

The King is Dead, Long Live the King:
Commemoration in Skaldic Verse of the Viking Age

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines the function of commemorative skaldic verse at the Viking-age court. The first chapter demonstrates that the commemoration of past kings could provide a prestigious genealogical record that was used to legitimize both pagan and early Christian rulers. In the ninth and early tenth centuries, poets crafted competing genealogies to assert the primacy of their patrons and of their patrons' religions. The second chapter looks at the work of tenth-century poets who depict their rulers' entrances into the afterlife. Such poets interrogate the role public speech and poetic discourse play in the commemoration of the king, especially during the political turmoil that follows his death. A discussion follows of the relationship between poets and their patrons in the tenth and eleventh centuries: although this relationship is often praised as one of mutual trust and reliance, the financial aspects of the relationship were often juxtaposed uneasily with expressions of emotional attachment. The death of the patron caused a crisis in these seemingly contradictory bonds between poet and patron. The final chapter demonstrates the dramatic development in the eleventh century of deeply emotional commemorative verse as poets become adopted into their patrons' families through such Christian ceremonies as baptism and marriage. In these verses poets express their grief after the death of the king and record the performances of public mourning on the part of the kings' followers. As the petty warlords of the Viking age adapted to medieval models of Christian kingship, the role of the skald changed too. Formerly serving as a propagandist and retainer in the king's service, a skald documenting the lives of kings at the end of the Viking age could occupy an almost infinite number of roles, from kinsman and friend to advisor and hagiographer.

Acknowledgements

It is an unfortunate stereotype that English students spend long, lonely hours in the library growing cross-eyed and frazzled as they work in utter solitude with nothing but the dust of manuscripts to keep them company. Long though those library hours have sometimes felt, I have never enjoyed so much delightful and thought-provoking company as during these past three years. The community of graduate medievalists has provided me with much laughter, argument, criticism and support, and this thesis would be far poorer without the friendship of many: Diane Alff, Sarah Baccianti, Tom Birkett, Christian Carlsen, Stephanie Fishwick, Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, Aditi Nafde, Liv Robinson, and Daniel Thomas. In addition to reading the entire thesis, Rob Avis has been a constant source of help, encouragement and affection. I have also been greatly helped by Sverre Bagge, Richard Dance, Alison Finlay, Judith Jesch, Else Mundal, Eric Stanley, and Judy Quinn, who have all given advice about sections of this thesis offered as conference papers, and by Matthew Townend, who introduced me to Old Norse. As my external examiner Russell Poole offered many excellent suggestions. I am particularly indebted to Carlyne Larrington for her constant kindness and advice, and for her infectious enthusiasm for (and generosity with) all things Scandinavian. Special thanks must of course go to my supervisor, Heather O'Donoghue, who has been alternately encouraging, critical, supportive, argumentative, and at all times inspiring.

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Abbreviations

Primary Sources

- Ágr-Fsk* Bjarni Einarsson, ed. *Ágrip af Nóregskonunga sögum, Fagrskinna - Nóregs konunga tal*. Íslenzk fornrit 29. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1985.
- Bwf* George Jack, ed. *Beowulf: A Student Edition*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994.
- Exeter* George Philip Krapp and Elliot van Kirk Dobbie, eds. *The Exeter Book*. The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records: A Collective Edition 3. New York, Columbia UP, 1936.
- Flat* C. R. Unger and Guðbrandur Vigfússon, eds. *Flateyjarbók: En samling af norske konge-sager*. Norske historiske kildeskrittfonds Skrifter 4. 3 vols. Christiania [Oslo]: P. T. Malling, 1860-68.
- Gylf* Snorri Sturluson. *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*. Ed. Anthony Faulkes. 2nd ed. London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2005.
- Hkr* Snorri Sturluson. *Heimskringla*. Ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson. 3 vols. Íslenzk fornrit 26-8. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1941-51.
- Ísl-Land* Jakob Benediktsson, ed. *Íslendingabók, Landnámabók*. 2 vols. Íslenzk fornrit 1. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1968.
- Mork* Finnur Jónsson, ed. *Morkinskinna*. Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur 53. Copenhagen: J. Jørgensen, 1932.
- Norsk* Ernst Albin Kock, ed. *Den norsk-isländska skaldediktningen*. 2 vols. Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1946-9.
- Ork* Finnbogi Guðmundsson, ed. *Orkneyinga saga*. Íslenzk fornrit 34. Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1965.
- Skáldatal* Guðni Jónsson, ed. *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar: Nafnapulur og Skáldatal*. Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1949. 339-55.
- Skj* Finnur Jónsson, ed. *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*. 4 vols (AI-II, BI-II). Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1912-15.

