

THE USE OF EDDIC POETRY IN CONTEMPORARY SAGAS

Both family sagas and contemporary sagas intersperse their narratives with *lausavísur*, single verses in *dróttkvætt* measure spoken by men who are active participants in the drama of the saga. Contemporary sagas, and *Íslendinga saga* in particular, also preserve a considerable number of eddic verses. These verses are spoken within dreams and visions by supernatural figures, such as valkyries, large imposing men, ravens and other figures who indicate in their speech that they have recently passed from the land of the living. They are spoken to men and women who are usually on the periphery of the action narrated by the saga, but whose dreams and visions are presented as authentic and significant to the telling of contemporary events. I want to begin this paper by examining the distinctions apparently operating in the use of eddic and skaldic verse in the contemporary sagas, and then to make some tentative observations about the apparent signification of utterance in eddic measure in Iceland in the second half of the thirteenth century.

While the characteristics of these two classes of poetry can be generally aligned with the conventional distinctions which operate between skaldic and eddic verse, a number of verses appear to be anomalous, according to definitions based on such formal criteria as metre or the anonymity of the author. That is, there are verses within dream poems that are in *dróttkvætt* measure, and anonymous *dróttkvætt* verses that function in the text in the same way as *lausavísur* composed by saga characters. While the appearance of a cross-over of features between the two types of poetry provides some indication of thirteenth century habits of mind in relation to the composition of poetry, it renders definition by formal features less than satisfactory. It seems useful then, to work out a functional definition of each type of poetry appearing in the contemporary sagas, rather than a formal one. This functional definition, it seems to me, needs to be

based on the voice of the verse: its identity, the conventions surrounding it, the authority it lends the content of the verse, as well as the function of the verse in the text. While discussing this functional definition, I will be using the terms eddic and skaldic as characteristic of archetypal eddic and skaldic poetry, that is, the traditional anonymous poetry of the Elder Edda, and the verse in *dróttkvætt* measure composed by poets whose identities are either known to us, or whose personalities are inscribed in their verse.

Nearly all the verse in contemporary sagas is in the form of *lausavísur* - verses of only one strophe which are presented as closely bound into a particular narrative context. In only a handful of cases are strophes belonging to longer poems quoted. For example in ch. 39 of *Saga Þórðar Kakala*: "Svá segir Ingjaldr Geirmundarson í flokki þeim er hann orti um Brand Kolbeinsson:" and in ch. 189 of *Íslendinga saga*: "Þess getr Sturla í drápu þeiri er hann orti um Þorgils:" (Jóhannesson et al:1946. All quotations from *Sturlunga saga* are from this edition) *Lausavísur* range in content from eulogy to invective, from the political reaction of one man to the news of a killing, to elegiac reflection on the killing of kin, such as the strophe Gizurr speaks after the burning at Flugumýr, where his wife and sons are killed. In general, *lausavísur* are presented in the saga as *ex tempore* compositions by the participants in the drama of the narrative, prompted by events outlined in the prose. They are usually attributed to a named speaker and are in *dróttkvætt* metre. This type of poetry is characterised by artistic self-consciousness which draws attention to the creative prowess of the speaker, and also by the subjective stance of the "I" who speaks the verse: it is an "I" who is represented as describing particular experiences at a particular point in historical time. These verses follow the conventions of skaldic poetry in being formally esoteric, self-reflexive and occasional. And in general, since they are subjective and situated in an historical context, they deal with events of the past (although their utterance is frequently intended to affect events in the present).

A number of the verses of this first type in contemporary sagas are anonymous. In some cases, the reasons for anonymity are clear. In ch 33 of *Íslendinga saga* a *dróttkvætt* verse criticising five brothers is introduced in this way: "Vísa þetta kom upp í Miðfirði, er kveðin var til Gíslssona". As a result of the verse, continues the saga, the sons of Gísl killed a man. In other cases, however, the verse is quoted simply without the author being named. Nevertheless, it is clear from the text of the verse that the speaker is an interested party in the events; referring to "I" or "we" in the verse, and passing judgement on others' actions. In ch. 8 of *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða* three *dróttkvætt* strophes are quoted relating the settlement between Þorgils and Hafliði. The final half strophe of these verses draws attention to the skald and to the anticipated transmission of the verse:

Reyndisk seggr inn svinni,
- slíkt heft öld í minni -
óð gerik oft - með sanni
at ágætismanni.

