lie that Bårdr told sound more trivial. *Sverri flagða* has not been translated at all, whereas *usling*, which does not appear in the Icelandic text, has been inserted, and the idea that beer was served lavishly for the banquet is derived from the prose context rather than from the stanza itself. He changes *blétuð dísir* to *diseblot*, which is explained in footnote 96 as 'en høytidsfull religiøs hjemmefest' (a celebration of a religious festival).<sup>74</sup> In this translation *brjótr kumbla* becomes the milder *dumfrekk*, thus losing its connotations with *ergi*. *Dumfrekk* is a word which Lie has coined for this occasion, combining the adjectives *dum* (stupid) and *frekk* (shameless/impudent). Although *frekk* on its own would probably have been more appropriate in the context, calling Bårdr 'dumb' absolves him of some of the responsibility.

Lines 5-6 follow the Icelandic text quite closely and the final two lines convey the notion of deceit and trickery, even if they are not very literally translated. In the final line of the Icelandic version, Egill directly accused Bårdr of having played a bad trick: *[þú] hafð brugðit illt bragð*. In the Norwegian text the focus shifts from second to first person, 'only trickery and falsehood did I find in your miserable behaviour', which has the effect of

<sup>72</sup> ÍF 2, p. 109.

<sup>73</sup> *Íslandske attesager*, p. 96. Lie gives a prose paraphrase of this stanza in his article of 1948, 'Jorvikferden. Et vendepunkt i Egil Skallagrímsson's liv', in Hallvard Lie, *Om sagakunst og skaldskap: Utvalgte avhandlinger* (Øvre Ervik: Alvheim and Eide, 1982), pp. 5-108, p. 69: 'Du [Bård] sa at du ikke hadde øl [å by på], enda du hadde laget i stand til diseblot; jeg stempler deg derfor, usling, som en svikfull mann. Du skjulte altfor dårlig ditt fiendtlige sinnelag overfor deg ukjente menn; du har begått en slett handling, Bård!' (You Bårdr said that you did not have ale to offer, although you had made some in preparation for the *dísablót*, therefore I brand you, coward, as a deceitful man. You hid all too badly your hostile disposition towards unknown men; you have committed a bad act, Bårdr).

<sup>74</sup> *Íslandske attesager*, vol. 1, p. 487.

making the criticism more subjective. The Icelandic phrase *bregða bragð* carries connotations of a game (either a boardgame or wrestling), which might imply that Bárðr has broken the rules of the ‘game’ of hospitality. Any hint of a sexually-tinged insult has been removed in this version and overall the tone is less menacing than Egill’s speech in the Icelandic stanza.

*Stanza 8: Spanish Translation*

<p>Dijiste al gran guerrero que cerveza no había, miserable, de las dísas en la fiesta, bellaco; de todo diste malo a hombres desconocidos, buen anfitrión no fuiste, Bárd, los engañaste.<sup>75</sup></p>	<p>You said to the great warrior that there was no beer – wretch – of the <i>dísir</i> in the festival,* scoundrel; you gave the worst (bad) of everything to unknown men, you were not a good host, Bárðr, you tricked them.</p>
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\*in the festival of the *dísir*

*Commentary & Analysis*

In the first half of this stanza this translation attempts to follow the syntax of the Icelandic text, which not surprisingly, results in a word order that is not typically Spanish.

Rearranging the Spanish translation in a more natural prose word order would read thus: ‘Dijiste, miserable, al gran guerrero que no había cerveza en la fiesta de las dísas, bellaco’.

On the whole this is quite a free translation. *Sverri flagða* becomes *gran guerrero* and *sumblekla* is rendered *no había cerveza*. Curiously, Bernárdez, like Lie, also introduces the term *miserable* (wretch) to refer to Bárðr. *Dijiste [...] que cerveza no había* (You said [...] that there was no beer) is not entirely accurate in the sense that Bárðr did not say that there was no beer for the *dísablót*, only that there was no beer for them.

The choice of the word *fiesta* in line 4 is interesting, as in Spanish it evokes visions of a national holiday, a saint’s day, a party, or all three, which could be quite appropriate in this context. However, this neglects the implication in the word *blóta* that part of the worship of the *dísir* would take the form of some kind of (probably animal) sacrifice. I have not been able to find the word *dísa(s)* in any Spanish dictionary, but it is interesting that Bernárdez has chosen to preserve it when he could have substituted it with *díosas* (goddesses).

In translating line 5, Bernárdez seems to have misunderstood the Icelandic text although what he does come up with is not inconsistent with the prose context. Bárðr did give Egill and his company curds and whey to drink when he could have offered them

<sup>75</sup> *Saga de Egil Skallagrímsson*, p. 141.



beer. Nor does *buen anfitrión no fuiste* (you were not a good host) figure in the Icelandic text although it is a fair summary, if understated, of Egill's accusation. The *los* (them) of the final line is also strange in that it does not seem to include Egill. Finally, in the Spanish version Bárðr is accused of trickery, but not of enmity or malice.

### *Stanza 19*<sup>76</sup>

In chapter 54 of *Egils saga*, Egill's brother Þórólfr is killed when fighting for King Æthelstan at the battle of Wen Heath. When the battle is over, Egill washes his brother's body, and buries him in full armour, putting two gold rings on Þórólfr's arms before covering him with earth. He delivers two stanzas in praise of Þórólfr, then goes to see the king. In the scene that follows Egill expresses his anger and grief in the most extraordinary way. Upon entering the hall, Egill is placed in the high-seat facing the king; he refuses to look at him, but instead bows his head and starts to slide his sword in and out of its scabbard. This eccentric behaviour is complemented by a description that emphasizes Egill's physical oddities. He is portrayed as being uncommonly tall (taller than other men) and well-built. His forehead, nose, and jaws are extremely large and we are also told that when he was angry his face was 'harðleitr ok grimmligr' (hard-looking and fierce). All of these features, combined with his thick, wolf-grey hair, contrive to create a picture of a man who is menacing and dangerous with perhaps some supernatural characteristics as well.<sup>77</sup> This scene is made all the more uncanny when Egill begins to scowl or wink by alternately raising his eyebrows up to the hairline and down onto his cheek. Egill's facial contortions are not explained in the prose, but although it has been suggested that, 'with this facial expression, Egill feigns having just one eye' thus identifying himself with the one-eyed god Óðinn,<sup>78</sup> I think it is more likely that it reflects his extreme internal turmoil and grief, as the poet himself states in stanza 20: *hvarms hnúpnípur knáttu drúpa mér af harmi* (my eyelid's projecting crags > EYEBROWS did droop from grief).<sup>79</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Some of the material related to the discussion of stanza 19 originally formed part of a paper delivered at the Thirteenth International Saga Conference, University of Durham on 7 August 2006. See Edel Porter, 'Skaldic Poetry: Making the World Fantastic', in *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature, Sagas and the British Isles: Preprints of the Thirteenth International Saga Conference*, ed. by John McKinnell, David Ashurst and Donata Kick, 2 vols (Durham: Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006), II, pp. 789-97.

<sup>77</sup> The reference to Egill's extreme size and wolf-grey hair echoes the scene in chapter 59 where he is described as 'mikill sem troll' (as big as a troll), ÍF 2, p. 178.

<sup>78</sup> Susanne Kries and Thomas Krömmelbein, "From the Hull of Laughter": Egill Skalla-Grímsson's "Höfuðlausn" and its Epodium in Context', *Scandinavian Studies*, 74 (2002), 111-36 (p. 123). The references to the gallows in the stanza, particularly the term *vingameiðr* also evoke the story of Óðinn hanging himself.

<sup>79</sup> There might be a parallel for this episode in the *Táin Bó Cuailnge* when Cú Chulainn goes into a 'warp-spasm' of battle-rage: '[Cú Chulainn] sucked one eye so deep into his head that a wild crane couldn't probe it

Finally the king responds. He removes a ring from his arm and slips it on to his sword, which he then holds out to Egill across the fire in the middle of the room. Egill takes the ring on his sword and behaves as though he is satisfied by the king's gift. We are told that he sits down, slips the ring onto his arm, his eyebrows resume a normal expression, he lays down his sword and helmet and accepts a drink. The skaldic stanza he then recites, however, reveals a state of mind in stark contrast to the poet's apparent outward calm.

Hrammtangar lætr hanga  
 hrynvirgil mér brynju  
 Hqðr á hauki troðnum  
 heiðis vingameiði;  
 rítmæðis knák reiða,  
 ræðr gunnvala bræðir,  
 gelgju seil á galga  
 geirveðrs, lofi at meira.<sup>80</sup>

*Prose word order*

Brynju Hqðr lætr hrammtangar hrynvirgil hanga mér á hauki troðnum heiðis vingameiði; knák reiða rítmæðis gelgju seil á galga geirveðrs; gunnvala bræðir ræðr at meira lofi.

*Translation*

Hqðr (god) of mailcoat > WARRIOR has a clinking-noose of a gripping-tong (hand) > RING hung on my hawk-trodden swinging-tree of hawk > ARM; I do put the band of the pole of the shield-wearer (sword) > [arm] > RING onto the gallows of the spear-storm (battle) > SWORD; the prey-feeder of battle-hawks (ravens/eagles) > WARRIOR does not have more praise.

*Commentary & Analysis*

The reference to *Hqðr* in the warrior kenning *Brynju Hqðr* (*Hqðr* of mailcoat > WARRIOR/MAN) is the only incontrovertible allusion to a mythological figure in this stanza. This type of kenning, where a god (qualified by 'battle' or some other term associated with warfare) denotes a warrior, is extremely common in skaldic poetry, and although the generic terms *reginn* or *áss* are sometimes used, the base-word is much more frequently the name of a specific god such as *Njörðr*, *Týr*, or *Freyr*. While it is obvious that a skald could select any god from the Old Norse pantheon to create this kind of kenning and the basis for that selection may have been purely metrical, I believe that in this instance the choice of *Hqðr* is also semantically significant.

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onto his cheek out of the depths of his skull; the other eye fell out along his cheek', in *The Tain: From the Irish Epic Táin Bó Cuailnge*, trans. by Thomas Kinsella (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 150.

<sup>80</sup> ÍF 2, p. 144.



Hǫðr was one of the *Æsir*, a son of Óðinn and brother of Baldr. We know very little of Hǫðr except that he committed the most infamous fratricide in Norse mythology. Through the machinations of Loki, this blind god inadvertently slew his brother Baldr with an arrow of mistletoe setting in motion the series of events which will lead to Ragnarǫk and the demise of the *Æsir*. It may be that the name of Hǫðr is prompted by a feeling on Egill's part that he was in some way responsible for his brother's death. If he had not acceded to the king's plan to separate the brothers in battle, and allowed Þórólfr to take the place originally assigned to him, his brother's death could possibly have been averted. At the time, Egill did feel that this was a decision he would live to regret: 'þessa skiptis mun ek opt iðrask',<sup>81</sup> and indeed his sense of foreboding was justified. Perhaps Egill is simply reminded of another instance in which a brother was killed in tragic circumstances; but if he consciously identifies himself as the one responsible for Þórólfr's death, then his feelings of guilt, shame and dishonour must be unbearable.

Whatever the motive, a close examination of the imagery of the stanza reveals a mind in turmoil and anguish that is anything but reconciled to his loss. In the kenning *brynvirgill brammtangar* for instance, the ring which Æthelstan presents to Egill is envisaged as a 'clinking-noose' of a 'gripping-tong', hardly the most positive response to the king's gift. Outside of a poetic context *brammr* refers to an animal's paw, especially that of a predatory animal which uses its claws to clutch at or grip its prey. In this kenning, however, the paw is fantastically combined with the metal tool (*tong*) to create a grotesque representation of a human hand. The 'noose' (*virgill*) of that hand is a ring, which presumably made a clinking noise as it was passed from one sword to another.

The theme of the gallows (suggested by the noose) is continued in the next phrase of the sentence as an arm is metamorphosed into a *hauki troðnum heiðis vingameiðr*, or 'hawk-trodden swinging-tree of hawk'. The word *vingameiðr* occurs in a number of Old Norse poems, probably most famously in *Hávamál* st. 138, where it is the tree upon which Óðinn hangs himself in his search for wisdom:

Veit ec, at heccvindgameiði á  
     nætr allar nío,  
 geiri undaðr                      oc gefinn Óðni,  
     síalfr síalfom mér,  
 á þeim meiði,                      er mangi veit,  
     hvers hann af rótom renn.<sup>82</sup>

I know that I hung on a windy tree  
 nine long nights,  
 wounded with a spear, dedicated to Odin,  
 myself to myself,  
 on that tree of which no man knows  
 from where its roots run.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>81</sup> ÍF 2, p. 140.

<sup>82</sup> *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern, I: Text*, ed. by Gustav Neckel, 3rd edn, rev. by Hans Kuhn (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1962), p. 40.

Although the manuscript reads *vingameiðr*, in the edition cited here this has been emended to *vindgameiðr*, which is glossed as ‘the wind-stirred or wind-exposed beam’ (Kuhn, 1968). Indeed most editors and translators agree that *vingameiðr* is derived from *vindgameiðr* or *vindugr meiðr* and should be glossed as ‘windy tree’, ‘wind-exposed, or wind-blown tree’.<sup>84</sup> Sigurður Nordal offers an alternative explanation, however, based on a comparison with the Icelandic verb *vingsa* (swing around), and the movement the falconer makes with his arm to launch a bird into the air.<sup>85</sup> The idea that the *meiðr* (‘tree’, ‘pole’, or possibly even ‘branch’) is flexible or moveable makes sense in the context of a kenning for an arm, which also shares these characteristics, but can only work if we remember that the earliest gallows were trees, as in our example from *Hávamál*. A pair of stanzas from Eyvindr Finsson skáldaspillir’s *Háleygjatal*, which are quoted in *Ynglingasaga*, give another account of a tree-hanging.<sup>86</sup> In the first of the stanzas we are told that Goðlaugr *tamði Sigars jó* (tamed Sigarr’s [i.e. Óðinn’s] stallion), in other words, that he ‘rode’ the gallows, and in the following one that, *náreiðr vingameiðr drúpir á nesi*, ‘a corpse-laden swinging-tree droops on the peninsula’. It seems clear that when the men were hung on the tree, its branches ‘drooped’ with the weight of the bodies.

When *vingameiðr* (swinging-tree) is determined by *heiðir* (hawk), and qualified by the adjectival phrase *hauki troðinn* (hawk-trodden) it becomes the arm, of course, as we have seen above. The effect this produces is similar to that of a hologram. Depending on how we read the complete sentence we see either a ring being hung on an arm or the enactment of a morbid scene: the noose being hung on the gallows. Or perhaps it is more correct to say we see both simultaneously, for it is difficult to say where one image starts and another ends. The fact that the arm is not only a gallows, but is also the perch of a hawk, introduces a third dimension to this helming and it is worth pointing out here that Egill is the first Icelandic poet to use the word ‘hawk’ in a kenning for hand. According to Björn Þórðarson this indicates personal experience on the part of Egill who probably first became acquainted with the art of falconry at the court of King Æthelstan.<sup>87</sup>

Two further allusions to the gallows occur in the kennings *galgi geirveðrs* (gallows of the spear-storm > sword) and *ritmæðis gelgja* (shield-wearer’s pole > arm). In the first of these, *galgi* presumably refers to one of the upright poles of a constructed gallows; there are

<sup>83</sup> *The Poetic Edda*, trans. by Caroline Larrington (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 34.

<sup>84</sup> For example Finnur Jónsson, 1966; Fritzner, 1973; Evans, 1986.

<sup>85</sup> ÍF 2, p. 144.

<sup>86</sup> *Heimskringla*, 2002, p. 44.

<sup>87</sup> Björn Þórðarson, ‘Falkar’ (Ísland), in *Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder*, vol. 4 (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde og Bagger, 1959), pp. 152-54.



many such kennings where a long, straight piece of wood such as a ‘pole’, ‘ski’ or ‘plank’, determined by ‘of battle’, can represent a sword. In *rítmeiðis gelgja*, the reference to hanging is a little more subtle. The primary meaning of *gelgja* is ‘pole’ or ‘stick’, but it can also denote the cross-beam of the gallows or a type of overhanging crane, such as the crane over the fire from which cooking-pots can be hung. While ‘the pole of the sword’ functions as a perfectly good kenning for ‘arm’, it seems likely, in the light of the previous imagery, that the poet is playing on the relationship between *galgi* and *gelgja* to re-emphasize his representation of the arm as a sort of gallows of flesh. In any case, he seems determined to work in as many references to hanging and the gallows as possible here, and it is clear that, by means of the kennings, the poet is trying to communicate something which is lost in the traditional interpretations of the stanza.

Finnur Jónsson, for example, translates this strophe as follows: ‘Krigeren lader ringen hænge på min høgebetrådte arm; jeg bærer det røde guldbånd på min arm; krigeren (kongen) råder over så meget større ros’ (The warrior has the ring hung on my hawk-trodden arm; I bear the red gold-band on my arm; the warrior (the king) commands so much greater praise).<sup>88</sup> He effectively removes all the poetry from the verses and crucially reads the line *gunnvala bræðir ræðr at meira lofi*, as unambiguously positive, as does Sigurður Nordal (but see my translation above and Guðrún Nordal et al, 1992, 236).<sup>89</sup> Sigurður Nordal’s Modern Icelandic interpretation is even more prosaic: ‘Hermaðurinn (konungur) lætur hring hanga á hendi mér (gefur mér hring); eg lyfti hringum á sverðinu; það er konungi til sóma’ (The warrior (king) has a ring hung on my arm (gives me a ring), I raise rings on the sword, that is to the king’s credit).<sup>90</sup> Of course Sigurður Nordal’s detailed breakdown and explanation of the poetic elements of the stanza is there for anyone to read, but this heuristic approach of presenting the skaldic stanza as a puzzle to be solved, encourages readings and translations which not only disregard the ‘multiple and shifting associations’ which Roberta Frank maintains are a ‘hallmark of skaldic aesthetics’,<sup>91</sup> but ignores any further message the poet might wish to convey. As Carol Clover has pointed out:

<sup>88</sup> ‘Brynju Höðr lætr hrammtangar hrynvirgil hanga mér á heiðis vingameiði, hauki troðnum; ek kná reiða rauðmeldrs gelgju á geirveðrs seiðs galga; gunnvala bræðir ræðr at meira lofi’ (Skj B I, 45). Finnur Jónsson interprets the stanza somewhat differently from Sigurður Nordal. He corrects the MS variants (*rytmeiðis*, *ryðmeiðis*, *rítmeiðis*, *rydmædis*) to *rauðmeldr* (‘red meal’, i.e. gold), creating a kenning ‘rauðmeldrs gelgja’ which he translates as ‘gold ring’; he also reads *seið* for *seil*.

<sup>89</sup> *Íslensk bókmenntasaga*, vol. 1, ed. by Guðrún Nordal, Sverrir Tómasson and Vésteinn Ólason (Reykjavik: Mál og menning, 1992), p. 236.

<sup>90</sup> ÍF 2, p. 145.

<sup>91</sup> Roberta Frank, ‘Skaldic Poetry’, in *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature* (see Clover, 1985), pp. 157-96, p. 169.

Of the early skalds Egill in particular is given to using an event as a starting point for an emotional unfolding which, by the time the strophe ends, may bear little relation to the original 'topic' [...] it may be said that there are in fact two 'topics', an ostensible one and the poet's own perception of the ostensible one, and that the latter may on occasion so overshadow the former that it tends to become the poem's main subject. In such instances it is fair to say that one topic, sometimes the chief one, of the poem is the poet himself.<sup>92</sup>

In the strophe under consideration here, the 'ostensible topic' is the gift of the ring; but, as I hope I have illustrated, even in the very words Egill uses to acknowledge the king's gift he is expressing his extreme dissatisfaction at the situation. The grotesque imagery Egill employs to describe the giving and receiving of the ring parodies, or even subverts, the stereotypical praise-poem. In the final phrase he clearly states that this 'praise' is all the king deserves: 'gunnvala bræðir ræðr at meira lofi'.

It is not incongruous that Egill is preoccupied with death in this stanza. His brother, after all, has just fallen in battle. However, while the gallows certainly symbolises death, it seems an inappropriate image to associate with Þórólfr, who had fought bravely and died a glorious death. In medieval Iceland hanging was associated with degradation and dishonour, and was a death usually reserved for thieves, traitors and other criminals; it was 'the most ignominious form of execution'.<sup>93</sup> Kari Ellen Gade also observes that in the sagas, hanging was a widespread literary motif, which was used like *níðvísur* and *níðstong* as a means of degradation and 'to destroy a person's honor'.<sup>94</sup> In this stanza Egill also uses the gallows as a literary motif to symbolise the dishonour that has been shown to him by the king's miserly gift, and the shame the king has brought upon himself as a result.

Egill's bizarre conduct and Æthelstan's response to it, demonstrates that both men accepted it was the king's responsibility to offer compensation for Þórólfr who had, after all, died in the service of the king. But whether Egill would have been happy to settle for monetary compensation is another matter. As Carol Clover notes, 'the shame attached to "selling one's kinsmen for money" or "carrying one's kinsmen in one's purse" was evidently as slow in dying out in Iceland as it was and is in bloodfeud societies elsewhere'.<sup>95</sup> In a stanza in *Sonatorrek* (st. 15), Egill himself explicitly denounces the practice of selling a brother for rings:

<sup>92</sup> Carol Clover, 'Skaldic Sensibility', *ANF*, 93 (1978), 63-68 (p. 65).

<sup>93</sup> Kari Ellen Gade, 'Hanging in Northern Law and Literature', *Maal og Minne* (1985), 159-83 (p. 166).

<sup>94</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 168, 176.

<sup>95</sup> Carol Clover, 'Hildigunnr's Lament', in *Cold Counsel: The Women of Old Norse Literature and Myth*, ed. by Sarah M. Anderson and Karen Swenson (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 15-54 (p. 17).



Mjök es torfyndr sás trúa knegum of alþjóð Elgjar galga, þvít niðflgóðr niðja steypir bróður hrør við baugum selr. <sup>96</sup>	It is very difficult to find one who we can trust from people of gallows of Elgr,* because a 'niðflgóðr', (?good for nothing) caster-off of kin, sells corpse of brother for rings.
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So Egill is now placed in a difficult predicament. His code of honour demands that he avenge his brother in blood, but in this situation such a form of revenge is completely impracticable and he must be content to accept a financial settlement instead. However, the payment the king initially offers, one gold ring, is very poor recompense for a man such as Þórólfr; it is an affront to his memory and to the family honour which Egill feels keenly. At the same time, it would be dangerous for him to insult Æthelstan by rejecting the gift. Egill finds a solution for this dilemma in the recitation of a *dróttkvætt* stanza, which provides the perfect vehicle for him to articulate his inner conflict. He takes the objects and characters from the 'real-life' scene which has been narrated in prose (i.e. the giving of the ring) and distorts and reshapes them until a warrior (the king) is transformed into a god; a ring is a metallic noose hanging on an arm which is a gallows of flesh and bone, or a wooden pole; a battle is a storm of spears, and so on. The distorted, fragmentary or even monstrous nature of these figures reflects the disorder and lack of harmony that Egill will feel until Þórólfr's death has been properly compensated. The stanza achieves the desired effect, and harmony is restored when King Æthelstan presents Egill with two chests of silver.

#### *Stanza 19: Norwegian Translation*

Ring av Rhin-malm røde ringle lot milde kongen om hånden min, hard og herdet, der hauken seg klofast klamrer. På sverdet skarpe jeg løftet skatten som meg raketes. Ved slike verk enn mere kongens ære økes. <sup>97</sup>	The generous king had a ring of red Rhine-metal jangle around my arm, hard and tempered, where the hawk grips on tightly (claw-fast). On the sharp sword I raised the treasure which was held out to me. With such deeds the king's glory increases still/even more.
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#### *Commentary & Analysis*

In this version Lie translates most of the original kennings by their sense-words but uses a series of adjectives, or adjectival phrases, to recreate the richness of the Icelandic stanza.

<sup>96</sup> ÍF 2, pp. 251-52.

<sup>97</sup> *Islandske ættesagaer*, vol. 1, p. 121.

For example, *Brynju Höðr* is supplanted by *kongen*, which severs the link with the story of Baldr's death and the theme of fratricide, which the name of Höðr metonymically evokes. *Kongen* is qualified by the adjective *mild*, a word which is now only rarely used to denote 'generous'; Einar Haugen considers it to be a dialect word in this sense.<sup>98</sup> It is clear from the use of *mild*, and the final two lines of the stanza, that Lie reads this poem as an unambiguous expression of gratitude on Egill's part.

He renders *brammtangar brynvirgil* as simply ring preserving the idea of the noise in *bryn-* (ringing) with the verb *ringle* (jangle). In order to describe the ring he adds a kenning, *Rhin-malm røde* (red Rhine-metal), explaining in the endnote to page 121 that *Rhin-malm* refers to *Gull*. This kenning, or a very similar version of it, *Rínar rauðmálmr* (Rhine's red metal), is quoted by Snorri in *Skáldskaparmál* in an excerpt from *Bjarkamál*.<sup>99</sup> The term *Rínar málmr* (Rhine's metal), also obviously a kenning for gold, occurs in stanza 16 of the heroic poem *Sigurðarkviða in scamma*.<sup>100</sup> However, for many readers the legend of the Rhine Gold might be more familiar from the first of four of Wagner's operas ('Das Rheingold') that comprise *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. Whether or not one is familiar with the term from medieval literature or from Wagner's opera, the reference to 'Rhine gold', here especially in association with a 'hard and tempered' ring, is sure to evoke associations with the heroic legends of the Nibelungen cycle, thus strengthening the association between this poetry and the ancient Germanic stories.<sup>101</sup>

Lie simplifies the phrase *á mér hauki troðnum heiðis vingameiði* to *om händen min*, but maintains the idea of the arm as a perch for the hawk in the line *der hauken seg klofast klamrer*. The idea of the hawk clinging 'claw-fast' to the arm is somewhat of a departure from the Icelandic participle *troðinn*, which rather suggests that the arm was a 'well-worn' perch of the hawk. *Klofast klamrer*, does, however, in sound if not entirely in meaning, recreate something of the effect of *brammtangar*.

The next kenning for 'ring' in the stanza, *ritmæðis gelgju seil*, is rendered as *skatt* (treasure), which has obviously been chosen for metrical purposes as well as for lexical variety, also has the effect of highlighting the high value of the ring. *Galga geirveðrs* is translated *sverdet*, and *skarpe* is added for alliterative purposes. According to Lie's adaptation, in this stanza Egill raises the ring 'which was held out to me' (*som meg raketes*) on his sword, an idea which is not present in the Icelandic stanza and is deduced from the

<sup>98</sup> Einar Haugen, *Norsk-Engelsk ordbok*, 3rd edn (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1995).

<sup>99</sup> *Skáldskaparmál*, vol. 1, p. 61.

<sup>100</sup> *Edda* (see Neckel, 1962), p. 209.

<sup>101</sup> A contemporary audience might also make an association with Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (first published in 1954-55).



prose context. Lie inserts another explanatory phrase, *ved slíke verk*, in line 7 because he realises that ‘enn mere kongens ære økes’ would not make much sense on its own. As I have argued above, I think the traditional interpretations do not make sense either in the context of the stanza itself or within the plot of the prose narrative. The final kenning of the stanza, *gunnvala bræðir* (prey-feeder of battle-hawks), is translated as *keongen* (the king).

What is most striking here is that not a trace remains here of the morbid gallows or hanging imagery. Compared to the Icelandic text Lie’s translation is one-dimensional. He clearly reads the stanza as a straightforward recognition of the king’s generosity. This translation depicts the king as a generous treasure-giver, whose gift-giving redounds to his honour. This is exactly the opposite effect to the one for which I have argued above. As I see it, the imagery Egill uses to describe the king’s gift shows his contempt of it, and it is only when he later receives a chest of silver that he is truly satisfied.

*Stanza 19: Spanish translation*

Una cinta de oro rojo el de la cota de malla dejó colgando en mi brazo donde el halcón descansaba; <sup>102</sup> pasé la banda de oro del que alimenta a los cuervos <sup>103</sup> sobre el mástil de la lucha <sup>104</sup> para mayor gloria de él. <sup>105</sup>	A band of red gold he of the mailcoat left hanging on my arm where the falcon rested; I passed the band of gold of he who feeds the ravens over the mast of the battle for his greater glory.
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*Commentary & Analysis*

Coincidentally (presumably) Bernárdez also uses the adjective ‘red’ to describe the gold of the ring. In the Icelandic stanza there is no mention what metal the ring is made of, it could be of either gold or silver, although in the prose text we are told that it was a large and valuable gold ring, which the king took off his own arm. Gold is frequently described as being red in Icelandic poetry, a fact which may have influenced Bernárdez, as well as the fact that *oro rojo* has a rhythmic sound. He uses the phrase *oro rojo* to determine what the *cinta* is made of, so that it becomes a kind of kenning. In Spanish a *cinta* is more usually made of cloth or thread and refers to tape, a ribbon, or string. But it corresponds well to

<sup>102</sup> *Saga de Egil Skallagrímsson*, p. 184, footnote 137: ‘Aquí, como en otros muchos lugares de éste y otros poemas escáldicos, se compara el brazo con el “asiento o el apoyo del halcón”, imagen tomada claramente de la cetrerí (here, as in many other places of this and other skaldic poems, the arm is compared to the “seat or the perch of the falcon”, an image obviously taken from falconry).

<sup>103</sup> *ibid.*, footnote 138: “El que alimenta a los cuervos” es el que mata; es decir, el guerrero’ (“he who feeds the ravens” is he who kills; namely, the warrior).

<sup>104</sup> *ibid.*, footnote 139: ‘Mástil de la lucha: “la espada”’ (mast of the battle: “the sword”).

<sup>105</sup> *Saga de Egil Skallagrímsson*, p. 184.

the Icelandic *seil* in the second ring kenning of the stanza. In this kenning, Bernárdez uses *banda* (band) again qualifying it with *de oro* (of gold). Whereas Lie mentions the king (*kongen*) twice in the stanza, Bernárdez does not use that word at all; in fact in the three instances Æthelstan is referred to it is with the pronoun *el* (he): ‘*el de la cota de malla*’, ‘*del que alimenta a los cuervos*’, ‘*para mayor gloria de él*’.

The first of these phrases, by including the mailcoat, maintains the idea of Æthelstan as warrior, an aspect that is missing from Lie’s version. It is obvious from the prose context that the warrior referred to here is the king, but it is not explicit in the stanza itself. By not saying ‘*Höðr de la malla*’ or even ‘*dios (god) de la malla*’, Bernárdez avoids having to explain the kenning in a footnote (he already has three for this stanza) as he is forced to do for ‘*(d)el que alimenta a los cuervos*’. *Del* (or, de el ‘of him’) refers to the ownership of the ring, which, as we know from the prose context, the king took off his own arm and gave to Egill. Bernárdez’s description of the way Egill passes the ring, ‘*pasé la banda de oro [...] sobre el mástil de la lucha*’, again is an interpretation that emphasizes the preceding scene, with the effect of linking the stanza more closely to the prose narrative.

Perhaps the most interesting line in the Spanish translation is *para mayor gloria de él* (for his greater glory). The line *gunnvala bræðir ræðr at meira lofi* is most often read as meaning ‘the warrior (king) commands all the more praise [for his act of generosity]’, which is more or less what the Norwegian translation reflects. The Spanish translation takes a slightly different direction, suggesting that Egill’s gesture of passing the ring onto the sword is an act of homage to the king. This is probably based on Nordal’s paraphrase ‘*það er konungi til sóma*’ (see above), although it is fairly clear that *það* refers to the giving of the ring, and not to the act of raising the ring on the sword. The phrase *para mayor gloria de él* has a decidedly Christian resonance and is strongly reminiscent of the Latin phrase *ad maiorem Dei gloriam*, the famous motto of the Society of Jesus, although it is also often used in a secular context in Spanish. In this context it certainly adds to Æthelstan’s glory. The reference to falconry (as explained in a footnote) reinforces the impression of an aristocratic milieu.

Like Lie, Bernárdez also omits any reference to hanging or the gallows, thus depriving the reader of the ambiguous and menacing overtones which I believe are present in the Icelandic text; in this version there is no sense that Egill is anything but content with his compensation.



*Stanza 28*

In chapter 56 of the saga Egill has summonsed Berg-Onundr to the Gulaping in order to try to recover the inheritance he feels is due to him. Before the case can be settled lawfully, however, it is sabotaged by Queen Gunnhildr. At her summons: ‘Síðan hljóp Askmaðr ok þeir sveitungar til dómsins, skáru í sundr vébændin ok brutu niðr stengrnar, en hleypðu á braut dómþundunum’ (Askmaðr and his men ran into the court, cut the boundary-ropes, broke down the stakes and drove the court away).<sup>106</sup> In the ensuing mêlée Egill and Arinbjörn manage to make their escape but before he departs Egill makes a speech forbidding anyone from working on the lands he claims are his and threatening: ‘en hverjum manni, er þat gerir, legg ek við lögprot landsréttar ok griðarof ok goðagremi’ (and I accuse any man who does so with breaking the laws of the land, and breach of the peace and angering the gods).<sup>107</sup> The stanza quoted below, which he recites later, directs this curse more specifically at the king. Egill holds Eiríkr responsible for the loss of his property and therefore calls down the wrath of the gods on him, asking them to drive the king from his lands as a punishment, not only for the offences against himself, but also as an act of divine retribution for the desecration of the sanctuary. In this context, *vé*, which usually denotes a heathen temple or sanctuary, must refer to the *þinghelgi*, sanctuary of the *þing*, or assembly, which Eiríkr and Gunnhildr’s men have violated.

Svá skyldi goð gjalda,  
gram reki bænd af lundum,  
reið sé rogn ok Óðinn,  
rön míns féar hönnum;  
folkmýgi lát flýja,  
Freyr ok Njörðr, af jörðum,  
leiðisk lofða stríði  
landóss, þanns vé grandar.<sup>108</sup>

*Prose word order*

Svá skyldi goð gjalda hönnum rön féar míns. Bænd reki gram af lundum. Rogn ok Óðinn sé reið. Freyr ok Njörðr, lát folkmýgi, þann’s grandar vé, flýja af jörðum. Landóss leiðisk stríði lofða.

*Translation*

Thus should the gods repay him for the robbery of my property. May the gods drive the king from his lands. May the gods and Óðinn be angry. Oh Freyr and Njörðr, make the

<sup>106</sup> ÍF 2, p. 157.

<sup>107</sup> ÍF 2, p. 158. In chapter 33 of *Vatnsdala saga* Jökull Ingimundarson utters a similarly-worded threat to those who do not accept his challenge of a duel. *Vatnsdala saga*, ÍF 8, pp. 88-89.

<sup>108</sup> Stanza 28, ÍF 2, p. 163.

oppressor of men who destroys sanctuaries flee from the estates, may the landgod/spirit be (make himself) hateful to the enemy of the people.

*Commentary & Analysis*

Although this stanza reflects the words Egill utters on the erection of the *níðstǫng* in spirit, and the language is quite formulaic, the basis for suggesting that this stanza was in fact carved on the pole is debatable. That argument mostly centres on understanding the word *landǫss* as synonymous with the singular form of *landvættir*, the ‘guardian spirits of the land’ or ‘land-spirits’. However, if we examine the context in which the stanza is recited, it seems more likely that the ‘land-god’ here refers to Þórr.

Of the gods he has named in his prayer, two, Freyr and Njǫrðr, are strongly associated with property and prosperity and have a predilection for conferring wealth; at least, they are portrayed as such in the works of Snorri Sturluson. In *Gylfaginning*, for instance, he says:

Freyr is the most glorious of Æsir. He governs rain and sunshine and therefore the produce of the earth, and it is good to call upon him for prosperity and peace. He also governs the wealth of men.<sup>109</sup>

And in *Skáldskaparmál*, Snorri relates that in kennings Njǫrðr is referred to as *gefandi guð* (the giving god), and Freyr can be called *árguð* (harvest god) and *féggjafi* (wealth-giver).<sup>110</sup> Snorri also quotes a half-stanza from Egill’s poem *Arinbjarnarkviða* in which Egill refers to Freyr and Njǫrðr:

Þvíat Grjótbjörn  
of gæddan hefr  
Freyr ok Njǫrðr  
at fjárafli.<sup>111</sup>

For Freyr and Njǫrðr have endowed Grjótbjörn (i.e. Arinbjörn) with powerful wealth.

As Freyr and Njǫrðr seem to be the gods to apply to for the conferring of wealth, it is presumably not inappropriate to ask them to take it away, which is what Egill wants on this occasion. As he has already listed three gods by name it seems reasonable to assume that the *landǫss* Egill appeals to in line 8, is a god too, most likely Þórr. Þórr is arguably the most

<sup>109</sup> Anthony Faulkes, ed., *Snorri Sturluson: Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning* (Oxford, 1982; repr. London, 2000), p. 24.

<sup>110</sup> *Skáldskaparmál*, vol. 1, p. 18.

<sup>111</sup> *ibid.*: ‘Freyr er hinn ágætasti af Ásum. Hann ræðr fyrir regni ok skini sólar ok þar með ávexti jarðar, ok á hann er gott at heita til árs ok friðar. Hann ræðr ok fésælu manna’.



important of the gods; he is the one most frequently invoked on runic inscriptions and he is strongly associated with fertility, the land, and with farmers, and even in his connection with war he seems to occupy a role of protection rather than aggression. He would certainly be a suitable deity to pray to in the context.

The language used in this stanza evokes a sense of right and wrong, a balance that needs to be restored. A reversal needs to take place. By not supporting the rightful claim of Egill, Eiríkr has committed a crime against the natural order of inheritance and has become the oppressor instead of being the protector. Egill signifies this role-reversal in the kennings that he uses to refer to Eiríkr. Whereas a typical epithet for a king or prince in Old Icelandic praise-poetry would be ‘protector of the people’, Egill chooses to refer to Eiríkr instead as ‘oppressor of the people’ and ‘the enemy of the people’. Interestingly, Egill is not asking for his own lands to be restored; what he asks is that Eiríkr be made to flee from his lands, a revenge that would not only deprive him of his territory but also bring him shame and dishonour.