- Skm* Snorri Sturluson. *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*. Ed. Anthony Faulkes. 2 vols. London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1998.
- SkP* *Skaldic Project Homepage*. Ed. Tarrin Wills et al. 2001–2010. Skaldic Project Academic Body. <<http://skaldic.arts.usyd.edu.au/db.php>>.
- SPSMA II* Kari Ellen Gade, ed. *Poetry from the King's Sagas 2: From c. 1035 to c. 1300*. 2 parts. Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 2. Turnhout: Brepols, 2009.
- SPSMA VII* Margaret Clunies Ross, ed. *Poetry on Christian Subjects*. 2 parts. Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 7. Turnhout: Brepols, 2007.

The Poetic Edda

The following poems are cited from Ursula Dronke, ed. *The Poetic Edda*. 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon, 1969, 1997.

Vol I: *Heroic poems: Atlakviða, Atlamál in Grœnlensko, Guðrúnarhvöt, Hamðismál*

Vol II: *Mythological poems: Völuspá, Baldrs Draumar, Rígsþula, Völundarkviða, Lokasenna*

All other poems are cited from Gustav Neckel and Hans Kuhn, eds. *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*. 2 vols. Heidelberg: Carl Winters Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1962–8.

Reference works

- CV* Richard Cleasby, Gudbrand Vigfusson [Guðbrandur Vigfússon], and William A. Craigie, eds. *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*. 1874. 2nd ed. Oxford: Clarendon, 1957.
- LP* Sveinbjörn Egilsson and Finnur Jónsson, eds. *Lexicon poeticum antiquae linguae septentrionalis: ordbog over det norsk-islandske skjaldesprog*. 2nd ed. Copenhagen: Atlas, 1966.
- Meissner* Rudolf Meissner. *Die Kenningar der Skalden: ein Beitrag zur skaldischen Poetik*. Rheinische Beiträge und Hülfsbücher zur germanischen Philologie und Volkskunde. Bonn: Kurt Schroeder, 1921.

- MSE* Philip Pulsiano, et al., eds. *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*. New York: Garland, 1993.
- NN* Kock, Ernst Albin. *Notationes norrænæ: anteckningar till Edda och Skaldediktning*. Lunds universitets årsskrift. 27 vols. Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1923-44.

Journals

- ANF* *Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi*
- ASE* *Anglo-Saxon England*
- EME* *Early Medieval Europe*
- JEGP* *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*
- MS* *Medieval Scandinavia*
- SBVS* *Saga-Book of the Viking Society*
- SS* *Scandinavian Studies*
- VMS* *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia*

Manuscripts

All manuscript images and transcriptions were accessed through *SkP*.

- AM* Copenhagen, Arnamagnæan Collection of the University of Copenhagen

Introduction

Commemoration of the dead is a subject that arises repeatedly throughout Icelandic literature from the medieval to the modern period. In *Sjálfstætt folk* by Halldór Laxness, the protagonist Guðbjartur Jónsson is keenly aware of his obligations to his dead wife, Rósa:

Aðalatriðið er það að fá ræðu frá réttu yfirvaldi á réttum stað yfir réttri manneskju, því annars er manni fundið það til foráttu, það er sagt að maður hafi kanski ekki haft efni á að eyða í ræðu, en undir þesskonar svivirðingum vil ég ekki liggja í héraðinu meðan ég á að heita sjálfstæður maður. Mín kona var sjálfstæðiskona.¹

Sjálfstætt folk may be read as a story about the commemoration of two women. Bjartur's insistence that his wife's death be suitably remembered in public contrasts sharply with his uncompromising refusal to honour the grave-mound of Gunnvör, a ghost who haunts his valley. The memory of Rósa takes on new life in Bjartur's love for her daughter, but Gunnvör too reaches from beyond the grave to destroy the family group. Steeped in the *rímur* and *sögur* of the past, Bjartur is a poet well aware of the power of speech to lay to rest or to challenge the dead.