In addition, judgements are made in the verse about the actions of other saga figures. A curious case of anonymity is found in ch. 112 of *Íslendinga saga* where a *dróttkvætt* verse is quoted, detailing Órækja's amassing of six hundred men only to be stymied in his plans by Snorri. After this prose account a verse is quoted which was said to have been found at Sauðafell, carved on a wooden stick. Because of the allegation made in the verse about the character of Órækja, this citation may reflect another case of politically expedient anonymity. On the other hand, during the initial transmission of the verse, the bearer of the stick may have provided the identity of the author.

The anonymity of eddic verse is based on a different conception. In the collections of the Elder Edda, eddic poetry is presented as the unmediated words of non-human or at least super-human figures. Knowledge and wisdom is vested in figures who dwell outside the world of the gods - with giants, dwarves and *völur*. The *völva* herself in *Völuspá* has experience of nine worlds, as well as having an extensive memory which

ranges from the beginning of time to the end of the world. In order to acquire their knowledge Óðinn must journey outside his home territory, and compel them to deliver their knowledge. Although eddic poetry is allusive and densely referential, it does not draw attention to itself as skilful composition in the way that skaldic poetry does. To do this would be to draw attention away from the unmediated quality of the words as authoritative and objective, and from outside the here and now. In Snorri's mythology, eddic verse is presented as the words of the gods themselves - "svá sem hér er sagt at Óðinn mælir sjálfir við þann Ás er Loki heitir" (Faulkes: 1982, 21) - although the whole body of material is presented within a framework which euhemerises the gods.

The "I" of skaldic verse is that of an eye-witness, a subjective assessor, who is assertively present in the verse, whereas the eddic "I" functions as a medium of received opinion, who, in the case of the *völva*, is reluctant to speak the material she knows, and speaks it without apparent personal interest. The seemingly personal voice of some eddic heroic verse is personal only in the sense that the heroic figure who speaks the verse embodies certain heroic ideals. Skaldic poets on the other hand, do sometimes represent the speech of gods, but in a poem of this sort such as *Eiríksmál* their speech is cast in eddic measure and set within a dream. *Eiríksmál* was composed in the mid tenth century, apparently commissioned by the widow of Eirik Blood-Axe, although its author is not known. It deals with Eirik's reception at Valhöll, where he is greeted by Óðinn, Bragi and the heroes Sigmundur and Sinfjötli. As in much medieval dream vision poetry, the speaker of the verse casts himself as a dreamer in order to function as a medium through which the words from another world can be transmitted. In poems by named poets, where mythological or heroic figures from the past speak, their words are often presented as mediated in this way, if not by a dream, then by a similarly exceptional experience. *Haraldskvæði* for instance, begins by calling attention to the source of the panegyric for Harald, which was spoken by a raven and transmitted by a wise valkyrie who understands the speech of birds:

Hlýði hringberendr,
meðan frá Haraldi
segik odda þróttir
enum afarauðga;
frá mölum munk segja,
þeims ek mey heyrða
hvíta, haddbjarta,
es við hrafn dæmði.

(Jónsson: 1973, 22)

The poem is in *málháttir* and this aspect of form, as well as the use of the voices of valkyries and ravens (as in *Sigrdrífomál* and *Helgaqviða Hiorvarðssonar*), ties the poem to eddic tradition and lends it authenticity as a representation of truth revealed by supernatural figures.

A comparison of two poems which both deal with genealogical information, the eddic *Hyndluljóð* and the skaldic *Háleygjatal*, reveals how it is the construction of poetic voice which constitutes a fundamental difference between them. *Háleygjatal* is by Eyvindr Skáldaspillir, who begins by calling the audience's attention to his poem, in which he has drawn up the genealogy of Earl Hákon. Eyvindr's personal voice is foregrounded immediately the poem begins:

Viljak hljóð at Höars líði
meðan Gillings gjöldum yppik
meðan hans ætt í hverlegi
galga farms til goða teljum.