This verse is clearly neither a lament nor a complaint. It is an expression of pure hatred and ill-will against a man Egill considers to be his bitterest enemy. It expresses his loathing and resentment in the form of a curse to the effect that, just as he has been deprived of his property, so should Eiríkr be also deprived. Egill balances references to the gods against references to land and property, creating a sense of equilibrium, an equilibrium that is not reflected in his actual state of affairs. But if the gods become wrathful and repay Eiríkr for robbing, and if he who destroys the property of others is made to flee from his own land and is made afraid, perhaps justice will have been done. Egill’s wish comes true when King Eiríkr is forced by his brother Hákon to flee to England.

*Stanza 28: Norwegian Translation*

<p>Driv dådrike makter drotten fra land og rike! Hevn, Odin og høye æser, i harme, at han meg rantel! La folkplageren flykte, Frøy og Njord, fra Norge! Tungt, Tor, du tukte Tinghelgs usle krenker!<sup>112</sup></p>	<p>Drive, glorious [divine] powers, the king from land and realm! Avenge, Odin and exalted gods in anger, [the fact] that he robbed me! Make the people-plager flee, Freyr and Njorðr, from Norway! Severely, Þórr, may you punish the miserable violator of the thing- sanctuary!</p>
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<sup>112</sup> *Islandske ættesagaer*, vol. 1, p. 133.

*Commentary & Analysis*

It is obvious in Lie's version of the verse that some words have been chosen because they alliterate with each other rather than for their semantic value, but although these words may not be exact literal translations, in selecting words which fit the alliterative scheme Lie has remained faithful to the spirit of Old Icelandic skaldic verse. In line 3, for example, the word *hevn* (avenge) does not appear in the Icelandic stanza, but it is clear from this verse that Egill is seeking revenge, and Lie presumably chose it because it alliterates with *høye* and *harme* in the following line. In this interpretation, Egill addresses all the gods directly, not only Freyr and Njörðr, which, along with the four exclamation marks in lines 1, 4, 6 and 8, make the prayer seem more urgent and emotional.

Lie refers to the gods in the lines 1 and 3 as *dådrike makter* (glorious powers) and *høye æser* (high/exalted gods) again, I suspect, for alliterative purposes.<sup>113</sup> However, by choosing the word *æser* (sing. *ás*) to translate *rogn*, Lie is suggesting a meaning that is not implied in the Icelandic text. While *rogn* alludes to all the gods in general, *æser* (or *æsir* in Icelandic) refers to a particular race of gods, which includes Óðinn and Þórr. Freyr and Njörðr, on the other hand, belong to the race of fertility gods known as the *Vanir*. Both words exist in Modern Norwegian, but while *vaner* is rare, *æser* (sing. *ás*) seems to be used as an unspecific term meaning 'Old Norse god' and is in more common usage. It could also be that Lie has decided that the gods referred to in line 3 do not include the *vanir*, Freyr and Njörðr, who are later named in line 6.

In the second line the word *drotten* is a good choice, because, like *gram(r)* in the source text, it can indicate either a king or a lord. In line 2 Lie has translated *af lǫndum*, which could refer either to Eiríkr's personal estates or his realm, as *land og rike*, thus avoiding having to choose one interpretation or the other, but in line 6 he is quite definite that the land referred to is the country of Norway. It could be argued that he has chosen *Norge* to achieve *aðalending* with 'Njord', but *fra Jorda* (from the land) could equally well have been used and would have been closer etymologically to the Icelandic *af jörðum*. We could perhaps impute to the translator a degree of Norwegian patriotism here, and it is also reasonable to suppose that this interpretation would appeal to a Norwegian readership.<sup>114</sup>

The last two lines of the stanza are translated quite freely. *Landóss* is rendered as *Tor*, whom Egill, in this version, asks to punish Eiríkr severely. Presumably it is *lofða stríði(r)*,

<sup>113</sup> See however Gabriel Turville-Petre's translation, 'may the powers drive the prince from his lands'. E.O. Gabriel Turville-Petre, *Scaldic Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), p. 22.

<sup>114</sup> In Leiv Heggstad's *nynorsk* translation the word is translated as simply 'landet' (the land, country). See *Egils saga*, trans. by Leiv Heggstad (Oslo: Det Norske Samlaget, 1965), p. 125.



which is his basis for the adjective *usle* (miserable, wretched). Perhaps Lie is interpreting ‘enemy of the people’ to mean that Eiríkr is exiled from humankind and is therefore miserable/wretched, although that is not the reading given by Sigurður Nordal’s edition on which Lie’s translation is based: ‘Þór sé gramur (geri sér leiðan) mannfjandanum, sem spillir þinghelginni’ (May Þórr make himself hateful to the enemy of men who destroys the thing-sanctuary).<sup>115</sup>

*Stanza 28: Spanish Translation*

<p>Que los dioses castiguen a Eirík, del país le arrojen, que también Odín se irrite, pues mis riquezas robó; que huir hagan de sus tierras al tirano, Njörd y Frey, dé Thor la espalda al abyecto violador del thing sagrado.<sup>116</sup></p>	<p>May the gods punish Eiríkr, may they drive him out of the country, may Óðinn also be angry, for he stole my property; May Njörðr and Freyr make the tyrant flee from his lands Þórr, turn your back on the abject violator of the sacred ‘thing’.</p>
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*Commentary & Analysis*

Because the content of this particular verse is relatively uncomplicated, the translation can mostly follow the Icelandic line by line, if not word for word, causing only a slight unnaturalness in the Spanish word order. For example, instead of arranging the first two lines as: ‘que los dioses castiguen a Eirík, que le arrojen del país’ (may the gods punish Eiríkr, may they drive him out of the country), which would be a more typical Spanish arrangement, Bernárdez chooses to put ‘a Eirík’ in the same position as *gram* in the Icelandic version, i.e. as the first word on the second line.

The straightforward nature of the narrative in this stanza means that it is possible to translate the content fairly literally; however, Bernárdez does make some significant departures from the Icelandic text. In line 2 the word *gram(r)* (king, prince) is used to refer to Eiríkr, and from the context in which the verse is quoted it is obvious who is being referred to. In the Spanish version, however, Bernárdez chooses to translate *gramr* as ‘Eirík’ although he could equally well have used the Spanish word for king (*rey*), which would have been a more literal translation. The translator has removed any ambiguity as to the identity of the *gramr* by naming the king as Eiríkr, but whether he made this decision for stylistic or semantic purposes is impossible to say. Similarly he translates *af löndum* (lit. ‘from lands’), which could refer either to Eiríkr’s lands or to the country of Norway, as *del país* (from/out

<sup>115</sup> ÍF 2, p. 163.

<sup>116</sup> *Saga de Egil Skallagrímsson*, pp. 201-02.

of the country) thereby choosing the latter interpretation. Further on in the stanza, in line 6, *af jorðum* (from lands/estates) is translated as *de sus tierras* (from his lands) in accordance with Sigurður Nordal's interpretation.<sup>117</sup>

One of the most characteristic devices of the poetic diction of skaldic poetry, the use of *heiti*, is exemplified in the first three lines of the Icelandic stanza where we can count three appellations for 'gods'. In the context of the stanza at least, *goð*, *boǰnd* and *rogn* have the same significance and could be exchanged without any important impact on the meaning but not without spoiling the alliteration in lines 1 and 3 and the *aðalbending* in line 2. In the first *helmingr* of the Spanish translation the gods are mentioned only once, perhaps because in Spanish to repeat the word *dioses* three times would seem clumsy and unpoetic, and in line 2 this is in any case unnecessary, as the plural ending of *arrojen* implies 'they', i.e. the gods. In line 3, however, the omission of *rogn* in the rendering *que Odín también se irrite* does change the meaning, however slightly, and reduces the stylistic effect created by the repetition. In line 4 a more typical syntax in Spanish, at least in prose, would be 'pues/porque robó mis riquezas'; however, the arrangement the translator has preferred does not affect the meaning, except perhaps to make the sentence sound more poetic, and the full stress on the final syllable of *robó* produces the effect of a conclusion to the first *helmingr*.

In the second half of the Icelandic stanza there is a change of tone when Egill now directly addresses Freyr and Njorðr, asking them to make Eiríkr flee the country. This creates an effect of urgency and emotional fervour which is not reproduced in the Spanish translation. The kenning for Eiríkr, *fólkmýgir* (lit. 'people-destroyer' or 'oppressor of the people') is translated as *tirano* 'tyrant', but the second reference to him as *lofða stríði(r)* (enemy of men) is narrowed down to the less powerful adjective *abyecto*. In fact the translation of the final two lines is quite free overall: *leiðisk* (be/make oneself hateful to), which implies anger as well as hatred, is translated as *dar la espalda* (turn one's back) instead of *enfadarse* (get angry), for instance; *landóss* (god of the land) becomes *Thor*, and *vé* (temple) Bernárdez translates not as *templo* but as *thing sagrado* (thing-sanctuary) a phrase that makes no sense to a reader who doesn't know what *þing* or *þinghelgi* means.<sup>118</sup> He changes *þann's grandar* (who violates) to *violadar* (violator), a noun he qualifies with *abyecto* (abject, miserable), an adjective which does not occur in the Icelandic text but must be a loose

<sup>117</sup> ÍF 2, p. 163: 'af eignum sínum' (from his property).

<sup>118</sup> Bernárdez's translation agrees with Sigurður Nordal's interpretation of *vé* as 'heilagur, helgaður staður; hér er líklega átt við þinghelgina' (sanctuary, holy place; probably refers to the thing-sanctuary here). See ÍF 2, p. 163.



translation of *lofða stríði*. The *landóss* referred to in line 8 may well denote Þórr, as he is the god most closely identified with the land and with Norway, but it could also be identified with the *landalfr* in verse 29 (which Bernárdez translates as *dios de esta tierra*, ‘god of this land’). Whether the terms refer to Þórr or to the ‘spirit of the land’ is open to interpretation but the fact that Bernárdez has denied the Spanish reader the opportunity to decide for him/herself, shows a somewhat manipulative tendency.

#### PART TWO: *HQFUÐLAUSN*

To return to the scene at the royal court at York, it is not surprising, perhaps, that Gunnhildr should want to avenge Egill’s maledictory words by demanding his death. King Eiríkr ignores the queen’s protests, however, and angered though he is by Egill’s impertinence, allows himself to be persuaded into giving Egill a chance to redeem himself. He indulges Arinbjörn’s request that Egill be allowed to compose and recite a *drápa* (a full-length praise-poem with a refrain) in honour of the king, for, as Arinbjörn says in response to Gunnhildr’s charge of *níð*, ‘ef Egill hefir mælt illa til konungs, þá má hann þat bæta í lofsorðum þeim, er allan aldr megi uppi vera’ (If Egill has slandered the king, he can pay compensation for it in laudatory words that will last until the end of time).<sup>119</sup> The fact that Gunnhildr, in the shape of a twittering swallow,<sup>120</sup> tried to prevent Egill from concentrating during his composition of the poem shows that she feared that Egill’s words would be powerful enough to influence the king’s decision, and indeed she was right. When Egill recites the finished *drápa* before the king the following day, Eiríkr decides to let him keep his head, hence the name of the poem: *Hqfuðlausn* (head-ransom). Although Eiríkr is keen to emphasise that he is letting Egill go only on Arinbjörn’s account, and that he does not consider himself to be reconciled with Egill, he does acknowledge that the poem was well delivered.

This episode excellently illustrates the power of both slanderous and encomiastic poetry. By composing a *drápa* in praise of Eiríkr, it appears that Egill is able to reverse or mitigate to some extent the damage his *níð* has done to the king’s reputation. Praise and slander are genres which are so closely linked that it is sometimes possible to pass one off as the other, as is so well demonstrated in the ingeniously ambiguous final strophe of the poem.

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<sup>119</sup> ÍF 2, p. 180.

<sup>120</sup> ÍF 2, pp. 182-83.

### Metre

*Hofuðlausn* is generally acknowledged to be the first poem in the Old Norse language to have end-rhyme or *runhent*,<sup>121</sup> although another case of *runhent* appears in a stanza spoken much earlier in the saga by Egill's father, Skalla-Grímr. All types of skaldic verse can qualify as *runhent* and Snorri lists several different varieties in his treatise on metre, *Háttatal*, in which he classifies metre according to the number of distinct rhymes in the stanza and according to the length of the lines.<sup>122</sup> According to Snorri, *rét* (normal/full) *runhenda*, maintains the same rhyme through every line in the stanza, although no example of this is to be found in the Old Norse poetic corpus apart from his own example. The second type Snorri identifies is *hin minni runhenda* (the lesser *runhenda*), which maintains one rhyme in the first half of the stanza and another in the second helming (as in stanza 2 of *Hofuðlausn*). Snorri calls the third type *in minzta runhenda* (the least *runhenda*), where each pair of lines has a separate rhyme; this is the variant which is most common in *Hofuðlausn*, occurring in seven of the twenty stanzas. Overall, however, the rhyme-pattern varies greatly as we can see in the following list:

AABBCCDD ('the least *runhenda*') in stanzas 1, 7, 8, 14, 16, 17, 18.

AAAABBBB ('the lesser *runhenda*') in stanza 2.

AABBCCCC in stanzas 3, 4, 20.

AAAABBCC in stanzas 5, 10, 11, 13, 19.

AABB in stanzas 6, 15.

AAAA in stanzas 9, 12.

As we shall see below, Enrique Bernárdez's translation follows this pattern almost exactly (with the exception of strophes 2 and 4). Unlike his translations of the *dróttkvætt* stanzas in the first section of this chapter, which were only partially successful in representing the rhyme scheme, Bernárdez's version of *Hofuðlausn* (*Rescate de la Cabeza*) demonstrates the extent to which the *runhent* metre is achievable in Spanish, particularly with regard to the end-rhyme. The translator has also managed to maintain the alliterative aspect to a certain degree, as we can observe in stanza 10, for example:

<sup>121</sup> For a detailed analysis of rhyme in *Hofuðlausn* see Odd Nordland, '*Hofuðlausn*' i '*Egils saga*': *Ein tradisjonskritisk studie* (Oslo: Det Norske Samlaget, 1956), pp. 206-21. Nordland concludes that the manner in which rhyme has been employed in this poem, proves that Egill was working with a new concept in Old Norse poetry, but one which was heavily influenced by traditional models of rhyme such as *aðalhending*.

<sup>122</sup> *Snorri Sturluson: Edda. Háttatal*, ed. by Anthony Faulkes (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991) pp. 33-37, 86-87.



*Rescate de la Cabeza 10*

Tiño el jefe la espada en sangre, devorada por cuervos, era hallada la carne destrozada por lobos, y la lanza a Hel guerreros lanza, de Escocia el adversario nutre así al sanguinario;	The chief dyed the sword in blood, devoured by ravens, was found, the flesh torn by wolves, and the spear sends warriors to Hel; the enemy of Scotland feeds in this way the bloody one. <sup>123</sup>
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Lie endeavours to do the same, and although the rhyme scheme of his translation matches the Icelandic text in only nine of the twenty stanzas, in a number of instances he is able to mirror the end-rhyme of the Icelandic text exactly, or at least very closely, and in some cases is actually able to use a cognate Norwegian word (these are indicated in bold) as we can see below:

*Hodeløsningen 2 (1-4)*

lofat vísa vann, víst mærik þann; hljóðs biðjum <b>hann</b> , því at hróðr of <b>fann</b> .	Skal rost bli <b>han</b> som best jeg kan; for denne mann, jeg lovord <b>fann</b> .
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*Hodeløsningen 3 (1-4)*

flestr maðr of frá, hvat fylkir vá, en Viðrir <b>sá</b> , hvar valr of <b>lá</b> .	Din <b>då</b> skraft må hver mann forstå, men Odin <b>så</b> hvor valen <b>lå</b> .
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*Hodeløsningen 17 (3-8)*

muna <b>hodd</b> -dofa; <b>hring</b> brjótr lofa; mjök's <b>hó</b> num fjol <b>hauk</b> strandar mjol gláðar <b>flot</b> na fjol við Fróða mjol.	skatter som sover; fyrsten ei lover; ødselt sitt gull han strør som muld av hånden full den konge <b>hull</b> .
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*Hodeløsningen 19 (5-6)*

hrærðak <b>munni</b> af munar <b>grunni</b>	Øste <b>min munn</b> fra hjertets <b>grunn</b>
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<sup>123</sup> The 'bloody one' referred to here is probably the wolf.

The analysis that follows departs from the procedure adopted in the first part of this chapter, and will examine *Hofuðlausn* and the translations as individual units, rather than stanza by stanza. Only the opening and closing stanzas of the poems are quoted in full in this chapter, but all three translations can be found in their entirety in the appendix.

### *Hofuðlausn* 1

Vestr fórk of ver en ek Viðris ber munstrandar mar, svá's mitt of far; drók eik á flot við ísa brot, hlóðk mærdar hlut míns knarrar skut.	I went westwards over sea and I bear the sea of the mind-coast (breast) of Viðrir (Óðinn) > POETRY, Such is my situation; I launched a ship afloat (lit. 'I dragged an oak onto water') At the breaking of the ice-floes, I loaded the stern of my vessel > BREAST with a cargo of praise.
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In this opening stanza Egill gives the impression that he has purposefully come to York in order to achieve a reconciliation with King Eiríkr and to recite a praise poem in his honour. As we have seen above, however, this is contradicted by the prose text of the saga which explains Egill's visit as an accident.<sup>124</sup> While the phrase *vestr fórk of ver* (I went westwards over sea) might suggest another inconsistency with the prose context, *at fara vestr* is, in fact, a standing phrase. Originally used to describe journeys west from Scandinavia to Ireland and Britain, it had become so synonymous with travelling to the British Isles that here it is used of a journey from Iceland to England, even though the direction Egill takes is obviously eastward. One final discrepancy worthy of note refers to the time of the year at which Egill made his voyage. According to the saga, Egill left Iceland late in the summer, and indeed it was due to an autumn storm that his ship was blown off course. However, the verse above, *við ísa brot*, suggests that Egill launched his ship in springtime, when the winter sea-ice begins to break up.

The theme of seafaring is prominent in this stanza, particularly in the kennings concerning poetic composition. *Viðris munstrandar marr* (sea of the mind-coast of Viðrir/Óðinn) imagines the poetic mead (which the poet withdraws from his chest or mind in order to compose poetry) as the sea, which is located along Óðinn's 'mind'-strand or

<sup>124</sup> In a stanza in *Arinbjarnarkviða* Egill claims his visit was deliberate. See *Arinbjarnarkviða*, st. 3: Hafðak endr/Ynglings burar,/ríks konungs,/reiði fengna;/drók djarfhott/of dökkva skor,/létk hersi/heim of sóttan (Formerly I had incurred the wrath of a powerful king, descendant of Ynglings; I put my daring hat on my dark head and visited the prince). According to Nordal *hersir* here could refer to either Arinbjörn or Eiríkr).



coast, i.e. his breast.<sup>125</sup> In the second helming, in the phrase *blóðk mæðar blut míns knarrar skut* (I loaded the stern of my vessel with a cargo of praise), Egill envisages his body as a cargo ship, the stern (i.e. breast or mind) of which he has filled with a load of praise (i.e. poetry).

*Höfuðlausn 2*<sup>126</sup>

Buðumk hilmir loð, þar ák hróðrar kvøð, berk Óðins mjøð á Engla bjøð; lofat vísa vann, víst mærik þann; hljóðs biðjum hann, því at hróðr of fann.	The king offered hospitality to me, I have an obligation there with regard to a praise-poem, I bear the mead of Óðinn > POETRY to the lands of the Angles; I succeeded in praising the king, Assuredly do I praise him We ask him for silence (i.e. a hearing) Because I have conceived a praise-poem
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Considering the circumstances under which this poem was composed, in this stanza Egill does not beg for the king's forgiveness, as one might expect, but rather reminds the king of his obligations as host by stating that the king offered him hospitality. When this is read in the context of the prose narrative, it is difficult to regard it as anything other than ironic. Eiríkr certainly did not invite Egill to be his guest, indeed he is a very unwilling host, but because of the conventions of society both men have a role to play. Eiríkr must be the generous host, the magnanimous king. Egill can expect hospitality but must submit to Eiríkr's authority and act the part of the loyal skald dutifully reciting in honour of his lord. Egill, with the help of the level-headed Arinbjörn, has cleverly manipulated the situation to suit himself and suggests that he must repay the king's hospitality by composing a praise poem for him. The motivation for this poem was to save his own head, but by speaking of himself as the king's guest, he subtly reminds Eiríkr that it is his duty to spare the life of his guest.

*Höfuðlausn 3*

Hygg, vísi, at vel sómir þat, hvé ek þylja fet, ef ek þøgn of get; flestr maðr of frá, hvat fylkir vá,	Oh king, give heed to this - it befits well – how I do recite if I get silence most men (many a man) heard what the king achieved by fighting
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<sup>125</sup> cf. st. 19 below and *Sonatorrek* 1(4-8): esa nú vænligt/of Viðurs þýfi/né hógrægt/ór hugar fylgsni. (Viðurr's theft > POETRY is not now to be expected, nor easily dragged out of the hiding-place(s) of thought > BREAST).

<sup>126</sup> The first helming of this stanza also occurs in *Snorra Edda*. See *Skáldskaparmál*, p. 12.

en Viðrir sá, hvar valr of lá.	but Viðrir (Óðinn) saw where the slain lay.
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In the third stanza Egill again shows some audacity, in the context, when he tells the king the most befitting or seemly way for a host to behave, although in the rest of the stanza goes on to praise Eiríkr describing how he gained renown through his bravery as a warrior. The latter is characteristic of the main body of the poem which mostly praises Eiríkr's skill on the battlefield and his generosity as a lord in a fairly unambiguous, formulaic manner. It is possible, however, to read a deeper significance into some of these statements, although we can only speculate as to whether or not these meanings were intended by the poet. In *Hofuðlausn* 16 for instance, Egill says:

Enn munk vilja fyr verum skilja skapleik skata skal mærd hvata; verpr ábröndum, en jöfurr löndum heldr hornklofi; hann's næstr lofi.	Moreover do I wish, before men, to expound the character of the noble man I shall hasten the praise; The king scatters/throws river-brands > GOLD, but holds his lands fast; he is most worthy of praise.
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Editors are unclear as to the meaning of *hornklofi*, but it most likely refers to some sort of tongs, the implication being that Eiríkr holds his lands in a vice-like grip. When we remind ourselves that the reason Eiríkr is in England is because he has been driven out of Norway by his brother (who has presumably seized his former lands) this sort of praise can surely only be seen as mocking. Perhaps Egill also has in mind the dispute over his inheritance, the original cause of the ill-will between him and Eiríkr, and the tenacity with which the king held on to Egill's property.

And in *Hofuðlausn* 18, Egill again refers to the generosity of the king and the increase of his fame:

Verpr broddfleti af baugseti hjørleiks hvati, hann es baugskati; þróask hér sem hvar, hugat mælik þar, frétt's austr of mar, Eiríks of far.	The advancer of sword-play > WARRIOR throws the plain of the spear > SHIELD from seat of the ring > ARM, He is a ring-generous man; Eiríkr's fame increases everywhere, I speak earnestly there, It is reported east across the sea.
--	--



The verses in this stanza may just be purely formulaic, but if we look more closely at line 7, *bugat mælik þar* (I speak earnestly there), it is also possible to imagine that Egill is intimating to his audience that he is aware of the hypocrisy of this poem and alerting his listeners to the ambiguity of his words. But it is the final stanza which provides the most obvious clue that Egill is laughing at his foe, and that his praise is tongue-in-cheek.

*Hofuðlausn* 20

Bark þengils lof á þagnar rof; kannk mála mjöt of manna sjöt; ór hlátra ham hróðr bark fyr gram; svá fór þat fram, at flestr of nam.	I bore praise of the king into the breach of silence I know how to measure speech (i.e. speak correctly) for an assembly of men/in the abodes of men Out of the case/covering of laughter > BREAST I bore praise before the king Thus it came to pass that most understood.
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Although *hlátra ham* (case/covering of laughter > BREAST) is not an uncommon kenning for ‘mind’ or ‘breast’, there are many equally appropriate ones that Egill could have chosen. Therefore it is not unreasonable to imagine that he is telling the audience that all along he has been laughing at Eiríkr. Certainly the last line of the stanza is highly ambiguous. The verb *nema* in this context specifically means ‘to catch on’, or ‘to perceive’ and if he is not referring to his mockery of Eiríkr it is difficult to see what else could they be ‘catching on’ to. Egill also implies that ‘most’ people (presumably everybody apart from the king and queen) got the point, i.e. that mockery was involved. The reference in line 3 to his own skill as a poet, *kannk mála mjöt*, would also indicate that his double-meanings are very conscious and deliberate, for what skilled poet would make such allusions without realising?

However, if we read *Hofuðlausn* as a poem not praising Eiríkr, but in fact mocking him, we have to address the problem of Eiríkr’s response. Neither the King nor the usually shrewd Queen Gunnhildr appears to perceive any ambiguity nor question the sincerity of Egill’s words. Eiríkr takes the poem at face value and perhaps feels that Egill has redressed the balance as regards the slanderous verses he had previously directed at him.

*Hodeløsningen* (‘The Head-Ransom’)

In his endnote to his translation of *Hofuðlausn*, Hallvard Lie points out that it is the oldest poem (*krud*) in Nordic poetry (apart from Skalla-Grímr’s *lausavísa*, st. 2) which has end-

rhyme. Lie also maintains that the structural qualities of the poem are superior to its aesthetic value:

A praise-poem which was composed under such circumstances as ‘The Head-Ransom’ cannot be expected to contain particularly ‘deep’ poetic values; it is indeed hollow and bombastic to a high degree, but considered purely from a formal point of view, in the original language it is a masterpiece, with a truly plangent quality.<sup>127</sup>

With such an approach in mind, it is not surprising that Lie’s translation lays greater emphasis on maintaining the rhyme-scheme of the Icelandic text than on reproducing the content of the poem in a very literal way. It is also important to take into account Lie’s understanding of the special ‘circumstances’ under which he believes *Hofuðlausn* was composed, which he does not elaborate on, but which are the subject of a lengthy article first published in 1948, three years prior to the publication of the first volume of *Islandske ættesager*. In this essay, ‘Jorvikferden: Et vendepunkt i Egil Skallagrimssons liv’, Lie utterly rejects the ‘storm theory’ as an adequate explanation for Egill’s visit to York.<sup>128</sup> Instead he argues that Egill’s journey was fatefully determined by his ‘magiske gemytt’ (magical nature) and his ‘angst’ (fear) of the magical powers of his arch-enemy Gunnhildr, which drove him to commit ‘hans livs mest halsbrekkende handling’ (the most dangerous act of his life),<sup>129</sup> by confronting her at Eiríkr’s court. According to this theory, Egill realises that Gunnhildr has put a spell on him in retaliation for the curse he invoked on the king and queen with the erection of the *níðstǫng* (which resulted in their flight from Norway), and although his faith in his own magic powers is now increased, so too is his fear of Gunnhildr. Rather than endure the gnawing feeling of insecurity (*nagende utrygghetsfølelsen*), Egill takes a wild ‘leap’, preferring to face the danger out in the open in order to try to rid himself of his fear. Lie argues that under such circumstances it is not surprising that there is not a hint of this in *Hofuðlausn* itself, as it was vital to give the impression that he had come to Eiríkr’s court voluntarily.

Lie reads this poem, therefore, as a purely formulaic *drápa*, important as an example of its genre, and with regard to its tonal quality, but as ‘hollow’ and without “‘deep” poetic values’. Unlike *Sonatorrek*, *Arinbjarnarkviða* or many of the *lausavísur*, *Hofuðlausn* does not give the reader an insight into the poet’s state of mind, and therefore is of little value for

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<sup>127</sup> *Islandske ættesager*, vol. 1, p. 147: ‘Et lovkvad som er blitt til under slike omstendigheter som “Hodeløsningen”, kan man selvsagt ikke vente å finne noen særlige “indre” poetiske verdier i; det er da også i høy grad hult og bombastisk, men i originalspråket, rent formelt sett, et mesterverk, med en veldig klangvirking’.

<sup>128</sup> Hallvard Lie, ‘Jorvikferden: Et vendepunkt i Egil Skallagrimsson’s liv’, in *Om sagakunst og skaldskap. Utvalgte avhandlinger* (Ovre Ervik: Alvheim & Eide, 1982), pp. 5-108.

<sup>129</sup> *ibid.*, p. 84.



the sort of psychoanalytic approach which underlies Lie's theories about Egill's character. As Lie feels that the content of this poem is hollow and insincere, he has in theory all the more freedom as regards his choice of vocabulary, although in actual fact his translation follows the Icelandic text quite closely.

Lie credits Egill with the introduction of the *runhent* form into Old Norse poetry, and forms a rather elaborate theory about the inspiration behind it. Very briefly, Lie believes that this first appearance of *runhent* in Old Norse poetry was not the result of the influence of continental poetics, but that the source of Egill's inspiration to compose rhyming poetry was rhetorical Latin prose, to which he had been exposed ten years before during the ceremony of his 'primsigning' (although he would not have understood a word of it).<sup>130</sup> Lie is obviously anxious to attribute the innovation of end-rhyme in Old Norse poetry to a native poet, although his inspiration may have been foreign.

#### *Hodeløsningen 1*

Mot vest jeg fôr, tok meg ombord den dyre mjød, meg Odin bød; da is var gått, dro båt jeg flott, og la bak mast min diktnings last.	I travelled westwards, I took on board the precious mead (i.e. poetry) [that] Óðinn offered me; when ice was gone I launched a boat, and laid behind the mast my cargo of poetry.
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The rhyme scheme in this strophe is clearly AABBCDD, the same as in the first stanza of the source text. While this translation follows the content and even the language of the original stanza quite closely in places (*Mot vest jeg fôr* = *Vestr fôr*; *dro båt jeg flott* = *drók eik á flot*), Lie has obviously prioritised the rhyme scheme with regard to his choice of vocabulary, most noticeably in locating the 'cargo of poetry' *bak mast* (behind the mast) as opposed to in *skutr knarrar míns* (the stern of my vessel), with the result that it is now impossible to read this phrase as a kenning for chest/breast. In the first helming, Lie replaces the kenning, *Viðris munstrandar marr* (sea of the mind-coast (breast) of Viðrir), with a different one, *den dyre mjød meg Odin bød* (the precious mead that Óðinn offered me), perhaps anticipating *Óðins mjøðr* in line three of the following stanza. The phrase *meg Odin bød* has the effect of emphasising the personal nature of the poet's relationship with the god Óðinn, but by removing the reference to the sea in this kenning, the theme of sea-faring, so foregrounded in the Icelandic text, is further diminished.

<sup>130</sup> Hallvard Lie, 'Skaldestil-studier' in *Om Sagakunst og Skaldskap: Utvalgte avhandlinger* (Ovre Ervik: Alvheim & Eide, 1982), pp. 109-200 (pp. 168-77).

It is interesting to note here, that although Lie's translations normally reflect his anxiety to reconcile discrepancies between the poetry and its prose context, here he does seem to anticipate any confusion on the reader's part regarding the phrases *Alt vest jeg fór* and *da is var gått*; at least he does not explain those terms in a note.

*Hodeløsningen 2*

Til gjest meg ba den konge da, og lønn i kvad skal drotten ha! Skal rost bli han som best jeg kan; for denne mann jeg lovord fann.	The king invited me then as a guest, and payment in poetry the king shall have! He shall be praised to the extent of my ability; for this man I found words of praise.
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Lie's translation of *Buðumk hilmir lød* (the king offered hospitality to me) as *den konge da til gjest meg ba* (the king invited me then as a guest) insinuates even more powerfully than the original that Egill is at court because of an invitation from the king, when of course Eiríkr has made it abundantly clear that Egill is very unwelcome, and has only very grudgingly offered to grant him a hearing. The subsequent statement, *og lønn i kvad skal drotten ha!* (and payment in poetry the king shall have!), suggests that the praise-poem will be a payment for Eiríkr's hospitality, when in reality it is a plea for his life. Still, the idea of payment and reward could serve as a reminder to the king of the typical transaction between and skald and lord, and may have the effect of distracting the king from the true state of affairs, or, of allowing him to use the situation as a face-saving device for both king and skald. The exclamation mark at the end of the phrase *skal drotten ha!*, a device which is characteristic of Lie's translations, gives an impression of informality.

Lie's use of the word *fann* (Bm. 'fannt') in the final line of stanza 2, *því at bróðr of fann* is one example of a number of *nynorsk* words in this translation. As we have seen in chapter 3, Lie was a staunch advocate of the *riksmål* language, but for the sake of the rhyme scheme he is prepared to use all the resources available to him, including *nynorsk*, Danish and dialect words. Other instances of *nynorsk* terms used for the sake of rhyme occur in stanzas 6 (*koll*); 8 (*hold*, *glupe*, *snarpe*); 10 (*skrubben*); 11 (*korpenne*); and 18 (*lave*). These words are in daily use in *nynorsk* but might sound like Old Norse to someone not familiar with them. Lie would also of course have been aware of the Old Norse cognates for these words (e.g. *kollr*, *haldr*, *snarpr*, *korpr*, *lafa*) and might have been using them to in a poetic sense in this way, as he does with *drotten* (st. 2), *valen* (st. 3), *gny* (st. 4), *ry* (st. 6), *vargen* (st. 11), *dis* (st. 13), and *skald* (st. 19). These words, many of which are in rare usage and not



part of everyday Norwegian, would be recognisable to a Norwegian reader as belonging to a certain pool of terms (such as *grid*, *hird*, *hirdfjore*) relating to the world of saga. The word *skrubben*, which Lie uses in stanza 10 to translate *flagðs goti* (steed of the giantess > WOLF), is interesting in that it functions in folktales as a euphemism, somewhat in the manner of a kenning, so that the taboo of mentioning the wolf is avoided; literally it means ‘the punisher’.

Lie also relies on a number of Danish or old-fashioned Dano-Norwegian words and structures for his rhyme scheme throughout the poem, which would also have an archaic sound to the Norwegian ear. Examples include *kolde* (Bm. *kalde*) in stanzas 5 and 8; *il* (archaic) and *aker* (Bm. *åker*) in stanza 10; *drotten hin snare* (Bm. ‘den snare drotten’) in stanza 14; *hård* (Bm. *hard*) in stanza 16; *muld* (Bm. *mold*) and *hull* (archaic) in stanza 17.

With regard to the kennings in this poem, Lie adopts a number of different strategies to translate or explain them. In his endnotes to *Hodeløsningen*, for example, he glosses a total of five kennings in the following manner: ‘*blodorm: sverd*’ (blood-serpent: sword); ‘*sårsnok: sverd*’ (wound-snake: sword); ‘*Nares søster: Hel*’ (Nari’s sister: Hel); ‘*Troll-kejerrings best: Ulv*’ (Trollhag’s horse: wolf) and ‘*latterens hjem: brystet*’ (home of laughter: the breast).<sup>131</sup> However, while *Nares søster* (st. 10) and *Troll-kejerrings best* (st. 12) are pretty accurate translations of *nipt Nara* (Nari’s sister > HEL) and *Gjalpar skær* (steed of Gjalp (name of a giantess/trollwoman) > WOLF) respectively, the two sword kennings are not literal representations the kennings in the original as we can see below:

*Hodeløsningen* 4 (1-2)

Bet blodorms tann i skjolderand,	Tooth of blood-serpent bit into shield-rim,
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*Hofuðlausn* 4 (1-2)

Óx hjörva glöð Við hlífar þröð,	The clash of swords grew on edge of shield,
------------------------------------	--

*Hodeløsningen* 8 (1-2)

Blodorm freste, sårsnók hveste,	Blood-serpent hissed, wound-snake spat,
------------------------------------	--

*Hofuðlausn* 8 (1-2)

Hlam heinsöðul við hjaldröðul,	Saddle of the whetstone > SWORD broke against sun of battle > SWORD/SHIELD,
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<sup>131</sup> *Islandske ættesager*, vol. 1, p. 485.

In the first instance, Lie has inserted a kenning where there was not one, replacing *hjǫrr* (gen.pl. *hjǫrva*, ‘sword’), with *blodorms tann* (blood-serpent’s tooth > SWORD-BLADE) and in stanza 8, he replaces the sword-kennings of the original with *blodorm* and *sársnók*. The first of these is based on the Icelandic *blóðormr*, a compound-word kenning which does not occur elsewhere in Egill’s poetry, although it is used by skalds such as Sturla Þórðarson and Þorleifr jarlsskáld (‘earl’s skald’); in the second Lie conjoins the elements *sár* and *snók* (ON *snákr*), a combination which is not found in the extant Old Icelandic poetic corpus, although similar forms such as *sárlinnr* and *undlinnr* (wound-serpent) are relatively common.

This tendency to introduce new kennings or alter existing ones to suit the rhyme-scheme is a recurrent feature of Lie’s translations as we have already seen in stanza 1 above. Another noteworthy example of a kenning invented by the translator in this text also occurs in stanza 4 where *valkyrjenes sang* (valkyries’ song) replaces *malmbríðar spá* (song/noise of the weapon-storm > BATTLE); the explanation for this kenning is given in the previous helming (*stridens gny*, ‘din of battle’), although the ‘song of the Valkyries’ could also be interpreted literally.

#### *Hodeløsningen 20*

Mens tyst det var, jeg kvedet har på verdig vis til kongens pris. Fra latterens hjem bar kvadet jeg frem, så alle må hvert ord forstå.	While it was quiet I have recited in a worthy way of the king’s fame. From the home of laughter I bore forth the poem so [that] all might each word understand.
---	--

In the endnote to this final stanza Lie explains how in the Icelandic phrase *hlátra hamr* (covering of laughter), the word *hamr* refers to the outer covering in which ‘laughter’ is encased, in other words, the breast:

The home [*hjem*] of laughter (literally ‘skin/covering [*ham*] of laughter’) is a circumlocution for *the breast*, the location [*sete*] of all intellectual faculties. It is difficult to say for sure if Egill had a slightly malevolent intention behind this ‘kenning’; at the same time it is not unthinkable that he has chosen it very advisedly, at the very least to provide a tiny glimpse into his true state of mind in the end, when he had to stand and praise his old, bitter enemy in verse.<sup>132</sup>

<sup>132</sup> *Islandske ættesager*, vol. 1, p. 489: ‘Latterens hjem (i orig. ordrett: “latterens ham”) er en omskrivning for *brystet*, alle åndsevners *sete*. Om Egil har hatt en litt ondskapsfull baktanke med denne “kjenningen”, lar seg vanskelig avgjøre med sikkerhet; untenkelig er det imidlertid ikke at han har valgt den med velberådd hu, for dog til slutt å få gitt et orlite glimt av sin sanne sinnstilstand, der han måtte stå og lovprise sin gamle dødsfiende’.