Bjartur is only a poor crofter in a world in which the authority of poets has been usurped by bankers and politicians. In medieval Scandinavia however, Icelandic poets in particular enjoyed a unique position of influence and authority. This thesis will examine the

¹ Halldór Laxness, *Sjálfstætt fólk*, 3rd ed. (Reykjavík: Helgafell, 1961), 133. The standard English translation reads, 'The main thing is to have a speech for the right person made in the right place by the right authority, otherwise they hold it against you and hint that perhaps you can't afford a speech, but that is a slur that I'll never have cast in my teeth as long as I can call myself an independent man. My wife was an independent woman' from Halldór Laxness, *Independent People*, trans. J. A. Thompson (London: Vintage Books, 2008), 138.

powerful role poetic commemoration played in the politics of the Viking-age court. Composers of the intricate form of verse known as skaldic poetry were normally members of an elite warrior band, the *drótt* who served a king or chieftain. The skalds travelled and fought with their leader, acting not only as eulogists, but also as advisors, ambassadors, and confidants.² As Roberta Frank writes, '[p]oetry perpetuates. In cultures in which fame and honour are the supreme virtues, eulogy and satire play a central role. Poets alone can keep alive the memory of great deed – or defend a coup d'état'.³ The skald was a highly public, political figure. His relationship with the ruler ensured proximity to the centre of power, and skaldic poetry must therefore been seen as a form of discourse that expresses the concerns and ideals of the elite. In commemorating the lives of dead rulers in verse, poets record the history of this elite group,

² Diana Whaley, 'Skalds and Situational Verses in *Heimskringla*', *Snorri Sturluson: Kolloquium anlässlich der 750. Wiederkehr seines Todestages*, ed. Alois Wolf, ScriptOralia 51 (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1993), 246-51. The role of the Viking-age skald has been discussed by many scholars, including Kari Ellen Gade in 'Poetry and its Changing Importance in Medieval Icelandic Culture', *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 42 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), 61-95, Bjarne Fidjestøl in 'The King's Skald from Kvinesdal' (1976), *Selected Papers*, trans. Peter Foote, eds. Odd Einar Haugen and Else Mundal (Odense: Odense UP, 1997), 73-9, and Anthony Faulkes in *What was Viking Poetry For?*, Inaugural Lecture (Birmingham: University of Birmingham School of English, 1993). In particular, the representation of skalds in the sagas has received much attention, as in Margaret Clunies Ross' *A History of Old Norse Poetry and Poetics* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2005), 83-96, and in the collection of essays edited by Russell Poole, *Skaldsagas: Text, Vocation, and Desire in the Icelandic Sagas of Poets*, *Ergänzungsbande zum Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde* 27 (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2001). Aspects of skaldic performance are discussed by Stefanie Würth in 'Skaldic Poetry and Performance', *Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World: Essays in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross*, eds. Judy Quinn, Kate Heslop, and Tarrin Wills (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 263-81.

³ Roberta Frank, *Old Norse Court Poetry: The Dróttkvætt Stanza*, *Islandica* 42 (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1978), 120.

proclaim the legitimacy of the ruling party, and ensure continuity between one ruler and the next.

The array of ceremonies that today commemorate someone or something is almost infinite: wars, birthdays, deaths, political victories, sporting victories, the publication of important books, the delivery of important speeches, changes in legislation, changes in religion, the founding of societies and the establishment of institutions are all commemorated in different ways. In this thesis, commemoration will be defined simply as the remembrance of someone who has died. As Mary Carruthers observes in *The Book of Memory*, remembrance is a highly complex and social activity, and one often performed through language:

The Latin word *textus* comes from the verb meaning “to weave” and it is in the institutionalizing of a story through *memoria* that textualizing occurs. Literary works become institutions as they weave a community together by providing it with a shared experience and a certain kind of language, the language of stories that can be experienced over and over again through time and as occasion suggests.⁴

Carruthers’ book, published first in 1990, is one of many from that decade to investigate the social, collective nature of memory, and her work is indispensable to medieval and literary studies for introducing sociological theories of memory into the discipline. The conception of memory as a social process is indebted in turn to the work of the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, who introduced the idea of a ‘collective memory’ into sociological discourse.⁵

⁴ Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008), 14.