(Jónsson: 1973, 60)

The anonymous *Hyndluljóð*, however, begins as an unmediated dialogue between Freyia and Hyndla, who after being cajoled recites a genealogy of Óttarr heimsci:

Vaki mæ meýia vaki mín vina
Hyndla systir er í helli býr.
nú er röcr röcra ríða vit scolom
til Valhallar oc til vés heilags.

(Neckel Kuhn 1983, 288)

This comparison demonstrates the way eddic and skaldic conventions were put to

particular uses even within a set of poems dealing with the same topic. In this example, the skaldic voice concentrates on praise through the worthy composition of a genealogy, whereas the eddic voice presents itself as authoritative and having access to some kind of external world.

Most of the eddic verse in *Íslendinga saga* is spoken by valkyries who are linked to heathen tradition by their appearance as well as their speech. In Norse mythology valkyries function as intermediaries between humans and gods, choosing warriors on Óðinn's behalf, who will join him at *ragnarök* in the final battle against the forces of evil. It is not surprising therefore that it is valkyries who appear in dreams and voice prophecies about men's deaths in battle. In some cases valkyries are represented as interceding on behalf of heroes and against the wishes of the gods - in *Sigrdrífomál* for example. The role of the valkyrie is shifted there from that of a functionary within the supernatural system, to a mediator of that system, who is potentially sympathetic to humans.

Nearly all the dream verses are clustered before important battles, at which the valkyries intend to set about their business of choosing the slain. They almost invariably mention battle or death. In their words they echo both the poetic conventions and cultural beliefs represented in eddic heroic and mythological poetry. Within the discourse of *Sturlunga saga* the authority of this impersonal eddic voice is predicated on a cultural belief in supernatural knowledge and wisdom. This belief is, of course, common to both Christian and pagan systems of thought, and manifests itself in the contemporary sagas through the phenomenon of dreams. The verb "to dream" in Old Icelandic denotes an involuntary action, with the dreamer as the involuntary recipient of material presented by the dream figure. Within *Sturlunga saga*, however, it can be seen that Christian dreams and visions spring from a different tradition from the prophetic visions voiced by valkyries. In the Christian dreams, which are narrated in prose, a bishop appears to a saga figure and advises or

reassures him (Glendinning: 1974, 89f). It is only those dreams which involve the appearance of a supernatural figure that contain verse. Within a Christian context belief in the truth or the authority of words of heathen figures who represent heroic ideals is problematic, and requires some contextualisation. Great efforts are made in the prose of the Jóreiðr cycle of dream verses (*Íslendinga Saga* ch. 190) to contextualise this authority within Christian society. Jóreiðr asks the dream woman why a heathen has come to advise her, to which the valkyrie answers "Engu skal pik skipta, hvárt ek em kristin eða heiðin, en vinr em ek vinar míns". That is, the emphasis is taken away from the awkward ideological problem posed by these figures of traditional wisdom, and shifted to their authoritative knowledge of ethics. In the first of Jóreiðr's dreams the valkyrie claims that the intention of the burners of Flugumýr was to spread heathendom throughout the land. In this statement the dream speaker contextualises the forces of good and evil in an ahistorical framework. She herself is on the side of good, and in that sense is not heathen. In the second verse of the first dream the speaker identifies the significance of her words for Jóreiðr's family, and in this her function is similar to that of a *fylgja*, or the corresponding Christian figure, a guardian angel. From the evidence of *Íslendinga saga* then, it appears that by the thirteenth century these figures of cultural authority had passed into a pluralistic dream tradition, in which figures of traditional authority could be accommodated within a Christian framework. Robert Glendinning (1966: 95-7) has suggested that v.4 of *Íslendinga saga*, in which two grey-hooded men (possibly greyfriars) rock violently as they chant about the day of judgement is a Christian companion piece to the preceding verse in which two bloodied valkyries Guðr and Göndul rock and chant about their mission to Ráðthlið where they will be worshipped by the sacrifice of warriors. The diction of the verse "á efsta dómi" appears to provide convincing evidence of the assimilation of Christian rhetoric into the native dream verse tradition.