Playing on the phonological similarity between *ham(r)* and *hjem*, Lie furnishes a translation which sounds almost identical to the original phrase, and results in the same sense-word ‘breast’, but with a subtle difference in emphasis. The ‘home of laughter’ has a deeper resonance than the ‘case/covering of laughter’ in the context, and this translation further substantiates Lie’s argument that in his final stanza Egill may have taken the opportunity to mock the king in an ambiguous kenning.

*Rescate de la Cabeza* (‘Ransom of the Head’)

The most striking aspect of Bernárdez’s translation, as we have noted above, is the manner in which he has managed to replicate the rhyme patterns of the Icelandic text, but inevitably this has led to a compromise as regards the content of the verses resulting in a translation which is sometimes rather loose.<sup>133</sup>

*Rescate de la Cabeza* 1

Por mar al oeste fui y de Odín recogí el zumo del pecho <sup>134</sup> así siempre lo he hecho; en mi barco cargué cuando en él embarqué fardos de poesía; ya el hielo se fundía.	By sea to the west I went and from Óðinn I obtained (collected) the juice of the breast I have always done it this way; On my ship I loaded, when I embarked in it, bundles of poetry; the ice was already melting.
--	--

For example, lines 2-3 of this first stanza are rendered *de Odín recogí el zumo del pecho* (from Óðinn I collected the juice of the breast), an interpretation which ignores the fact that Óðinn (or Viðrir) is part of the kenning which gives rise to the meaning ‘poetry’ and cannot be separated from it. It also reduces the two-dimensional aspect of the original kenning which evokes both the mythological legend of the origins of poetry and the image of the sea breaking on the shore which, as I have argued above, complements the sea voyage theme introduced in the opening verse. Bernárdez explains in a footnote that *el zumo del pecho* (the juice of the breast) is ‘poetry’, but neglects to mention that this meaning

<sup>133</sup> Luis Lerate’s subsequent Spanish translation *Hofuðlausn* (*Rescate de cabeza*) adopts a decidedly different strategy. In the introduction to his translation Lerate states that he has considered it preferable to renounce a ‘slavish reinvention of Castilian rhymes’ (una esclava reinención de rimas castellanas) in order to better preserve the literal context of the Icelandic text. It seems not unlikely that this is a criticism of Bernárdez’s approach. See *Poesía Antiguo-Nórdica: Antología (Siglos IX-XII)*, trans. by Luis Lerate (Madrid: Alianza, 1993), p. 112.

<sup>134</sup> *Saga de Egil Skallagrímsson*, p. 224, footnote 178: ‘El zumo del pecho: “la poesía”’ (The juice of the breast: ‘poetry’).

is only possible if the liquid is designated as pertaining to Óðinn; as it is, his explanation is somewhat misleading, indeed to an inexperienced reader the first helming reads as though Egill sailed west in order to collect the poetry from Óðinn.

In the second helming, Bernárdez's very literal reading of *blóðk mæðar blut míns knarrar skut* (I loaded the stern of my vessel > BREAST with a cargo of praise) as *en mi barco cargué [...] fardos de poesía* (on my ship I loaded [...] bundles of poetry), like Hallvard Lie's translation, precludes the possibility of the interpretation 'breast' for *knarrar skut*. Nor does Bernárdez offer the Spanish reader any explanation for the apparent discrepancy between the prose text, where Egill obviously sailed eastwards, and the opening statement of the stanza *por mar al oeste fui* (by sea to the west I went), although presumably he was aware of it.

### *Rescate de la Cabeza 2*

Albergue el rey me dio, debo alabarle yo; de Odín traigo bebida a donde el anglo habita; al príncipe he alabado, en verdad le he cantado; una oda he dispuesto, si está a oírla presto.	The king gave me lodging I should praise him; from Óðinn I bring drink to where the Angle dwells; I have praised the prince, truly have I sung to him, an ode I have prepared, if he is disposed to hear it.
--	---

In this second stanza the line *de Odín traigo bebida a donde el anglo habita* (from/of Óðinn I bring drink to where the Angle dwells) also sounds as though Egill is on a mission from Óðinn. To the Spanish reader, or indeed to any reader unfamiliar with skaldic poetry this line does not make a lot of sense, but presumably Bernárdez feels there is no need for further explanation than the footnote to the first stanza. However, it is possible that this is an example of Bernárdez's eccentric syntax and the line should actually be read: 'traigo el bebida de Odín' (I bring Óðinn's drink) a translation which is much closer to the Icelandic *berk Óðins mjöð á Engla bjöð* (I bear the mead of Óðinn to the lands of the Angles/Englishmen).

In the second helming of this stanza the focus shifts onto the performance of the poetry, and represents, more or less accurately, the content of the Icelandic text, namely that Egill has conceived of a praise poem for the king and is asking for the opportunity to recite it. Bernárdez works into his translation a number of terms which are strongly associated with Spanish medieval literature, particularly with the 'cantares de gesta' (cf. *las gestas del señor*, 'the deeds of the lord', in stanza 16), the most famous of which is undoubtedly the *Cantar de Mio Cid*. These poems were performed or sung in public by



*juglares* (troubadours) who were normally accompanied by music. Speaking of the performative aspect of Spanish epic poetry in his edition of the *Cantar de Mio Cid*, Francisco A. Marcos Marín notes:

When thinking about any epic poem, as when we think about a *jarcha*, a *cejel*, a carol or a romance, we should imagine it as a sung text [*texto cantado*], in which the music would have a natural influence on the rhythm and the regulation of the metre.<sup>135</sup>

Moreover, Marcos points out that ‘the verb for the most exalted act of the *juglares* is, without doubt, ‘to sing’ [*cantar*]’ and that ‘in the romance languages, in this era, the verb derived from the Latin *dicere* (Castillian *dezir*, French *dire*) corresponds to the modern [terms] ‘sing, recite/say, play (an instrument)’.<sup>136</sup> Bernárdez chooses *cantar* to describe the reciting of the poem in the stanza above, *en verdad le he cantado*, and in stanza 19: *Ante el rey he cantado los versos que he formado* (before the king I have sung the verses that I have composed), but most notably in the final stanza (see below), where he uses the verb twice *canté, cantar*, as well as the noun *canto*. In the context, the verb *decir* in *dije así mi poema* (thus did I recite/versify my poem) should also be read in its medieval sense, further emphasising the analogy between *Hofuðlausn* and medieval Spanish poetry.

#### *Rescate de la Cabeza* 20

Del rey canté alabanza, recité sin erranza, en casas de señores bien sé cantar loores; ahora desde el pecho al rey un canto he hecho; dije así mi poema, hubo atención suprema.	I sang praise of the king, I recited without error, in houses of lords/gentlemen I know well how to sing praise-poems; now from my breast to the king a poem/song I have made; thus did I recite/versify my poem, there was supreme attention.
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The phrase *bien sé cantar loores* (I know well how to sing praise-poems), introduces another term closely associated with Spanish medieval literature, which occurs, for example, in the works of the first known poet to write in the Castilian language, Gonzalo de Berceo (1197-

<sup>135</sup> *Cantar de Mio Cid*, ed. by Francisco A. Marcos Marín (Madrid: Biblioteca nueva, 1997), p. 14: ‘Al pensar en cualquier poema épico, como al pensar en una *jarcha*, en un *cejel*, un villancico o un romance, tenemos que imaginarlo como un texto cantado, en que la música tendría una natural influencia en el ritmo y en el ajuste de la métrica’. A *jarcha* or *kharja* is the concluding stanza to a type of love long composed by Arab or Jewish poets in Moslem Spain during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. While the main part of the poem was in classic Arabic or Hebrew, the *jarcha* was colloquial, either in Spanish or Spanish interspersed with Arabic words. The *cejel* (*ʔéjel*, *ʔajâl*) was another type of medieval song with Hispano-arabic roots.

<sup>136</sup> *ibid.*: ‘El verbo para la acción más elevada de los juglares es, acertadamente, *cantar*’ [...] ‘En las lenguas románicas, en esa etapa, el verbo derivado del latín *dicere* (cast. *dezir*, fr. *dire*) corresponde a los modernos ‘cantar, decir, tocar [un instrumento]’.

1264). His poems in praise of the Virgin Mary are named *loores* (*Loores de Nuestra Señora*), and the word is also incorporated into the poetry for example:

En tu loor, Sennora	querría entender,
de las tus largas faldas	una fimbria tanner,
ca non me siento digno	ante ti parescer,
maguer la tu feduça	no la puedo perder. <sup>137</sup>

In your praise, Lady, I would like to touch the hem of your long skirts; I would like to understand, because although I do not feel worthy of appearing before you, I cannot lose your trust.

Other archaic, poetic and medieval words and phrases are scattered throughout the stanzas in the poem such as: *estar presto a* (st. 2); *erranza* (st. 5, 20), *dardo* in the sense of ‘arrow’ (st. 6, 9); *tabalí* (st. 8); *broquel* (st. 7); *por cierto* in the sense of ‘certainly’ (st. 12); *las gestas* (st. 16) and *doquiera* (st. 18). Bernárdez suggests the following motive for the use of archaic and medieval vocabulary in translations of skaldic poetry:

It is necessary to point out that skaldic texts were already seen as archaic forms in the era of the composition of the sagas, and that consequently there exists a contrast not only between verse and prose, but also between contemporaneous language (of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries) and ‘archaic’ language (of the ninth to eleventh centuries, primarily). It would be fitting if this contrast were respected in some way in translations which, as a rule, is not normally the case.<sup>138</sup>

However, as I have illustrated above, these terms are bound to evoke in the Spanish reader’s mind a number of associations with their native medieval literature in general, as well as particular poems such as the high-status medieval classic *El Cantar del Mío Cid*. By rewriting the Icelandic text in terms of the native Spanish tradition, probably with the intention of trying to engage the reader with a familiar frame of reference, Bernárdez performs an act of cultural colonisation on the text which has now got a decidedly Spanish flavour despite its references to ‘Odín’.

<sup>137</sup> Gonzalo de Berceo, *Obras completas 3: El Duelo de la Virgen, Los himnos, Los loores de nuestra Señora, Los signos del juicio final*, ed. by Brian Dutton (London: Tamesis, 1975), p. 73.

<sup>138</sup> Enrique Bernárdez, ‘Acerca de la traducción de los kenningar y otros aspectos de la poesía escáldica’, *Filología Moderna*, 68-70 (1980), 223-40 (p. 228): ‘Es preciso señalar que los textos escáldicos, ya en la época de redacción de las sagas, se entendían como formas arcaicas, y que, consecuentamente, existe un contraste no sólo entre prosa y verso, sino también entre lengua contemporánea (de los siglos XIII y XIV) y lengua “arcaica” (de los siglos IX a XI, fundamentalmente). Parecería conveniente que este contraste se respetara de alguna forma en las traducciones; lo que por regla, no suele hacerse’ (It is necessary to point out that by the time of the age of saga composition, the skaldic texts were already considered as archaic forms, and that as a consequence, there is a contrast not only between prose and verse, but also between contemporary language (of the 13th and 14th centuries) and ‘archaic’ language (of the 9th to the 11th centuries, principally).



## CHAPTER FIVE

### POEMS OF GRIEF AND LOVE

The previous chapter focused on types of skaldic poetry that chiefly belonged to the public sphere. *Níðvísur* and praise-poetry constitute genres whose performative force lies in their public utterance; in other words, they only have the power to enhance or injure a person's reputation if they are remembered and repeated. We have also seen how *níð* is normally motivated by revenge, while praise-poetry is usually produced in return for some form of remuneration, although the borderline between praise and mockery can sometimes be very unclear. This focus of this chapter, however, is on a number of poems that were composed and recited under very different circumstances to *níðvísur* and praise-poetry. The greater part of the discussion will centre on two instances of male lament in *Egils saga*. The first is a stanza uttered by Egill Skalla-Grímsson's grandfather, Kveld-Úlfr, on hearing of the death of his son Þórólfr; the second is Egill's *Sonatorrek*, which here deserves an introduction.

*Sonatorrek* is probably the most celebrated poem of all of Egill's verse, and is certainly the one that has received the most attention. 'Most' is a word that surfaces again and again in relation to *Sonatorrek*; indeed, it is remarkable how often the poem is defined in superlative terms. To quote a few such accolades: 'Sonatorrek is one of the most interesting cultural-historical documents from the Viking era' (Hallvard Lie: 1958);<sup>1</sup> 'The *Sonatorrek* is the most powerful of Egill's verse-sequences' (Turville-Petre: 1976);<sup>2</sup> 'the best skaldic poem extant' (Bernárdez: 1988);<sup>3</sup> 'this must be counted the most remarkable poem

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<sup>1</sup> Hallvard Lie, 'Egill Skallagrímsson', in *Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder. Fra vikingetid til reformationstid*, ed. by John Danstrup and others (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde og Bagger, 1956-78), III (1958), 521-22 (p. 522): 'Sonatorrek er et av de interessanteste ånds-hist. dokumenter fra vikingtiden'. I have translated 'ånds-hist[orisk]', here as 'cultural-historic', but it should be noted that 'ånd' also has connotations of artistic genius.

<sup>2</sup> E. O. Gabriel Turville-Petre, *Scaldic Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> Bernárdez, Enrique, trans., *Snorri Sturluson: Saga de Egil Skallagrímsson* (Madrid: Miraguano, 1988), p. xiii: 'el mejor poema escáldica de todos los existentes'. This volume will be referred to throughout this chapter as *Saga de Egil Skallagrímsson*.

we now have by any named poet of the Viking Age' (Jónas Kristjánsson: 1988);<sup>4</sup> 'The poem concerns mainly Egill's own feelings, and it has been called the most lyrical product of Norse poetry' (Bjarni Einarsson: 1993, 154);<sup>5</sup> 'Egill's finest poem is *Sonatorrek*' (Fidjestøl: 1994).<sup>6</sup> Thus we can claim with confidence that *Sonatorrek* is firmly established in the canon of Nordic literature as a text in its own right, and is undoubtedly considered to be a valuable cultural artefact inherited from the Viking Age, and consequently part of the 'cultural capital' of the modern states of Iceland and Norway. Viewed from a wider perspective, it could even be considered to be part of 'our' common European heritage.

As we have seen in the quotations cited above, *Sonatorrek*'s appeal is principally based on the perception that it has an emotional, personal, and individual (all three of which usually add up to 'lyrical') quality unmatched by any other skaldic or Eddic poem. In *Sonatorrek* the oftentimes brutal Viking Egill lays bare his soul and expresses, or even purges, his grief in a manner unprecedented in Old Norse-Icelandic verse. It is this emotional aspect that, has led to its being called 'the most lyrical product of Norse poetry' and which has prompted Bjarne Fidjestøl to reflect that:

*Sonatorrek* seems remarkably modern in attitude. The poet seeking consolation in his art may appear notably like a Romantic theme, and Egill's poem has been compared to *Den Salige*,<sup>7</sup> an elegy by the Norwegian Romantic Welhaven. Egill is remote from us in many ways – in one stanza, for instance, he boasts of biting through the throat of an enemy in a hand-to-hand fight (if that is the right interpretation of the verse) – but in *Sonatorrek* the Viking comes close to ourselves. A substantial work on autobiography in world-literature devotes a separate chapter to Egill and refers to him as the first modern man (Misch 1949-69): 2.1: 131 – 77).<sup>8</sup>

The notion that *Sonatorrek* provides a rare opportunity to somehow get close to, as Hallvard Lie puts it, 'Egill the individual', or get a glimpse into his soul, is one of the many reasons why scholars have tried to recover the 'original', 'authentic' poem from the 'miserable, disintegrated verse', as it now exists.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Jónas Kristjánsson, *Eddas and Sagas: Iceland's Medieval Literature*, trans. by Peter Foote (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1988), p. 101.

<sup>5</sup> Bjarni Einarsson, 'Egill Skalla-Grímsson', in *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, ed. by Philip Pulsiano (London: Garland, 1993), pp. 153-54 (p. 154).

<sup>6</sup> Bjarne Fidjestøl, 'Norse-Icelandic composition in the oral period', in *Selected Papers* (Haugen, 1997), pp. 303-32 (p. 326).

<sup>7</sup> Johan Sebastian Welhaven's poem 'Den Salige' was probably inspired by the death of his fiancée and provided an opportunity for the poet to work through his loss.

<sup>8</sup> Bjarne Fidjestøl, 'Norse-Icelandic composition in the oral period', in *Selected Papers* (Haugen, 1997), pp. 303-32 (p. 327).

<sup>9</sup> Hallvard Lie, 'Sonatorrek str. 1-4', in *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 61 (1946), 182-207 (p. 183). In this article Hallvard Lie compares *Sonatorrek* with the work of another romantic poet, Percy Bysshe Shelley, citing the following lines from 'To a Skylark': 'our sweetest songs are those/ which tell of saddest thought'.



This poem, in the state that has been handed down to us, contains so many obscure phrases and words that many of the strophes make no sense at all, and scholars have had to resort to extensive emendation to arrive at a reasonably comprehensible text. While some of these emendations are universally accepted, there has been much debate over certain textual cruces in *Sonatorrek*, and a large quantity of critical material has amassed on the subject. In 1946, Hallvard Lie somewhat optimistically claimed that:

With a flawless, authentic *Sonatorrek*, Old Norse literary history would have possessed an artistic and humanistic document of such rare worth that the philologists would undoubtedly have sacrificed, without hesitation, all the literature they had themselves created over the years about the poem, if this could help Egill's words to live again.<sup>10</sup>

It must be owned that the desire to reconstitute the 'original' text of *Sonatorrek* and decipher its enigmas is one of the main reasons why philologists feel compelled to interpret and re-interpret it; as to the readings that can be derived from the text, the possibilities seem endless.<sup>11</sup> There is also a lack of consensus regarding the genre of the poem. Depending on its various interpretations, *Sonatorrek* has been defined as a lament, a dirge, an elegy, and even a catharsis;<sup>12</sup> in the saga itself it is described as an *erfikevæði* ('memorial lay' or 'funeral ode'). In fact *Sonatorrek* combines elements of all of these forms. Its ostensible purpose in the saga is to honour the deceased, in the manner of an obituary poem, but it is clear that it also has a therapeutic function for the poet and also shares some aspects of the genealogical poems (such as *Ynglingatal* and *Háleygjatal*) in terms of theme and metre. However, as we have seen above, it is the perceived lyrical quality of *Sonatorrek* which has fascinated scholars, particularly Scandinavian scholars, and which has earned *Sonatorrek* its reputation as the finest poem in Old Norse literature.

This chapter will also include a discussion, and an analysis of the translations, of a pair of stanzas of quite a different subject matter, but also spoken in a private, domestic setting. These stanzas form part of an exchange between Egill and the girl with whom he has been paired at a feast, and represent Egill's first encounter with the opposite sex. In this chapter I have arranged the poetry in chronological order, i.e. in the order that it occurs in the saga.

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<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p. 182: 'Med et plettfritt, autentisk *Sonatorrek* hadde norrøn litteraturhistorie eiet et kunstnerisk og menneskelig dokument av en så sjelden verdi, at filologene uten tvil betenkingsløst hadde ofret all den litteratur de selv i årenes løp har skapt omkring kvadet, hadde det såsant hjulpet Egills egne ord til live igjen'.

<sup>11</sup> Most of the readings concern the Old Norse pagan religion and mythology.

<sup>12</sup> Richard North, 'The Pagan Inheritance of Egill's *Sonatorrek*', in *Atti del 12. Congresso Internazionale di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo/Poetry in the Scandinavian Middle Ages: Seventh International Saga Conference, Spoleto 4-10 September 1988*, ed. by Teresa Pàroli (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 1990), pp. 147-67 (p. 154).

*Stanza 1*

This is the first skaldic stanza to be quoted in *Egils saga* and is one of the few that is not recited by Egill himself. It is delivered by Kveld-Úlfr (Egill's grandfather) upon receiving the news of the death of his son Þórólfr at the hands of King Haraldr of Norway, fulfilling his prophecy that 'our family will not enjoy good fortune from this king'.<sup>13</sup> The prose context explains that the king, afraid of engaging in open battle with Þórólfr, orders his house to be burnt instead. Þórólfr manages to escape from the burning house and almost succeeds in wounding the king but he is attacked by the king's guard and dealt the mortal blow by King Haraldr himself. On receiving the tidings of his son's untimely death Kveld-Úlfr is so grief-stricken that he takes to his bed and refuses to get up. His other son, Skalla-Grímr, 'visited him often and entreated him to take heart, saying that anything was more befitting than to languish uselessly in bed. "It would be more advisable if we were to try to get revenge for Þórólfr; it may be that we come within reach of some of the men who were present at Þórólfr's killing. If not, then there will be men which we can catch that the king will find contrary to his liking."<sup>14</sup> In response Kveld-Úlfr recites the following verse:

Nú frák norðr í eyju,  
norn erum grimm, til snimma  
Þundr kaus þremja skyndi,  
Þórólf und lok fóru;  
létumk þung at þingi  
Þórs fangvina at ganga,  
skjótt munat hefnt, þótt hvettimk  
hugr, malm-Gnáar brugðit.<sup>15</sup>

*Prose word order*

Nú frák Þórólf fóru und lok norðr í eyju; norn erum grimm; Þundr kaus þremja skyndi til snimma; þung fangvina Þórs létumk brugðit at ganga at þingi malm-Gnáar; skjótt munat hefnt, þótt hugr hvettimk.

*Translation*

Now I found out that Þórólfr has met his end (i.e. died) north on an island. The norn is grim to me. Þundr (Óðinn) chose the swinger of the sword-edges > WARRIOR prematurely. The difficult (heavy) wrestling partneress/opponent of Þórr > OLD AGE allowed me to fail in going to the meeting of metal-Gná (goddess) [ > valkyrie] > BATTLE. Quickly will it not be avenged although the mind whetted/encouraged it.

<sup>13</sup> ÍF 2, p. 13: 'at vér feðgar munim ekki bera gæfu til þessa konungs'.

<sup>14</sup> ÍF 2, p. 60: 'Skalla-Grímr kom opt til hans og talði fyrir honum, það hann hressa sik, sagði, at allt var annat athæfiligra en þat, at auvirðask ok leggjask í kqr, – "er hitt heldr ráð, at vér leitum til hefnda eptir Þórólfr; má vera, at vér komim í færi við nokkura þá menn, er verit hafa at falli Þórólfs; en ef þat er eigi, þá munu þeir vera menn, er vér munum ná, er konungi mun sér þykkja móti skapi'.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*



*Commentary & Analysis*

This strophe is remarkable for its numerous references to Norse mythology. Firstly Kveld-Úlfr claims that (the/a) *norn* has been severe to him. The *norns* were female beings who ruled the fate of the world, who presided over the fortunes of men and even of the gods themselves, although they are not utterly omnipotent, as Jenny Jochens points out:

According to *Völuspá* and Snorri, however, the *völur* (plural of *völva*) and the *nornir* are not directly responsible for the events either. The *völva* happens to know and the *norns* perform more as agents than as direct cause. In both cases a higher albeit unspecified power looms behind them. In the heroic poetry and among some skalds, however, the *norns* are often held directly responsible for events unfavorable to the heroes.<sup>16</sup>

Kveld-Úlfr also accuses Óðinn of taking his son's life too early (*til snimma*) and he laments the fact that he is too old to avenge his son's death himself. This is expressed in the kenning *fangvina Þórs*, which evokes the story in the *Snorra Edda* of Utgarða-Loki, in which Þórr fails tests set by the giants because he is being deceived by means of optical illusions. In the second of these tests Þórr fails to defeat an old woman at wrestling. Her name is Elli, or 'Old Age'.

Another kenning contained within the stanza with a mythological reference is *þingi malm-Gnáar* (assembly of metal-Gná). Gná is one of the minor *ásynjur* or female *æsir*, i.e. a goddess; in skaldic poetry, the 'metal-goddess' is a common kenning for valkyrie, whose 'assembly' or 'meeting' (*þingi*) is battle or combat. The valkyries were fearsome beings whose function is inscribed in their name, namely to chose (*kjósa*), at Óðinn's bidding, those warriors who were destined to die in battle, collect the slain (*valr*) from the battlefield and conduct them back to *Valhöll*, the hall of the slain.

Kveld-Úlfr's attitude towards the *norns*, Óðinn and the valkyrie, as expressed in the stanza above is consistent with what we know of the roles of these mythological figures. According to this mythological perspective, Þórólfr has been specially selected by Óðinn to be slain on the battlefield, and then to be carried to *Valhöll* by a valkyrie. The mention of the *norns* reminds us, however, that it is they, and not Óðinn, who ultimately decide the fate of all men. While the belief that the fate of each human being had long ago been decided was probably of some consolation to the grieving father, and the manner in which Þórólfr met his fate was the most noble he could have wished for, his desire for revenge reminds us that it was a human hand that caused Þórólfr's death. The desire for vengeance is also articulated by Skalla-Grímr, who reminds his father that they are honour-bound to

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<sup>16</sup> Jenny Jochens, *Old Norse Images of Women* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), p. 40.

exact retribution for Þórólfr (this stanza marks the commencement of a long-running feud between Kveld-Úlfr's sons and grandsons and the Norwegian royal family), but Kveld-Úlfr feels that although his spirit is willing, *þótt hugr hvettimk* (although the mind whetted it), his flesh is weak, and due to his advanced age he is personally unable to take such action. In the story to which he alludes, even the great battle-god Þórr cannot defeat old age.

It may be of some significance, in the context, that of the four references to figures from Norse mythology in this stanza (the norns, Óðinn, Gná and Elli), three are feminine. There may be a suggestion of the woman as inciter in the phrase *þótt hugr hvettimk*, and it is conceivable that these allusions are meant to imply that Kveld-Úlfr's position is weak, passive and perhaps effeminate. Kveld-Úlfr is certainly impotent against the powers of the norns, the valkyries, or Old Age as personified by Elli.<sup>17</sup> Another possibility is that they could simply be part of a tradition that associates female figures with misfortune and evil.<sup>18</sup>

Kveld-Úlfr's grief-stricken response to the news of Þórólfr's death is paralleled in a scene that occurs later in the saga. On hearing of the drowning of his son Bǫðvarr, Egill also takes to his bed in despair, refusing all food and drink. His daughter, Þorgerðr, manages to foil his plan by tricking him into drinking some milk and, once her father has revived a little, persuades him to compose a poem in honour of his lost son. In the resulting poem, *Sonatorrek*, which we will examine below, Egill also expresses his frustration at his inability to take revenge on Bǫðvarr's killer, the sea.

*Stanza 1: Norwegian translation*

<p>Nidingsdåd spørs der nordfra          – nornene er meg grumme –          for tidlig tok Tors fader          Torolv til Valhalls saler          Mødig og mett av dage          meg malmtingsferd er nektet;          om hevntanker i hugen verker,          hevndåd min harm ei stiller.<sup>19</sup></p>	<p>Cowardly deed is reported from the north          – the norns are dreadful to me –          too soon Þórr's father took          Þórólfr to Valhǫll's halls/rooms.          Weary and tired of life          to me 'metal-assembly journey' is denied;          although vengeful thoughts work in mind          vengeful deed alleviates not my grief.</p>
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<sup>17</sup> In one of the final *lausavísur* in the saga (st. 58) Egill also makes an association between old age and sexual impotence: 'Vals hefk váfur helsis/váfallr em ek skalla/blautr erum bergis fótar/borr, en hlust es þorin' (My neck trembles; I am inclined to fall and hurt my bald head; my penis is soft, and my hearing is diminished).

<sup>18</sup> See *Cold Counsel: The Women of Old Norse Literature and Myth*, ed. by Sarah M. Anderson and Karen Swenson (New York; London: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>19</sup> Hallvard Lie, trans. *Egil Skallagrímsson's saga*, in *Islandske ættesagaer*, vol. 1, ed. by Hallvard Lie (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1951), pp. 25-211 (p. 64), endnote: 'Tors fader. Odin. – *malmting*. "Sverdting", kamp' (Þórr's father: Óðinn. – metal-assembly: 'sword-assembly', battle). This volume will henceforth be referred to as *Islandske ættesagaer*, vol. 1.



*Commentary & Analysis*

In contrast to the Icelandic text, the Norwegian translation is immediately judgemental. The first word of stanza, *nidingsdåd* (cowardly deed), presupposes a *niding* or villain, which in this case must refer to Haraldr. It is easy to see from the prose context why King Haraldr and his actions could be called *niding*, but it is a sentiment that is not present in the Icelandic text of the stanza. *Spørs der nordfra* (is reported from the north) omits the specific information given in the source text, that Þórólfr died in the north on an island (*Nú fráke Þórólfr fóru und lok norðr í eyju*). The second line of the Norwegian translation is a very close rendering of the Icelandic except that the indefinite form of *norn*, implying ‘a’ or ‘one’, has been given the definite plural ending, implicating all three of the norns. To use an article in Norwegian is perhaps more logical than what is found in the original (although strict logic is perhaps not necessary in a poetical context), but it is probable that the definite plural form is used mainly here to provide two extra syllables, which then add up to seven, as in all the other lines in this stanza (except line 7).

This translation replaces the appellation for Óðinn, Þundr, with the phrase (or kenning) *Tors fader*. Presumably Lie felt that a Norwegian equivalent for ‘Thunderer,’ such as ‘Tordener’ might be too easily confused with ‘Tor’, whose name comprises the first element of the Norwegian word for thunder, *torden*. However, it is not quite accurate to speak of Óðinn (*Tors fader*) as having ‘taken’ Þórólfr to Valhøll; as we have seen above, Óðinn never actually takes the warriors himself – although he does choose them. It is the valkyries who fly down to the battlefield and carry away the slain. While it is implied in the Icelandic text that Þórólfr has been taken to Valhøll, the Norwegian translation makes this far more explicit. In Lie’s version Þórólfr is not only taken to Valhøll, but to its halls or rooms (*Valballs saler*); while *salr* is often used in kennings in Old Norse, such as *Óðins salr*, to refer to Valhøll, it does not seem to occur in the plural in this context. Perhaps Lie has been influenced in his wording by a phrase which occurs in stanza 11: *til hássalar Heljar* (to the high-halls of Hel), or he has possibly chosen to place the words thus in order to achieve the only example of *aðalending* in the stanza: *Valballs saler*. Lie also leaves out the kenning *þremja skyndi* (swinger of the sword-edges) here, which does not alter the basic meaning of the stanza to a great extent, although it does slightly diminish Þórólfr’s reputation as a warrior and omits the implication that Þórólfr died with a sword in his hand.

In the second helming we are told that the journey to battle is denied to the speaker but we are not told by whom or by what, merely that he is *mødig og mett av dage*

(tired and weary of life). *Om hevntanker i hugen verker* (although vengeful thoughts work in mind) is a rough approximation of *þótt hugr hvettimk* although the idea of ‘whetting’ is omitted. The final line of this translation *hevndåd min harm ei stiller* (vengeful deed alleviates not my grief),<sup>20</sup> transforms Kveld-Úlfr’s unequivocal wish for vengeance into a somewhat ambiguous statement. This could be simply stating a fact, i.e. that revenge has not taken place, and therefore his grief is not alleviated; which would be consistent with a medieval Scandinavian view of such a situation, but it could also be read as ‘no act of revenge will alleviate my grief’ which would reflect a more philosophical or even Christian perspective.

The overall effect of the Norwegian stanza is quite different from that of the Icelandic text. The addition and omission of words or even entire phrases gives rise to a subtle but undeniable change in the impressions evoked, although the basic meaning remains the same. The Norwegian translation comes across as being relatively subjective, with even a touch of tenderness, perhaps. In the Norwegian version Kveld-Úlfr’s condemnation of the *nidingsdåd* makes the poetry more personal than it is in the original, as does the use of the word *fader*, the phrase *mødig og mett av dage*, moreover, conveys not purely physical restrictions, but a world-weariness and a heaviness of heart or resignation. There is no sense of a struggle, which is implied in the Icelandic, however slightly, by the term *fangvina*.

In the Norwegian version the mythological elements are very much reduced, to the extent that it seems that the pagan aspects are being deliberately played down. *Fangvina Þórs* disappears completely and with it the allusion to the story of Þórr and Elli. *At ganga at þingi malm-Gnáar* (going to the meeting of the metal-goddess (valkyrie) > BATTLE) becomes *malmtingsferd* (metal-assembly journey), which removes the association with the goddess/valkyrie. Apart from the reference to the norms, the demystified Norwegian version removes any idea of malevolent females and gives a prosaic tone to the whole episode. While in the Icelandic text the ‘stilling’ of Kveld-Úlfr’s grief is not an issue, the Norwegian version implies that he is seeking peace of mind, and it is possible that the translator, consciously or otherwise, is alluding to a Christian heaven when he refers to *Valhallas saler*.<sup>21</sup>

Some care has been taken with the positioning of words in the stanza. For example, Torolv corresponds exactly with Þórólfr in the Icelandic and the placing of *Nidingsdåd* and *hevndåd* as the first words of the first and last lines creates an impression of symmetry, perhaps suggesting that one act will cancel out the other.

<sup>20</sup> The negative particle *ei* is an archaic form for *ikke* (not).

<sup>21</sup> John 14. 2: ‘In my father’s house are many mansions’.



*Stanza 1: Spanish translation*

<p>Nuevas tuve del norte,  hostiles son las normas<sup>22</sup>  muy pronto eligió Odín<sup>23</sup>  mató a Þórólf el guerrero;  pues de Thor la enemiga<sup>24</sup>  me impide ir al thing, lenta es,  de valquirias,<sup>25</sup> la venganza;  mas la idea me aguija.<sup>26</sup></p>	<p>News I had from the north  hostile are the norms  very early/soon did Óðinn choose  he killed Þórólfr the warrior;  (however) of Þórr the (female) enemy*  prevents me from going to the 'thing', slow is,  of valkyries, the vengeance  but the idea goads me.</p>
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\* i.e. the enemy of Þórr, see Bernárdez's explanatory footnote 52 below.

*Commentary & Analysis*

As this is the first example of a *dróttkvætt* stanza the reader encounters in the Spanish translation, it is not surprising that there are so many explanatory notes accompanying a text which contains several terms and references to Norse mythology that a non-specialist reader would not understand without some clarification. Therefore, while the name of the god 'Odín' might be recognizable to a general Spanish audience, it will probably not be aware of the manner in which he chose the *guerreros* ('warriors', here referring to the *einherjar*) from the battlefield sending the *valquirias* (valkyries) as emissaries to collect their bodies and take them back to Valhøll (see footnote 51 below). In the previous footnote (50) Bernárdez explains the *normas* as the 'three old women who ordained the destinies of men' and compares them to the Greek *parcas*, obviously assuming a certain familiarity on the readers' part with these figures of classical mythology. The similarity between the Roman Parcae (Nona, Decima and Morta), or their Greek equivalents the Moirae (Cloto, Laquesis and Atropos), and the Norns of Norse mythology (Urðr, Verðandi and Skuld) has often been noted, but the suggestion of such a correspondence here may also lead the reader to make further associations between Old Norse poetry and classical literature as they read through the poetry in the rest of the saga. Likewise, the use of the terms *nuevas*

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, p. 80, footnote 50: 'Las normas eran tres ancianas que establecían los destinos de los hombres, equivalentes a las *parcas* griegas' (the norms were three old women who ordained the destinies of men, equivalent to the Greek Parcae).

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, p. 80, footnote 51: 'Odín elegía – él sólo, o las valquirias en representación suya – a los guerreros que deberían morir y acompañarle al Valhalla. De ahí que se le considere, entre otras cosas, el dios de los muertos.' (Óðinn chose – he alone, or the valkyries on his behalf – the warriors who should die and accompany him to Valhøll. Because of this he is considered, among other things, as the god of the dead).

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, p. 81, footnote 52: 'La enemiga de Thor es la vejez, con la que peleó cuando estuvo en el palacio de Útgarda-Loki, según se cuenta en la *Edda* de Snorri' (The enemy of Þórr is old age, with which he fought when he was in the palace of Útgarda-Loki, as it is related in Snorri's *Edda*).

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, p. 81, footnote 53: 'El thing de las valquirias es un *kenning* para "la lucha"' (The thing of the valkyries is a *kenning* for 'the battle').

<sup>26</sup> *Saga de Egil Skallagrímsson*, pp. 80-81.

and *mas*, words which are strongly associated with Spanish medieval literature, may evoke in the reader's imagination, classics of Spanish tradition such as the *Cantar del Mío Cid*.<sup>27</sup>

For the Spanish reader, assuming he or she is familiar to some extent with medieval literature, probably the most striking aspect of the above stanza is the unnatural word order, which makes some of the sentences almost incomprehensible. The second half of the stanza is particularly convoluted. A more natural word order of the second helming, for instance, would be 'pues la enemiga de Thor me impide ir al thing de valquirias, la venganza es lenta, mas la idea me aguija' (the female enemy of Þórr prevents me from going to the thing of valkyries, vengeance is slow, but the idea goads me). As I have indicated previously this approach is probably an attempt to imitate the convoluted syntax of the Icelandic text in order to give the reader some idea of the original format, but, as we have seen in chapter 3, it is not without precedent in the Spanish literary tradition. It is reminiscent of *culteranismo*, a literary style that emerged in Spain in the late sixteenth century and was characterised by an 'abusive richness of strange, innovative metaphors, the exaggerated use of 'cultisms' and complex syntax.'<sup>28</sup>

### *Stanza 13*

This is one of the few stanzas in the saga that is recited by a woman. Having been invited by Earl Arnfinnr to a banquet, Egill has been paired as a drinking companion with the earl's daughter, but when he takes his place in her seat she reacts by reciting the following verses:

Hvat skaltu, sveinn, í sess minn?  
þvít þú sjaldan hefr gefnar  
vargi varmar bráðir,  
vesa vilk ein of mína;  
sáttaðu hrafn í hausti  
of hræsolli gjalla,  
vastaðu at, þars eggjar  
á skelþunnar runnusk.