⁵ See Barbara A. Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering*, Theorizing Society (Maidenhead: Open UP 2003), 50-51.

Halbwachs asserted that every social group constructs a collective memory of the past in order to explain and support its own unique identity in the present; such memories are therefore constantly changing as they conform to new situations within the group.⁶ Halbwachs' ideas formed the basis in the 1980s of a body of scholarship in which sociologists investigated who or what determined these changes in memory. A collection of essays edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, reveals the careful management of tradition, ritual and memory by those in power. Public ceremonies, monuments and commemoration are shown to be central to the formation of a group's identity.⁷ These studies have in turn formed the basis of recent work emphasizing the concept of 'popular memory', a form of remembrance usually in opposition to that promoted by official institutions. Embracing Foucault's idea of 'counter-memory', studies in the 1990s and 2000s have focused on forms of memory that have traditionally been marginalized by dominant discourses disseminated by the state and educational institutions.⁸ Such studies resist earlier views of social memory as totalizing and

⁶ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. Lewis A. Coser, *The Heritage of Sociology* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992), 182-3.

⁷ Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983). See especially Hobsbawm's introduction to the volume, 1-14.

⁸ Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault*, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1977), 160. The use of dissenting memories as 'historiographic activism' is particularly strong in Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes, eds., *Oral History and Public Memories, Critical Perspectives on the Past* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2008), 105. Similarly, Doron Mendels suggests the term 'fragmented memory' to refer to memories that are not promoted by the dominant group in a collection of essays that focuses especially on the

celebrate instead the resistance dissenting stories of the past can offer to the dominant voice.

Memory is now seen as a dynamic process of negotiation in which official narratives are not all-powerful. The contemporary collective memory emerges from many competing discourses.⁹

Curiously, the Icelandic historian Snorri Sturluson is to some extent in agreement with the concept of ‘popular memory’ and the assumption that no political force is strong enough to impose a fabricated memory on a community. His oft-quoted assertion that ‘[þ]at væri þá háð, en eigi lof’ [it would be mockery rather than praise] to eulogize a king for deeds he did not perform suggests a process of interrogation and affirmation by the community of the version of events narrated by the skaldic poets (*Hkr* I, 5). In this way Snorri invites his readers, both medieval and modern, to accept skaldic poetry as true, and certainly the historical veracity of the verses has often been accepted by other saga-authors and by later scholars.¹⁰

role the media plays in memory and the commemoration of public events and figures. See Doron Mendels, ed., *On Memory: An Interdisciplinary Approach* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007), 10.

⁹ Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering*, 67.

¹⁰ The ‘authenticity’ of skaldic verse as a primary historical source has been praised by scholars such as Diana Whaley in her articles “The ‘Conversion Verses’ in *Hallfreðar saga*: Authentic Voice of a Reluctant Christian?”, *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross, Viking Collection 14 (Odense: UP of Southern Denmark, 2003), 252-4, and ‘A Useful Past: Historical Writing in Medieval Iceland’, *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 42 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), 176. This assumption has been questioned in the work of such scholars as Margaret Clunies Ross (*Poetry and Poetics*, 72-76) and in studies that combine literary and historical investigation: see for example Kari Ellen Gade in ‘Norse Attacks on England and Arnórr jarlaskald’s “Þórfinnssdrápa”’, *Skandinavistik* 33.1 (2003), 1-14, and Russell Poole in ‘Skaldic Verse and Anglo-Saxon History: Some Aspects of the Period 1009-1016’, *Speculum* 62.2 (1987), 265-98.