A number of other conventional features link the dream poems to the tradition of eddic mythological verse. The authority of these supernatural dream figures stems in part

from their detachment: the speaker of the verse usually comes from another world, or another time. In some cases the voice of authority is disembodied - "Þetta var kveðit fyrir konu einni skammt frá Þingeyrastað um ljósan dag, en eigi sá hon manninn, en hátt var kveðit" (p.427). The speakers approach from specific locations, like the forces of evil at *ragnarök* in *Völuspá*. The valkyrie figure in the Jóreiðr cycle for instance, says she has just come from the world of the dead: "Norðan kom ek at ór násheim" (p.519). Other dream figures are characterised as having travelled far and wide, like the figure of Óðinn in the mythological poems, in particular in *Hávamál*. (The speaker of verse 71 begins: "Lífök of heim ór heimi".) A number of the verses are in fact spoken by someone resembling Óðinn both in physical description and unruly intentions. In *Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* for instance, two verses are spoken by a man who identifies himself in the verse as "Faraldr". The dream figures are frequently presented as all-knowing both in the texts of verse "Vit tvau vitum þat" (v.30) and in the surrounding prose "Þat veit ek allgerla" (p.519). One valkyrie appears to Sturla Sighvatsson to say explicitly that knowledge of the fates and successes of men is not permitted to him or other men. Several verses are spoken by figures who have recently passed from the world of men to the world of the dead. Sturla Sighvatsson appears as the speaker in two dreams before his death at Gizurr's hands, and another verse is spoken by northern men, going into battle to meet their deaths. In the battle of Örlygsstaðir Sturla Sighvatsson is killed in a particularly gruesome way. He is wounded in the cheek and throat and is in the process of asking for quarter when Gizurr comes up and leaps into the air to strike him, leaping so high that men could see the sky between the horizon and his feet. Gizurr strikes him his death blow on the head from the left behind the eye. In the series of dream verses preceding this battle a verse is spoken in a dream by a large man, badly wounded in the head and neck, who refers to his own death "en vér erum felldir", and "Því varðk norðr" (p.424). Like other dream verse speakers, he predicts the destruction and desolation caused by the warring, and the great loss of lives it will involve. This speaker is an interesting fusion of a supernatural prophet and a returned spirit - he is "mikill" like other supernatural

dream figures, but his wounds are particularised - "ok var höggvin af hnakinn ok á halsinn". His voice is personal and particularised - and at the same time prophetic and authoritative. Like the valkyries he predicts destruction in the world: "Þornar heimr ok hrørnar, hriðeflir ferr víða."

In general, dream verses deal with events of the future, and are situated before a prose account of the events they prefigure. In this, they are distinct from skaldic verses which tend to come at the end of prose accounts, and to treat events of the past. This distinction derives from the property of the voice of dream poems to foretell the future. In eddic verse, both prophetic voices and narrating voices are found, but it is with poems spoken by a prophetic voice that the dream verses share many thematic and stylistic similarities.

The first and last verses quoted in Íslendinga saga are spoken in dreams by named figures from the past, the tenth century poet Egill Skallagrímsson and the figure from the cycle of eddic heroic poems, Guðrún Giúkadóttir. In Hrafn's saga Sveinbjarnarsonar the naming of the speaker of a verse, and the establishment of his credentials clearly lend authority to the contents of the quoted verse. There the speaker is called Ingólfr, and he is said to have previously correctly foretold the death of Markús. The identification of Egill and Guðrún also only occurs in the prose. Egill appears in a dream to his namesake Egill Halldórsson and expresses his dissatisfaction with the conduct of his descendants, Snorri and the other Myra men of the early thirteenth century. He then speaks a half strophe of *dróttkvætt*, claiming that men are nowadays cowards, and warning them of the troubled times ahead.