### *Prose word order*

Hvat skaltu, sveinn, í sess mín? þvít sjaldan hefr þú gefnar vargi varmar bráðir; vilk vesa ein of mína; sáttaðu hrafn í hausti gjalla of hræsolli; vastaðu at, þars skelþunnar eggjar runnusk á.

<sup>27</sup> The word *nuevas* occurs several times in the *Cantar del Mío Cid*, for example in line 957: 'Llegaron las nuevas al conde de barcelona' (the news arrived to the Count of Barcelona). The modern Spanish equivalent is *noticias*.

<sup>28</sup> *Diccionario de la lengua española*, 22nd edn (Real Academia Española, 2001).



*Translation*

What do you want, boy, (getting) into my seat? Because you have seldom given wolf warm pieces of flesh; I want to be alone (?with mine);<sup>29</sup> you did not see a raven croaking over the corpse-swill in autumn, you were not present where shell-thin blades ran against each other.

*Commentary & Analysis*

By addressing him as *sveinn*, a word normally used to address boys or even servants, the earl's daughter implies that Egill is not her equal, and she challenges his right to share her bench by suggesting that he has not sufficiently proved himself in battle. Her insults take the form of an inversion of three typical kennings for warrior or battle.<sup>30</sup> For example, prefiguring the kenning, *gunnvala bræðir* (feeder of raven > WARRIOR) in strophe 19, she claims *þú sjaldan hefr gefnar vargi varmar bráðir* (you have seldom given wolf warm pieces of flesh), the accusation being, of course, that Egill has neither killed, nor provided the wolf with carrion, and is therefore not a true warrior. The next charge that the earl's daughter levels at him is that he 'did *not* see a raven croaking over "corpse-swill" in autumn' (*sáttaðu brafni í hausti gjalla of hræsollu*), a statement which, like the previous one, refers to one of the most common images in skaldic poetry, that of a carrion-animal feeding on the corpses left on the battlefield. Arfinnr's daughter's final reproach to Egill is that he was *not* present where shell-thin blades ran against each other (*vastaðu at, þars skelþunnar eggjar runnusk á*), an allegation which is again based on the presumption that a worthy man would have been present at, and would have participated in battle. She makes it clear that she would rather be alone than share a seat with a man who does not live up to her heroic ideals.

Although the tone of the stanza is haughty and indignant, with perhaps even a hint of petulance in the line *vilk vesa ein of mína* (I want to be alone), there is something humorous in the aspect of a young girl challenging a boy of equal age concerning his military prowess. However, as Egill retorts in the following stanza, he has already proven himself to be a valiant and skilful warrior. The earl's daughter's remoulding of stereotypical images from Icelandic poetic diction itself becomes part of a formulaic exchange between the two.

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<sup>29</sup> It is not clear what 'mine' refers to here.

<sup>30</sup> cf. st. 28, chapter 4.

*Stanza 13: Norwegian translation*

Hva vil den pilten i plassen min? pak deg unna, gutt, som svintest! Visselig ikke har vargen varm-mat hos deg fått smake, sjelden har du sett svarte sårfulgen i likslintrer slite, langt av lei var du der larmende stål-leiken sto! <sup>31</sup>	What is that boy doing in my place? get packing, young man, right away! The wolf has certainly not got to taste warm-food from you, Seldom have you seen the black wound-bird tear apart tough/stringy corpse-meat you were far away when the noisy steel-play took place!
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*Commentary & Analysis*

In a departure from the Icelandic text in which, in the first line of the stanza, the girl addresses Egill directly as ‘you’ (*hvat skaltu*), this version directs the question to the room at large, making public what is in the Icelandic text a private dialogue. The following line *pak deg unna, gutt, som svintest!* (Get packing, young man, right away!), however, is far more direct than the original *vilk vesa ein of mina* (I want to be alone). The language of this line is informal, and the repeated use of the terms for boy (*pilt* and *gutt*) in lines 1-2 gives the impression that the speaker is much older than the addressee, and is annoyed by this time-wasting. Lie presumably chooses *pilt* over the modern Norwegian cognate *svein* for the purposes of alliteration, but this does not greatly alter the tone of the line as both words have cognates in Old Ice. (*piltr* and *sveinn*) and have more or less the same connotations (although *sveinn* is sometimes used in the sense of ‘servant’, ‘attendant’ in Old Icelandic). *Gutt*, however, is a modern Norwegian word (which is not associated with Old Norse) and therefore contributes to a more contemporary mood than *pilt*. The phrasing of *som svintest!* introduces a sense of impatience or even urgency, which is confirmed by the use of an exclamation mark. The sense of energy and emotion in the Norwegian text is in contrast to the tone of the original phrase, which is one of sulkiness or even boredom.

In line 3 Lie replaces the *því* (because) of the original with the word *visselig* (certainly, indeed), as opposed to a more literal translation such as *fordi* (because). *Visselig* does recreate the emphasis in the original stanza that Egill has ‘seldom’ (i.e. never) provided the wolf with carrion, but loses the explanatory nature of the statement. *Vargr* is rendered here with *varg*, rather than the more common *ulv*. *Varg* is more poetic than *ulv* and by retaining it the translator would probably hope to evoke associations with Old Norse in a modern Norwegian mind, as well for alliterative purposes. *Vargr/varg* also has a wider range of

<sup>31</sup> *Islandske ættesager*, vol. 1, p. 105, endnote: ‘sårfulgen: Åtselfulgen, ravenen. - likfulgen: D. s.’ (the wound-bird: the carrion-bird, the raven. - the corpse-bird: the same).



connotations than *ulv*.<sup>32</sup> There are some further minor differences. The phrasing of lines 3-4 in this version creates a tone different to that of the original, which states that ‘you seldom gave the wolf fresh meat’; here the statement is: ‘the wolf never got meat from you’. The Icelandic phrase for the meat, *varmar bráðir* (warm raw flesh), is more gory and graphic than the Norwegian *varm-mat* (warm-food). *Mat* in Norwegian (cognate with English ‘meat’) is a general term that refers to any food or nourishment. As I have not been able to find any other occurrences of the word *varm-mat* I assume that it is a compound invented by Lie who obviously felt it was more appropriate here than *varm-kjøtt* (warm/hot-meat).

In lines 5-6 Lie once again selects his vocabulary on the basis of alliteration, choosing not to render *brafn* with Norwegian *ravn*, but instead inventing his own kenning to describe the raven, i.e. *svarte sårfulgen*. He thus changes the meaning from ‘you did not see the raven cry over corpse-swirl’ to ‘you have seldom seen the black woundbird tear apart tough corpse-meat’. Perhaps he feels that the image of the raven crowing over the freshly-slain, although a recurrent one in Old Icelandic poetry, is not one which will be readily understood by a Norwegian readership, and so chooses the more explicit scene of the bird tearing the flesh apart. It also clarifies the fact that the food the wolf would taste is the same corpse-meat as the raven enjoys. The phrase that Lie employs to denote the raven here, *svarte sårfulgen*, is comparable to kennings for raven that appear in skaldic poetry such as: *sárgagl* (wound-gosling);<sup>33</sup> *sárgammr* (wound-vulture) or *valfugl* (bird of the slain).

The third accusation which the girl makes in this stanza is that Egill was not present at a battle. She simply states ‘you were not there (*vastaðu at*) where shell-thin blades ran together’. Lie exaggerates this accusation somewhat when he translates it as *langt av lei var du* (you were a long way away). For the kenning she uses for battle *þars skelþunnar eggjar runnusk á* (where shell-thin blades ran against each other), Lie replaces one of his own, *larmende stál-leiken* (noisy steel-play), a modification of an Old Icelandic kenning *leiker stála* (play of swords > BATTLE).

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<sup>32</sup> For a discussion of the etymology of *varg* see Harald Björvand and Fredrik Otto Lindeman, *Våre arveord: Etymologisk ordbok* (Novus forlag: Oslo, 2000), p. 1021.

<sup>33</sup> See st. 5, chapter 4.

*Stanza 13: Spanish translation*

¿Qué haces, muchacho, en mi asiento? Rara vez alimentaste con carne caliente al lobo, prefiero quedarme sola; no viste al cuervo en otoño cantando sobre la sangre, no estuviste donde corren los filos acerados. <sup>34</sup>	What are you doing, boy, in my seat? you rarely fed the wolf with warm flesh I prefer to remain alone; You didn't see the raven in autumn singing over the blood, you were not where steel edges run.
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*Comment & Analysis*

In this stanza, one of the less complicated of the *lausavísur*, the translator has been able to achieve quite a literal translation into Spanish. The first line, *¿Qué haces, muchacho, en mi asiento?*, for example, is a word-for-word rendering of the original text, except perhaps for the replacement of the verb *skulu* with *hacer*. *Muchacho* is an appropriate choice for *sveinn*, as it is a word used specifically for young boys; it is a word generally used by older people towards younger ones, rather than by young people towards each other. It also alliterates with *mi* in the same line and *alimentaste* in line 2.

Lines 2-3 are also syntactically quite close to the Icelandic text but there is a rather more variation in the lexis here. *Alimentar* (to feed) is more specific than *gefa* (to give), but *carne caliente* has a broader range of connotations than *bráðir*, as the Spanish language makes no distinction between ‘meat’ and ‘flesh’. In order to avoid evoking an image of hot (cooked) meat, the translator could have chosen the adjective *fresca* (fresh) instead of *caliente*, but he obviously preferred to imitate the characteristic alliteration of *dróttkvætt* verse by maintaining two alliterating sounds in the odd line, which link to the *hofuðstafr* (*quedarme*) in the even line.

The most significant difference in these lines, however, is the omission of the word *því* or *því at* (because) in line 2. The girl does not feel that Egill is worthy to share her seat *because*, as she explains in the next line of the Icelandic text, he has seldom (an understatement for ‘never’) fed the wolf corpse-meat; i.e. he has never killed a man. Without the word ‘because’ (*því*) there is no conjunction linking the first two lines and the affront to Egill’s masculinity does not follow on logically from the question. The word

<sup>34</sup> *Saga de Egil Skallagrímsson*, p. 156. Footnote 119 on this page, ‘Sobre la costumbre de beber en parejas [about the custom of drinking in pairs] cfr. nota 17’, directs the reader to footnote 17, p. 26 : ‘En las fiestas era costumbre que durante un rato se bebiera en parejas con el mismo cuerno; podían ser parejas de hombres, o de hombre y mujer, y en ese rato se charlaba y a menudo se discutían importantes asuntos personales’ (It was the custom at festivals that for a certain space of time people would drink in pairs from the same horn; they could be pairs of men, or of a man and a woman, and in this time they would chat and often discuss important personal business).



*prefero* (I prefer) in line 4 gives a clue as to the girl's motivation: she would prefer to be alone than to share a seat with an unmanly man. This is not a direct translation of the term used in the Icelandic *vil ek*, simply 'I want' or 'I wish', and Bernárdez is probably following Sigurður Nordal's suggestion 'eg vil (heldur) vera ein um mína (hitu)' (I would rather be alone with my (fire)).

In line 5 Bernárdez preserves the reference to autumn (*otoño*) but in this version the raven is singing (*cantando*) over the blood (*sangre*) while in the Icelandic he cries out (*gjalla*) over the corpse-swill (*bræsoll*). There is no exact equivalent in Spanish for *soll*, as it is used in this context, to refer to a gory mess, the only possibility is the one Bernárdez has chosen, i.e. *sangre*, although he could have said 'cadáveres ensangrentados' (bloody corpses) to convey the meaning more accurately. The selection of the verb *cantar* in this rendition is more difficult to understand, as a raven is obviously not a songbird; rather it tends to emit a harsh croaking sound. Perhaps Bernárdez here is trying to create a strong impact on the reader by his incongruous use of *cantar*; the word is bound to evoke a pleasant image of a songbird, which throws the horror of the scene into higher relief. This is a device often employed by Egill himself, as we have seen in stanza 19, for example. In the final couplet Bernárdez reduces *skelþunnar eggjar* (shell-thin blades) to the more prosaic *filos acerados* (steel blades) and translates *runnusk á* (run together) as simply *corren* ('run' in the sense of 'move'), thus diminishing the reading of the phrase as a kenning for battle where swords run against each other and clash.

Interestingly, and perhaps coincidentally, *no viste* (line 5) and *no estuviste* (line 7) rhyme, and in this respect mirror the positioning of *sáttaðu* (line 5) and *vastaðu* (line 7) in the Icelandic version.

#### *Stanza 14*

When Earl Arnfinnr's daughter finishes her speech Egill takes hold of her and sits her beside him, and recites a verse. We are not given any further details in the prose text as to how he took hold of her, whether roughly or tenderly, but we are told that after he had spoken his verse that they pair drank together all evening and got on very well.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> ÍF 2, p. 121: 'þá drukku þau saman um kveldit ok váru allkát'.

Farit hefk blóðgum brandi,  
 svát mér benþiðurr fylgði,  
 ok gjallanda geiri;  
 gangr vas harðr af víkingum;  
 gerðum reiðir róstu,  
 rann eldr of sjöt manna,  
 létum blóðga búka  
 í borghliðum sæfask.

*Prose word order*

Ek hef farit blóðgum brandi ok gjallanda geiri svát benþiðurr fylgði mér; gangr vas harðr af víkingum; reiðir gerðum róstu, rann eldr of manna sjöt; létum blóðga búka sæfask í borghliðum.

*Translation*

I've proceeded with bloody sword and whistling spear in such a way that a wound-grouse > RAVEN accompanied me; the onslaught of the Vikings was hard. Angry, we made battle; fire ran over dwellings of men; we allowed bloody bodies to fall/collapse in the gates of strongholds.

*Commentary & Analysis*

The girl's deliberately provocative comments elicit the above response from Egill and in this stanza he refutes her accusations one by one. He counters the first charge of not providing the wolf with food by saying that 'we' (i.e. he and his Viking band) *létum blóðga búka í borghliðum sæfask* (allowed bloody bodies to fall in the fortress gates). In response to *sáttaðu hrafn í hausti of hræsolli gjalla* (you did not see a raven croaking over the corpse-swirl in Autumn) he says that in fact the raven or 'wound-grouse' followed *him* (*benþiðurr fylgði mér*), presumably because he was such a prolific provider of carrion. And finally, in answer to the claim that he had not been present at a battle, Egill replies: *gangr vas harðr af víkingum; reiðir gerðum róstu* (the onslaught of the Vikings was hard. Angry we made battle).

Thus stanzas 13 and 14 appear to be a sort of verbal duel between the two young people; the first strophe being a challenge to which Egill responds. However, while stanza 13 is full of references to 'you' (*skaltu, sáttaðu, vastaðu*) and 'me' (*minn, mina*), Egill's riposte focuses on himself (*hefke, mér*) and his Viking companions (*gerðum, létum*) and he neither refers directly to his drinking companion or their situation nor responds to her first question *Hvat skaltu, sveinn, í sess minn?* (What do you want, boy, (getting) into my seat?). The specific reference in this stanza is to the attack on Lund, which took place a short while before. It tallies with the prose description of the event which refers to Lund as a *borg* (fortified town/fortress), in using the word *borghlið*, and describes the great loss of life



(*varð þar mannfall mikit*), the sacking of the town and its destruction by burning at the hands of the Vikings before they departed.<sup>36</sup>

According to Gabriel Turville-Petre the form of this stanza is irregular, and ‘the imagery and syntax of a kind which a young girl could understand’.<sup>37</sup> The saga is not explicit about the age of the earl’s daughter; all we are told is that she is ‘allfríða ok þá vel frumvaxta’ (very beautiful and at that time in her prime).<sup>38</sup> She cannot therefore be much younger than Egill, although the tone of her stanza would suggest that she feels herself to be his senior.<sup>39</sup> It seems to me likely that in his first potentially romantic encounter, an adolescent Egill would want to impress a girl not only by recounting his deeds but also with his poetic ability. This stanza is certainly not one of the most artistic of the *lausavísur*, however. Its language is formulaic, it contains only one kenning, and, as Turville-Petre points out, its uncomplicated syntax means that it is instantly comprehensible. This could be due to its function. The exchange between Egill and the earl’s daughter takes place in a domestic, intimate setting and, although it could hardly be called a conversation, it is perhaps appropriate in this context that the poetic response to stanza 13 is not a high-flown, cryptic piece. It also provides the perfect opportunity for a little boasting on Egill’s part.

#### *Stanza 14: Norwegian Translation*

Brukt har jeg blodete sverdet og blistrende spydet lange, slik at likfuglen mitt følge likte. Larmen sto av viking-laget! Harme vi om oss herjet, hus og hjem åt ilden, blodige buker lot vi i borgléene lemlestet ligge. <sup>40</sup>	I have used the bloodied sword and long whistling spear in such a way that the corpse-bird liked my company. The noise arose from the Viking-band! Angry, we harried around us, the fire consumed houses and homes, we made bloody bellies lie dismembered (mutilated) in the town gates
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#### *Commentary & Analysis*

In the first lines of this translation Lie renders the verb *fara* (to travel) in line 1 of the original with the Norwegian *bruke* (to use); and replaces *benþiðurr* (wound-grouse > RAVEN) with his own kenning, *likfuglen*, but otherwise follows to the Icelandic text quite closely.

<sup>36</sup> ÍF 2, p. 118: ‘ræntu þeir kaupstaðinn, en brenndu, áðr þeir skildusk við’.

<sup>37</sup> *Scaldic Poetry*, p. 19. Stanza 15 is equally uncomplicated.

<sup>38</sup> ÍF 2, p. 119.

<sup>39</sup> According to the chronology of the saga Egill should be about fifteen years old at this time.

<sup>40</sup> *Íslandske ættesager*, vol. 1, p. 105, endnote: ‘*sárfuglen*: Átsselfuglen, ravnén. - *likfuglen*: D. s.’ (*the wound-bird*: The carrion-bird, the raven. - *the corpse-bird*: the same).

In line 3 Lie lays stress on the noise or tumult generated by the attack, whereas the Icelandic text makes a relatively general statement to the effect that the going or onslaught (*gangr*) of the Vikings was hard. Although *larmen* does not alliterate with any other word in the line, it does rhyme with *harne* in the following verse, a line in which Lie changes the focus of the original to a certain extent. Where the Icelandic has *reiðr gerðum róstu* (angry we made battle) Lie opts for *harne vi om oss herjet* (angry we harried around us), which is a closer reflection of the scene as recounted in the prose text than of the stanza itself. By employing the word *herje*, which traditionally categorises the Vikings as plunderers, he is reinforcing stereotypical impressions (even though in this case the description might well be accurate). In line 6 Lie again changes the verb *renna* (*rann*) for *ete* (pret., *át*) thus removing the idea of motion that the former word implies. ‘Fire ran over the dwellings of men’ is more dramatic than ‘fire consumed houses and homes’.

In line 7 we are provided with another instance of how closely related the Icelandic and Norwegian languages are. According to Cleasby and Vígfusson’s *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, *búkr* refers to the trunk of the body, especially ‘the trunk without the head’. If it is indeed decapitated bodies that are meant in the Icelandic version then this is certainly supported by the Modern Norwegian cognate of that word *buk* (abdomen/belly/stomach), and in case the reader is in any doubt Lie adds the past participle *lemlestet* (dismembered) to complete the gruesome image, which emphasises the brutality of the Vikings even further. Like the Icelandic version Lie places these dismembered trunks in the gates of the *borg* (fortified town).

#### *Stanza 14: Spanish Translation*

<p>Fui con la hoja ensangrentada  el cuervo me acompañaba,  y fui con la lanza aullante;  bien luchaban los vikingos;  irritados combatimos  y les quemamos las casas,  sangre en los cuerpos, caían  ante la alta empalizada.<sup>41</sup></p>	<p>I went with bloodied blade,  the raven accompanied me  and I went with the yelling spear;  the Vikings fought well;  angry we battled  and we burned their houses  blood on the bodies, they fell  in front of the high palisade.</p>
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#### *Commentary & Analysis*

Because of the uncomplicated structure of this stanza, the Spanish version, like the Norwegian one, is able to follow the original line-for-line if not word-for-word, and each line of the Spanish translation corresponds to its equivalent in the Icelandic.

<sup>41</sup> *Saga de Egil Skallagrímsson*, p. 156.



In this version Bernárdez preserves the notion of accompaniment, of Egill proceeding on his way with the weapons and being accompanied by the carrion-bird, here identified as the raven. In this translation the bodies are bloody, but no mention is made of mutilation or decapitation, and in the last line the Spanish version departs from the source text in stating that the bodies fall *ante la alta empalizada* (in front of the high palisade) as opposed to ‘in the gates of the fortress’. This ‘palisade’ is obviously a reference to the *tréborg* or ‘wooden fort’, which the prose text describes as surrounding the town of Lund.<sup>42</sup> The saga goes on to tell how the townspeople placed guards on this fortification when they saw Egill and his men approaching. However, when the Vikings entered the town the inhabitants fled: ‘síðan flýðu bæjarmenn; varð þar mannfall mikit’ (afterwards the townsmen fled; there was great loss of life).<sup>43</sup> This would explain the idea of bodies falling in the gates (or gateways) of the town; the townspeople were killed as they tried to escape. *Ante la alta empalizada*, however, suggests something slightly different. As *ante* could mean either ‘before’ or ‘in front of’ it is not clear whether the people have fallen outside the palisade (defending it, for example) or inside it.

In this stanza, as in the previous one, Bernárdez has linked the lines in pairs by alliteration. In lines 3-4, for instance, the alliterating sound is clearly /l/:

y fui con la lanza aullante;  
bien luchaban los vikingos;

Strictly speaking, however, according to the rules of *dróttkvætt* metre, it is only initial consonants or vowels in stressed syllables that alliterate with each other; unstressed syllables (such as *la* or *los* here) do not enter into the schema. These lines also contain an example of *aðalbending* (line 3) and *skothending* (line 4), although strictly speaking, in *dróttkvætt* verse full internal rhyme is required in even lines.

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<sup>42</sup> ÍF 2, p. 118: ‘var þar tréborg um staðinn’. Incidentally, this line is not translated in the Spanish version of the saga.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*

## SONATORREK

*The Prose Context*

*Sonatorrek* occurs in a well-known scene in chapter 78 of the saga. Egill's beloved son Bǫðvarr drowns when his boat sinks and his body is washed up on the shore. When Egill hears the news, he immediately goes to find Bǫðvarr's body. He picks it up and rides out with it to Digranes and has it buried in the mound with Skalla-Grímr:

It is said that when they buried Bǫðvarr, that Egill was dressed [thus]: his hose was bound tightly on his legs; he had a red fustian tunic, the upper part of which was tight and laced at the sides; and the story goes that he swelled up so much, that the tunic burst off him, as did his hose.<sup>44</sup>

After that he went home to Borg and locked himself in his bed-closet for two days without eating or drinking. On the third day his wife sent for his daughter Þorgerðr, who managed to trick her father into drinking some milk. She then suggested that while they were alive it would be appropriate to compose a memorial poem (*erfikuæði*) in honour of Bǫðvarr, as she did not expect her brother Þorsteinn to compose one. Egill replied that he did not think he would be able to compose a poem but that he would try. We are next told that Egill had another son called Gunnarr who had died shortly before, and then follows this statement: 'and this is the beginning of the poem' (this is where the first stanza is quoted in *M* and the entire poem is quoted in modern editions). The saga goes on to say that during the process of composing the poem Egill cheered up somewhat, and when he had finished it he recited it to Ásgerðr, Þorgerðr, and the rest of the household. Then he left his bed and went to sit in the high-seat. He called the poem *Sonatorrek* and held a funeral feast for his son according to the old custom.

*The Metre*

*Sonatorrek* is composed in *kviðuháttr* (lay form), the metre that is also used in *Arinbjarnarkviða*, and in the great genealogical poems *Ynglingatal* (composed by Þjóðólfr of Hvinir) and *Háleygatal* (by Eyvindr skáldaspillir). As in *dróttkvætt*, and indeed all Old Norse poetic measure, the half-lines are linked in pairs by alliteration (this is indicated in italics in the sample stanza below). A non-structural but characteristic feature of *kviðuháttr* is the

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<sup>44</sup> ÍF 2, p. 244: 'En svá er sagt, þá er þeir settu Bǫðvar niðr, at Egill var búinn: hosan var strengð fast at beini; hann hafði fustanskyrtíl rauðan, þröngvan upphlutinn ok láz at síðu; en þat er sǫgn manna, at han þrúnaði svá; at kyrtillinn rifnaði af honum ok svá hosumar.'



carrying of internal rhymes across the metrical caesura, as an additional (and optional) poetic ornament (this is indicated in bold in the sample stanza below).

In *kviðuháttir* stanzas the odd half-lines consist of three syllables and the even half-lines of four and appear to have been counted strictly. The syllables can be weighed as long or short.

*Sonatorrek 5*

Þó <b>m</b> unk <b>m</b> itt	3
ok <b>m</b> óður hrør	4
<b>f</b> öður fall	3
fyrst of telja,	4
þat berk <b>ú</b> t	3
ór <b>o</b> rðhofi	4
<b>m</b> ærðar timbr	3
<b>m</b> áli laufgat.	4

Regarding syllable counting in *kviðuháttir* the following rules apply:

- A long syllable contains a long vowel or a diphthong followed by one or more consonants, e.g. Þó, **m**óður, út, ór, **m**ærðar, **m**áli, laufgat.
- A syllable is also long if it has a short vowel followed by a consonant group or by a double consonant, e.g. mitt, fall, fyrst, **t**elja, **o**rðhofi, timbr.
- A pair of syllables, of which the first must be short and the second may be so, counts as metrically equivalent to a long syllable, e.g. föður. This phenomenon is known as resolution.
- An enclitic, such as *es* (later *er*), the relative particle, or *ek* 'I', becomes non-syllabic by dropping its vowel, e.g. ber'k, mun'k. This phenomenon is known as neutralization.<sup>45</sup>

In his translation, Lie adheres very strictly to the syllable counting requirements, and indeed to the alliteration of *kviðuháttir*. Apart from a very small number of exceptions, all of the odd lines in the Norwegian translation contain three syllables and the even lines four, which results in a cadence very similar to the source text. As we have noted in chapter one, words in the Spanish language are characteristically polysyllabic and for the Spanish translator, composing lines of three or four syllables has proved practically impossible.

<sup>45</sup> Russell Poole, 'Metre and Metrics', in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Language and Culture*, ed. by Rory McTurk (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 265-84.

Nevertheless the Spanish translation is rhythmic and Bernárdez has managed to preserve alliteration and internal rhyme to a certain extent.

*Analysis and Commentary on Text and Translations*

*Sonatorrek 1*

<p>Mjök erum tregt tungu at hræra eða loptvætt ljóðpundara; esa nú vænligt of Viðurs þýfi né hógdrægt ór hugar fylgsni.</p>	<p>Moving the tongue is very difficult for me, as is raising aloft of song-steelyard &gt; TONGUE; Viðurr's theft &gt; POETRY is not now to be expected/likely, nor easily dragged/borne, out of the hiding-place(s) of thought &gt; BREAST.</p>
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In this stanza Egill focuses on the process of poetic composition and the difficulty that attends it. The very act of moving his tongue seems to require great effort, as we can see in lines 1-2 and again in lines 3-4. Not all scholars agree on the interpretation of these last two lines, however. The earliest manuscripts vary in their versions of line 3: *M* has 'ór lopt ætt', while *K* has 'eðr loptvæi'; but as neither of these interpretations makes much sense, it is usually edited along the lines of Sigurður Nordal's emendation, reproduced above. Nordal cites Guðmundur Finnbogason's suggestion that *loptvætt* or *loptvægi* might mean 'lifting', 'the action of raising aloft' and that *ljóðpundari* is the tongue or a symbol for the gift of poetry, which weighs each word in the poem on golden scales (*gullvog*). If this interpretation is correct, these two lines refer to the poet's weighing of words to fit the metre of the poem, and this in turn fits well with the theme we have outlined above. The other chief topic of this stanza is the story of the poetic mead, which, at least according to the version of the story in the *Snorra Edda*, was stolen out of Giantland by Óðinn (Viðurr). Here, poetry, or poetic inspiration, is envisaged as a tangible (liquid) substance which must be drawn out of its 'hiding-place' in the cavern of the mind.

The idea of difficulty, heaviness or sluggish movements is strongly suggested by the lexis of this stanza. Words such as *tregt* or *hógdrægt* convey a sense of the tremendous exertion it cost the poet to try to compose, an impression that is further emphasised by the references to weights and balances. According to Turville-Petre, *kviðuhátt* is a 'swift-moving' metre, but in the case of this stanza surely takes on a sombre, heavy, almost plodding rhythm, as exemplified in the endings: *-tregt*, *-vætt*, *-ligt*, *-drægt*. The poet is



pessimistic about his ability to summon poetry from the depths of his heart. According to the prose context, he did not expect ever to have to do so again.

*Pérdida Irreperable de los Hijos 1*

<p>La lengua se resiste a alzarse en mi boca, no puedo levantar la balanza del verso;<sup>46</sup> no encuentro placer en el néctar de Odín,<sup>47</sup> no es fácil que surja de su hogar en mi pecho.</p>	<p>The tongue refuses to raise itself in my mouth; I cannot lift the scales of the verse; I find no pleasure in Óðinn's nectar; It is unlikely that it will surge out of its home in my breast.</p>
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In the first lines of this interpretation, the focus shifts slightly, in that the emphasis here is on the tongue, which, as if it has a will of its own, stubbornly resists the poet's attempts to move it. It is not until the following pair of lines that the subject reverts to the poet ('I cannot lift...'), whose point of view is indicated in the first line of the Icelandic original. In the second helming, however, the differences between the Icelandic and Spanish texts are more significant. The kenning *Viðurs þýfi* (Viðurr's or Óðinn's theft > POETRY), for example, is rendered *el néctar de Odín* (Óðinn's nectar) evoking a set of mythological referents different from those in the original. While *el néctar de Odín* could be considered an apt kenning for poetry, and indeed would be instantly understood as such by anyone familiar with skaldic verse, a non-specialist Spanish reader would more likely be reminded of the drink of the gods of Ancient Greece, known as 'nectar'. When the gods are deprived of their divine food and drink (ambrosia and nectar) they become breathless, and lie down spiritless and voiceless in a manner reminiscent of Egill's apathy. Of course in Spanish *néctar* can also refer to the sweet juice that bees and other insects extract from flowers, and there is thus a certain association with honey, although mead (in Spanish *hidromiel*) is not a well-known beverage in the Spanish context. In the footnote for this kenning (see below), Bernárdez explains that *el néctar de Odín* refers to 'poesía' (poetry), but he could equally well have translated *Viðurs þýfi* as 'el robo de Odín' (Óðinn's theft) with an accompanying explanatory note.

The entire line *no encuentro placer en el néctar de Odín* (I find no pleasure in Óðinn's nectar), contains a sentiment that is not present in the first stanza of the original, where there is no expectation of pleasure, although it perhaps anticipates the term *fagnafundur* in

<sup>46</sup> *Saga de Egil Skallagrímsson*, p. 292, footnote 218 bis: 'Balanza del verso: "la lengua"' (*Scales of the verse: 'the tongue'*).

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*, p. 292, footnote 219: 'Néctar de Odín: "poesía"' (Óðinn's nectar: 'poetry').

the next stanza. In the final couplet the suggestion in the Spanish translation is that the poet is waiting for poetry to ‘surge’ forth from his breast whereas in the Icelandic text the poet feels that it will be difficult to drag it out (*né hógdrægt ór hugar fylgsni*). In fact the line *no es fácil que surja de su hogar en mi pecho* (it is unlikely that it will surge out of its home in my breast) would more accurately translate the first two lines of the following stanza. The Spanish text also specifically locates *hugar fylgsni* as the breast, although it might equally refer to the head or heart.

*Sonatorrek 2*

<p>Esa auðþeystr, þvítt ekki veldr hǫfugligr, ór hyggju stað fagnafundr Friggjar niðja, ár borinn ór Jötunheimum,</p>	<p>It does not easily gush forth – heavy grief (a ‘convulsive sobbing’) prevails – out of place of thought &gt; BREAST, [that] joyful find of Frigg’s kinsmen (the Æsir) &gt; POETIC MEAD, borne of yore out of Jötunheimar.</p>
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*Esa auðþeystr* echoes *esa* [...] *hógdrægt* in the previous stanza, and indeed the first four lines here are more or less a repetition of the second helming of stanza 1, i.e. the difficulty of bringing forth poetry from the *stað hyggju* (place of thought > MIND/HEART/BREAST). In this stanza grief (*ekki*) is clearly specified as the impediment to the flow of poetry, but although sluggish movement is stressed by phrases such as *esa auðþeystr* and *hǫfugligr* in the first four lines, a note of optimism is hinted at in the second helming, where poetry is referred to as *fagnafundr Friggjar niðja* (the joyful discovery of the gods). The gift of poetic inspiration was not only a joyful find for the gods, but also for humanity, and even at this early stage in the poem it is intimated that there may be some solace for Egill after all if he can find relief in poetic composition.

The idea of poetry ‘gushing out’ (*þeysa*) is reminiscent of Óðinn spewing, or vomiting the stolen mead into the three vats in Ásgarðr, and perhaps there is a correlation between the way the poetic mead was borne out of Giantland and the difficulty Egill is having in drawing it out now from the *fylgsni* or ‘hiding-places’ of thought.



*Pérdida Irreperable de los Hijos 2*

No podré sacar de la honda morada de mis pensamientos –me atormenta el dolor, me impide moverme– el licor de poesía que un día trajo Odín del país de los trols. <sup>48</sup>	I will not be able to take out of the deep dwelling-place of my thoughts – the pain torments me; it impedes me from moving– the liquor of poetry that Óðinn brought one day from the country of the trolls.
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Perhaps the word *surja* (surge) in stanza 1 reflects the description of poetry in the original as ‘gushing’. As in the previous stanza, where Bernárdez translates *Viðurr* as ‘Odín’, the kenning *Friggjar niðja* is simply rendered ‘Odín’, whose ‘joyful find’ is translated as ‘the liquor of poetry’ that Óðinn brought from the ‘land of the trolls’, although he qualifies this in a footnote as the ‘land of trolls or giants’. The terms *jötunn* (giant) and *tröll* (giant, evil being) are indeed ambiguous and seem to be sometimes interchangeable, although *Jötunheimar* is never called *Tröllheimar*, as far as I am aware, and to translate it as *el país de los trols*, is somewhat misleading. Presumably, *trol* appeared to Bernárdez to have a more Nordic ring to it than *gigante* (giant) would have done, apart from the fact that it alliterates with *trajo* in the previous line.

Bernárdez skilfully circumvents having to use the awkward term *hidromiel* in his reading of *fagnafundr Friggja niðja* (joyful find of Frigg’s kinsmen > POETIC MEAD) by using the phrase *licor de poesía*. In Spanish *licor* can simply mean ‘a liquid substance’ but it more normally refers to a flavoured alcoholic drink such as: ‘licor de avellanas’ (hazelnut liqueur), ‘licor de café’ (coffee liqueur), etc. *Licor de poesía*, therefore, might sound like a liqueur flavoured with poetry, or even ‘essence of poetry’, a conceit which would make more sense to a Spanish ear, even though it does not exactly reflect the original.

*Sonatorrek 3*

lastalauss es lifnaði á Nøkkvers nøkkva bragi. Jötuns hals undir þjóta Náins niðr fyr naustdyrum.	Faultless/flawless when it quickened (came to life) on Nøkkverr’s boat ‘bragi’. Wounds of giant’s neck roar down below (before?) boathouse doors of Náinn (a dwarf).
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<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*, p. 292, footnote 220: ‘Odín robó la poesía del país de los trols o gigantes, según se cuenta en la *Edda* de Snorri’ (Óðinn stole poetry from the land of trolls or giants, as is related in Snorri’s *Edda*).

This stanza has received much critical attention due to its cryptic nature, but has still not been deciphered entirely satisfactorily.<sup>49</sup> First of all, the subject of the first helming is not explicit. It is something ‘flawless’ or ‘faultless’ which ‘came to life’ on a boat or ship belonging to ‘Nǫkkverr’, but nobody has been able to identify conclusively who or what *nǫkkverr* is, although many scholars believe it to be the name of a dwarf. Similarly *bragi* in line 4, has been subject to multiple interpretations. It could refer to the name of the boat of ‘Nǫkkverr’, to Bragi, the god of poetry, or to poetry itself, although it is hard to make sense of any of these meanings in this context.

According to Sigurður Nordal, ‘the first helming of this stanza looks as if it is linked to the previous stanza, cf. 13-14 and 19-20’, the subject seemingly being poetry. If this were the case, then it would be logical to assume that ‘Nǫkkvers nǫkkvi’ would be a kenning for poetry.<sup>50</sup> However, this interpretation rules out the possibility of *bragr* referring here to poetry, or to a poem, since ‘faultless, it came to life, on the poetry of poetry’ is not very logical. Nordal cites Guðmundur Finnbogason’s suggestion that the word might be the dative form of the feminine noun *brag* (motion, movement), but this does not help much with the overall interpretation either, and Nordal acknowledges that despite all the attempts at interpretation, *lifnaði* and *bragi* are still a puzzle.<sup>51</sup>

Even if we accept the reading ‘dwarf’s boat’, we must wonder in what way poetry ‘came to life’ on a boat? In the story of the origin of the poetic mead, there is nothing to suggest, in the *Snorra Edda* at least, that poetry ever had its origin on a boat; although this could, of course, refer to a story that has not survived. Overall then, the evidence for poetry as the subject for the first half-stanza seems mainly to be based on the presumption that *lastalauss* must carry on from the previous stanza, whose subject is certainly poetry.

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<sup>49</sup> For varying interpretations see E. O. Gabriel Turville-Petre, *Scaldic Poetry*, and Carol Clover, ‘Skaldic Sensibility’, *ANF*, 93 (1978), 63-81 (p. 72); Lee M. Hollander, *The Skalds: A Selection of Their Poems, With Introductions and Notes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1945), p. 91.