In the context of the ninth-, tenth-, and eleventh-century court, however, competing discourses are few and far between. Skaldic poets are notorious for their support of – some would say propaganda for¹¹ – the political elite. They act as spokesmen for the king and proclaim the official, constructed version of past events. The value of skaldic verse, therefore, is not in the accuracy of the skalds' representations of the past but in the skill of the court poets to construct meaning from past events. That is, as they craft a shared memory for the political elite in their verses, skalds not only promote the dominant version of historical events but also proclaim the significance of those events to the identity and cohesion of the political elite for whom they perform. More often portrayed as wood- and metal-workers than as weavers,¹² skalds nevertheless weave the community together, as Carruthers observes, through the language of stories.

The importance of the skald's role as spokesman for the group and as constructor of the social memory is nowhere more evident than in commemorative verse. The title of this thesis, 'The King is Dead, Long Live the King', illustrates the paradox of one of the most fraught and unstable periods possible in the context of the early medieval court. The poetic commemoration of a Viking-age ruler simultaneously announces his death to the community

¹¹ Folke Ström, 'Poetry as an Instrument of Propaganda: Jarl Hakon and his Poets', *Speculum Norroenum: Norse Studies in Memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre*, eds. Ursula Dronke, Guðrún P. Helgadóttir, Gerd Wolfgang Weber and Hans Bekker-Nielsen (Odense: Odense UP, 1981), 440-58.

¹² As in Clunies Ross, *Poetry and Poetics*, 84-91. Russell Poole's characterisation of the skaldic poems as 'tissues of the ideologies prevailing in their period' is an analogous metaphor to Carruthers', albeit two years *avant la lettre* in 'Skaldic Praise Poetry as a Marginal Form', *Poetry in the Scandinavian Middle Ages: The Seventh International Saga Conference, Spoleto, 4-10 September 1988*, ed. Teresa Pàroli (Spoleto: Presso la Sede del Centro Studi, 1990), 175.

while celebrating his life. The king is dead, but his reputation lives on even as his successor begins to rule. Commemorative poems are contradictory and complex texts that occupy the spaces between life and death, between one ruler and the next. The poet who commemorates a dead ruler has a difficult task before him: proclaiming publicly the effect of the king's loss on the community, the poet must also express his personal attachment to the dead lord.

Celebrating the political success of one king, the poet must also forge for himself a role in the succeeding regime. Sometimes the stories of past kings' lives are used to legitimate their descendants' rule, while the memory of a dead king can also provide a powerful means of resistance to a foreign overlord. The political order is immediately thrown into flux with the death of a king, and the skald's role as the creator of commemorative texts is to negotiate the transition between the old regime and the new.

The aim of this thesis, therefore, is to investigate how skaldic poets responded to the deaths of their kings and how skaldic commemoration functioned within the social and political community of the Viking-age court. Due to limits of space, a comprehensive overview of all commemorative skaldic verse is not possible; the sequences examined are therefore only those cited in the historical sagas and poetic treatises. Skaldic verse is notorious for its fragmentary state of preservation,¹³ and the fraught relationship between the presumed original oral composition of many verses and the stanzas' incorporation into later prosimetric sagas has been

¹³ Many excellent summaries are available in which the idiosyncrasies of the preservation of the skaldic corpus are discussed. See for example Diana Whaley, 'Skaldic Poetry', *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. Rory McTurk (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 479-502.

much debated.¹⁴ The majority of scholars do, however, accept that those verses preserved in the sagas of the kings are more likely to be accurate than those preserved in the family sagas and elsewhere.¹⁵ My focus, therefore, is on verses dated from the ninth to the middle of the eleventh centuries preserved in the *konungasögur*. I have also confined my study mainly to stanzas attributed to named court poets whose existence is verified by the thirteenth-century list of poets, *Skáldatal*. I have further limited the verses to those likely produced in Norway or in courts under Norwegian influence, partly due to constrictions of space and partly in order to trace the development of commemorative texts associated with one particular court context. I accept that the date and attribution of any skaldic verse will always be open to interpretation, but as my interest is primarily literary rather than historical, I believe that it is necessary to take the information given in the *konungasögur* about the stanzas as a starting point in order to compile a body of texts to study.