Guðrún Giúkadóttir names herself as the speaker of verses to a certain woman called Jóriðr from Miðjumdalr. In an article on male and female archetypes in the Elder Edda, Steblin-Kamenskij (1982:87) characterises the eddic heroine Guðrún as showing strength of feeling in fulfilling what she considers to be her duty. Preben

Meulengracht Sørensen has recently investigated a number of cases in thirteenth century literature where Guðrún's name is invoked and associated with the quality of absolute loyalty of action without regard for its consequences. Of these cases the Jóriðr cycle is the only place where her words are actually quoted. She is, however, only named in the prose, and the verses she speaks are in different metres, and refer to events outside the immediate time of the saga. (As well, the authorship of the chapter in which they appear is uncertain.) Nevertheless the incorporation of these verses together in one chapter, and their attribution to Guðrún in the prose suggests that to the thirteenth century audience she represented a cultural archetype of loyalty, and her words on loyalty, which echo lines in Hávamál, were regarded as authoritative.

The figure of Guðrún is interesting in another respect. She and the other valkyries who foretell the future represent female voices of authority familiar from the eddic corpus but rare in skaldic verse. The gender of the voice, then, becomes another aspect of the difference in the two types of verse quoted in contemporary sagas, and the distinction here suggests the existence of a native tradition in which *völur* and valkyries are regarded as funds of knowledge, particularly about the future.

Another important distinction between the two types of poetry is the audience to whom it is directed. Skaldic strophes are usually directed to members of the group of people who are at the centre of the action. A large number of male members of this group are represented as composing *dróttkvætt* strophes themselves. Eddic dream verses, however, are represented as heard almost exclusively by people on the periphery of this group. With the exception of four verses, the source of all the dream verses in Íslendinga saga is among people whose name and dwelling place is given, but who are otherwise not mentioned in the saga. The members of this group are both male and female. The two instances of dream verses recited by named figures are also directed to otherwise insignificant people. While dreams involving traditional Norse figures are represented in the saga as more common among people who are not politically

influential, these dreams nevertheless appear to have been transmitted far and wide, and to have been treated seriously by members of both groups. It is significant in this respect that Sturla Þorðarson, the author of the saga, is himself visited by a valkyrie in his dreams.

The other three exceptions to the pattern of valkyrie dreams being attributed to ordinary people are as follows: Sturla Sighvatsson has a dream in which a valkyrie denies him knowledge of the future (v. 66) and an otherwise unmentioned person appears in a dream to Steinvör Sighvatsdóttir and asks her why a head is lying near the house (v.55). This dream prefigures the death of Steinvör's father Sighvatr. The fourth dream (v.54) is dreamt by Sighvatr, who dreams his horse Flöski comes into his room asking him why he doesn't offer him any food. The horse then devours all the food, and the dishes as well. In the verse of this dream, which is in *dróttkvætt* measure, Sighvat draws attention to the fact that he is mediating between the horse's speech and its reception, saying "Flöski spoke, but I have formed the verse" using an elaborate skaldic kenning to describe verse: "Kvað Flöski - hrærik Boðnar báru". A number of other dream verses are also in *dróttkvætt* measure, but it is not always made so explicit that the skill and habits of mind of the dreamer affect the form of the transmitted verse. Dream verses in *dróttkvætt* measure are spoken to Sturla Sighvatsson (v.66), to Sturla Þorðarson (v.68), to a priest (v.71), and two verses are spoken to an otherwise unmentioned man, Snæbjörn of Sandvík (vv. 60-1). None of the *dróttkvætt* dream verses are spoken to female dreamers.

To what extent the texts of *Sturlunga saga* reflect the state of dream verse production in thirteenth century Iceland cannot be known for certain. The frequent references to the abundance of dreams dreamt during particularly tumultuous political feuds, not only in *Íslendinga saga* but also in *Hrafn's saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*, would seem to indicate that dreams and their transmission from one person to another, and from one district to another was a social fact in medieval Iceland. References such as the

following are made in both sagas:

Þá urðu í Vestförðum mörg kyn í draumum ok synum. (*Íslendinga saga*, ch 14)
 Margir váru aðrir draumar sagðir í þenna tíma, þó at hér sé eigi ritaðir, þeir er tíðindavænir þóttu vera, svá ok aðrir fyrirburðir. (ch.134)
 Fyrir tíðindum þessum er hér fara eftir, urðu margir fyrirburðir, þó at hér sé fáir ritaðir. (ch. 136)
 Þá urðu í Vestfjörðum mörg kyn í draumum ok synum. (*Hrafn's saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*, ch.14).