<sup>50</sup> According to one passage in *Skáldskaparmál*, vol. 1, ed. by Anthony Faulkes (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1998), p. 4: ‘Af þessu kǫllum vér skáldskap Kvasis blóð eða dverga drekku eða fylli eða nakkvars konar lög Óðreris eða Sónar eða farskost dverga, fyrir því at sá mjǫðr f[lut]ti þeim fjǫrlausn ór skerinu, eða Suttunga mjǫð eða Hnitbjarga lǫgr’ (That is why we call poetry Kvasir’s blood or dwarf’s drink or the contents of Odrerir or Bodn or Son, or dwarf’s transportation, because this mead brought them deliverance from the skerry, or Suttung’s mead or the liquid of Hnitbiorg); and later, p. 14: ‘Enn er kallaðr skáldskaprinn far eða lið dverganna; lið heitir ǫl ok lið heitir skip. Svá er tekit til dæma at skáldskapr er nú kallaðr fyrir því skip dverga’ (Poetry is also called the dwarf’s vessel or *lid*. *Lid* is a word for ale and *lid* is a word for ships. This is the origin of the expression, whereby poetry is now as a result called dwarf’s ship). Translation from *Edda: Snorri Sturluson*, trans. by Anthony Faulkes, (London: Everyman, 1987), pp. 62, 72.

<sup>51</sup> ÍF 2, p. 247, n. 3: ‘en þrátt fyrir allar skýringartilraunir, er *lifnaði* og *bragi* [...] óráðin gáta’.



The fact that in stanza 24, the art (*íþrótt*) of poetry is described as ‘devoid of flaws’ (*vammi firrða*), may also have influenced scholars in this interpretation.<sup>52</sup>

In the second helming, while it seems fairly clear that *undir hals Jotuns* must be a kenning for the sea (the giant referred to here is Ýmir, from whose neck-wounds the sea originates according to Old Norse mythology), *niðr fyr Náins naustdyrum* has also remained a puzzle. Turville-Petre echoes the general view when he explains that ‘since dwarfs live in rocks, *Náins naustdyrr* (boat-shed door) may be the cliffs by the sea’. Thus the second helming may be roughly translated: ‘the sea crashes against the cliffs’.<sup>53</sup> According to Sigurður Nordal this line was inspired by Egill listening to the sound of the sea against the cliffs while he was composing, and certainly the references to boats, the sea, and the noise of the sea call to mind the manner of his son’s death.

I believe, however, that the second helming of stanza 3 may contain a metaphor for the composition of poetry. Egill frequently begins his longer poems with a statement that poetry is about to commence. In the first strophe of *Berudrápa*,<sup>54</sup> for instance, he says:

Heyri fúrs á forsa  
fallhadds vinar stalla,  
hyggi þegn, til þagnar  
þinn lýðr, konungs, mína;  
opt skal arnar kjapta  
örð góð of tröð Hörða,  
hrafnstýrandi hræra  
hregna, mín of fregnask.

*Prose word order*

Heyri þegn konungs á mína forsa fallhadds stalla fúrs vinar; hyggi þinn lýðr til þagnar; opt skal mín góð arnar kjapta örð of fregnask of Hörða tröð, hræra hregna hrafnstýrandi

*Translation*

Listen, king’s retainer, to my stream of long-haired friend of fire of altar (Óðinn) > POETRY; may your men be silent, often my good harvest of the eagle’s jaw > POETRY is heard around the land of the Hords > NORWAY, the rain of the raven-steerer moves.

<sup>52</sup> Interestingly, *nokekvi* also appears in a kenning for poetry in a stanza by Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld, where he calls it *Austra burar nokekvi*. As Austri is a dwarf, his son is also a dwarf and the dwarf’s boat or vessel, as we have seen above, is poetry.

<sup>53</sup> A problem with this reading might be that, according to *Gylfaginning* at least, Náinn seems to be a soil or earth-dwarf rather than one that lives in the rocks. *Snorri Sturluson: Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, ed. by Anthony Faulkes (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982; repr. London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2000), p. 16: ‘and these [the prophetess] says are the names of these dwarfs: ...Nár, Náinn, Nipingr, Dáinn...[...] but these are also dwarfs and live in rocks, whereas the previous ones live in soil (en þessir eru ok dvergur ok búa í steinum, en inir fyrri í moldu). Translation from *Edda: Snorri Sturluson* (Faulkes, 1987), pp. 16-17.

<sup>54</sup> *ÍF* vol. 2, p. 274.

And in the opening (and only surviving) stanza of the *drápa* which Egill composed on receiving a shield from the poet Einarr skálaglamm, he actually uses the kenning ‘dwarf’s ship’ in his announcement: ‘I shall not lose control of the reins of the horse of the land of Gylfi (ship) of earth-grown (dwarves) > POETRY; my words are heard’.<sup>55</sup> In the opening stanza of *Hofuðlausn* the process of loading and launching a poem is directly compared to ship-launching (*ek dró eik á flot*), and *ek hlóð hlut mæðar skut kenarrar míns* (I loaded the stern of my vessel [*kenarr*] with a cargo of praise). Possibly then, the sea pounding before the doors of the dwarf’s boathouse, which can only contain a dwarf’s boat, i.e. poetry, is a metaphor for the commencement of poetic composition. Egill is announcing that poetry, like a ship, is about to be launched.

*Pérdida Irreperable de los Hijos 3*

<p>Vivía sin tacha  en la larga casa  similar a la nave  de guerra de Nökkver;<sup>56</sup>  silbó la sangre,  el mar, en las rocas  donde habita  el pueblo de enanos.<sup>57</sup></p>	<p>I/he/she/it? lived without blame  in the long house  similar to the warship  of Nökkver;  the blood whistled,  the sea, in the rocks  where the dwarf-race  dwells.</p>
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The first word in this stanza is highly ambiguous. Without a pronoun *vivía* here could mean ‘I lived’, ‘he/she lived’ or ‘it lived’, and it is difficult to know from the context which choice is the most logical. From the wording of the rest of the phrase it would seem to refer to a person, perhaps Egill’s recently deceased son, although the significance of Þoðvarr living ‘without blame’ in a ‘long house’ is not clear. An examination of the other elements in the Spanish version of this stanza reveals a translation that deviates quite dramatically from traditional interpretations. For example, it is curious that Bernárdez translates *nøkkvi* as *nave de guerra* (warship), when it is actually a small rowing boat. A *nave* in Spanish is distinct from the more generic term *barco* in that it does not have oars and is propelled by sails only. There is nothing in the Icelandic text to suggest the boat having any connection with war. Bernárdez’s explanatory footnote (see 221 below) suggests that

<sup>55</sup> St. 54, ÍF 2, p. 272: ‘skalat mér verða misfengnir taumar at Gylfa grundar glaums erðgróins’.

<sup>56</sup> *Saga de Egil Skallagrímsson*, p. 292, footnote 221: ‘Nökkver parece ser un enano; la nave de guerra de Nökkver (que es resultado, a su vez, de la interpretación de un *kenning*) podría ser la poesía, inventada por los enanos. Pero la interpretación dista mucho de ser segura’ (Nökkver appears to be a dwarf; the warship of Nökkver (which is in turn the result of the interpretation of a *kenning*) could be poetry, invented by dwarves. But the interpretation is far from certain).

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*, footnote 222: ‘Los enanos habitaban bajo las rocas y en los acantilados’ (The dwarves lived underneath rocks and in the cliffs).



*la nave de guerra de Nökkrver* could be a kenning for poetry, which was ‘invented by the dwarves’. It is certainly true that the kenning ‘dwarfs’ ship’ refers to poetry, at least according to *Snorra Edda*, but because of the confusion surrounding the meaning of *bragi*, the whole phrase has not been satisfactorily explained. In his footnote Bernárdez points out that his interpretation is far from certain, and does not allude to ‘bragi’ at all. However, if Bernárdez believes that ‘the warship of Nökkrver’ could mean poetry, it is difficult to account for its comparison with ‘the long house’. The second helming is more readily identifiable as a traditional interpretation, although Bernárdez has been innovative here also. Instead of rendering *undir hals Jotuns* solely with a sense-word meaning ‘sea’ (Spanish, *mar*), Bernárdez’s translation, *silbó la sangre* (the blood whistled), immediately followed by *el mar* (the sea), is a little far-fetched. It is as if he is trying to suggest that the blood and the sea are one and the same, but I think the lines are confusing for a reader not already familiar with the poem. Bernárdez follows the majority of editors and translators in supposing that *naustdyr Náins* refers to cliffs or rocks.

#### *Sonatorrek* 4

Þvít ætt mín á enda stendr, hræbarnir sem hlynir marka; esa karskr maðr sás koggla berr frænda hrørs af fletjum niðr.	Because my lineage is at an end like ruined (brought to ruin) maple-trees of forests; the man is not hearty/cheerful who bears limbs of corpse of kinsman down, out of (the) house.
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This is another stanza which editors have had to emend significantly in order to make sense of it. Where *K* has *sem hræbarnar blinnar*, for instance, Sigurður Nordal reads *hræbarnir sem hlynir marka*; similarly, *þogla* (acc. pl. of *þogull*, ‘silent’), although appropriate enough semantically speaking, does not fit the context grammatically, nor does it alliterate with *karskr* in the previous line and has therefore been changed to *koggla*. Finally, *niðr* is a replacement for the manuscript reading *riðr* (a ‘riding’).

Stanza 4 contains the first direct reference to the loss of Egill’s son, and however lines 3-4 are interpreted, the first sentence makes it clear that the poet feels his family line is at an end. This of course contradicts the evidence in the prose narrative that he was survived by a son (Þorsteinn) and daughter (Þórgerðr), but perhaps it is not meant to be taken absolutely literally; lamenting the dwindling of one’s race or kind is a familiar trope in medieval literature. For instance, the same complaint occurs in Guðrún’s lament in the

‘obituary poem’ *Hamðismál*, where the powerful metaphor or ‘elegiac conceit of the tree as an image of human growth and ruin’ as Ursula Dronke calls it,<sup>58</sup> is also used:

*Hamðismál* 5<sup>59</sup>

Einstæð em ek orðin sem ǫsp í holti, fallin at frændom sem fura at kvisti vaðin at vilia sem viðr at laufi, þá er in kvistkœða kømr um dag varman.	I am left standing alone like the aspen in woodland, shorn of kinsmen as pine-tree of branch, stripped of joy as wood of leaf when the girl, branch-robbing, comes on a hot day.
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In the second helming of the fourth stanza of *Sonatorrek*, the poet points out that it is not a happy man who bears the body of a kinsman *af fletjum niðr* (down, out of the house). Again this does not correspond with the prose context where we are told that when Egill found Bǫðvarr’s body on the beach: ‘tók hann þat upp ok setti í kné sér ok reið með út í Digranes til haugs Skalla-Gríms’ (he took [Bǫðvarr’s body] up and placed it on his knees and rode out with it to Digranes to Skalla-Grímr’s burial mound). The saga does not say that he brought the body anywhere near the house.

*Pérdida Irreperable de los Hijos* 4

Mi linaje ya se hunde en la decadencia, es un bosque repleto de árboles caídos; hondo dolor sufre quien saca del lecho al pariente querido y lo lleva a su tumba.	Now my lineage is falling into decline it is a forest full of fallen trees he suffers deep pain who takes the beloved relation out of bed and carries him to his grave.
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The Spanish translation of stanza 4 is actually much easier to follow than the original text. Bernárdez replaces *Þvítt ætt mín á enda stendr* (Because my lineage is at an end), with its connotations of finality, with the more gradual ‘my lineage is now falling into decline’ which accords better with the prose context. *Es un bosque repleto de árboles caídos* (it is a forest full of fallen trees) corresponds to the most commonly accepted adaptation of the otherwise incomprehensible *sem hræbarnar hlinnar*. In the second helming however, Bernárdez has accentuated and made more explicit the suffering expressed in the phrase

<sup>58</sup> Ursula Dronke, *The Poetic Edda*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 184.

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*, p. 162.



*era karsker maðr* (the man is not hearty/cheerful) by rendering it as *hondo dolor sufre* (he suffers deep pain). Although litotes is commonly used to great effect in Germanic poetry, perhaps Bernárdez felt that the Spanish reader would not fully appreciate the sentiment as it is expressed in the Icelandic text, and would interpret it as a lack of grief on the part of the bereaved father. He also adds the adjective *querido* (beloved), omits to translate *hrør* (corpse) and has the man taking his kinsman *del lecho* (out of bed) and carrying him to his grave, as opposed to simply *niðr af fletjum* (down out of the house).

*Sonatorrek* 5

Þó munk mitt ok móður hrør fǫður fall fyrst of telja, þat berk út ór orðhofi mærdar timbr máli laufgat.	But/yet first I must tell you of demise (death) of mother, and fall of father; I bear that timber of praise, 'leavéd' with speech (i.e. with words as leaves) out of/from temple of words > BREAST/MIND.
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The first word of this stanza, *Þó*, would suggest that the poet has caught himself in the act of digression, and is returning to what he sees as the correct order of topics. Before he deals with the loss of his sons, he must refer to the demise of his parents, who have gone before. He does not elaborate on their deaths, he merely names them and in the second helming moves on to the subject of poetic composition. In the first stanza the poet had talked about the difficulty of drawing 'Óðinn's theft' from the 'hiding-place of thought', but by stanza 5 there does not seem to be any such difficulty. 'Poetry', or even 'the poem' is simply borne out of the *orðhof*, the 'temple of words', i.e. the mouth (or possibly the breast). As Snorri says: 'Munn skal svá kenna at kalla land eða hús tungu eða tanna, orða eða góma, varra eða þvílíkt' (the mouth shall be referred to by calling it land or house of tongue or teeth, words or gums, lips or something like that),<sup>60</sup> but while *hof* can obviously function in the same way as 'house' here, the term 'word-temple' conveys a notion of pagan religious practice and of the sacredness of poetic language, Óðinn's gift.

As has been already pointed out, the phrase *timbr mærdar* is generally supposed to refer to the material from which praise-poetry is constructed (glossed in *Lexicon poeticum* as 'digtningsæmne', or 'stuff of poetry'). In Old Icelandic *timbr* is always used in the sense of 'building material', therefore the use of this term in the context evokes a comparison

<sup>60</sup> *Skáldskaparmál*, vol. 1, p. 108; *Edda: Snorri Sturluson*, trans. by Anthony Faulkes (London: Everyman, 1987), p. 153.

between the composition of poetry and the construction of a building. This trope is common in classical and medieval literature; according to Margaret Clunies Ross:

It was also customary for poets to represent the act of poetic composition in terms drawn from the semantic fields of wood-, stone- and metal-working and to refer to the poems themselves in terms of the most complex and highest-status artefacts of Viking Age and medieval society [...].<sup>61</sup>

The image of the stuff of poetry as wood, which has been harvested from the forest to be used as building material, contrasts nicely with the idea of language sprouting leaves. Perhaps the skald here is referring to different methods he employs in poetic composition; by *timbr* he means a store of ready-made poetic figures and phrases that he can draw on, and by *máli laufgat* any fresh concepts that might be generated in the process.

*Pérdida Irreperable de los Hijos 5*

Mas diré, primero, la muerte del padre, cómo murió mi madre, sacaré de mi boca torrentes de palabras, serán hojas del árbol alto y copudo de la poesía.	But I'll versify, first, the death of my father, how my mother died, I will extract from my mouth streams of words, they will be leaves of the tall, crowned tree of poetry.
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Bernárdez opens this stanza with a phrase, *mas diré*, which as I have pointed out in my discussion of the Spanish translation of *Höfuðlausn*, is strongly evocative of Spanish medieval literature. He renders *orðhof* a simply *boca* (mouth). The translator seems to be influenced by the previous stanzas into adding an image that is not present in the original, 'streams of words' as part of his reworking of the metaphor for poetry. However, by changing the figure from liquid to leaves, Bernárdez is guilty of *nykrat*, the sort of mixed metaphor which Snorri considers to be stylistically bad.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Margaret Clunies Ross, *A History of Old Norse Poetry and Poetics* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2005), p. 86.

<sup>62</sup> Anthony Faulkes, ed., *Snorri Sturluson: Edda. Háttatal* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), p. 7.



*Sonatorrek 6*

Grimmt vörum hlið, þats hrǫnn of braut föður míns á frændgarði; veitk ófullt ok opit standa sonar skarð, es mér sær of vann.	Grim to me was the gap (or gateway) which the wave (Hrǫnn) broke in the family stronghold of my father; I perceive empty and standing open son's space which sea caused me.
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In the chief metaphor of this stanza Egill imagines the family as a sort of fortification or fence (*frændgarðr*), with each member constituting an essential part, and which is only as strong as its parts. When one piece is missing, the building is weakened and vulnerable and, for Egill, the lack of his son is as plain as a gap in a protecting outer wall or fence. The idea of the family 'house' falling into ruin recalls the sentiments expressed in stanza 4.

The wave that caused this breach, *hrǫnn*, could simply be read as a poetic appellation for 'wave' or 'sea', but it is also the name of one of the daughters of the sea-deities Rán and Ægir.<sup>63</sup> It is impossible to tell whether Egill is literally holding a supernatural figure responsible for his son's death or whether this is simply a figure of speech but, in the stanzas that follow, he repeatedly accuses the sea deities by name.

*Pérdida Irreperable de los Hijos 6*

Cuánto daño me hace la brecha que abrieron las olas del mar en los muros paternos, abierta la raja vacía está y oscura; una onda maligna me arrebató al hijo.	How much pain it causes me the breach/crack that the waves of the sea opened in the paternal walls, the open gash is empty and dark; an evil wave took my son away.
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The Spanish translation of this stanza is extraordinarily close to the original. There are, however, two additions. Bernárdez adds the word *oscura* (dark) to describe the gap left in the family wall by the death of his son, and describes the sea as *maligno* (evil/malign), a judgement not made in the Icelandic. The Spanish version seems to make the sea's robbery deliberately evil. Another reference to evil occurs in the Spanish translation of

<sup>63</sup> *Skáldskaparmál*, vol. 1, p. 36: 'Hvernig skal sæ kenna? Svá at kalla hann Ymis blóð, heimsækir guðanna, verr <R>ánar, faðir Ægis dœtra þeira era svá heita: Himinglæva, Dúfa, Blóðughadda, Hefring, Uðr, Hrǫnn, Bylgja, Bára, Kólga' (How shall sea be referred to? By calling it Ymir's blood, visitor to the gods, husband of Ran, father of Ægir's daughters, whose names are Himinglæva, Dufa, Blodughadda, Hefring, Unn, Hronn, Bylgia, Bara, Kolga). Translation from *Edda: Snorri Sturluson* (Faulkes, 1987), p. 91.

stanza 15: *sirve a lo oscuro quien vende por oro el cuerpo de un hermano por compensación* ('he who sells a brother's body for gold, for compensation, serves the dark side'), see appendix.

*Sonatorrek* 7

Mjök hefr Rán ryskt um mik, emk ofsnauðr at ástvinum; sleit marr bænd minnar ættar, snaran þátt af sjölfum mér.	Rán has handled me very roughly I am greatly deprived/bereft with respect to dear friends; sea severed bonds of my kindred, a tough strand of myself.
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It is difficult to form a precise understanding of the nature of the goddess Rán or her attributes. Her name occurs as a valkyrie in a kenning for warrior (*runnr folk-Ránar*, 'tree of valkyrie'), for instance, but most frequently in skaldic verse she appears in kennings related to the sea such as: *Ránar vegr* (Rán's way) and *Ránheimr* (Rán's home), as well as kennings for women, e.g. *dýnu Rán* (Rán of the down covering). Rán is listed in the *þulur* among the *ásynjur*, but does not appear in Eddic verse except in the prose introduction to *Reginismál*, which says that Loki went to Rán and borrowed her net in order to capture the dwarf Andvari, who had changed himself into a pike and was sporting in the river (this story also occurs in *Völsunga saga*). Snorri reports in *Skáldskaparmál* that Rán is the wife of Ægir and that they have nine daughters, whose names have to do with the waves. More interestingly, he also says that she has a net with which she hunts men who go to sea.<sup>64</sup> It is likely that this is the myth to which Egill is referring here when he says that 'Rán has handled me very roughly', and if this is to be taken as a literal rather than a metaphorical reference, it could mean that Egill believes his son is now in the realm of Rán and Ægir (although he seems to contradict this statement in stanza 10).

In the second helming we get another vivid metaphor for 'family'. This time the family is compared to a rope made of single strands twisted tightly together, which is what gives it its strength. When one of these strands is broken the whole rope is weakened. Egill plays here on the idea of family ties and connections. He directly accuses Rán (or the sea) of cutting the bonds of his kindred, which has a double consequence: his relationship with his son has been broken by death, but the family line has also been interrupted (even though, as we have said earlier, this does not accord with the prose context). In calling his

<sup>64</sup> *Skáldskaparmál*, vol. 1, p. 41: Þá urðu Æsir þess varir at Rán átti net þat er hon veiddi í mann alla þá er sæ kómu' (Then the Æsir discovered that Rán had a net in which she caught everyone that went to sea). Translation from *Edda: Snorri Sturluson* (Faulkes, 1987), p. 95.



son ‘a tough strand of me myself’, Egill identifies himself closely with his son, seeing in him the potential to be a strong man like his father.

*Pérdida Irreperable de los Hijos 7*

Duro golpe me asesta la diosa del mar, huérfano estoy de amigos amados; rompió el mar los lazos que mi estirpe unían, las mismas ligaduras que a mí mismo me unen.	The sea-goddess deals me a hard blow I am an orphan of beloved friends; the sea broke the ties which held my lineage together, the same bonds which unite them to myself.
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Bernárdez removes the reference to Rán, who is simply rendered *la diosa del mar* (the sea-goddess here), and with it the allusions to the kingdom of Rán and Ægir. Overall the Spanish translation runs relatively parallel to the language and imagery of the Icelandic text, but in lines 3-4 Bernárdez displays an element of poetic licence which is worth drawing attention to. Where the original text reads *emk ofsnauðr at ástvinum* (I am greatly deprived/bereft with respect to dear friends), the Spanish introduces a new kenning-type metaphor. Here Egill is portrayed as a ‘friend-orphan’; the term *huérfano* also cleverly evokes the loss of the sons, in that as a child who had lost both their parents would be an orphan, so too is a father who has lost both his sons an ‘orphan of sons’.

*Sonatorrek 8*

Veizt, ef þá sǫk sverði of rækak, vas ǫlsmiðr allra tíma; hroða vágs bræðr, ef vega mættak, fórk andvígr ok Ægis mani.	You know if I were to avenge that crime by sword all of Ale-smith’s (Ægir’s) days would be over; If I could fight (with weapon), I would be a match for brother of bay’s disabler (wind) > SEA and Ægir’s mistress/wife.
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In this stanza Egill comments on the powerlessness he feels in this situation. The futility of the idea of fighting the sea with a sword poignantly highlights the helplessness of Egill’s condition. He does not have recourse to the normal means of redress. Because Bǫðvarr has drowned, there is no one from whom Egill can claim compensation or take revenge.<sup>65</sup>

Egill observes that the usual routes of redress for a killing, i.e. through legal or violent means, are not open to him in these abnormal circumstances, and stand in contrast

<sup>65</sup> cf. stanza 1.

to the supernatural terms in which the sea is described. All three references to sea in this stanza are encased in kennings. The first, *ǫlsmiðr*, is a reference to Ægir, a mythological figure, or personification of the sea, as we have seen above. Although he is listed as a giant, he is married to Rán and is closely associated with the gods. *Hymiskviða* tells how Þórr acquires a cauldron large enough to hold the beer Ægir is going to brew for the gods, and in the poem that follows it in *CR*, *Lokasenna*, the gods are feasting in Ægir's hall, where reference is made to the beer that Ægir has brewed.<sup>66</sup> Lee M. Hollander suggests that Ægir was known as the 'ale-smith' or 'ale-maker' of the gods 'on account of the resemblance of sea foam to that on beer'.<sup>67</sup>

*Pérdida Irreperable de los Hijos 8*

<p>Sabed que si ese agravio con espada de vengara, la esposa de Aegir<sup>68</sup> estaría ya muerta; si pudiera matar al señor de los mares, si atacar pudiera a la amante de Aegir.</p>	<p>Know you (pl.) that if his offence could be avenged with sword, Aegir's wife would be dead by now; if only I could kill the lord of the seas, if I could attack Aegir's lover.</p>
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In the Spanish translation the references to Rán and Ægir are maintained, although in a modified form. The image of Ægir as *ǫlsmiðr* has been removed, and the kenning *broða vágs bræðr* (brother of bay's disabler (wind) > SEA), with its negative connotations, has been replaced with *el señor de los mares* (the lord of the seas), an appellation more appropriate to Neptune perhaps than to Ægir.

*Sonatorrek 9*

<p>En ek ekki eiga þóttumk sakar afl við sonar bana, þvíit alþjóð fyr augum verðr gamals þegns gengileysi.</p>	<p>But I do not have, it seemed to me, the upper hand in this case against slayer of son, because an old thane's lack of retinue is there for all to see.</p>
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<sup>66</sup> John Lindow, *Norse Mythology: A Guide to Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 48: 'Ægir's prowess as a host is the final motif Odin reveals to the terrified King Geirrǫd in *Grímnismál* before beginning the list of names that leads to his epiphany'.

<sup>67</sup> Lee M. Hollander, *The Skalds*, p. 92, footnote 93.

<sup>68</sup> *Saga de Egil Skallagrímsson*, p. 293, footnote 223: 'Ægir es el dios del mar' (Ægir is the god of the sea).



Egill once again refers to his helplessness in legal terms (*ekki sakar afl*). He cannot win a case against his son's slayer. No matter how many men he had, he would never have a majority against the sea. Pure force (such as Egill is accustomed to use in such cases) is equally of no avail against an opponent such as the sea.

In this stanza Egill also reveals a certain anxiety about his public image; at least, he appears to be concerned not only with the depletion of his group of followers, and the ensuing diminishment of his power, but also with the fact this weakness is exposed to all. The practical implication for Egill is that he does not have the strength in numbers that he once had, either to fight the slayer of his son, against whom he would always lose no matter how great a troop he had, or to hold his position as a great man in the neighbourhood. As far as we know from the prose text, he has two children remaining when he composes his poem, Þorsteinn and Þórgerðr. But while he clearly holds his daughter in high esteem, as a woman she cannot provide the same support as a son; neither he nor Þórgerðr seem to rate Þorsteinn at all. Therefore when Egill says that his line is at an end, perhaps he is thinking of his reign of power as coming to a close. For example, if he were injured or killed there would be no one to avenge him, or if he were to take a case to the Alþingi, there would be no one to support him. He laments the fact that this is known to all the people. As an aging man without a brother or sons who will support him he is feeling vulnerable for the first time in his life.

*Pérdida Irreperable de los Hijos 9*

<p>Mas la ley no permite vengarse con muerte de quien mató a mi hijo, así yo lo creo; sabe cualquiera que Aegir, el anciano, no posee ni un hijo, cosa es conocida.</p>	<p>But the law doesn't allow me to take revenge by killing on him who killed my son, or so I believe; everybody knows that Aegir, the ancient one, does not possess even one son, that is common knowledge.</p>
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There appear to be a number of misunderstandings in this translation. In the first helming Bernárdez seems to have taken the reference to the law very literally. The second half of the stanza can only mean that Egill cannot avenge himself against Ægir because he does not have a son, but Bernárdez seems to have understood that the *gamall þegn* (old man/retainer) refers to Ægir (not Egill) and his 'lack of retinue' is rendered *no posee ni un hijo*.

*Sonatorrek* 10

Mik hefr marr miklu ræntan, grimmt es fall frænda at telja, síðan's minn á munvega ættar skjoldr aflífi hvarf.	Sea has robbed me of much – it is grim to recount the fall of kinsmen (or a kinsman) – since my shield of lineage > SON turned from life towards ways/paths of joy (i.e. the road to Valhalla).
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Once again Egill blames the sea for his son's death, and although it is referred to here as *marr*, and not by one of the mythological personifications we have already seen, the use of the verb *ræna* calls to mind the sea-goddess Rán, whose names also signifies 'robbery'. The second line is ambiguous in that *frænda* could mean either 'of a kinsman' or 'of kinsmen'. If it is the singular form then Egill must be taken to be referring to Bǫðvarr, the *skjoldr ættar* (shield of lineage) of line 8, but most scholars read 'of kinsmen', which makes the statement sound more like a general observation. By means of the kenning *skjoldr ættar* Egill once again evokes the idea of the son as a fundamental constituent in the family, here in the role of protector. The begetting of sons ensures the continuation of the family line, and in a practical sense, too, a son would be expected to protect his family from harm or dishonour.

The term *munvegar* has not yet been satisfactorily explained. In the context above it can only refer to a place to which one would go after 'turning from life'. Sigurður Nordal takes this place to be Valhǫll, interpreting it as *glæðivegir*, 'paths of joy'; Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson, on the other hand, argues for the reading 'the paths of thought/mind/spirit' as part of his thesis that Bǫðvarr does not go to Valhǫll at all but to the realm of Rán and Ægir.<sup>69</sup>

*Pérdida Irreperable de los Hijos* 10

La mar me ha causado pérdida irreparable qué triste es contar la muerte de un hijo; era escudo de mi estirpe, echó a andar por la senda que conduce a la alta mansión de los muertos.	The sea has caused me an irreparable loss, how sad it is to relate the death of a son; he was the shield of my lineage, he began to walk on the path that leads to the high mansion/hall of the dead.
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<sup>69</sup> Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson, 'Religious ideas in *Sonatorrek*', *Saga-Book of the Viking Society*, 25:2 (1999), 159-78 (p. 165).



In this stanza the translator includes a reference to the title of his own poem ‘pérdida irreperable [...] de un hijo’, which does not occur in the original. *Escudo de mi estirpe* (shield of my lineage), however, corresponds closely to *ættar skjoldr*, and Bernárdez apparently concurs with Nordal’s suggestion that *munvegjar* (paths of joy) refers to Valhøll, as is made plain by the phrase *la alta mansión de los muertos* (the high mansion/hall of the dead). This reading is reinforced in lines 5-6 of *Pérdida Irreperable de los Hijos* 17 (*Sonatorrek* 18), *mi hijo ha llegado al albergue de Odín* (my son has arrived at Óðinn’s lodging), which he glosses in a footnote as ‘El Valhalla’.

*Norwegian Translation: Sønnetapet*

For the most part Hallvard Lie’s translations of the verse in *Egils saga* are based on Sigurður Nordal’s edition and in general conforms to Nordal’s interpretation of the poetry. However, this is not the case with *Sonatorrek*. Lie explains why in the foreword to his translation:

I have not been able to reconcile myself to the older interpretations of this poem with regard to several issues, and I have therefore, among other things, changed the order of a couple of stanzas (I have provided a more explicit justification for this in *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 1946).<sup>70</sup>

The article Lie refers to here is an extremely detailed argument in favour of his thesis that the ‘confusion’ and ‘lack of continuity in the thought-process within the four strophes’ can be rectified by reinterpreting the ‘enigmatic’ strophe 3 and reversing the order of strophes 3 and 4. Lie is fully convinced that anyone who ‘has read *Sonatorrek* from beginning to end a few times, and who has “experienced” the poem, i.e. acquired a sense of its personal spirit (*personlige ånddraget*)’ cannot suppress a feeling of rebellion on the part of the reader at the interruption of stanza 3 in an otherwise logical sequence.<sup>71</sup>

It cannot be denied that Lie has a valid point here, especially with regard to a break in thematic continuity between strophes 3 and 4. As we have seen above, first helming of *Sonatorrek* 3 continues to puzzle scholars, although most seem to accept that what is meant by the blameless (*lastalaus*) thing which came to life (*lifnaði*) on Nøkkverr’s boat (*bragi*) is poetry. There is also a general consensus that although *Nøkkverr* does not occur anywhere

<sup>70</sup> Islandske ættesager, vol. 1, p. 27: ‘Det eldre tolkningene av dette kvadet har jeg for flere punkters vedkommende ikke kunnet forlike meg med, således har jeg bl. a. latt et par vers bytte plass (en nærmere filologisk begrunnelse har jeg gitt i *Arkiv f. nord. filologi* 1946)’.

<sup>71</sup> Hallvard Lie, ‘*Sonatorrek* str. 1-4’, *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 61 (1946), 182-207.

else in Old Norse literature, since ‘dwarf’s ship’ is a common kenning for poetry, *Nokkverr* is probably a dwarf’s name. Therefore if *Sonatorrek* 3 (1-4) contains a reference to the story of the mythological origins of poetry, it could be seen as logically following on from the previous stanza, which deals with the same theme. The thematic continuity between the second helming and stanza 4, however, is considerably more problematic.

Lines 5-8 of strophe 3, *Jötuns hals undir þjóta Náins niðr fyr naustdyrum*, have been interpreted by Gabriel Turville-Petre as: ‘the wounds of the giant’s neck roar down below the boat-shed door of Náinn’; he goes on to explain that Náinn is the name of a dwarf and as the dwarfs live in rocks, the boat-shed door may be the cliffs by the sea, the overall meaning being ‘the sea roared beneath the cliffs’.<sup>72</sup> This image does not fit so well, however, with the beginning of the stanza 4: *Þvítt ætt mín á enda stendr* (Because my lineage is at an end), unless, as Sigurður Nordal explains, Egill is understood to be hearing at this point the sound of the surf against the cliffs and thus being reminded of his grief, which would then lead him to lament the end of his line.<sup>73</sup>

Hallvard Lie, however, offers an entirely different suggestion; he believes that the first word of strophe 4, *Þvítt* (or, *þvítt* at, ‘because’), is further proof that the arrangement of verses is not as it should be, but that by removing stanza 3 ‘the most natural logical-syntactical connection between the two remaining strophes [i.e. 2 and 4] emerges’,<sup>74</sup> and that stanza 3, can, by means of a re-interpretation, be made to follow on just as logically from stanza 4. With Lie’s ‘re-interpretations’ (in parenthesis) *Sonatorrek* 3 would read as follows:

*Sonnetapet 4 (Sonatorrek 3)*

lastalauss ‘er’ (= ef) lifnaði ‘ä’ (= án) nakkvars nokkva ‘brage’ (= bragði) jötuns hals undir ‘flota’ (= fljóta) náins ‘nidr’ (= nids) fyr naustdyrum. <sup>75</sup>	lik av sønn som lytefri mann var blitt, fans båtsvik ei. Nå flyter jotnens sår-flod ved døde nærskyldings dør.	body of son, which would have become a flawless man if it had not been for boat’s treachery. Now flows the giant’s wound-flood near dead close-relative’s door.
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<sup>72</sup> E. O. Gabriel Turville-Petre, *Scaldic Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 30.

<sup>73</sup> ÍF 2, p. 217, note 3.

<sup>74</sup> Hallvard Lie, ‘Sonatorrek str. 1-4’, in *Arkiv för nordisk fililologi* (1946), 182-207 (p. 190): ‘Tenker man seg imidlertid str. 3 fjernet, oppstår den naturligste logisk-syntaktise sammenheng mellom de gjenstående strofene’.

<sup>75</sup> Hallvard Lie, ‘Sonatorrek str. 1-4’, p. 191. Lee M. Hollander also interprets the stanza as referring to *Bøðvarr* as opposed to poetry: ‘since my son/ on sea-skerry/ was cut short/ the shapely one:/ down below/ by the loved one’s barrow/ throbs the blood-/ of-the-thurse’s-neck’, See *The Skalds*, p. 91.



an interpretation that differs substantially from Nordal's version:

*Sonatorrek 3*

<p>Lastalauss es lifnaði á Nøkkvers nøkkva bragi. Jötuns hals undir þjóta Náins niðr fyr naustdyrum.</p>	<p>Faultless/flawless, when it quickened (came to life) on Nøkkverr's boat 'bragi'. Wounds of giant's neck roar down below (before?) boathouse doors of Náinn (a dwarf).</p>
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but one that certainly reads more naturally, semantically and syntactically speaking, in the context of the other strophes which, in Lie's translation of *Egils saga*, appear thus:

*Sønnetapet 1*

<p>Tungt det er på tungens vekt å veie Valfaders skatt, mistrøstig nå jeg maner Vidurs ran fra tankens vrå.</p>	<p>It is heavy/hard on the tongue's scales to weigh Battle-Father's treasure; dejected, now I summon forth Viðurr's theft from thought's hidden cranny.</p>
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*Sønnetapet 2*

<p>Krøkt av sorg jeg evner knapt å løfte i lyset frem mjøden dyr, som Friggs mann bar i urold fra Jotunheim.</p>	<p>Bent from sorrow, I am scarcely able to bring forth into the light the precious mead, which Frigg's husband bore in primeval times from Giantland.</p>
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*Sønnetapet 3 (Sonatorrek 4)*

<p>Ti min ætt er enden nær, lik morken lønn i skogen; motløs går den mann som bær' (abbrev. for bærer) sin sønns lik til siste sted, –</p>	<p>Hence my family/lineage is near the end, like rotting maple in the forest; despondent goes the man who bears his son's body to (the) last place, –</p>
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*Sønnetapet 4 (Sonatorrek 3)*

lik av sønn som lytefri mann var blitt, fans båtsvik ei. Nå flyter jotnens sår-flod ved døde nærskyldings dør.	body of son, which would have become a flawless man if it had not been for boat's treachery. Now the giant's wound-flood flows near dead close-relative's door.
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Apart from the rearrangement of the stanzas 3 and 4, Lie's translation corresponds fairly closely to Sigurður Nordal's edition, with the exception of a few significant alterations. In stanza 5, for example, Lie replaces the image of the poem as a 'timber of praise', which is 'leavéd' with words, with the lines:

i mitt dikt de døde skal ærerikt evig leve.	in my poem the dead shall gloriously, live eternally.
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The changes Lie has implemented here, which he refers to as 'simple, insignificant structural liberties',<sup>76</sup> have the effect of seriously altering the tone of the poem by introducing a religious, perhaps even biblical dimension which is certainly not present in the original stanza. This is a device Lie also employs in his rendition of stanza 12. While the second helming of the Icelandic text reads:

mér upp helt of verbergi ok mitt afl mest of studdi.	(he) held up my household, and greatly supported my power.
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Lie's translation is imbued with religious overtones:

var mín stav på folksom sti, mín evnes støttende arm.	he was my staff on crowded path, my capable/powerful supporting arm.
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The image created here, of an old man leaning on his son's arm, also serves to develop the mood of sorrowfulness and pathos of the aged, grieving father, which is introduced by the phrase, *krøkt av sorg* (bent from sorrow), in stanza 2, and culminates in the final exclamation, *usle liv!* (miserable life!), in the first line of the final stanza. In addition, the

<sup>76</sup> Hallvard Lie, 'Sonatorrek str. 1-4', p. 185: 'Med enkelte ubetydelige formelle friheter kan dette gjengis slik'.



scene demonstrates Lie's eagerness to emphasise the personal nature of the relationship that existed between father and son, a reflection of his belief that *Sonatorrek* constitutes a very personal outpouring of grief. Although Lie claims his emendations are not based on 'subjective feelings', it is clear that he is motivated by the rather romantic mission of '[helping] Egill's own words to live again', as we have already quoted above, and also restoring a poetic monument to Old Norse literary history.