¹⁴ See for example Joseph Harris, ‘The Prosimetrum of Icelandic Saga and Some Relatives’, *Prosimetrum: Crosscultural Perspectives on Narrative in Prose and Verse*, eds. Joseph Harris and Karl Reichl (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997), 135, Heather O’Donoghue, *Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005), 10-77, and Russell Poole, *Viking Poems on War and Peace: A Study in Skaldic Narrative* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1991), 4-8. Scribal interference also offers a potential corruption of the text; on this, see Chris Abram, ‘Scribal Authority in Skaldic Verse: Þórbjörn hornklofi’s *Glymdrápa*’, *ANF* 116 (2001), 5-19.

¹⁵ This follows Peter Foote in ‘Things in Early Norse Verse’, *Festschrift til Ludvig Holm-Olsen på hans 70-årsdag den 9. juni 1984*, ed. Bjarne Fidjestøl (Øvre Ervik: Alvheim og Eide, 1984), 74, and Judith Jesch in ‘Skaldic Verse and Viking Semantics’, *Viking Revaluations: Society Centenary Symposium 14-15 May 1992*, eds. A. Faulkes and R. Perkins (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1992), 160. Bjarne Fidjestøl offers an excellent discussion of the methodological considerations of dating oral poetry, although his focus is on eddic rather than skaldic texts in *The Dating of Eddic Poetry: A Historical Survey and Methodological Investigation*, *Bibliotheca Arnarnagnæana* 41, ed. Odd Einar Haugen (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel, 1999), esp. 187-203.

In the first chapter of the thesis I examine the early genealogical poems *Ynglingatal* and *Háleygiatal* and the ways in which poets use the commemoration of distant rulers to bolster the political powers of their living patrons. In the second chapter I examine three early memorial poems, *Eiríksmál*, *Hákonarmál* and the *Erfiðráða Óláfs Tryggvasonar*, in which each poet describes his ruler's transition to the afterlife and interrogates the role of poetic discourse in the representation of a king's death. Poet-patron relationships are the focus of my third chapter as I examine three skaldic sequences in which poets are forced to transfer their allegiance to a new ruler: these are the poems *Gráfeldardráða* and *Vestrfararvísur*, as well as a series of *lausavísur* about the death of Hákon inn góði. In the fourth and final chapter I examine the proliferation of deeply emotional commemorative verse in the eleventh century. The role of the poet expands in these verses as rulers adapt to Christian, Continental models of kingship. The sanctification of Óláfr Haraldsson is discussed in *Glelognskviða* and in Sigvatr Þórðarson's verses commemorating the king, while Óláfr's son Magnús is commemorated in a series of *lausavísur* describing his funeral. A discussion of Arnórr jarlaskáld's commemoration of Magnús and his uncle Haraldr Sigurðarson, as well as of the poet's anguished account of the conflict between the Orkney earls, concludes the chapter. Throughout the thesis, I offer detailed readings of each sequence while also placing the verses within their historical and generic contexts. Too often skaldic verse has been mined for historical or linguistic nuggets of information. Through a detailed literary analysis of each poem I hope to demonstrate the beauty and complexity of

these verses as sophisticated, creative texts, and to reveal the integral role such verses played in the political life of the early medieval court.

A Note on Translations

All skaldic verse is cited from Finnur Jónsson's *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning (Skj)* and all references to stanza numbers are taken from this edition. Although the new series, *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages*, will provide a valuable resource in the very near future for readers of skaldic verse, I have not used it as my primary source because the complete work is still forthcoming. The majority of the poems I discuss in this thesis are yet to be published in Volume I, *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas 1: From Mythical Times to c. 1035*; the few later poems I discuss have recently appeared in Volume II, *Poetry from the King's Sagas 2: From c. 1035 to c. 1300 (SPSMA II)*, but this edition was unavailable for much of the time that I was working on the poems. All translations are my own. I have not provided prose word orders to the verses because I believe that the syntax and metrical structure are integral characteristics of such verse and that these should not be sacrificed to conform to modern reading habits. Prose word orders are, however, available in *Skj* and I have indicated in the footnotes where my construal deviates significantly from Finnur's and where his differs from other editions such as *SPSMA II* and the *Íslenzk fornrit* series. All proper names are given in the Old Norse form with the exception of common place-names, which are given in their modern English equivalents. I give the referents of simple kennings in parentheses in the modern English translations, but I explain more complex constructions in the footnotes.