Particular attention is also paid to establishing the reliability of the transmission of a dream to the saga writer:

Þorgrímr Hauksson sagði draum sinn sonum Þórðar, Óláfi ok Sturlu, er þeir riðu um Vatnaheiði." (ch. 65).

No doubt in their selection of dreams saga authors placed a certain construction on the events and the attitudes of people to contemporary political events. Robert Glendinning (1974) has argued it is in the selection and placement of dreams in *Íslendinga saga* that Sturla Þorðarson's political and moral views are most clearly represented. Various pieces of textual evidence seem to suggest that while the verses may have sprung from independent dreams, the context in which they are put by the prose frame is subject to authorial variation, whether deliberately or as a function of the greater propensity of details in prose to change during transmission compared with details preserved in poetry. For instance in the series of dream verses recorded in ch.136 of *Íslendinga saga* the same dream verse is attributed to a man in Borgarfjörðr and later to a woman west in Svartadalr. A verse preserved in ch. 23 of *Íslendinga saga* is attributed to a man in the West fjords, but in *Guðmundar saga goða* (ch.60) it is attributed to a man in the East Fjords. The prose frame of several verses appears to be an interpretation of the verse itself, rather than an account of the context in which the verse was spoken. (This is particularly noticeable in the prose introductions to verses 3 and 4.) As well, the authorship of the chapter containing the Jóreiðr cycle is in doubt, as well as that of four other leaves of *Íslendinga saga* which preserve some dream verses. As

Meulengracht Sørensen has pointed out, all the verses of the Jóreiðr cycle do not seem to be from the same source - some are in different measures, and the last verse concerns itself with matters separated in time from the first three dreams.

The existence of dream verses in *dróttkvætt* measure seems to indicate that the form a dream was transmitted in was made compatible with the knowledge and habits of mind of the dreamer. It seems from the evidence of *Sturlunga saga* that saga figures who are more important and influential members of the community were adept in formulating *dróttkvætt* verse, whereas this habit of mind was less common among women and ordinary male members of the community. The best illustration of this pattern is in verses 66 and 67. In the first verse a valkyrie appears to Sturla Sighvatsson in a dream and speaks half a strophe in *dróttkvætt* measure (female informant, male recipient: *dróttkvætt* measure). Sturla himself appears in the next verse as a spirit, addressing a woman named Þuríðr, and the verse is in eddic measure (male informant, female recipient: eddic measure). In this case, even though the male informant is capable and accustomed to composing *dróttkvætt* strophes, the determining factor as far as metre is concerned appears to be the gender of the recipient. This pattern is of interest for its apparent reflection of compositional habits among Icelanders of the thirteenth century, although the author may have been responsible for the regularisation of the pattern, and conceivably, for its invention.

Before commenting on the generic characteristics of dream verses, I should note that there are a few instances of eddic verse quoted in contemporary sagas outside the context of dreams. While the metrical form of the three verses quoted below is similar to that of dream verses, the verses themselves appear to belong to a different tradition from the highly conventionalised and solemn valkyrie visions. In ch.38 of *Íslendinga saga* a verse in *fornyrðislag* is spoken by a saga figure as he approaches a battle site: "Þá er Loftr reið í túnit, kvað hann þetta:

Hér ferr Grýla í garð ofan
ok hefr á sér hala fimmtán"

It is not clear from the text whether Loftr is quoting lines from a lost eddic verse, or composing lines in eddic measure on the spot. Another eddic verse is presented as the composition of a collective group. In *Hrafn's saga Sveinbjarnarsonar* (ch.14) a joke is made about the beggar passed on by Hrafn to a man named Josep. "Þetta kvaðu förunautar hans [Hrafns]:

Færum gildan grepp Jóseppi
Sá skal ráða ríkr Súðavík

After an incident in *Íslendinga saga* (ch.39) in which several men avoid conflict by going into hiding, another anonymous verse in eddic measure expressing a taunt about cowardice is quoted: "Þá var þetta kveðit:

Loftr er í eyjum
bitr lundabein
Sæmundr er á heiðum
ok etr berin ein."