In their translations both Lie and Bernárdez play down the number of emendations that are necessary to shape *Sonatorrek* into a poem that reads fluently and logically, although they do make some reference to the more difficult passages in their explanatory notes. However, despite all protestations to the contrary, it is thanks to the many oblique passages and indecipherable words in the manuscripts of *Sonatorrek* that Lie, in particular, is able to impose on the poem his own vision of Egill as a person capable of feeling deep pain and sorrow. In his translations of the *lausavísur*, Lie also strives to emphasise the humanity of the characters as much as possible.

The tone of Bernárdez's translation, by comparison, comes across as far more formal than Lie's, although it too smoothes over some of the more obvious discrepancies in the source text (in omitting the corrupt stanza 16 for example). The Spanish translation also has a tendency to make what are ambiguous statements in the original, far more definite and explicit. Unlike Lie, Bernárdez cannot assume a knowledge of Norse mythology on the part of his readers, and is therefore compelled to provide a large amount of explanatory material in the numerous footnotes. Nevertheless, Bernárdez seems anxious to preserve as many mythological references as possible in his translations, which is presumably calculated to appeal to the reader.

## CHAPTER SIX

### ‘VIGNETTES OF VIKING LIFE’

#### *Stanza 3*

The prose context in which this stanza is situated relates that ‘Skalla-Grímr var járnsmiðr mikill’ (Skalla-Grímr was a great blacksmith), and explains that he went to some trouble to build a smithy at Raufarnes. It is not unusual to find a man of high degree such as Skalla-Grímr engaging in blacksmith’s work. Grave finds in Scandinavia from the Middle Ages give some evidence for the social position of the smith:

Forty-five known graves in Scandinavia from this period each contained at least one item of metallurgical equipment – the most usual being hammer, tongs, or a file. In twenty-six of the graves only one tool was present, usually accompanied by one or two farming implements and the weapons of the dead man. This suggests that many men were capable of carrying out basic smithing activities, such as repairs to household and agricultural equipment. Nevertheless, some graves contained more extensive assemblies of tools as well as weapons, probably indicating that their owners were full-time smiths who occupied key positions among a warrior class near the top of the social scale [...] The importance of the smith lay above all in his ability to make weapons, especially swords, which were not just weapons but also symbols of authority.<sup>1</sup>

Skalla-Grímr’s skill in smithying therefore adds to, rather than diminishes, his status but his assiduity is emphasized as much as his ability. His servants complain when they are expected to rise so early but the opening line of the stanza recalls strophes 58 and 59 from the Eddic poem *Hávamál*, where rising early is specifically recommended for those who wish to make money.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, ed. by Joseph R. Strayer (New York: Scribner, 1982-89), VIII, p. 291.

<sup>2</sup> See *Hávamál*, ed. by David Evans (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1986), pp. 50-51.



Mjök verðr ár, sás aura,  
 ísarns meiðr at rísa,  
 váðir vidda bróður  
 veðrseygjar<sup>3</sup> skal kveðja;  
 gjalla lætk á golli  
 geisla njóts, meðan þjóta,  
 heitu, hrærikytjur  
 hreggs vindfrekar, sleggjur.<sup>4</sup>

*Prose word order*

Mjök ár verðr at rísa ísarns meiðr, sás skal kveðja veðrseygjar váðir vidda bróður aura; lætk sleggjur gjalla á heitu golli geisla njóts, meðan vindfrekar hreggs hrærikytjur þjóta.

*Translation*

Very early must the tree of iron arise, he who intends to summon up the wealth of the windsucker of clothes of the brother of sea (wind) > [leather] > BELLOWS. I made the sledge ring out on the hot gold of the possessor of light-rays (fire) > IRON, while it whistles in the wind-greedy moving chamber(s) (?of wind).

or

Very early will the tree of iron have to rise, he who intends to summon up the windpipe of the clothing of sea's brother (wind) > [leather] > BELLOWS. i.e. sea's brother > WIND. Wind's clothing > SKIN/LEATHER. Leather of the *verðrleggur* (wind-pipe of bellows) > BELLOWS.

*Commentary & Analysis*

The kennings of this stanza are quite complex, but once they are deciphered construct a vivid impression of the blacksmith at work in his forge. The first of these, *ísarns meiðr*, literally 'tree of iron' or 'mast of iron' is one of the more straightforward. *Meiðr* (tree/pole) mostly occurs in kennings for 'man' (in stanza 5 there two such instances)<sup>5</sup> and this example is no exception. A kenning comprising the base-word 'tree/mast/pole' and determined by 'metal', usually signifies 'warrior' because of the association between metal and weapons. In the example above this could indeed be the case but in the context of the rest of the strophe it is more likely to be 'one who works with metal', e.g. a blacksmith, rather than 'one who wields metal as a weapon'. Of course man-of-weapons could also be a perfectly appropriate appellation for a smith, as he fashions weapons among other things, so the ultimate meaning is ambiguous. In his edition of

<sup>3</sup> Scholars disagree on the construction and interpretation of the kenning *veðrseygjar váðir vidda bróður*. The controversy centres on the word *veðrseygjar*, which does not actually occur in any manuscript but is a reconstruction by Sigurður Nordal. *M* has *veðr leggjjar*, *ε* *veðr seggjjar*; *δ* *veðrleggjjar* and *W* *veðr leggjja*.

<sup>4</sup> ÍF 2, p. 79.

<sup>5</sup> In the first Egill refers to his host as *hagr herðimeiðr sárgagls* ('skilful hardening-tree', or, 'skilled warrior/weaponsmith of the wound-gosling') and the second as *borðvallar blakka kennimeiðr* (knowing-tree of the horse of the ship (gunwale) –field).

*Egils saga* Sigurður Nordal chooses to gloss it as ‘járnsmiður’ (ironsmith). In *Den norske-islandske skjaldedigtning B I*, Finnur Jónsson also translates the phrase as ‘jærnsmed’ (ironsmith) but, strangely enough, in the *Lexicon Poeticum* as ‘kriger’ (warrior).

The next kenning *veðrseygjar váðir vidda bróður* contains many more elements. All editors and translators agree that the sense-word of the whole phrase is ‘bellows’. According to Bjarni Einarsson, *vidda*, or *viddi* in the nominative form, is the name of a giant and is equivalent to *viðir*, ‘the wide one’, or, ‘the sea’ (i.e. Ægir) whose *bróður* is the wind. The clothes (*váðir*) of the wind here refers to the leather bag of the bellows, which is *veðrseygjar* (wind-sucking). Thus the smith must rise early to summon up the *aura* (wealth/gold) of the bellows. It is also possible that *aura* is part of the kenning, and wealth or gold of the bellows could be the red-hot iron in the fire. This would mirror the next kenning in the stanza, *beitu gollu geisla njóts*, where an association is made between iron and wealth. This kenning can be translated as ‘hot gold of the possessor of light-rays’ where iron, red and glowing from the heat of the fire (the possessor/enjoyer of rays/beams), is compared to gold. However, it is more likely that the *aura* in line 1 refers to the profit the smith will make by selling the iron-products he makes. The final kenning of this stanza refers to the bellows again which are described as *vindfrekar hreggs hrærikytjur* (wind-greedy moving chambers of wind in which it whistled/howled).

The poetic response that Skalla-Grímr makes to his servants is, on one hand, a pragmatic one that focuses on the industrious and economic aspects of the blacksmith’s trade, a view which is reinforced by the lexis of the stanza. He refers to the wealth that he intends to make (*auðr*), to iron as the gold (*goll*) of the fire, and the greedy (*frekar*) wind-sucking bellows perhaps reflects his own eagerness to create wealth. Indeed the picture he portrays of the forge is not static, but one of motion and energy. The smith is an active man who rises early; he is a man of some strength and determination who pounds the heavy sledgehammer on the molten iron. The idea of rhythm and constant movement is also conveyed by the description of the bellows as *vindfrekar* (greedy for air), which must be kept moving if the fire is to be kept at an adequate temperature. On the other hand, stanza 3 could be an idealised, stylised portrait of a smith at work, or, the expression of someone intimate with the craft.

The sounds, as well as the sights, of the smithy are also very powerfully made present. The sledgehammer rings out (*gjalla*) on the metal. And the wind in the bellows ‘whistles’, ‘wheezes’, or even ‘howls’ (*þjóta*). We can also imagine without difficulty the extreme temperature inside the forge.



In contriving this representation the poet employs a surprising amount of elemental imagery. The air in the bellows is the brother of the sea; the bellows are wind-suckers and wind-greedy. This stanza shows man's power and manipulation over the elements. He has harnessed the power of wind in a bag of leather. In fact in the second kenning for bellows, *vindfrekar breggs hrærikytjur*, the use of the word *bregg* could imply that a miniature storm is taking place inside the chamber. With this machine, and a coal or charcoal fire, the smith is able to create temperatures which are high enough to melt iron and bend it to his will. It shows human ingenuity, endeavour and dominance of the elements. The storm/wind is often an arbitrary force to be feared, although its power can be harnessed to propel a sail.

*Stanza 3: Norwegian Translation*

<p>I otten opp må smeden, som sølv i pung vil sanke ved belgen, som vindfylt blåser brann i blåsvarte kullet. Sleggen smellende slår jeg slag i slag mot stålet, som glohett gnistrer og glimter, mens grådige vindbelger tyter.<sup>6</sup></p>	<p>The smith must up at dawn, who wants to gather silver in purse by means of the bellows, which wind-filled blow a glow in the blue-black coal. I strike the sledgehammer banging thick and fast on the steel which red-hot sparks and flashes while greedy wind-bellows wheeze.</p>
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*Commentary & Analysis*

The first two lines of the Norwegian translation immediately dispel any ambiguity as regards *ísarns meidr*. Lie chooses the interpretation 'the smith' who here rises *i otten* (at dawn) which is more specific than the Icelandic *ár* (early). The general term *aura* (wealth/ gold) is rendered *sølv*. Although the Norwegian word *øre* would be closer etymologically, its use would be somewhat misleading as it refers to a specific coin/amount (as it does in Modern Icelandic). Although it is presumably to be read metaphorically, the use of the word *pung* (purse) does alter the mood of the stanza making the smith sound more petty somehow, or at least more focused on the material profit of his industry. This silver will be created *ved belgen* (by means of the bellows), we are rather prosaically told, 'which wind-filled blow a glow (flame) in the blue-black coal'. The colour of the fire is emphasised here, which is not mentioned in the Icelandic, although perhaps the idea of a 'glow' in the 'blue-black coal' is slightly paradoxical. As in the Icelandic version, the subject shifts from the impersonal use of the third person in the first helming to the first person in the second helming, a change which creates

<sup>6</sup> *Íslandske ættesager*, vol. 1, p. 77.

greater intimacy in the scene but whereas the Icelandic *ek læt sleggjur gjalla* is in the preterite, the Norwegian maintains a sense of immediacy by using the present tense *jeg slår sleggen*. In the Norwegian version the smith strikes on steel while in the Icelandic, although no metal is directly referred to, the kenning (*heitt*) *goll geisla njóts* is usually interpreted as ‘iron’. It is probably inaccurate to say that a smith would have used a sledgehammer on steel. Thus the ‘hot gold of the possessor of light-rays’ becomes the ‘steel which red-hot sparks and flashes’. The association of gold with money/profit is lost and the idea of rays of light from the fire is substituted by the sparks which fly off the hot metal as it is struck by the hammer which to some extent creates the same impression as a precious metal although I think it is inaccurate to say that red-hot metal sparks and flashes, it rather glows or gleams. The repeated use of *belgur* in the Norwegian version serves to highlight the skill of the Icelandic skald who managed to express the idea of the bellows (Ice. *belgr*), without using that word once.

In the Norwegian version the idea of economic gain is preserved, but the almost magical/mystical portrait of man harnessing the elements is very faint if not totally lost. The word *vind* (wind) is used twice but it does not have the same force (with the possibility of violence) as *veðr*, *vidda broður* or *hregg*. Only two words are directly cognate *slegge* and *tyte*. The vision the Norwegian gives us is not as romantic or dramatic. Many of the choices are based on how they fit in with the rhyme scheme.

### *Stanza 3: Spanish Translation*

Temprano se levanta el herrero que exige metales al fuelle que el viento vomita; el martillo hago cantar sobre el metal ardiente mientras los voraces sopladores braman. <sup>7</sup>	Early rises the blacksmith who demands metals from the bellows which vomits the wind; the hammer I make sing on the red-hot metal while the voracious blowers roar
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### *Commentary & Analysis*

Bernárdez renders the kenning *ísarns meiðr* here with *herrero*, which I have translated above as blacksmith, but which literally means, ‘person whose profession is to work with iron’. While it is clear from the references to a blacksmith’s forge in the following lines that Bernárdez is referring to a blacksmith here, the word *herrero* in a more general context could be translated as ‘ironsmith’, although its range of meanings encompasses

<sup>7</sup> *Saga de Egil Skallagrímsson*, p. 103.



both concepts. In this context, *herrero* is an appropriate choice in terms of its ambiguity but also because, like the Icelandic phrase, it contains a reference to ‘iron’ (Sp. *hierro*).

With regard to the clause, *sás skal kveðja veðrseygjar váðir vidda bróður aura* (wealth of the windsucker of clothes of the brother of sea (wind) > [leather] > BELLOWS), Bernárdez translates *sás skal kveðja* fairly literally with *el...que exige* (he who demands), renders the kenning with its sense-word ‘bellows’ (*fuelle*), but renders the ‘wealth’ (*aura*, nom. *eyrir*) of the bellows with the non-committal term *metales* (metals). In line 4 Bernárdez recreates the image of the wheezing bellows which the phrase *que el viento vomita*. Translated absolutely literally this phrase reads ‘which the wind vomits’, but it is most likely that here we have another example of distorted syntax in the Spanish translation and the line should be read: ‘which vomits the wind’.

In the second helming of the stanza, both the Icelandic poet and the Spanish translator describe the blacksmith as causing the hammer to emit a sound, and in both cases the verb used, *gjalla* (to yell) and *cantar* (to sing) respectively, are more typically used of human beings than inanimate objects. The kenning *heitu golli geisla njóts* (hot gold of the possessor of light-rays (fire) > IRON), is skilfully rendered here as *metal ardiente* (burning/red-hot metal), and *vindfrekar hreggs hrærikytjur* (wind-greedy moving chambers of wind) is translated by a kenning of Bernárdez’s invention *los voracious sopladores* (the voracious blowers). Finally, the word the Spanish translator chooses to render *þjóta* (to whistle/howl), is worthy of note. *Bramar* (to roar/howl) is more normally used of the sound the sea or an animal makes, and in this context is quite poetic. However, Bernárdez may also have been influenced by the Germanic etymology of this word, which according to the *RAE* is probably of Gothic origin.<sup>8</sup>

### *Stanza 9*

After the hearing the insulting stanza Egill directs at him (st. 8, see chapter 4) Bárðr goes to Queen Gunnhildr and tells her that there is a man ‘er skómm færði at þeim’ (who would bring shame on them), because of his heavy drinking. Together the queen and Bárðr mix a poisoned drink, Bárðr makes a sign over it and gives it to a serving girl to give to Egill who bids him drink. Egill takes out a knife and sticks it into the palm of his hand. He accepts the horn, carves runes on it, smears the runes with blood and recites the following stanza:

<sup>8</sup> ‘Quizá del gót. \**bramón*, cf. b. al. medio *brammen*, a. al. ant. *brëman*, ingl. ant. *bremman*’ (Perhaps from Gothic \**bramón*, cf. Middle German *brammen*, Old High German *brëman*, Old English *bremman*).

Rístum rún á horni,  
 rjóðum spjöll í dreyra,  
 þau velk orð til eyrna  
 óðs dýrs viðar róta;  
 drekkum veig sem viljum  
 vel glýjaðra þýja,  
 vitum, hvé oss of eiri  
 ǫl, þats Bárðr signdi.<sup>9</sup>

*Prose word order*

Rístum rún á horni, rjóðum spjöll í dreyra; velk þau orð til eyrna róta viðar óðs dýrs; drekkum, sem viljum, veig vel glýjaðra þýja; vitum hvé ǫl, þats Bárðr signdi, of eiri oss.

*Translation*

Let us carve a rune on the horn. Let us redden the words in blood. I choose those words for the roots of the tree of the ears of the furious beast > DRINKING HORN; Let us drink as we please the draught of the well-gladdened serving-maids. Let us see how the beer that Bárðr blessed agrees with us.

*Commentary & Analysis*

The stanza above reiterates some of the information we are given in the prose text such as that Egill carves runes on the horn and reddens them in blood. The words he carves are carefully selected. He says *ek vel þau orð til eyrna róta viðar óðs dýrs* (I choose those words for the roots of the tree of the furious beast). The ‘tree of the ears’ of an animal is the horn, the roots are the parts attached to the head, which, when the horns are made into drinking vessels, become the wide brim. The prose text does not state whether Egill has seen the poisoned drink being mixed, but we must presume that he knows somehow, and that the runes he carves on the horn constitute some kind of protection charm or spell. After the stanza is recited the drinking-horn breaks in two and the drink spills onto the straw.

In the final line of the stanza Egill refers to the fact that Bárðr has ‘blessed’ the drink. The sign that Bárðr makes over the drink is could be interpreted as the sign of Thor’s hammer, Mjöllnir, which in the Viking Age became the most important symbol for Scandinavian heathendom in its opposition to Christianity.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> ÍF 2, p. 109.

<sup>10</sup> Rudolph Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, trans. by Angela Hall (Cambridge: Brewer, 1993).



*Stanza 9: Norwegian Translation*

Runer ramme jeg rister, røde av blod, på hornet: her er ord som ager ølets vonde vetter! Drikk karskt nå kagge-skipet, som kåte kvinnfolk bær' oss, og kjenn om sunn den smaker supen, som Bård'n signet! <sup>11</sup>	I carve runes border/edge reddened by blood, on the horn Here are words which frighten the ale's evil spirits! spryly drink keg-"dishwater" which frisky women bear us, and check out the delicious swig which 'the' Bård blessed!
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*Commentary & Analysis*

In his version the imperious first person plural form used by Egill becomes the more humble 'jeg' and is only used once. The kenning *eyrna rota viðar óðs djýrs* (roots of the tree of the ears of the furious beast > DRINKING HORN) is omitted or replaced by the rather free *her er ord som ager ølets vonde vetter!* There is nothing to suggest either in the prose or poetic text that the ale contains anything more prosaic than poison. The sign that Bårdr makes over the drink has probably more to do with the *disablót* although it is arguable that he might be cursing rather than blessing it. Lie's translation anticipates the prose passages that follow it.

The 'let us' formula, which is repeated four times in the Icelandic text, has been abandoned here, which has the effect of depersonalising it. For example, it is not clear here whose blood has reddened the runes and omits the fact that *vel ek* (I chose) those words, Egill has carefully selected the words that he wishes to engrave on the horn. Lie's translation of *veig* as *kagge-skipet* is subjective, as is the use of the word *kåte* to describe the serving maids. While the Icelandic *glýjaðr* (gladdened) probably means 'happy' or 'merry', *kåte* has slightly more sexual overtones. The final two lines preserve the sentiment of the original although the Norwegian has magnified the level of sarcasm. Compared to the Icelandic the Norwegian text seems to be more light-hearted, almost jovial.

*Stanza 9: Spanish Translation<sup>12</sup>*

Tallo en el cuerno runas, y con sangre las tiño, letras trazo, del uro fiero en largo leño; <sup>13</sup> bebo tranquilo el licor que alegre la sierva trajo, veremos si daña aún la bebida que Bård hizo.	I carve runes on the horn and I stain them with blood; I write (trace), of the fierce aurochs on long log;* I drink calmly the liquor which happily the serving-maid brought, we will see if the drink which Bårdr made still does damage.
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<sup>11</sup> *Íslandske ættesager*, vol. 1, p. 97.

<sup>12</sup> *Saga de Egil Skallagrímsson*, pp. 141-42.

\*I write letters on the long log of the fierce aurochs

*Commentary & Analysis*

The Spanish version preserves the formulaic aspect of the Icelandic, although it uses the first person instead of the third. This translation is careful to avoid the word ‘write’ (or *escribir*) for the carving of the runes, instead using *trazo* (I trace) and decides to preserve the kenning for horn, explaining it in a footnote. Bernárdez doesn’t preserve it entirely however. *Eyrna róta viðar* is rendered simply as *largo leno* (long log), and *óðr dýrr* as *uro fiero*. *Fiero* is a word which is very often used in relation to dangerous wild animals such as lions and tigers but the translator chooses to make the general term *dýrr* specific, rendering it as *uro*, the ure-ox or aurochs. He appears to want to preserve the kenning to some degree but decides against the complicated form of the original.

The fourth line of the stanza takes an interesting turn when we are told that Egill actually drinks the liquor. This is a departure from the Icelandic text, which only states that Egill is waiting to see what happens. *Sem viljum* seems to give rise to the adjective *tranquilo* and *glýjaðr* now becomes an adverb, or at least that is how it appears. Bernárdez opts to omit *signdi* the final line replacing it with *hizo* but the most interesting insertion is *aún* (still). The impression given by the Spanish translation is that by carving runes on the horn etc. Egill has counteracted the poisoned drink making it harmless – ‘we will see if the drink which Bárðr made *still* does damage’ after the charm that I have worked.

*Stanza 11*

Having killed Bárðr, Egill avoids capture by hiding and waiting till nightfall to swim to another island nearby. When the king’s men eventually come to look for him he manages to kill three of them single-handedly, steals their boat, and rows away not stopping until he reaches Þórir’s house. The next morning, Egill is discovered lying in his bed, to the great surprise of Þórólfr, who then asks how he had managed to escape, or whether anything of note had happened on his travels. In response Egill recites the stanza quoted below:

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<sup>13</sup> *Saga de Egil Skallagrímsson*, p. 141, footnote 112: ‘Largo leño del uro fiero: kenning por “cuerno” (Long log of the fierce aurochs: kenning for ‘horn’).



Svá hefk leystsk ór Lista  
 láðvarðaðar garði,  
 né fágak dul drjúgan,  
 dáðmildr ok Gunnhildar,  
 at þrifreynis þjónar  
 þrír nakkvarir Hlakkar  
 til hásalár Heljar  
 helgengnir fqr dvelja.<sup>14</sup>

*Prose word order*

Svá hefk leystsk, dáðmildr, ór garði Lista láðvarðaðar ok Gunnhildar, – né fágak dul drjúgan, – at þrír nakkvarir þjónar Hlakkar þrifreynis, helgengnir til hásalár Heljar, dvelja fqr.

*Translation*

I, who am unsparing in noble deeds, have become free from the dwelling belonging to the land-guardian/protector of Listi (i.e. Norway) > KING and to Gunnhildr – I do not much go in for/practice self-deception, – in such a way that some three servants of the thriving rowan tree of Hlökk > WARRIOR who have gone to the high halls of Hel (i.e. are dead), are delaying their (return?) journey.

*Commentary & Analysis*

Although he tries to deny it, Egill is clearly proud of his latest exploit and not unjustifiably. He has outwitted the king (and queen), killed four of the king's men, and managed to arrive back home safely to the amazement of all. Egill's new-found friend Arinbjörn expresses his admiration in no uncertain terms: 'Arinbjörn applauded the deeds and said it was his father's duty to make terms with the king'. Even Þórir admits that people might well agree that Bárðr deserved to be killed.

In this poetic account of the episode, the verb Egill chooses to describe his escape is the reflexive form of *leysa*, he says *ek hef leystsk ór garði Lista láðvarðaðar ok Gunnhildar*, 'I have become free' or, literally, "loosed myself", from the dwelling of the King (land-guardian of Listi) and of Gunnhildr'. Presumably *garðr*, here, does not refer to the King's and the Queen's permanent abode but rather to their court, wherever that happened to be held, in this case at Bárðr's farmstead. If we read *garðr* in a more figurative sense though, it could refer to the extent of the royal couple's power or to the scope of their jurisdiction, which Egill feels he has freed himself from. The epithet used in this phrase to denote King Eiríkr (*Lista láðvarðuðr*) is deliberately mocking. Although described as the land-guardian of Listi and, by extension, of all of Norway, he has been proven by Egill not to be able to protect his followers under the same roof, let alone his subjects in the whole country.

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<sup>14</sup> ÍF 2, p. 113.

The next kenning in the stanza, *Hlakkar þrifreynir*, seems to refer to the King as warrior. *Hlökk* (gen. *Hlakkar*) is the name of a valkyrie, and ‘tree (here *reynir*, the rowan) of valkyrie’ is a common kenning for warrior, but the prefix to *reynir*, *þrif-*, makes the interpretation of this kenning more complicated. According to Sigurður Nordal, for example, *Hlakkar þrifreynir* is a *hermaður* (warrior) but it is debatable whether *þrifreynir* refers to wood/timber which prospers, or to wood which makes *Hlökk* (battle) prosper well, or to one who endeavours to promote battle itself.

As in so many of the extemporaneous stanzas in the saga, these lines show Egill reflecting on his own behaviour. He is not modest about his achievements; indeed he boasts that he is *dáðmíldr* (deed-generous, valiant), insisting at the same time that he does not cherish/indulge much in self-deception (*né fágak dul drjúgan*). However, he could not but be proud of his remarkable escape from Eiríkr’s clutches, and what is this stanza if not a boast of his deeds?

Egill’s escape necessitated the killing of three of the king’s men, as he puts it himself, they are “hel-gone” to the high halls of Hel’ (*helgengnir til hásalár Heljar*). The fact that they have gone to Hel and not Valhalla emphasises the ignominious nature of their deaths; one was caught unawares and killed by a single blow and Egill managed to cut the leg off another as he tried to run away. The third man attempted to escape in a boat before Egill overtook him and, after a brief struggle, killed him and threw him overboard.

That a young and fairly inexperienced Egill has proven to be more than a match for three of the King’s men must be a humiliation to Eiríkr. The killing of Bárðr so gratuitously, and right under the King’s nose, also shows Egill’s utter contempt for the King’s jurisdiction, be it in the whole of Norway or within a more limited space. This and subsequent actions show that Egill does not feel himself to be bound by the King’s code, and his subversive attitude provokes Þórir to comment that Egill has inherited his family’s gift for caring too little about incurring the king’s wrath, ‘en þat verðr flestum monnum þungbært’ (and that will be difficult for most men to bear).<sup>15</sup> That Egill’s disregard includes the queen as well as the king is made clear by his direct reference to Gunnhildr, and this episode signals the beginning of a life-long personal enmity between him and the royal couple.

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<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*



*Stanza 11: Norwegian Translation*

<p>Slik var min ferd og frelse          fra frege fjell-lands-drotten          og kaute dronning Gunnhild          – kyt kan dette ei kalles–          at to-tre konge-treller          nå tramper veien vide          til Hels høye saler          med hoggsår i hold og hauser.<sup>16</sup></p>	<p>Such was my journey and escape          from the renowned mountain-land's lord          and haughty Queen Gunnhild          – it cannot be called boasting –          that two or three king-slaves          now tramp the broad path          to Hel's high halls          with cut-wounds in flesh and skulls.</p>
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*Commentary & Analysis*

Although the general meaning of the Icelandic text is conveyed fairly accurately here into Norwegian, quite a few ideas and adjectives are apparent in this version which are not present in the original. The use of the word *ferd* (journey) in the first line, for example, is an addition. In the original stanza Egill refers to his escape from the King but not to his subsequent boat-trip. *Ferd*, of course, does provide one of the two alliterating sounds in line 1. In the next line the construction *fjell-lands-drotten* seems to be a rather free interpretation of *Lista láðvarðaðar*. As Listi (a district in the south of Norway now called Lista) has a flat landscape, we can only assume that the *fjell-land* here refers to the whole country of Norway which is so frequently characterised as mountainous; the lord (*drotten*) of Norway being, of course, its king. This conveys the sense, more or less, of the original kenning, but in this translation the idea of protection or guardianship is lost and no mention is made of the royal *garðr*.

Another element which is not present in the original, *frege* (renowned, famed), could conceivably be derived from the *þrif-* element in the other kenning for Eiríkr in this stanza, *Hlakkar þrifreytir* (thriving rowan-tree of Hlökk). As we have seen above, this kenning means 'warrior' and refers to Eiríkr, but it is not exactly clear how this meaning is arrived at. If we take it to mean that the rowan tree itself is thriving, i.e. 'thriving warrior', the reference might be to Eiríkr's prosperity and success, which would explain the choice of the adjective *frege*. It should be noted that *frege* is derived from the Old Norse *frægr* (famous), an adjective which was often used to describe kings. Gunnhildr's status as queen (*dronning*) is added in this version, as is the adjective used to describe her, *kaute* (haughty).<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> *Islandske ættesager*, vol. 1, p. 99.

<sup>17</sup> According to Einar Haugen's *Norsk-Engelsk ordbok* this word *kaute* is 'popular' (*folkelig*, 'homely, plain, of the folk') language.

The use of the archaic term *ei* in the line – *kyt kan dette ei kalles*– (roughly equivalent in English to ‘boasting can it not be called’) is perhaps an attempt on behalf of the translator to create a feeling of antiquity. Lie further modifies this phrase by replacing the active voice of the verb in the Icelandic phrase (*fágak*) with a passive form (*kalles*), thus changing the tone from one of personal expression to detached observation. Examining the terms of the Norwegian phrase more closely, we can conclude that it is perhaps misleading to use the word *kyt* (boasting) to denote *dul*, as *kyt* implies a vocal action whereas *dul* is a feminine noun meaning ‘self-deception’. *Fága* usually means ‘to cultivate, worship, lay stress on’, but in this context should be read as ‘go in for’, ‘practice’, implying a habitual action and qualified here by the adjective *drjúgr*, used adverbially in the accusative singular masculine *drjúgan*, and meaning ‘much’, the phrase *né fágak dul drjúgan* could be interpreted as ‘I am not much of a self-deceiver’ or perhaps even, ‘I do not indulge overmuch in self-deception’, but the Norwegian translation precludes these interpretations and leaves only one possible reading. Of course, by describing himself as *dáðmildr* (unsparing in noble deeds), Egill could be accused of a degree of vainglory and, although this word is not translated here, it may have influenced the translator in his interpretation of *né fágak dul drjúgan*.

The phrase *þrír nakkvarir þjónar Hlakkar þrifreynis* (some three servants of the luxuriant (growing) rowan tree of Hlökk) has been reduced to *to-tre konge-treller* (two or three king-slaves) here, with the result that the association with Hlökk is broken, as is the connection with the thriving rowan tree. Lie allots the status of *trell* (slave) to the king’s men even though *tjener* (servant) would have been a more obvious choice. *Tjener* is the Mod. Norwegian cognate of *þjónn* and, as well as having the same meaning, it has the same number of syllables as the Old Icelandic form of the word *þjónar*, and would alliterate with *to-tre treller* almost as well as *treller* does. We must assume, therefore, that Lie considered and rejected *tjener* in favour of the more humble *treller* and investigate the motive for this decision. In medieval Scandinavian society the distinction between a free-born man and slave was an important one. If the men that Eiríkr sends after Egill are taken to be slaves, this has a number of possible implications, for example, that the king is sending men of relatively little importance to capture Egill because he doesn’t expect him to be so difficult to deal with. Another consideration may have been that if the men Egill had overcome were merely slaves, his deeds could not be considered as heroic as if he had killed three free-born men. Yet another is that Egill might have been



so dismissive of the men that he would refer to them in a disparaging way, whether they were actually slaves or not.

The Norwegian rendering of these lines also gives the impression that the King's 'slaves' are *en route* to Hel, unlike the Icelandic text which states that they are already in Hel and are delaying their journey (*dvelja för*), in other words that they will not be leaving. The word Lie uses to describe the manner of walking there (*tramper*) and the broadness of the path (*veien vide*) is information which is not given in the original stanza. *Tramp* implies a heavy step, indicating perhaps heaviness of heart or an arduous journey. *Med hoggsår i hold og hauser* (with cut-wounds in flesh and skulls) gives information that one can deduce from the prose context, but which is not included in the Icelandic stanza. Here it has the effect of emphasising Egill's brutality.

Lie obviously does not seem to think it necessary to explain 'Hel' to a Norwegian audience.

#### *Stanza 11: Spanish Translation*

<p>Me sacudí el poder del señor de Noruega —y no me vanaglorio— y de la reina Gunnhild; tres guerreros reales envié a las altas salas del Hel,<sup>18</sup> y allí ahora por siempre muertos, callan.<sup>19</sup></p>	<p>I escaped the power of the lord of Norway — and I do not boast— and of Queen Gunnhild; three royal warriors I sent to the high halls of Hel, and now there forever dead, are silent.</p>
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#### *Commentary & Analysis*

Of the three versions of this stanza we are comparing, Icelandic, Norwegian and Spanish, it is the last of these which states most clearly of all that it is Norway of which Eiríkr is lord, although *garðr* is rendered as *poder* (power), so that the focus is on the figurative, rather than the concrete, aspect of Eiríkr's domain. The word employed here to describe Egill's escape, *sacudir*, with its implications of violent movement, is more descriptive than *escapar* (to escape) would have been and accentuates the idea that Egill's escape was difficult and dangerous. However, the care with which Egill emphasises this dramatic escape seems at odds with line 3, *no me vanaglorio* (I do not boast/I am not

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, footnote 114: '*Altas salas de Hel*: el infierno; es decir, el lugar donde habitan los muertos que no van al Valhalla. No tenía, aparte de su carácter lúgubre, connotaciones especiales negativas. Hel era la diosa que habitaba en el infierno y que regía a los muertos' (High halls of Hel: hell, that is to say, the place where the dead who are not going to Valhøll dwell. It didn't have, apart from its dismal character, especially negative connotations. Hel was the goddess who dwelt in hell and ruled the dead).

<sup>19</sup> *Saga de Egil Skallagrímsson*, p. 146.

boasting), although this contradiction is not particular to the Spanish version. In contrast to Lie's interpretation of *þjónar Hlakkar þrifreynis* as 'king-slaves' (*konge-treller*), Bernárdez elevates their rank so that they become *guerreros reales* (royal warriors). This has the effect of making Egill's actions seem more glorious; it was not mere servants or slaves that he overcame, but warriors, worthy opponents. As we have seen above, however, it is fairly clear from the prose text that they were not men of high status.

In the main text of this stanza Bernárdez preserves the word 'Hel', from the Icelandic phrase *hásalar Heljar*, preferring instead to translate it in a footnote as 'el infierno', a term which corresponds more closely to the Christian concept of Hell as the place or condition in which the wicked are punished after death, than to the Hel of Old Norse mythology. In the footnote he does point out that this was the place 'where the dead who are not going to Valhalla dwell' and that it didn't have 'especially negative connotations', but it might have been helpful for a non-specialist audience to explain that according to Norse mythology, the basis for sending the dead to Valhalla or Hel had to do with the manner in which men died rather than with their character. Warriors who died heroically in battle and with sword in hand, were then gathered by the valkyries and carried off to Valhalla where they remained with Óðinn for eternity, drinking horns of ale served by beautiful maidens. Everyone else, it appears, went to Hel. Unlike the Norwegian translation, Bernárdez does not elaborate on the journey the men make to Hel. The phrase *por siempre muertos* (forever dead) corresponds more or less to what is conveyed in the original by *dvelja for*, although it is not a literal translation, but *callan* (are silent) seems to be an embellishment.

### *Stanza 12*

When the town of Lund is proposed as a suitable place for raiding and the men are divided as to whether they should go, Þórólfr asks for his brother's opinion and the following stanza is Egill's spirited response:<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Roberta Frank, *Old Norse Court Poetry*, p. 149: 'If the stanza does date from the middle of the tenth century, this would be the first mention of Lund in literature. The site, which lies eight kilometres from the sea at its closest point, first became a township (as opposed to a trading settlement) around 1020 under Knut the Great; by 1074, Sven Estridsen had established a bishopric there; a stone cathedral was started around 1080'.



Upp skulum órum sverðum,  
 ulfs tannlituðr, glitra,  
 eigum dáð at drýgja  
 í dalmiskunn fiska;  
 leiti upp til Lundar  
 lýða hverr sem bráðast,  
 gerum þar fyr setr sólar  
 seið ófagran vigra.<sup>21</sup>

*Prose word order*

Skulum, ulfs tannlituðr, glitra órum sverðum upp; eigum at drýgja dáð í dalmiskunn fiska; leiti hverr lýða sem bráðast upp til Lundar; gerum þar ófagran vigra seið fyr setr sólar.

*Translation*

Let us, wolf's tooth-reddener > WARRIOR, make our swords glitter upwards; we have to carry out a daring deed in dale - mercy of - fish > SUMMER; let each man (each one of men) proceed as quickly as possible up to Lund, let us perform there (the) unbeautiful incantation of spears > BATTLE before the setting of the sun.