Chapter One: Kings or Shadows? Commemoration in the Early Genealogical Poems

In a lecture given at the British Academy in 1953, Kenneth Sisam warned his audience of the difficulties presented by the genealogies of the Anglo-Saxon kings:

Anybody who wishes to form a general idea of the nature and value of these genealogies will not find the way easy. If the incidental references to them are assembled, they leave an impression of incoherence which the longer studies do not altogether remove; and the documents themselves are baffling...One soon becomes involved in a tangle of possibilities, where the temptation to be over-ingenious is always present, with the doubt whether time is well spent on these old names of kings or shadows.¹

It is a dismal diagnosis of the uncertainties inherent in the study of such records, and a similar problem confronts those who approach the Scandinavian genealogies of the same period. The poems *Ynglingatal*, by Þjóðólfr ór Hvini, and *Háleygjatal*, by Eyvindr skáldaspillir Finnsson, date from the late ninth and early tenth centuries. They record several generations of the royal house of Norway and of the Hlaðjarlar of Hålogaland, tracing their families back to mythical and even divine ancestors. The poems contain our earliest accounts of the first kings of Sweden and Norway, but the poets present at once too much information and too little: the list of kings is long, but details of their lives are scanty and allusive. To a modern audience, the kings praised by Þjóðólfr and Eyvindr are indeed nothing but shadows. Nevertheless, the poets demonstrate that the deaths of distant rulers could be manipulated effectively in verse to bolster their living patrons' political powers. The old names of kings are not important in themselves, but by telling the

¹ Kenneth Sisam, *Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies*, Proceedings of the British Academy 39, Offprint (London: 1954), 382.

stories of past rulers these two poets are able to explore the role commemoration plays in contemporary politics, and to assert the importance of their craft in the legitimization of their patrons' rule.

In his investigation of the Anglo-Saxon royal genealogies, Sisam warns of the dangers of taking the information given as historically accurate, and indeed many more recent studies of genealogy from all over the world have shown that the function of genealogy is not to preserve the past but to explain the present. Genealogy studies flourished particularly during the 1950s and 60s as part of an anthropological interest in oral African societies. Studies such as Laura Bohannan's work among the Tiv of Nigeria promoted the idea that genealogies function as 'charters' that do not record the events of the past, but function rather to explain existing relationships between different groups.² As such, they are highly mutable texts in which the lack of a formal written record encourages 'structural amnesia': elements of a genealogy that are no longer relevant to contemporary events are forgotten and new elements that explain or consolidate the changed power dynamic are quietly introduced.³ As Jan Vansina observes, '[I]sts of rulers exist to prove the continuity and to legitimate the institution of chieftainship, and justify why X occupies that office

² Laura Bohannan, 'A Genealogical Charter', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 22.4 (1952), 301-15.

³ David E. Thornton, 'Orality, Literacy and Genealogy in Early Medieval Ireland and Wales', *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies*, ed. Huw Pryce, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 33 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), 85, and David N. Dumville, 'Kingship, Genealogies and Regnal Lists', *Early Medieval Kingship*, eds. P. H. Sawyer and I. N. Wood (Leeds: School of History, University of Leeds, 1977), 87.

today and why he has the authority of the office'.⁴ Genealogies, both past and present, are ideological expressions of contemporary power structures.

The oral genealogies upon which such studies are based tend to record relatively few generations. It is generally found that no more than five or six generations of ancestors are remembered between the mythical founder of a tribe and his living descendants when the genealogy is transmitted orally.⁵ Written examples, on the other hand, reveal a trend essentially opposite to the structural amnesia found in oral accounts. David Thornton has studied genealogical texts from early medieval England and Wales and he observes in those texts a process of 'genealogical schizophrenia': written genealogies, he notes, are prone to augmentation rather than abridgement. Writers of genealogies tend to amalgamate competing lines of descent into one genealogical scheme, promoting a simplified, unified picture of the dominant family.⁶ The genealogy of the early Irish king Osraige, for example, records over one hundred generations stretching back to Noah, while the genealogists of some minor kingdoms record 300-400 direct ancestors of the ruling family. Such genealogies, Thornton argues, are theoretically unlimited and ancestors may be added indefinitely.⁷ Their function as 'charters' for the present, however, remains unchanged.