The metre of this verse, which includes end-rhyme, is similar to the form of later *rímur*, or dance song verses (Ólason: 1982, 38-9).

The body of dream verses preserved in *Sturlunga saga* seems to indicate that in the second half of the thirteenth century eddic poetry representing the words of supernatural figures was widely, if not commonly, produced and transmitted. This poetry can be shown to share many features of diction, metre and voice with the traditional eddic poetry recorded in the *Codex Regius* of the Elder Edda. The prophetic voice of many of the verses echoes *Völuspá* in the frequent use of present tense constructions, particular with the verb "vera", for example, "dimmt es í heimi" (v.63) and "nu er in skarpa skalmöld komin" (v.65). The verb "munu" is also used to introduce prophecies: "Þá mun oddr ok egg (v.65) and "Nú munu nauðir norðmenn kveða" (v.69). All of these characteristics are found in *Völuspá* 45 (see below), as well

as in other strophes of the poem. The whole phenomenon of widespread valkyrie sightings is reminiscent of str. 30 of Völuspá, which describes the prelude to *ragnarök*:

Sá hon valkyrior vítt um komnar
gorvar at riða til Goðpióðar.

As well, the sentiments of Völuspá 45 -

Bræðr muno beriaz oc at bönom verdaz
muno systrungar sifiom spilla
hart er í heimi hórdómr mikill
sceggöld, scálmöld, scildir ro klofnir.

are echoed in some of the dream verses:

Ætla lyðir þótt á laun fari
kemr vél fyr vél vélar at gjalda. (v. 52)

Fásk munu sár af sárum
svás heldr þars menn felldusk
koma mun hörð fyr harða
hríð ok skammt at bíða. (v. 71)

Particular phrases spoken by valkyries, such as "Viltu enn lengra" (v.30) are similar to the diction of the *völva* (see Völuspá 27f and Hyndlolióð 31f). The appearance of this phrase suggests the relationship between the valkyrie and the dreamer was sometimes conceived of as modelled on that of the *völva* and Óðinn. This antagonistic relationship is clearly modified in certain dream visions, perhaps as the result of Christian influence. In the *Jóreiðr* cycle, for instance, the valkyrie is sympathetic and compassionate towards the dreamer and her community.

Another voice familiar from eddic mythological verse is also heard in the dream verses. The voice of traditional wisdom, characteristic of Hávamál, but also found in snatches in the composition of other poems (see for example Vaförðunismál 10) is found in the dream verses. In the dream verses the voice appears to act as a guide on questions of

ethics, especially loyalty:

Ves þú vinr vinar míns
en ek mun með svinnum at saka bótum. (v.90)

A further convention attested to in the eddic corpus and found in the dream verses is the sinister implications of a grim stranger appearing and naming himself. In Grímnismál Óðinn's revelation of identity spells the end for his interlocutor, and in v. 3 of Hrafn saga Sveinbjarnarsonar a large man appears in a dream and proclaims:

Faraldr ek heiti ferk of aldar kyn
emka ek sættir svika.

Like the corpus of eddic poetry preserved in the Codex Regius manuscript, dream verses exhibit certain technical features that are usually associated with skaldic art. Just as Hárbarðzlióð displays the influence of skaldic diction, dream poems in eddic metre spoken by valkyries can incorporate elaborate kennings in the verse:

Mál er at minnask mömar hlakkar (v.30)

This brings us back to the question raised at the beginning of this paper, namely, what distinctions were operating in the minds of thirteenth century Icelanders between eddic and skaldic verse. It has often been noted that the corpus of skaldic verse, as it has traditionally been assembled, includes many poems in eddic measure, limiting the usefulness of metre as a definitive criterion. The use of kennings is also not isolated to one type of verse, although the kenning plays a much more significant role in skaldic poetics than it does in eddic. The distinction of eddic poetry seems to have depended on the unmediated quality of the voice of the verse, which had its source beyond everyday reality. In the second half of the thirteenth century it does not appear to have been implausible that this voice spoke in *dróttkvætt* measure and used kennings.