*Commentary & Analysis*

Using vivid, bellicose language he vigorously exhorts the men to battle. The first kenning of the stanza, *ulfs tannlituðr*, anticipates the violent nature of the battle to follow, evoking the familiar image in Icelandic poetry of the warrior as a feeder of wolves, whose teeth will be coloured or reddened by the blood of the corpses it feeds upon. This blood-thirsty anticipation of the slaughter of the inhabitants of an unsuspecting Lund is thrown into higher relief by the word *miskunn* (mercy, compassion) in line 4; it is a quality that is unlikely to be displayed in the ensuing attack. *Miskunn* forms part of the kenning *dalmiskunn fiska* (mercy of dale-fish), which most scholars understand to be an example of tmesis (the separation of the elements of a compound word by the interposition of another word or words).<sup>22</sup> Tmesis is a device often used in Old Norse poetry for metrical purposes but in this instance at least, it serves a dual purpose, fulfilling the metrical requirements of the strophe and, by splitting *dalfiska* and locating *miskunn* between the two parts, giving *miskunn* a special emphasis. The 'dale-fish' referred to here are the serpents, which are liberated from their period of hibernation by the mercy of warm weather, i.e. summer. In *Old Norse Court Poetry*, Robert Frank observes that calling summer 'mercy of the snake' is 'a kind of circumlocution not met again until the thirteenth century' which may be reason to believe this stanza was

<sup>21</sup> ÍF 2, p. 119.

<sup>22</sup> Konstantin Reichardt, in his analysis of examples of *tmesis* in Old Norse poetry, identifies the above example as one of those which could be 'corrected' by adding 's' to dal- as suggested by Kock. See also Finnur Jónsson, 'Kenningers led-omstilling og tmesis', *ANF*, 49 (1933) 1-23.

composed at a later date than often supposed. Frank suggests it may have been composed in the twelfth century, a period she claims to be one of 'great literary activity, when *dróttkvætt* verses were needed to embellish and authenticate tales told about Icelanders of an earlier time.' She goes on to remark that 'the poet's raid and his parodic use of religious terminology (*miskunn* 'mercy', *drygja* 'to commit', *seiðr* 'incantation') would have more point and literary merit respectively if Lund were already the thriving ecclesiastical center it became only at the end of the eleventh century'.<sup>23</sup> Later in her book Frank points out that the Christian elements in the vocabulary of this stanza could also be explained 'as reflecting Egill's primesigning (lat. *prima signatio*), a kind of preliminary baptism which the saga maintains he underwent so as to be able to associate with both Christians and heathens'.<sup>24</sup> However, as this primesigning takes place later on in the saga, when Egill and Þórólfr go to the court of Æthelstan, this explanation is not entirely convincing.

Frank does not explain in what sense she considers the word *seiðr* to be 'religious' or why Egill's use of it is 'parodic'. This term occurs in the final kenning of this stanza, *ófagran vigra seið* (unbeautiful incantation of spears), which refers to the battle or attack to be made on Lund before sunset. In this kenning the concept of battle is evoked by the image of spears creating an unmelodious, inharmonious 'music' as they clash against metal in combat. Most scholars agree with Johan Fritzner's definition of *seiðr* as 'en vis Slags Troldom' (a certain type of witchcraft),<sup>25</sup> although *An Icelandic-English Dictionary* gives more detailed information suggesting that 'the *seiðr* was performed either to work any kind of good or evil to another person, or to be a kind of oracle or fortune-telling, to foreshow future events, such as the life and fate of those present, the weather or the like' (p. 519). *Seiðr*, therefore, seems to refer to some sort of magic ritual, which would have included singing or chanting a charm or spell. The most detailed account of this type of chanting occurs in the well-known episode in chapter 4 of *Eiríks saga rauða* when Þorbjörg the *spákona* (prophetess/seeress) is preparing to perform the *seiðr* and asks for women who knew the *froedi* (knowledge/chant) which was necessary for *seiðr* and was called *Varðlokkur* (magic songs/charms).<sup>26</sup> The only woman who can be found who can do the chanting is Guðríðr, who at first refuses on the

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<sup>23</sup> Roberta Frank, *Old Norse Court Poetry*, pp. 31-32.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, p. 149.

<sup>25</sup> *Seiðr* is also a word for a type of fish and often appears in kennings such as *Gunn-seiðr*, 'fish of Gunnr' (sword) and *hjaldr-seiðr*, 'battle-fish' (sword).

<sup>26</sup> According to the glossary of terms in *The Sagas of Icelanders* anthology, *varðlokkur* literally means 'ward-enticers', which were 'chants likely to have been intended to attract the spirits to the sorceress, who was enclosed in a ring of wards'. *The Sagas of Icelanders: A Selection* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2000), p. 659.



grounds that she is a Christian but ultimately relents, and the saga tells that she ‘spoke the chant so well and so beautifully, that people there said they had never heard anyone recite in a fairer voice. The seeress thanked her for her chant. She said many spirits had been attracted who thought the chant fair to hear’.<sup>27</sup>

In Old Norse literature the practitioner of *seiðr* is almost always a woman whose art was highly respected and whose services were valued by the community.<sup>28</sup> There are also instances of men wielding the arts of magic; the god Óðinn himself practised *seiðr* as we are told in chapter 7 of *Ynglinga saga*:

Óðinn understood also the art in which the greatest power is lodged, and which he himself practised; namely, what is called magic. By means of this he could know beforehand the predestined fate of men, or their not yet completed lot; and also bring on the death, ill-luck, or bad health of people, and take the strength or wit from one person and give it to another. But after such witchcraft followed such *ergi*, that it was not thought respectable for men to practise it; and therefore the priestesses were brought up in this art.<sup>29</sup>

This and other references to the performance of *seiðr* by men make it clear that it was considered to be an unmanly activity, the implication in the above quotation being that its practice led to physical weakness or exhaustion. It seems odd that a word with such a strong association with female practices and connotations of *ergi* should be included in a stanza which otherwise conforms to contemporary views of properly masculine behaviour. As all the other instances of *seiðr* in skaldic poetry occur in kennings for ‘battle’ (Finnur Jónsson cites four in *Lexicon poeticum*),<sup>30</sup> it would seem that in this context *seiðr* loses its effeminate associations and that the idea of comparing the clamour of battle to an incantation which will spell the doom of people of Lund is an apt metaphor.

Although it may be couched in ornate language, the message of the strophe is clear. On a long summer’s day (a fact which somehow highlights the horror of the planned attack), a group of greedy Vikings will descend on a hapless market town, the

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<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, p. 659.

<sup>28</sup> See Dag Strömbäck, *Seid: och andra studier i nordisk själsuppfattning*, with contributions by Bo Almquist, Gertrud Gidlund and Hans Mebius; ed. by Gertrud Gidlund (Hedemora: Gidlunds Förlag, 2000).

<sup>29</sup> *Heimskringla Snorra Sturlusonar: Konungasögur*, vol. 1, ed. by Páll Eggert Ólason (Reykjavík: Menntamálaráð, Þjóðvinafélag, 1946-48), p. 10: ‘Óðinn kundi þá íþrótt svá at mestr máttur fylgði og framði sjálfur, er seiðr heitir, en af því mátti hann vita örlög manna og óorðna hluti, svá ok at gera mönnum bana eða óhamingju eða vanheilindi, svá ok at taka frá mönnum vit eða afl ok gefa öðrum. En þessi fjölkyngi, ef framíð er, fylgir svá mikil ergi að eigi þótti karlmönnum skamlaust við at fara og var gyðjunum kennd sú íþrótt’.

<sup>30</sup> These are: *logðis seiðs Eiríkr viðsjá*, Lausavísur, 5; *Fjölnis seiðs Eiríkr viðsjá*, Lausavísur, 6; *sverða seið Sturla Þórðarson*, Hákonarkviða, 12; *vigra seiðs Guthormr Helgason kqrtr*, Lausavísur, 1. The Skaldic Editing Project identifies twelve more.

sun glittering on the swords they hold aloft. That they expect resistance is implied by the kenning for battle. Steel will ring on steel creating an unlovely music. Before the day is over the blood from the corpses of their opponents will stain wolves' teeth red.

Although the use of the third person plural in Egill's rousing line (*upp skulum órum sverðum*) creates an atmosphere of camaraderie urging the men to perform daring deeds, there is also something perfunctory about the way in which Egill presents the raid as a day's work. It reminds the men that the attack on Lund will give them the chance not only to win renown and honour but also wealth and booty.

*Stanza 12: Norwegian Translation*

De skarpe sverd la blinke, bror! i blåe luften! Drabelig dåd må vi øve her østpå i sommerens dage. Til Lund ligger leien, la lettvent oss dit løpe, og sverdene svartgalder syng, før solen i hav synker! <sup>31</sup>	Let the sharp swords glitter, brother! In the blue sky! We must perform a formidable deed here towards the east in the days of summer. To Lund lies the road, let us run there light-footed, and the swords sing a song of black magic before the sun sinks into the sea!
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*Commentary & Analysis*

Lie interprets the kenning *úlfs tannlituðr* as *bror* (brother), evidently taking this stanza to be a direct response from Egill to his brother Þórólfr. This has the effect of not only emphasising the kinship ties between the two but also serves to create a tone of intimacy as well as comradeship. This sense of brotherhood is further conveyed throughout the rest of the stanza by the use of the first person plural in lines 3 and 6 (*vi, oss*) which presumably refers not just to Egill and his brother but to all the men in their band. By translating *úlfs tannlituðr* as *bror* Lie limits the scope of the stanza, presenting it specifically as part of an exchange between brothers (the original meaning, 'warrior', is a general term which in skaldic poetry can be used to address or refer to any man), at the same time removing a violent, gruesome image.

The adjective *blå*, in the phrase *i blåe luften!*, is obviously introduced for alliterative purposes, although not inconsistent with the context of a summers day, and helps to generate an atmosphere of optimism. Similarly, while *lettvent* (light-footedness) of the Norwegian version clearly corresponds to *sem bráðast* and refers to speed and

<sup>31</sup> *Íslandske ættesagaer*, vol. 1, p. 103.



haste, it also contributes to a light-hearted mood at odds with the deed the Vikings are about to commit.

The verb *drýgja*, which in the Icelandic text expresses the act of carrying out the deed, seems to most often have negative connotations (e.g. *drýgja synd*, *hórdóm*, *munuðlíf*, *heiðinn sið*) and, according to the Cleasby-Vigfusson dictionary, *drýgja dáð* is one of the few phrases in which it has a positive meaning. This meaning can best be rendered in English as ‘to perform a daring deed’ (see above), which Lie expresses with the adjective *drabelig* (formidable, tremendous). The second reference to the battle that is to come, expressed in Icelandic in the kenning *ófagran vigrar seið*, is translated in this version as *(la) sverdene svartgalder synge*. Lie chooses to replace the spears (*vigrar*) here with *sverdene* (the swords); the rush of several spears whistling through the air in the midst of combat would create a different noise to the clanging of swords. *Galder* is the *nynorsk* version of ON *galdr* (magic song, charm), and can mean ‘magic’, ‘witchcraft’, ‘witchcraft-song’ or, ‘shriek’, ‘screech’, ‘howl’, which provides an image of the commotion of battle perhaps even more vivid than the original text.<sup>32</sup> Added to this the prefix *svart-* (black), the metaphor of the clash of swords creating a howling song of black magic with the intent to cause harm is complete. This attack is to occur, according to the Icelandic version, before the sun goes down but again in the Norwegian Lie is more specific, ‘before the sun sinks into the sea’ a phrase which recalls a line of the Norwegian national anthem ‘Og den saganatt som senker drømmer på vår jord’ (although ‘senker’ actually means ‘sends’: ‘the saga-night that sends dreams over our land’).<sup>33</sup>

By rendering the kenning *i dalmiskunn fiska* by its (approximate) sense-word Lie removes the metonymic associations that kenning might evoke. As we have seen above the ‘dale-fish’ referred to here are the serpents which are liberated from their period of hibernation by the mercy of warm weather, i.e. summer. Both the overt reference to fish, and the implied one to serpents call to mind the swords of the first line. Both fish and serpents are strongly associated with swords and weapons in general in Icelandic poetry because of their silvery, glittery appearance but, in the case of snakes, also because of their ability to bite. Furthermore, in the rendering *i sommerens dage* the reference to mercy (*miskunn*) is lost. The Icelandic version does name Lund as the place of action but Lie’s addition of the phrase *østpå* (to the east) and *til Lund ligger leien* (to

<sup>32</sup> There is also a Mod. Norwegian word *seið*, which Einar Haugen glosses as ‘magic, sorcery (esp. as practised in Old Norse times by a special group of women and involving *indecent* ceremonies whose object was to bring death and ruin to an enemy)’ [my emphasis].

<sup>33</sup> ‘Ja vi elsker dette landet’ written by Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson ca. 1860.

Lund lies the road) makes it seem like a very real location. Similarly, *i sommerens dage* (in the days of summer) locates the incident more specifically in time than *i dalmiskunn fiska* (summer). By its use of vocabulary and punctuation, the Norwegian translation of this stanza has the overall effect of making the scene seem less remote than the Icelandic version.

*Stanza 12: Spanish translation*

Alcemos las espadas, tú que cebas al lobo, que brillen, una hazaña hay que hacer en verano; que vaya a toda prisa cada uno hasta Lund, antes de que el sol se ponga de lucha entonemos cantos. <sup>34</sup>	Let us raise the swords you who feed the wolf, let them shine, a heroic deed has to be done in summer; let everyone go as quickly as possible to Lund, before the sun sets let us sing/chant songs of battle.
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*Commentary & Analysis*

The action of raising the swords in the first line of this version corresponds closely with the first line of the Icelandic stanza *upþ skulum órum sverðum*, and this translation, unlike the Norwegian one, preserves the kenning *úlfs tannlituðr* in the phrase *tú que cebas al lobo* (you who feed the wolf). We can tell from the word *tú* that it is a direct, informal address, to one person presumably Þórólfr. In all three versions the imperative nature of the deed is emphasised as if they were duty-bound to carry out the act. However, as in the Norwegian version, *dalmiskunn fiska*, has been reduced to ‘summer’ (*verano*). Indeed, very little poetic spirit remains in this version; even the word order is relatively normal until the last line *de lucha entonemos cantos* (lit. ‘of battle let us sing songs’). Once again there does not seem to be a correlation between this word order and that of the Icelandic.

The last line is a little misleading to a Spanish reader who would understand that the men are being exhorted to sing battle-songs. In the original, as we have seen above they are being asked simply to engage in battle. Perhaps the translator misinterpreted the kenning but if so it is difficult to know from where he derived the meaning ‘battle’.

<sup>34</sup> *Saga de Egil Skallagrímsson*, p. 153.



## CONCLUSION

In poetry, verbal equations become a constructive principle of the text. Syntactic and morphological categories, roots, and affixes, phonemes and their components (distinctive features) – in short, any constituents of the verbal code – are confronted, juxtaposed, brought into contiguous relation according to the principle of similarity and contrast and carry their own autonomous signification. Phonemic similarity is sensed as semantic relationship. The pun, or to use a more erudite and perhaps more precise term – paranomasia, reigns over poetic art, and whether its rule is absolute or limited, **poetry by definition is untranslatable**. Only creative transposition is possible: either intralingual transposition – from one poetic shape into another, or interlingual transposition – from one language into another, or finally intersemiotic transposition – from one system of signs into another, e.g. from verbal art into music, dance, cinema or painting.<sup>1</sup>

Jorge Luis Borges's 'Pierre Menard: Autor del Quijote', takes the form of a 'review' of a recent translation of Cervantes's *Don Quijote de la Mancha*. According to the story, this translator succeeded in indoctrinating himself so thoroughly in Cervantes's thoughts, culture and language that the finished product exactly matched Cervantes. In fact it was better, according to the 'reviewer', due to its modern philosophical perspective. While Borges's tale was actually a parody of postmodern theory, it also contains a moral for the translator. Even if it were possible for a translator to enter into the mind of a tenth-century Icelandic skald, so that he or she were able to reproduce accurately the thoughts and mind-processes of that poet, the result would be pointless and uninteresting. As Jakobson notes above, and as we have seen in chapter 2, absolute equivalence in translation is an impossible goal, and to insist on it implies constant failure.

The move in Translation Studies away from evaluating translated texts on the basis of their 'faithfulness' to the 'original', has opened up whole new lines of investigation and has begun to achieve for the art of translation some of the recognition it deserves. As we have seen in chapter 2, translations make an excellent basis for cultural investigation and Lie's and Bernárdez's translations are embedded with cultural markers which can be uncovered through close readings and comparative analysis.

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<sup>1</sup> Roman Jakobson, 'On Linguistic Aspects of Translation' (1959) in *Translation Studies Reader, The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. by Lawrence Venuti (New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 117.

However, while it is possible to glean some of this information from simply reading the translations, it is not until the texts are viewed in their cultural and historical context that a more complete picture can be realized.

Both translations form part of their respective literary systems, and while as translations they may remain on the margins of that system, they are still indicative of the state of language and culture at any particular given moment of time. A nation's literature is shaped by its history, which in the cases of Norway and Spain means colonial history to a large degree. As Antonio de Nebrija observed, language and, as a consequence culture, rise and fall with the fortunes of the nation or empire and it is only natural that in times of low national self-esteem or anxiety, people will turn to their country's most triumphant moments for solace. Both Spain and Norway have had their 'Golden Age'; for Norway it was the Middle Ages, when there existed a Norwegian empire of sorts, and Norway was a relatively powerful and above all, independent state. A Norwegian king meant a Norwegian court, and it was under the patronage of kings, princes and earls that the skaldic art flourished. At the same time Lie looks to the first Icelanders for their independent spirit, bravery and fierce tenacity in the face of difficult circumstances. In Egill Lie finds a fusion of a sublime poet and a tough Viking, perhaps these are qualities which he feels would well serve the Norwegians of his time.

The Golden Age of Spain was also at the height of its imperial strength and as we have seen Bernárdez finds a model for his translations in the baroque poetry of the Renaissance era. In translating texts such as skaldic poems, whose poetics will seem particularly alien to a Spanish audience, it is natural that the translator will seek to make analogies with examples from his native tradition. Bernárdez does not only gesture to Renaissance poetry in his translations, we have seen how he has also had recourse to medieval Spanish literature, such as the great epic *El Cid* and early lyric poetry. While Bernárdez manages to preserve very many of the Old Norse mythological allusions, he sometimes also finds it useful to refer to the Graeco-Roman tradition which will be more familiar to a Spanish audience. The Spanish text also occasionally has echoes of Christian concepts, such as rendering *Hel* by 'infierno'.

In Lie's translation there is a clear attempt to make the verses palatable to a modern Norwegian audience. His use of informal and even sentimental language is often strikingly in contrast to the original tone, and he often exploits popular or stereotypical images of Vikings and their brutal ways. Lie also appears anxious to reconcile the poetry with the prose context where there may be some discrepancy. This



is a tendency that can be seen in both translations, the inclination to smooth out inconsistencies and difficulties and to present the overall text as a coherent whole.

Both the translators, therefore, colonize the 'source text' in different ways. In the first place any act of translation implies a taking over, or conquering of a text. In order to achieve any kind of success the original must be shaped and moulded to suit the target audience. While a certain amount of foreignness is exotic, too much can be alienating, and for this reason the translators have both kept footnotes and explanatory material to a minimum. To the literary translation scholar, however, these paratextual devices can provide much valuable information about the translators' approach, particularly with regard to who he anticipates his audience will be.

The statement is frequently made that 'all translation is interpretation', more often than not in a tone which suggests that interpretation is the most one can hope for. This viewpoint is not only unnecessarily gloomy, but also completely neglects the positive implications of translation as interpretation. My own approach is that the translations I have been discussing are fascinating, not only in terms of what an analysis of them can contribute with regard to ongoing investigation into the phenomenon of literary translation, but also how much we can learn about skaldic poetry from an analysis between an original text and a translation.

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**APPENDIX:**  
**TRANSLATIONS OF *HQFUÐLAUSN* AND *SONATORREK***

*Hqfuðlausn*<sup>1</sup>

1.

Vestr fórk of ver en ek Viðris ber munstrandar mar, svá's mitt of far; drók eik á flot við ísa brot, hlóðk mærdar hlut míns knarrar skut.	I went westwards over sea and I bear the sea of the mind-coast (breast) of Viðrir (Óðinn) > POETRY, such is my situation; I launched a ship afloat (lit. 'I dragged an oak onto water') at the breaking of the ice-floes, I loaded the stern of my vessel > BREAST with a cargo of praise.
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2.

Buðumk hilmir lqð, þar ák hróðrar kvqð, berk Óðins mjqð á Engla bjqð; lofat vísa vann, víst mærik þann; hljóðs biðjum hann, því at hróðr of fann.	The king offered me hospitality, I have an obligation there with regard to a praise-poem, I bear the mead of Óðinn > POETRY to the lands of the Angles; I succeeded in praising the king, assuredly do I praise him; we ask him for silence (i.e. a hearing) because I conceived a praise-poem.
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3.

Hygg, vísi, at vel sómir þat, hvé ek þylja fet, ef ek þqgn of get; flestr maðr of frá, hvat fylkir vá, en Viðrir sá, hvar valr of lá.	Oh king, give heed to this – it befits well – how I do recite if I get silence; most men (many a man) heard what the king achieved by fighting, but Viðrir (Óðinn) saw where the slain lay.
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4

Óx hjqrva glqm Við hlífar þrqm, Guðr óx of gram, Gramr sótti fram; þar heyrðisk þá, þaut mækis á, malmhríðar spá sú vas mest of lá.	The clash of swords grew on edge of shield, battle increased around the king, the king advanced; there was heard then – the river of the sword > BLOOD gushed – the song (noise) of the weapon-storm > BATTLE; It/that was the greatest (battle) beyond the sea.
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<sup>1</sup> ÍF 2, pp. 185-92.

5.

Vasat villr staðar vefr darraðar of grams glaðar geirvangs raðar; þars í blóði enn brimlámóði völlr of þrumði, und véum glumði.	The spear-web did not go astray around/over the king's shining shield-rows, where the surf-beaten coast lay (covered) in blood (and) resounded beneath the flags of war.
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6.

Hné fólk á fit við fleina hnit orðstír of gat Eiríkr at þat.	People fell down on the shore at the clash of spears; Eiríkr got fame from that.
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7.

Fremr munk segja ef firar þegja, frágum fleira til frama þeira, óxu undir við jöfurs fundi brustu brandar við bláar randar.	I shall speak further if men keep silent, we (i.e. I, Egill) heard more things to their credit; wounds grew in the king's battles, sword-blades broke against the black/blue edges of shields.
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8.

Hlam heinsöðul við hjaldrröðul, beit bengrefill, þat vas blóðrefill, frák, at felli fyr fetilsvelli Óðins eiki í éarnleiki.	Saddle of the whetstone > SWORD broke against sun of battle > SWORD/SHIELD, wound-digger > WEAPON bit – that was a blood-point (i.e. sword); I heard that the oak wood of Óðinn > ARMY, TROOPS fell before the ice of the sword-belt > SWORD in the play of iron > BATTLE.
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9.

Þar vas eggja at ok odda gnat; orðstír of gat Eiríkr at þat.	There was a battle of swords and a collision of spearpoints; Eiríkr got renown from that.
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10.

Rauð hilmir hjör þar vas hrafna gjör fleinn hitti fjör flugu dreyrug spjör; ól flagðs gota fárbjóðr Skota, trað nipt Nara náttverð ara.	King reddened sword; there was a flock of ravens there; arrows/spears found bodies; bloody spears flew. The offerer of hostility (enemy) to the Scots (Eiríkr) fed the steed of the giantess > WOLF; Nari's sister > HEL trampled on the eagle's evening meal > CARRION/SLAIN BODIES.
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11.

Flugu hjaldrs tranar á hræs lanar, órut blóðs vanar benmás granar, sleit und freki, en oddbreki gnúði hrafni á hǫfuðstafni.	The cranes of battle > RAVENS flew onto stooks of carrion, the wound-gull's > RAVEN'S/EAGLE'S lips > BEAK did not become short of blood; wolf tore wound, and the point-wave > BLOOD gushed on the head-prow > BEAK of the raven.
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12.

Kom gríðar læ at Gjalpar skæ; bauð ulfum hræ Eiríkr of sæ.	The bane of greed > SATIETY came to the steed of Gjalp > WOLF; Eiríkr offered carrion to the wolves beyond the sea.
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13.

Lætr snót saka sverð-Frey vaka, en skers Haka skíðgarð braka; brustu broddar, en bitu oddar, báru hǫrvar af bogum ǫrvar.	The damsel of conflicts > VALKYRIE causes the sword-Freyr > WARRIOR (Eiríkr) to move* and the ski-fence of the of the skerry of Haki (sea) > ship > SHIELDS to creak ; Spears burst/shattered and points bit, hemp bow-strings bore arrows from bows.
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\* or, *he* causes *her* to stay awake (by his activity)

14.

Beit fleinn floginn þá vas friðr loginn, vas almr dreginn, varð ulfr feginn; stózk folkhagi við fjǫrlagi, gall ýbogi at eggtoði.	The flown spear bit – then was peace broken – the elm(-bow) was drawn, the wolf became gladdened; the war-wise leader defended himself against death (withstood death), the yew-bow sang/yelled at the sword-drawing.
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15.

Jǫfurr sveigði ý, flugu unda bý; bauð ulfum hræ Eiríkr of sæ.	The king bent the yew (-bow), wound-bees > ARROWS flew; Eiríkr offered carrion to the wolves beyond the sea.
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16.

Enn munk vilja fyr verum skilja skapleik skata skal mærd hvata; verpr ábröndum, en jǫfurr löndum heldr hornklofi; hann's næstr lofi.	Moreover do I wish, before men, to expound the character of the noble man I shall hasten the praise; The king scatters/throws river-brands > GOLD, but holds his lands fast; he is most worthy of praise.
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17.

Brýtr bógvita bjóðr hrampvita, muna hodd-dofa; hringbrjótr lofa; mjök's hónum fjöl haukstrandar mjöl gláðar flotna fjöl við Fróða mjöl.	The offerer of the stone of the hand (gold) > GENEROUS MAN breaks (i. e. distributes) the beacon (fire) of the shoulder (arm) > RINGS/GOLD; the ring-breaker shall not praise 'treasure-torpor'; he has many pebbles of the beach(es) of the hawk (arm) > RINGS/GOLD to give away; he gladdens many sailors (i.e. men) with Fróði's meal > GOLD.
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18.

Verpr broddfleti af baugseti hjørleiks hvati, hann es baugskati; þróask hér sem hvar, hugat mælik þar, frétt's austr of mar, Eiríks of far.	The advancer of sword-play > WARRIOR throws the plain of the spear > SHIELD from seat of the ring > ARM, He is a ring-generous man; Eiríkr's fame increases everywhere, I speak earnestly there, It is reported east across the sea.
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19.

Jǫfurr hyggi at, hvé ek yrkja fat, gótt þykkjumk þat es ek þögn of gat; hrærðak munni af munar grunni Óðins ægi of jǫru fægi.	Let the king consider how I paced/measured my poem it seems good to me that I got silence; I stirred up with (my) mouth, from the land of my mind > BREAST, the sea of Óðinn > POETRY about the promoter of battle > WARRIOR .
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20.

Bark þengils lof á þagnar rof; kannk mála mjöt of manna sjöt; ór hlátra ham hróðr bark fyr gram; svá fór þat fram, at flestr of nam.	I bore praise of the king into the breach of silence, I know how to measure speech (i.e. speak correctly) for an assembly of men/in the abodes of men; Out of the case/covering of laughter > BREAST I bore praise before the king; Thus it came to pass that most understood.
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*Hodeløsningen* (The Head-Ransom)<sup>2</sup>

Endnote to page 147:

‘The Head-Ransom: This is the oldest poem in Nordic poetry (apart from Skalla-Grímr’s ‘lausavísa’, p. 71), which has end-rhyme. A praise-poem which was composed under such circumstances as ‘The Head-Ransom’ cannot be expected to contain particularly ‘deep’ poetic values; it is indeed hollow and bombastic to a high degree, but considered purely from a formal point of view, in the original language it is a masterpiece, with a truly plangent quality.’<sup>3</sup>

1.

Mot vest jeg fòr, tok meg ombord den dyre mjød, meg Odin bød; da is var gått; dro båt jeg flott, og la bak mast min diktnings last.	I travelled westwards, I took on board the precious mead that Óðinn offered me; when ice was gone I launched a boat, and laid behind the mast my cargo of poetry.
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2.

Til gjest meg ba den konge da, og lønn i kvad skal drotten ha! Skal rost bli han som best jeg kan; for denne mann jeg lovord fann.	The king invited me then as a guest, and payment in poetry the king shall have! He shall be praised to the best of my ability; for this man I found words of praise.
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<sup>2</sup> *Islandske ættesager*, vol. 1, pp. 147-49.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 147: ‘*Hodeløsningen*: Dette er eldste kvadet i nordisk diktning (bortsett fra Skallagrims “lausavísa”, s. 71) som har enderim. Et lovkvad som er blitt til under slike omstendigheter som “Hodeløsningen”, kan man selvsagt ikke vente å finne noen særlige “indre” poetiske verdier i; det er da også i høy grad hult og bombastisk, men i originalspråket, rent formelt sett, et mesterverk, med en veldig klangvirking’.

3.

<p>Deg nøye merk, o konge sterk, hva skald formår, om lyd han får. Din dådkraft må hver mann forstå, men Odin så hvor valen lå.</p>	<p>Pay close attention Oh powerful king, to what the skald can do if he gets silence. Everyone must understand your heroic power, but Odin saw where the fallen warriors lay.</p>
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4.

<p>Bet blodorms tann i skjolderand, og opp mot sky steg stridens gny; der høyt da klang valkyrjenes sang, og blodelv tèt, hvor fred du brøt.</p>	<p>Tooth of blood-serpent bit into shield-rim, and up towards the sky rose the din of battle; where the valkyries' song then resounded loudly, and blood-river oozed where you broke the peace.</p>
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Endnote to page 148, *blodorm*: Sverd (blood-serpent: sword).

5.

<p>Veien sin kjente våpen som vendte eggene kolde mot kongsmenns skjolde, der flatskurte stranden søp blod i sanden, og vollen stønnet under våpendrønnet.</p>	<p>the weapon which turned its cold blades against shields of king's men knew its way where the flat-scrubbed/scoured strand sopped blood into the sand, and the field groaned under the weapon-roar.</p>
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6.

<p>Folk seg i koll på blodet voll. <i>Vant Eirik ry i kampens gny.</i></p>	<p>People fell over (i.e. died) on the bloodied meadow. Eirik won renown in the din of battle.</p>
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7.

<p>Mer enn dette jeg kan berette hvis stillhet råder, om Eiriks dåder. Sårene svidde der kongen stridde, sverd brøts småe mot skjoldrand blåe.</p>	<p>More than that I can relate about Eirik's deeds if silence rules. The wounds stung/burned where the king waged war, swords were broken in small pieces against blue shieldrims.</p>
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8.

Blodorm freste, sårsnók hveste, åt seg kolde inn i holdet; stridsmenn glupe stygt fikk stupe for sverdegg skarpe i jernleken snarpe.	Blood-serpent hissed, wound-snake spat, ate its way (bit) coldly into the flesh; excellent warriors fell dreadfully before sharp sword-edges in the rough battle-play.
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Endnote to page 148, *sårsnok* [*sic*]: sverd (wound-snake: sword).

9.

Der odder stakk, og egger knakk, <i>Vant Eirik ry</i> <i>i kampens gny.</i>	Where spears thrust and blades cracked, Eirik won renown in the din of battle.
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10.

Kongssverd ble rødt, korphop fikk kjøtt, spyd og pil tok liv i il; skotte-hater skrubben mater, Nares søster sin lik-aker høster.	King's sword became red raven-crowd got meat spear and arrow/dart took life in haste; Scot-hater feeds the wolf Nari's sister harvests her corpse-acre.
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Endnote to page 148, *Nares søster*: Hel (Nari's sister: Hel).

11.

Om kropper i dynger seg korpene slynger, om nebbet våte av blodig åte; vargen glafser, i licksår slafser, og blodet skummer om ravnemunner.	Around bodies in piles the ravens wheel, wet around the beak from bloody carrion; the wolf snaps, bites into flesh-wounds, and the blood foams around raven-mouths.
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12.

Trollkjerrings hest ble mettet som best. <i>Lik vargen fikk</i> <i>der Eirik gikk.</i>	The trollhag's horse was sated to the full. The wolf got corpses wherever Eirik went.
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Endnote to page 148, *Troll-kjerrings hest*: Ulv (Trollhag's horse: Wolf).

13.

Skjold-dis egger, stridsråd legger, lar krigeren vake og skjoldene brake; sverdene biter, i sår de sliter, og buestrenger pilene slenger.	Shield-goddess goads, makes battle-plans/strategies, causes the warrior to be watchful and the shields to crash; the swords bite, they tear into wounds, and bow-strings, fling the arrows.
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14.

Spydene svirret, buene dirret, da intet var fredet, og ulven seg gledet; trosset hver fare drotten hin snare, der sverd ble svinget på våpentinget.	The spears whirred/buzzed, the bows quivered, when nothing was protected, and the wolf rejoiced; the lord, the swift one, braved every danger where sword was brandished at the weapon-assembly.
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15.

Fra kongbuens streng føk piler i fleng. <i>Lik vargen fikk der Eirik gikk.</i>	From the string of the king's bow flew arrows aplenty. The wolf got corpses wherever Eiríkr went.
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16.

Enn vil jeg forkynne hva kongens lynne av storhet rummer, før kvadet forstummer; sitt gull han ei sparer, men landet han varer med jernhård neve. Hans ry skal leve!	I will further proclaim what greatness the king's character comprises, before the poem ceases (dies down); his gold he does not hoard, but the land he protects with an ironhard fist. His fame shall live!
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17.

De gullrøde smykker han bryter i stykker, skatter som sover; fyrsten ei lover; ødselt sitt gull han strør som muld av hånden full den konge hull.	The gold-red jewellery he breaks in pieces, the prince does not praise treasures that sleep; lavishly his gold he strews like soil from the full hand – that gracious king.
--	--



18.

<p>Av armen han river skjoldet og hiver til venner sin gave, lar av rikdom dem lave: Slik var Eiriks skikk hvorhelst han gikk, det rykte fór i syd og nord.</p>	<p>He tears from the arm the shield and throws to friends his gift, weighs them down with riches: Such was Eiríkr's custom wherever he went, that report went (forth) to south and north.</p>
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19.

<p>Konge, legg merke til skaldeord sterke! Stor er min glede fordi jeg fikk kvede. Øste min munn fra hjertets grunn ordenes vell over fyrstens hell.</p>	<p>King, take heed of the strong skald-words! My joy is great at being allowed to recite. My mouth drew from the bottom of the heart the stream of words about the prince's success.</p>
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20.

<p>Mens tyst det var, jeg kvedet har på verdig vis til kongens pris. Fra latterens hjem bar kvadet jeg frem, så alle må hvert ord forstå.</p>	<p>While it was quiet I have recited in a worthy way in honour of the king. From the home of laughter I bore forth the poem so that all might each word understand.</p>
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Endnote to page 149:

The home [*hjem*] of laughter (literally 'skin/covering [*ham*] of laughter') is a circumlocution for *the breast*, the location [*sete*] of all intellectual faculties. It is difficult to say for sure if Egill had a slightly malevolent intention behind this 'kenning'; at the same time it is not unthinkable that he has chosen it very advisedly, at the very least to provide a tiny glimpse into his true state of mind in the end, when he had to stand and praise his old, bitter enemy in verse.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 489: 'Latterens hjem (i orig. ordrett: "latterens ham") er en omskrivning for *brystet*, alle åndsevners sete. Om Egil har hatt en litt ondskapsfull baktanke med denne "kjenningen", lar seg vanskelig avgjøre med sikkerhet; untenkelig er det imidlertid ikke at han har valgt den med velberådd hu, for dog til slutt å få gitt et orlite glimt av sin sanne sinntilstand, der han måtte stå og lovprise sin gamle dødsfiende.'

*Rescate de la Cabeza* ('Ransom of the Head')

1.

<p>Por mar al oeste fui y de Odín recogí el zumo del pecho;<sup>5</sup> así siempre lo he hecho; en mi barco cargué cuando en él embarqué fardos de poesía; ya el hielo se fundía.</p>	<p>By sea to the west I went and from Óðinn I obtained (collected) the juice of the breast; I have always done it this way; on my ship I loaded, when I embarked in it, bundles of poetry; the ice was already melting.</p>
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2.

<p>Albergue el rey me dio, debo alabarle yo; de Odín traigo bebida a donde el anglo habita; al príncipe he alabado, en verdad le he cantado; una oda he dispuesto, si está a oírla presto.</p>	<p>The king gave me lodging; I should praise him; from Óðinn I bring drink to where the Angle dwells; I have praised the prince, truly have I sung to him; an ode I have prepared, if he is disposed to hear it.</p>
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3.

<p>Ahora, rey, atiende, el poema que te tiende el poeta, lo recito si el silencio suscito; sabidas del señor sus luchas y su ardor, Odín fue espectador de los muertos y el fragor.</p>	<p>Now, king, attend to the poem the poet offers you I (will) recite it if get silence; aware of the battles and the ardour of the king, Óðinn was the spectator of the dead and [of] the uproar.</p>
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4.

<p>Las espadas sonaban que escudos golpeaban, feroz lucha surgió cuando el rey atacó; entonces se oía, la sangre corría, de armas el estruendo como olas rompiendo.</p>	<p>The swords sounded that clashed [against] shields; ferocious battle broke out when the king attacked; then could be heard, – the the blood flowed – the din of weapons, like waves breaking.</p>
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5.

<p>Una malla de lanzas allá se abalanza, golpean con pujanza, chocan sin erranza;</p>	<p>A sheet of spears hurled itself there, they struck with vigour hit without error/missing;</p>
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<sup>5</sup> *Saga de Egil Skallagrímsson*, p. 224, footnote 178: 'El zumo del pecho: "la poesía"' (the juice of the breast: poetry).



de sangre ya llenos están los terrenos, las olas, quietas, las banderas, prietas.	the lands are already filled with blood, the waves, calm, the flags, dense (packed together).
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6.

Los hombres caían, los dardos les herían; gran fama ganaba Eirík y se agrandaba.	The men fell, the darts wounded them; Eiríkr won great fame and it increased.
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7.