While sharing many general features with the corpus of eddic verse, the dream verses of Sturlunga saga can be distinguished as a particular sub-group by the following features:

- The metrical form of many verses includes the repetition of the last line. Jón Jóhannesson (1946: 587) has distinguished this form as conventionally adopted in verse spoken by dead men or spirits. This feature then, is clearly related to the function of the verse in its narrative context, where the appearance of figures after their deaths is a conventional element in the development of the narrative.

- The speaker of the verse often uses the collective voice. For example: "nú kvæðum" (v.63) and "Ríðum allir" (v.57). The eddic poem Grottasöngur, preserved only in manuscripts of Snorra Edda, is expressed in a dual voice, but other eddic poems are either in monologue, dialogue or third person narrative form.

- The speaker sometimes exhorts the dreamer to transmit the verse, for example in v. 92:

Seg þorvarði þessa grímu
ungum auðskata ef þik eftir spytt.
En þótt þik eigi eftir fregni
þó skaltu segja syni oddvita.

- The verses are characterised by specialised diction relating to the activities of valkyries. Phrases such as "rignir blóði" and statements of intention to travel to a battle site are found in many verses, for example "Ríðum allir rógstefnu til" (v.57), "verðk þangat til ganga" (v.68) and "Göngum blóðgir með banasárum" (v.69).

These last three features are also found in the *fornyrðislag* verse spoken by valkyries in ch. 157 of Njáls saga. A certain man sees twelve female figures ride up to a stone hut, and through a chink, he watches while they weave a web made of human entrails

and chant a verse. The phrase "rignir blóði" occurs in the first strophe, and the following verse, expressed in a collective voice, exhorts listeners to transmit the verse:

Vel kváðu vér um konung ungan
sigrhljóða fjölð syngjum heilar
enn hinn nemi er heyir á
geirfljóða hljóð ok gumum segi. (Sveinsson: 1954, 458)

Strophe 4 expresses the valkyries' intentions to travel to the place where their assigned warriors are fighting:

Fram skulum ganga ok í fólk vaða
þar er vinir várir vápnum skipta.

The composition of Njáls saga is roughly contemporaneous with the composition of Íslendinga saga, although the valkyrie verse in the former is supposed to have been heard several centuries earlier. Whether the Darraðarlijóð represents a very old example of this kind of vision of valkyries reciting verse, or a contemporary composition, is not clear from the textual evidence. The appearance of these verses in separate narratives written down in the late thirteenth century suggests nevertheless, that there was some kind of vogue for this sort of verse around the time of the end of the Commonwealth. It is possible that the dream verses in both Sturlunga saga and Njáls saga were the inventions of saga writers, although the detailed explanations given about their origins and transmission indicate that they were intended to be regarded as derived from actual events. The verses are full of specific references to contemporary events (including names of people, places and battles), and are presented as representing responses to events throughout the country.

Whatever the origin of the verses, the narratives assume their audience's familiarity with heroic figures like Guðrún, mythological phenomena such as valkyries, and the implications of a visit from a large, much-travelled man. This assumption on the part

of saga writers seems to indicate that their audience knew at least some of the poems preserved in the Codex Regius manuscript of the Elder Edda, or at least a range of the conventions which are instantiated in these texts.

Judy Quinn

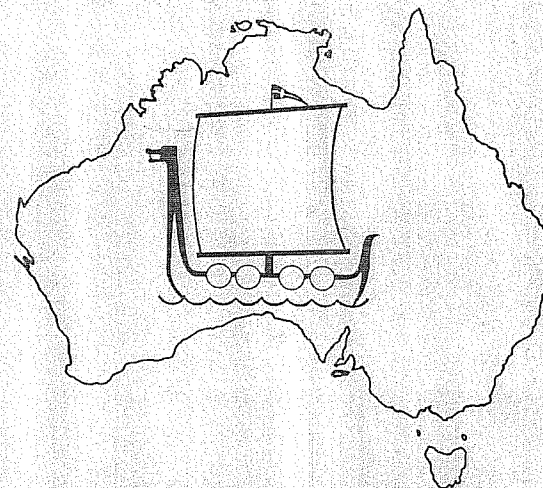
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