Más cosas hablaré, de las muertes diré, más larga es mi historia de su gran memoria; su fama se acrece, así el rey lo merece, se rompe el hierro fiel sobre el azul broquel	More things I will say; of the deaths I will speak; longer is my story of his great renown; his fame increases, the deserves it so, the faithful iron breaks over the blue buckler.
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8.

Quebróse el acero contra el hierro fiero, la punta ensangrentada chocó contra otra espada. La que pende del tahalí mató a tantos allí, de Odín los guerreros en el juego murieron.	The steel smashed against the fierce iron, the bloody (weapon-) point clashed against another sword. The one that hangs from the scabbard killed so many there; Óðinn's warriors died in the play (of battle).
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9.

Grande fama ganaba cuando el dardo sonaba; la espada tajaba, y Eirík se agrandaba.	He won great fame when the dart sounded; the sword cut and Eiríkr grew greater.
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10.

Tiñó el jefe la espada en sangre, devorada por cuervos, era hallada la carne destrozada por lobos, y la lanza a Hel guerreros lanza, de Escocia el adversario nutre así al sanguinario;	The chief dyed the sword in blood, devoured by ravens, was found, the flesh torn by wolves, and the spear sends warriors to Hel; the enemy of Scotland feeds in this way the bloody one. <sup>6</sup>
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<sup>6</sup> The 'bloody one' referred to here is probably the wolf.

11.

Devora de la herida el néctar de la vida; <sup>7</sup> en los muertos anida, la boca enrojecida; volaba la corneja, bebía sangre bermeja, el lobo desgarraba la carne que sangraba	Devours from the wound the nectar of life nests in the dead the reddened mouth; <sup>8</sup> the crow flew, drank red blood; the wolf tore apart the flesh which bled.
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12.

Quedó alegre por cierto el asesino experto <sup>9</sup> al lobo entrega el muerto, junto al mar abierto.	The expert assassin certainly remained happy (he) hands over the corpse to the wolf beside the open sea.
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13.

Despertaba al guerrero la dueña del acero, del escudo el alero se rajó primero, los bordes se quebraban que los filos rajaban, los dardos volaron cuando el arco tensaron.	The lady of steel woke up the warrior, the corner of the shield cracked first; the edges shattered which the blades split; the darts/arrows flew when they tautened the bow.
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14.

El dardo volante flotó hacia adelante, el arco tensando al lobo ha alegrado; las ansias de Hel venció el guerrero fiel, el arco restallando, los filos golpeando.	The flying dart floated forward; the tautened bow has made the wolf happy; the loyal warrior conquered Hel's desires/yearning; the bow twanging, the edges clashing.
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15.

El rey tensó su arco en las sendas del barco; <sup>10</sup> las flechas volaron, al lobo alimentaron.	The king tautened his bow on the paths of the ship; the arrows flew, they fed the wolf.
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<sup>7</sup> *Saga de Egil Skallagrímsson*, p. 226, footnote 179: 'El néctar de la vida: "la sangre"' (the nectar of life: blood).

<sup>8</sup> The reddened mouth (of the crow) nests in the dead and devours the nectar of life (blood) from the wound.

<sup>9</sup> *Saga de Egil Skallagrímsson*, p. 226, 'El asesino experto: "el lobo"' (the expert killer: the wolf).

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p. 227, footnote 181: 'Las sendas del barco: "el mar"' (the paths of the ship: the sea).



16.

<p>Aún más hablaré, a los hombres diré las gestas del señor, compongo con ardor; regala ardiente oro, reparte su tesoro, merece la albanza, gobierna sin templanza.</p>	<p>I will talk even more: to the men I will tell the deeds of the lord; I compose with ardour; he gives burning gold, he shares out his treasure, he deserves praise, he rules without mildness.</p>
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17.

<p>Los anillos divide, sus regalos no mide, no ama la avaricia, reparte sin codicia; abundante tesoro, posee en piezas de oro, siempre alegre al marino con el metal divino.</p>	<p>The rings he divides, his gifts he doesn't count, he doesn't love avarice, he shares without greed; abundant treasure he owns in pieces of gold, he always makes the sailor happy with the divine metal.</p>
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18.

<p>Su escudo arroja el que blande la hoja, lo suelta de su mano Eirík el soberano; sé muy bien cómo era, aquí, allá y doquiera, por el mar se ha sabido que su fama ha crecido.</p>	<p>He throws away his shield he who brandishes the blade, he releases it from his hand, Eiríkr the sovereign; I know very well how he was here, there and everywhere; over the sea it has become known that his fame has grown.</p>
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19.

<p>Ante el rey he cantado los versos que he formado, de corazón he hablado, atento me ha escuchado, recité con mi boca un poema que evoca de Odín el hidromiel para el guerrero fiel.</p>	<p>Before the king I have sung the verses that I have composed; from my heart I have spoken; he has listened to me attentively; I recited with my mouth a poem that evokes Óðinn's mead for the loyal warriors.</p>
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20.

<p>Del rey canté alabanza, recité sin erranza, en casas de señores bien sé cantar loores; ahora desde el pecho al rey un canto he hecho; dije así mi poema, hubo atención suprema.</p>	<p>I sang praise of the king, I recited without error, in houses of lords/gentlemen; I know well how to sing praise-poems; now from my breast to the king a poem/song I have made; thus did I recite/versify my poem, there was supreme attention.</p>
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*Sonatorrek*<sup>11</sup>

1.

Mjök erum tregt tungu at hræra eða loptvætt ljóðpundara; esa nú vænligt of Viðurs þýfi né hógdrægt ór hugar fylgsni.	Moving the tongue is very difficult for me, as is raising aloft of song-steelyard > TONGUE; Viðurr's theft > POETRY, is not now to be expected/likely, nor easily dragged/borne, out of the hiding-place(s) of thought > BREAST.
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2.

Esa auðþeystr, þvítt ekki veldr høfugligr, ór hyggju stað fagnafundr Friggjar niðja, ár borinn ór Jötunheimum,	It does not easily gush forth – heavy grief (a ‘convulsive sobbing’) prevails – out of place of thought > BREAST, [that] joyful find of Frigg's kinsmen (the Æsir) > POETIC MEAD, borne of yore out of Jötunheimar (lit. ‘giantland’).
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3.

lastalaus es lifnaði á Nøkkvers nøkkva bragi. Jötuns hals undir þjóta Náins niðr fyr naustdyrum.	Faultless/flawless, when it quickened (came to life) on Nøkkverr's boat ‘bragi’. Wounds of giant's neck roar down below (before?) boathouse doors of Náinn (a dwarf).
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4.

Þvítt ætt mín á enda stendr, hræbarnir sem hlynir marka; esa karskr maðr sás koggla berr frænda hrørs af fletjum niðr.	Because my lineage is at an end, like ruined (brought to ruin) maple-trees of forests; the man is not hearty/cheerful who bears limbs of corpse of kinsman down, out of (the) house.
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<sup>11</sup> ÍF 2, pp. 246-47.



5.

<p>Þó munk mitt ok móður hrør föður fall fyrst of telja, þat berk út ór orðhofi mærdar timbr máli laufgat.</p>	<p>But/yet first I must tell you of demise (death) of mother, and fall of father; I bear that timber of praise, 'leavéd' with speech (i.e. with words as leaves) out of/from temple of words &gt; BREAST/MIND.</p>
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6.

<p>Grimmt vörum hlið, þats hrönn of braut föður míns á frændgarði; veitk ófullt ok opit standa sonar skarð, es mér sær of vann.</p>	<p>Grim to me was the gap (or gateway) which the wave (Hrönn) broke in the family stronghold of my father; I perceive empty, and standing open, son's space, which sea caused me.</p>
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7.

<p>Mjök hefr Rán ryskt um mik, emk ofsnauðr at ástvinum; sleit marr bönd minnar ættar, snaran þátt af sjölfum mér.</p>	<p>Rán has handled me very roughly; I am greatly deprived/bereft with respect to dear friends; sea severed bonds of my kindred, a tough strand of myself.</p>
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8.

<p>Veizt, ef þá sök sverði of rækak, vas ǫlsmiðr allra tíma; hroða vágs bræðr, ef vega mættak, fórk andvígr ok Ægis mani.</p>	<p>You know if I were to avenge that crime by sword all of Ale-smith's (Ægir's) days would be over; If I could fight (with weapon), I would be a match for brother of bay's disabler (wind) &gt; SEA and Ægir's mistress/wife.</p>
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9.

<p>En ek ekki eiga þóttumk sakar afl við sonar bana, þvít alþjóð fyr augum verðr gamals þegns gengileysi.</p>	<p>But I do not have, it seemed to me, the upper hand in this case against slayer of son, because an old thane's lack of retinue is there for all to see.</p>
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10.

<p>Mik hefr marr miklu ræntan, grimmt es fall frænda at telja, síðan's minn á munvega ættar skjöldr aflífi hvarf.</p>	<p>Sea has robbed me of much – it is grim to recount the fall of kinsmen (or a kinsman) – since my shield of lineage &gt; SON turned from life towards ways/paths of joy (i.e. the road to Valhalla).</p>
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11.

<p>Veitk þat sjalfr, at í syni mínum vasa ills þegns efni vaxit, ef sá randviðr røskvask næði, unz her-Gauts hendr of tæki.</p>	<p>I know it myself, that in my son (the) stuff of a bad man (retainer) had not grown, if the shield-tree had succeeded in maturing until (he) could have taken hands of troops-Óðinn &gt; WARRIOR.</p>
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12.

<p>Æ lét flest þats faðir mælti, þótt öll þjóð annat segði, mér upp helt of verbergi ok mitt afl mest of studdi.</p>	<p>He always valued most that which father said, even though all people said otherwise; (he) held up my household, and greatly supported my power.</p>
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13.

<p>Opt kómur mér mána bjarnar í byrvind brœðraleysi, hyggjumk um, es hildir þróask, nýsumk hins ok hygg at því,</p>	<p>Often my brotherlessness comes to me in favourable wind of moon-bear (giant) &gt; MIND; I think upon it when battle thrives I look/peer around for him and think about this.</p>
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14.

<p>hverr mér hugaðr á hlið standi annarr þegn við óðræði; þarfk þess opt of þvergörum; verðk varfleygr, es vinir þverra.</p>	<p>Which other brave retainer (would) stand by my side in the frenzy (of battle)? I often need this against the adverse-minded (i.e. adversaries); I become cautious in flight as friends diminish/grow fewer.</p>
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15.

Mjök es torfyndr sás trúa knegum of alþjóð Elgjar galga, því niflgóðr niðja steypir bróður hrør við baugum selr.	It is very difficult to find one who we can trust from people of gallows of Elgr,* because a 'niflgóðr', (?good for nothing) caster-off of kin, sells corpse of brother for rings.
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\*if Elgr is Óðinn, his gallows is Yggdrasill, whose people are everyone in the world.

16.

Finn ek þat opt es féar beiðir - - -	I often find this when money is asked for - - -
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17.

Þat's ok mælt, at engi geti sonar iðgjöld nema sjalfr ali enn þann nið, es qðrum sé borinn máðr í bróður stað.	It is also said, that no-one may get compensation of son unless he himself begets that descendant, which to others could be a man born in brother's stead.
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18.

Erumka þekkt þjóða sinni, þótt sér hverr sátt of haldi; burr's Bileygs í bæ kominn, kvánar sonr, kynnis leita.	Company of people is not pleasant to me even though everyone holds his peace; son has come into farm/house of Bileygr (failing-sighted i.e. Óðinn) – son of wife – to look for/meet acquaintances.
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19.

En mér fens í fōstum þokk hrosta hilmir á hendi stendr; máka'k upp jqrðu grímu, rýnnis-reið, réttri halda,	But the ruler of the fen of stirred malt (sea) > ÆGIR stands against me in firm frame of mind; I cannot hold upright ground of mask > FACE, (or) chariot/wagon of understanding > HEAD/BREAST.
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20.

síz son minn sóttar brími heiptugligr ór heimi nam, þanns ek veit at varnaði vamma varr við várnæli.	Since deadly illness of fire > FEVER took my son out of the world, he who I know avoided evil talk wary of flaws.
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21.

Þat mank enn, es upp of hóf í goðheim Gauta spjalli ættar ask, þanns óx af mér, ok kynvið kvánar minnar.	That I remember yet, when friend of Gauts > ÓÐINN raised up into home/world of gods the ash of family, the one which grew from me, and was the family-branch of my wife.
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22.

Áttak gótt við geirs dróttin, gerðumk trygg at trúa hánum, áðr vinan vagna rúni, sigrhöfundr, of sleit við mik.	I got on well with the lord of spear > ÓÐINN I became loyal to believe in him, before friend of chariots > ÓÐINN author-of-victory broke friendship with me.
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23.

Blætka því bróður Vílis, goðjaðar, at gjarn séak, þó hefr Míms vinr mér of fengnar þqlva bætr, ef et betra telk.	I do not sacrifice [thus] to Vílir's brother, protector of gods, because I am eager, still Mímr's friend has given me comfort/remedy for misfortunes if I consider the better side of it.
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24.

Göfumk íþrótt ulfs of bági vígi vanr vammi firrða ok þat geð, es ek gerða mér vísa fjandr af vélöndum.	Battle-accustomed, enemy of wolf > ÓÐINN gave me an art devoid of flaws, and such a character, that I made for myself certain foes out of tricksters.
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25.

Nú erum torvelt: Tveggja bága njörva nipt á nesi stendr; skalk þó glaðr með góðan vilja ok óhrygg heljar bíða.	Now it is hard for me: enemy of Tveggi (Óðinn) > FENRIR'S sister > HEL stands on the headland; nevertheless I shall gladly, with good will, and unconcerned, wait for death (Hel).
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*Sønnetapet*, (The Loss of Son)<sup>12</sup>

Endnote to *Sønnetapet*:

In the translation of this poem – the most personal and powerful emotionally-inspired skaldic lay which has been left to us – I have tried to preserve the original's singular mode of expression in the form of 'kennings' and the like. The artificial skaldic language is (as everyone knows) firmly anchored in the ancient world of mythology to a great extent, and can therefore easily seem excessively affected and absurd to modern readers, who are not familiar with the peculiar cognitive processes which filled the mind of the ancient skald. But for themselves and their contemporaries the kennings were often more than empty wordplay. – For an understanding of *Sonatorrek* the following explanations should be sufficient: In the first two stanzas it is the myth of Odin who stole for himself the poetic mead at the giant Suttung's in Jotunheim, which has determined the fashioning/structuring [of the poem]. Óðinn is called *Valfader*, *Vidur*, *Frigg's husband*. – *Tankens vrå* (v. 1) is the place where thought belongs, the breast (in a later stanza, nr. 19) Egill locates the intellect in *the head*: 'hjelmens grunn/ der runer gror'. This is the first time in the old poetry that one encounters this 'modern' interpretation.) – *Jotnens sår-flod* (giant's wound-flood) (v. 4) is the sea, which according to the myth was formed from the blood of the primordial giant Ymir. – *Ran* (v. 7) is the 'sea-god' *Ægir's* wife; in v. 8 *Ægir* is called 'ale-brewer'; he once had a splendid ale-feast for the gods. *Biløys gard* (v. 18) is Óðinn's court, Valhöll. *Geirens drott* (v. 22) is the lord of spears, (Óðinn's renowned spear was Gungnir). *Viles bror, venn til Mime, Fenris motmann* (v. 23-24) are all terms for Óðinn. – That 'sport', Egill refers to in v. 24, is the 'sport of words', the skaldic art. – *Ulvens søster* (v. 25) is the wolf Fenrir's sister, Hel. – In the beginning of the poem I have reversed the original order of stanzas 3 and 4, and thereby made *the son* 'flawless' instead of *the poetic mead*, as older interpretations would have it. – In conclusion, it can be noted that *Sonatorrek* has survived in a most wretched condition, with the result that it the interpretation of almost every third word in the poem is called into question.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *Islandske ættesager*, vol. 1, pp. 186-88.

<sup>13</sup> *Islandske ættesager*, vol. 1, p. 490: '*Sønnetapet*: Ved oversættelsen av dette diktet – det personligste og sterkeste stemningsbårne skaldekvad stemningsbårne skaldekvad som er levnet oss – har jeg prøvd å bevare mest mulig av originalens særegne uttrykksmåte i form av "kjenninger" o. l. Det skaldiske kunstspråket hadde som bekjent i stor utstrekning sin faste forankring i den gamle myteverden, og kan derfor lett virke forkunstlet og absurd på moderne lesere, som ikke er fortrolige med det særegne tanke- og forestillingsliv som fylte de gamle skalders sinn. Men for dem selv og deres samtidige har kjenningene sikkert ofte vært mer enn tom formlek. – Til forståelse av *Sønnetapet* skulle følgende opplysninger være tilstrekkelige: I de to første versene er det myten om Odin som raner til seg dikter-mjoden hos jotnen Suttung i Jotunheim, som har bestemt formgivningen. Odin kalles *Valfader*, *Vidur*, *Friggs mann*. *Tankens vrå* (v. 1) d. e. tankens tilholdsted, brystet. (I et senere vers (nr. 19) lar Egil tankelivet ha sitt sete i *hodet*:

1.

Tungt det er på tungens vekt å veie Valfaders skatt, mistrøstig nå jeg maner Vidurs ran fra tankens vrå.	It is heavy/hard on the tongue's scales to weigh Father-of-the-slain's treasure; dejected, now I summon forth Viðurr's theft from thought's hidden cranny.
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2.

Krøkt av sorg jeg evner knapt å løfte i lyset frem mjøden dyr, som Friggs mann bar i urold fra Jotunheim.	Bent from sorrow, I am scarcely able to bring forth into the light the precious mead, which Frigg's husband bore in primeval times from Giantland.
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3.

Ti min ætt er enden nær, lik morken lønn i skogen; motløs går den mann som bær' (abbrev. for bærer) sin sønns lik til siste sted, –	Hence my family/lineage is near the end, like rotting maple in the forest; despondent goes the man who bears his son's body to (the) last place, –
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4.

lik av sønn som lytefri mann var blitt, fans båtsvik ei. Nå flyter jotnens sår-flod ved døde nærskyldings dør.	body of son, which would have become a flawless man if it had not been for boat's treachery. Now flows the giant's wound-flood near dead close-relative's door.
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'hjelmens grunn/ der runer gror'. Dette er første gang i den gamle diktningen at man møter denne 'moderne' oppfatningen.) – *Jotnens sårflod* (v. 4) er havet, som iflg. myten ble skapt av urjotnen Ymes blod. – Ran (v. 7) er 'havguden' Æges hustru; Æge kalles i v. 8 'ølbrygger'; han holdt nemlig engang et drustelig ølgilde for gudene. – Biløys gard (v. 18) d. e. Odins gard, Valhall. – *Geirens drott* (v. 22) d. e. spydets drott, Odin (Odins navnkundige spyd var Gungne). – *Viles bror, venn til Mime, Fenris motmann* (v. 23-24) er alt sammen betegnelser for Odin. – Den 'idrett', Egil taler om i v. 24, er 'ordets idrett', skalde-kunsten. – *Ulvens søster* (v. 25) d. e. Fenrisulvens søster, Hel. – I begynnelsen av kvadet har jeg latt originalens v. 3 og 4 bytte plass, og derved gjort *sønnen* 'lytefri' istedenfor *diktermjøden*, slik som eldre tolkninger vil ha det til. – Til slutt kan bemerkes at *Sønnetapet* er overlevert i en ytterst miserabel forfatning, slik at det knytter seg større eller mindre tvil til oppfatningen av nærsagt tredje hvert ord i kvadet.'



5.

<p>Min døde far og mor jeg først dog tar i minnet frem; i mitt dikt de døde skal ærerikt evig leve.</p>	<p>My dead father and mother I nevertheless first bring forth in memory; in my poem the dead shall gloriously live eternally.</p>
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6.

<p>Smertefullt var bølgens slag gjennom fars fredegjerde; åpent står, av intet fylt, det sønn-savn meg sjøen gav.</p>	<p>Agonizing/cruel was the wave's blow through father's guard-fence; [it] stands open full of nothing, the son-lack the sea gave me.</p>
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7.

<p>Hardt har Ran herjet om meg; ingen venn jeg eier mer; min slekts bånd slet havet av – den tråd av mitt tó<sup>14</sup> spunnet.</p>	<p>Harshly Rán has devastated/plundered me; no friend do I possess any longer (i.e. I have no friends left); my kin's bond the sea tore apart – the thread spun of my stuff.</p>
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8.

<p>Om til hevn meg sverdet hjalp, uhell fikk den ølbrygger! Stormens bror, sterke Æge, trygg ei var, strakk til min kraft.</p>	<p>If my sword could help to get revenge, bad luck would get the alebrewer! Storm's brother, strong Ægir, would not be safe, so long as my might lasted/availed.</p>
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9.

<p>Men hevnkraft har jeg ikke mot arge Æges velde; hvermann ser, hvor hjelpeløs ensomme oldingen står.</p>	<p>But power of revenge have I not against arrant Ægir's might; everyone sees, how helpless the solitary old one stands.</p>
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<sup>14</sup> In Norwegian this is spelled without an accent, *tó* is Old Icelandic.

10.

<p>Meg havet hardt har ranet! Trått diktes om frenders død, siden min sønn, min ætts skjold, lykksalig fra livet svant.</p>	<p>The sea has robbed me severely! It is difficult to compose about death of kinsmen, since my son, my family's shield, blissfully (or blessed) faded from life.</p>
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11.

<p>Godt jeg vet: i gutten min til usling ei emne lå, hadde blott til herdet mann skjebnen latt ham leve få.</p>	<p>I know well: in my boy did not lie the stuff of cowards, if only fate had let hardened man live.</p>
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12.

<p>Far sitt ord han aktet mest, om mot meg alle mælte, – var min stav på folksom sti, min evnes støttende arm.</p>	<p>He respected most the words of his father, although all spoke against me, – he was my staff on crowded path, my capable/powerful supporting arm.</p>
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13.

<p>Titt rinner i tanken frem at bror min bort er vandret; speiende spør mitt øye, når jeg står i stridens larm;</p>	<p>It often comes to my mind that my brother has passed away; spying my eye seeks when I stand in the tumult of battle;</p>
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14.

<p>hvem søker til min side fryktløs nå i farens stund? I trengslen jeg trenger ham, vår jeg blir i venn-tom flokk.</p>	<p>now who goes fearless by my side in time of danger? In bad times I need him, I am become wary in a friendless (friend-bare) crowd.</p>
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15.

<p>Én du trygt kan gi din tro, finnes knapt blant folk på jord, ti usle ætte-spiller tar bot blott for drepte bror.</p>	<p>One you are sure of can give your trust [to] is hard to find among folk on earth for miserable kin-destroyer accepts only money (weregild) for killed brother.</p>
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16.

<p>Ser jeg godt hans griske hånd ---</p>	<p>I see well his grasping/greedy hand ---</p>
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17.

<p>Så er sagt, at sønnebot den kun får som far kan bli til ny sønn, som nevnes kan gjenfødt mann i frendes sted.</p>	<p>It is said, that the only son-remedy (compensation) that can be got as a father is to (have) a new son, who can be called reborn man in kinsman's place.</p>
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18.

<p>Med forakt mennis ferd jeg ser, skjønt <i>min</i> rett ingen rammer. Biløygs gård vår gutt har nådd, min vivs sønn, der venner bor.</p>	<p>With contempt do I view men's conduct, although no-one breaks <i>my</i> law. Bileygr's farm our boy has reached my wife's son, where friends dwell.</p>
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19.

<p>Men meg står mjødraneren med hardt sinn hatfull imot; hjelmens grunn, der runer gror, ei løfte jeg lenger kan,</p>	<p>But the mead-thief stands hateful with hardened mind against me; helmet's land where runes grow I can no longer raise,</p>
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20.

<p>siden brått en sottens brand sønnen min fra livet slet, ham jeg vet sitt rykte holdt, ærekjær for anke fritt.</p>	<p>since abruptly a (burning) brand of sickness tore my son away from life, him I know [to have] kept his reputation proud, free from criticism.</p>
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21.

<p>Godt minnet også gjemmer, at ås-venn til Valhall tok ætt-treet som vekst jeg gav, av min viv til verden brakt.</p>	<p>Good memory also minds, that god-friend took to Valhalla the family-tree which I produced as a stripling, brought into the world by my wife.</p>
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22.

<p>Geirens drott jeg gav min hug, trygg jeg ble ved tro på ham, til svikfull seiergiver vennesinn fra meg vendte.</p>	<p>[to the] The lord of spears I gave my soul/heart, I was confident through faith in him, until treacherous victory-giver turned his friendship from me.</p>
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23.

<p>Ei av lyst jeg offer gir Viles bror, gudernes vern; dog har meg venn til Mime trøst skjenket mot skjebnens slag:</p>	<p>Not out of desire do I sacrifice to Víli's brother, protector of the gods although Mímir's friend has given me solace against fate's blows.</p>
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24.

<p>Ti meg gav Fenris motmann en idrett uten lyte, og det sinn som sviker tvang i dagen, til åpen dyst.</p>	<p>Hence Fenrir's opponent gave me a sport without defect, and that character which forced traitors into the light into open (public?) combat.</p>
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25.

Usle liv! Ulvens søster der nede på neset står –; dog skal glad og med godt mot som mann jeg møte døden.	Miserable life! The wolf's sister stands down there on the 'ness' (peninsula); still, gladly, and with good grace, I shall meet death like a man.
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*Pérdida Irreperable de los Hijos* ('Irreparable Loss of Sons')<sup>15</sup>

1.

La lengua se resiste a alzarse en mi boca, no puedo levantar la balanza del verso; <sup>16</sup> no encuentro placer en el néctar de Odín, <sup>17</sup> no es fácil que surja de su hogar en mi pecho.	The tongue refuses to raise itself in my mouth I cannot lift the scales of the verse; I find no pleasure in Óðinn's nectar, It is unlikely that it will surge out of its home in my breast.
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2.

No podré sacar de la honda morada de mis pensamientos –me atormenta el dolor, me impide moverme– el licor de poesía que un día trajo Odín del país de los trols. <sup>18</sup>	I will not be able to take out of the deep dwelling-place of my thoughts – the pain torments me; it impedes me from moving– the liquor of poetry that Óðinn brought one day from the country of the trolls.
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3.

Vivía sin tacha en la larga casa similar a la nave de guerra de Nøkkver; <sup>19</sup> silbó la sangre, el mar, en las rocas donde habita el pueblo de enanos. <sup>20</sup>	I/he/she/it? lived without blame in the long house similar to the warship of Nøkkver; the blood whistled, the sea, in the rocks where the dwarf-race dwells.
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<sup>15</sup> *Saga de Egil Skallagrimsson*, p. 292.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, footnote 218 bis: '*Balanza del verso*: "la lengua"' (*Scales of the verse*: 'the tongue').

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, footnote 219: '*Néctar de Odín*: "poesía"' (*Óðinn's nectar*: 'poetry').

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, footnote 220: 'Odín robó la poesía del país de los trols o gigantes, según se cuenta en la *Edda* de Snorri' (Óðinn stole poetry from the country of trolls or giants, as is related in Snorri's *Edda*).

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, footnote 221: 'Nøkkver parece ser un enano; la nave de guerra de Nøkkver (que es resultado, a su vez, de la interpretación de un *kenning*) podría ser la poesía, inventada por los enanos. Pero la interpretación dista mucho de ser segura' (Nøkkver appears to be a dwarf; the warship of Nøkkver (which is in turn the result of the interpretation of a *kenning*) could be poetry, invented by dwarves. But the interpretation is far from certain).

4.

<p>Mi linaje ya se hunde en la decadencia, es un bosque repleto de árboles caídos; hondo dolor sufre quien saca del lecho al pariente querido y lo lleva a su tumba.</p>	<p>Now my lineage is falling into decline; it is a forest full of fallen trees; he suffers deep pain who takes the beloved relation out of bed and carries him to his grave.</p>
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5.

<p>Mas diré, primero, la muerte del padre, cómo murió mi madre, sacaré de mi boca torrentes de palabras, serán hojas del árbol alto y copudo de la poesía.</p>	<p>But I'll versify, first, the death of my father, how my mother died, I will extract from my mouth streams of words, they will be leaves of the tall, crowned tree of poetry.</p>
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6.

<p>Cuánto daño me hace la brecha que abrieron las olas del mar en los muros paternos, abierta la raja vacía está y oscura; una onda maligna me arrebató al hijo.</p>	<p>How much pain it causes me the breach/crack that the waves of the sea opened in the paternal walls, the open gash is empty and dark; an evil wave took my son away.</p>
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7.

<p>Duro golpe me asesta la diosa del mar, huérfano estoy de amigos amados; rompió el mar los lazos que mi estirpe unían, las mismas ligaduras que a mí mismo me unen.</p>	<p>The sea-goddess deals me a hard blow I am an orphan of beloved friends (i.e. I am bereaved of friends); the sea broke the ties which held my lineage together, the same bonds which unite them to myself.</p>
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<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, footnote 222: 'Los enanos habitaban bajo las rocas y en los acantilados' (The dwarves lived underneath rocks and in the cliffs).



8.

<p>Sabed que si ese agravio con espada de vengara, la esposa de Aegir<sup>21</sup> estaría ya muerta; si pudiera matar al señor de los mares, si atacar pudiera a la amante de Aegir.</p>	<p>Know you (pl.) that if his offence could be avenged with a sword, Aegir's wife would be dead by now; if only I could kill the lord of the seas, if I could attack Aegir's lover.</p>
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9

<p>Mas la ley no permite vengarse con muerte de quien mató a mi hijo, así yo lo creo; sabe cualquiera que Aegir, el anciano, no posee ni un hijo, cosa es conocida.</p>	<p>But the law doesn't allow me to take revenge by killing on him who killed my son, or so I believe; everybody knows that Aegir, the ancient one, does not possess even one son, that is common knowledge.</p>
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10.

<p>La mar me ha causado pérdida irreparable qué triste es contar la muerte de un hijo; era escudo de mi estirpe, echó a andar por la senda que conduce a la alta mansión de los muertos.</p>	<p>The sea has caused me an irreparable loss, how sad it is to relate the death of a son; he was the shield of my lineage, he began to walk on the path that leads to the high mansion (hall?) of the dead.</p>
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11.

<p>Sé muy bien que mi hijo grande hubiera crecido y llegado a ser hombre; si hubiese llegado a tener el vigor, la mano fornida, de un fuerte guerrero.</p>	<p>I know well that my son would have grown great and become a man; if he had come to have the vigour, the strong hand, of a powerful warrior.</p>
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12.

<p>Atendía siempre las palabras del padre, aunque los otros otras cosas dijeran; él era mi apoyo en todas las cosas, en él mi fuerza podía reposar.</p>	<p>He always paid attention to his father's words, although others said otherwise; he was my support in all things, on him my strength could rest.</p>
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<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, p. 293, footnote 223: 'Aegir es el dios del mar' (Aegir is the god of the sea).

13.

<p>Me viene a menudo al pensamiento la falta de amigos; cuando la lucha aún más se endurece pienso en esto, vuelve a mi recuerdo, mi razón atormenta:</p>	<p>It comes often to my thoughts the lack of friends; when the struggle becomes harder I think about this, it comes into my memory, it torments my reason:</p>
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14.

<p>¿en quién confiaré, acaso algún hombre llegará a ayudarme en mi amarga cuita? Me hará tanta falta cuando el pérfido ataque, ha de ir con cuidado quien de amigos carece.</p>	<p>in whom will I trust, perhaps some man will come to help me in my bitter sorrow? I will have great need of him when the treacherous one attacks, he who lacks friends must tread carefully.</p>
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15.

<p>Es difícil hallar en el tronco de Odín<sup>22</sup> a uno tan sólo en quien pueda confiar; sirve a lo oscuro quien vende por oro el cuerpo de un hermano, por compensación.<sup>23</sup></p>	<p>It is hard to find in Óðinn's line (trunk) even a single one whom you can trust; he who sells a brother's body for gold, for compensation, serves the dark side.</p>
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16.

<p>Compensación, dicen que nunca se logra por el hijo muerto; queda engendrar sólo otro hijo más que diga la gente que era igual de bueno que el hermano perdido.</p>	<p>Compensation, they say is never achieved for a dead son; all one can do is create another son of whom people could say that he was just as good as the lost brother.</p>
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<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, p. 295, footnote 224: "Tronco de Odín" se refiere, probablemente, a todos los dioses y hombres (exceptuando, por tanto, gigantes y enanos) ('Odin's line' probably refers to all gods and men (excluding, therefore, giants and dwarves)).

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, p. 295, footnote 225: 'Hemos encontrado ya otros ejemplos de rechazo de la compensación económica por la muerte de parientes próximos; cfr. notas 38 y 116' (We have already seen other examples of the rejection of compensation for the death of close relatives; cf. notes 38 and 116).



17.

<p>No me agrada ya compañía de gentes, aunque busquen todos conservar la paz; ha llegado mi hijo de Odín al albergue,<sup>24</sup> el hijo de mi esposa fue a ver a los suyos.<sup>25</sup></p>	<p>The company of people does not give me pleasure anymore, although everyone is trying to keep the peace, my son has arrived at Óðinn's lodging, my wife's son went to visit his own kind.</p>
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18.

<p>Pero me es hostil el dios que destila dulce licor de malta<sup>26</sup> agrio su corazón; ya no puedo erguir mi cansada cabeza, no puedo tener firme el carro de la razón,<sup>27</sup></p>	<p>But the god who distils sweet malt liquor is hostile to me: bitter is his heart; I cannot lift my weary head now, I cannot hold firm the cart of reason,</p>
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19.

<p>desde que mi hijo fue arrastrado por la fiebre ardiente del mundo de los vivos;<sup>28</sup> bien sé que él siempre evitó con orgullo caer en la vergüenza, que evitó el vituperio.</p>	<p>since my son was taken away by the burning fever from the world of the living; I know well that he always proudly avoided falling into disgrace, that he avoided slander.</p>
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20.

<p>Recuerdo todavía que el dios de los gautas<sup>29</sup> se llevó a mi hijo al país de los dioses; rama de mi estirpe al que yo engendré; retoño querido era de mi esposa.</p>	<p>I still remember that the god of the <i>Gautar</i> took my son – the one I engendered – away to the land of the gods; branch of my lineage; beloved (off)shoot he was of my wife.</p>
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<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, p. 296, footnote 226: 'El albergue de Odín: "El Valhalla", donde iban los guerreros muertos en combate o los que, al morir, eran marcados con una lanza, símbolo del dios Odín' (*The lodging of Óðinn: 'Valhalla', where those warriors who had died in battle went or those who, on dying, were marked with a spear, symbol of the god Óðinn*).

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, footnote 227: 'Es decir, fue al mundo de los muertos donde habitan todos sus antepasados' (That is to say, he went to the world of the dead where his all ancestors dwell).

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, footnote 228: 'El dios de la poesía, Odín' (The god of poetry, Óðinn).

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, footnote 229: 'El carro de la razón: "la cabeza"' (*The cart of reason: 'the head'*).

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, footnote 230: 'Se hace referencia aquí a la anterior muerte de su hijo Gunnar' (A reference is being made here to the previous death of his son Gunnarr).

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, footnote 231: 'El dios de los gautas es Odín. Los gautas eran, o bien los godos, o bien, más probablemente, los habitantes de la posterior Gotlandia, en el suroeste de Suecia, que tan importante papel desempeñan en una de las tradiciones heroicas germánicas, reflejada en el *Beowulf* anglosajón' (The

21.

<p>Yo fui amigo fiel del señor de la lanza,<sup>30</sup> tan crédulo fui que en él confié; pero el dios, que es rey de los dioses todos, el que el triunfo otorga, quebrantó la amistad.</p>	<p>I was a loyal friend of the lord of the spear I was so gullible/credulous that I put my trust in him; but the god, who is king of all the gods, he who grants victory, violated the friendship.</p>
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22.

<p>Por eso, no podré hacer ya sacrificios gustoso a Odín, defensor de los dioses; pero he de ser sincero, el dios más sabio me dio compensación por todas mis cuitas.</p>	<p>that is why I won't be able to offer gladly sacrifices to Óðinn anymore, defender of the gods; but I must be sincere, the wisest god gave me compensation for all my sorrows.</p>
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23.

<p>Odín, el guerrero habitado al combate, me concedió un arte perfecto y sin tacha, que obliga al enemigo a descubrir sus tretas, tal es la fuerza de la poesía.</p>	<p>Óðinn, the warrior accustomed to battle, granted me a perfect flawless art, which forces the enemy to reveal his tricks such is the force of poetry.</p>
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24.

<p>Estoy afligido pues cerca está ya Hel, la diosa de los hombres muertos; mas con alegría, y aún con deseo, y ya sin miedo, aguardaré la muerte.</p>	<p>I am distressed because Hel is (already) near the goddess of dead men; but I will happily and even with desire, and now without fear, await death.</p>
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god of the Gautar is Óðinn: the Gautar were either the Goths or more probably the inhabitants of the later Gotland in the south-west of Sweden, who played such an important role in one of the germanic heroic traditions, reflected in the Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf*.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, p. 297, footnote 232: 'El señor de la lanza: "Odín"' (*The lord of the spear: 'Óðinn'*).



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<sup>1</sup> I have also included a small number of texts in Gallego (Galician), which are indicated by an asterisk. The main focus of this bibliography is on translations of and research on Old Norse-Icelandic literature; I have also included some references to works outside the area of literature, but by no means do I claim to provide a complete account of all publications in Spanish on all aspects of Icelandic studies.

<sup>2</sup> This Basque-Icelandic glossary is an edition (in Latin) based on Icelandic manuscripts written in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

<sup>3</sup> This article was later republished in English, see Enrique Bernárdez, 'The Use of the Affixed Article in Old Icelandic', in *The Nordic Languages and Modern Linguistics 5: Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference of Nordic Languages and Modern Linguistics*, ed. by K. Ringgaard and V. Sorensen (Aarhus: University of Aarhus, 1984), pp. 213-19.

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<sup>4</sup> This is a translation of *The Vinland Sagas: The Norse Discovery of America*, trans. by Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965).



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<sup>1</sup> This is a reworking of *Antiguas literaturas germánicas*.



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