⁴ Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison, Wisconsin: U of Wisconsin P, 1985), 24.

⁵ M. Fortes, 'The Structure of Unilineal Descent Groups', *Kinship: Selected Readings*, ed. Jack Goody (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), 265, and Thornton, 'Orality, Literacy and Genealogy', 89.

⁶ Thornton, 'Orality, Literacy and Genealogy', 87.

⁷ Thornton, 'Orality, Literacy and Genealogy', 89-91.

As in the African models, therefore, it is clear that genealogies were constructed during the medieval period to explain and to consolidate contemporary power structures. Thanks to Sisam and others the Anglo-Saxon genealogies are well known and represent some of the earliest European examples of the genre. There are many more. Following the model of Continental ruling families who traced their origins back to Noah, the authors of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* constructed a genealogy around Scaef, said to be the ark-born son of Noah and progenitor of the house of Wessex.⁸ The *Historica Brittonum*, the West Saxon Regnal Table, and Asser's *Life of King Alfred* all contain royal genealogies from the Anglo-Saxon period.⁹ Religious authors similarly provided extensive genealogies for saints from the ninth century onwards,¹⁰ and Irish and Welsh sources provide further examples of genealogical texts that locate ruling families within the Biblical genealogical tradition.¹¹ Twelfth-century examples from the continent such as the *Russian Primary Chronicle*¹² and the Catalan *Gesta Comitum Barcinonensium*¹³ also demonstrate the growing

⁸ Daniel Anlezark, 'Scaef, Japeth and the Origins of the Anglo-Saxons', *ASE* 31 (2002), 14-18.

⁹ Sisam, *Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies*, 292-98. See also Craig Robert Davis in 'Cultural Assimilation in the Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies', *ASE* 21 (1992), 23-36.

¹⁰ Dumville, 'Kingship, Genealogies and Regnal Lists', 76.

¹¹ On this, see David E. Thornton, 'Kings, Chronicles, and Genealogies: Reconstructing Celtic Dynasties', *Family Trees and the Roots of Politics: The Prosopography of Britain and France from the Tenth to the Twelfth Century*, ed. Katharine S. B. Keats-Rohan (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1997), 23-40, and Donnchadh Ó Corráin, 'Creating the Past: The Early Irish Genealogical Tradition', *Peritia* 12 (1998), 177-208. Two articles which speculate on the extent to which Irish texts were influenced by the Anglo-Saxon tradition are Dumville's 'Kingship, Genealogies and Regnal Lists', 103-04, and Colin Ireland's 'Aldfrith of Northumbria and the Irish Genealogies', *Celtica* 22 (1991), 64-78.

¹² Aleksandr Viktorovich Rukavishnikov, 'Tales of Bygone Years: The *Russian Primary Chronicle* as a Family Chronicle', *EME* 12.1 (2003), 53-74.

importance of genealogy in the medieval world as their authors trace contemporary ruling families to St. Vladimir and to Charlemagne, respectively. Thus, the Scandinavian poems *Ynglingatal* and *Háleygjatal* exist within a wide context of medieval genealogical texts.

By the end of the twelfth century, the principal ruling houses of Scandinavia – the Ynglingar, who ruled over much of south and central Norway, the Hlaðajarlar, who controlled a large area in the north, and the Skjöldungar, the royal family of Denmark – could trace their lineages back to the Norse gods just as their contemporaries in the rest of Europe could trace their families to Old Testament and classical progenitors.¹⁴ The thirteenth-century Icelandic historian Snorri Sturluson gives genealogy pride of place in *Heimskringla*, his collection of sagas about the kings of Norway.¹⁵ The genealogical sequences *Ynglingatal* and *Háleygjatal* receive a special introduction in Snorri's *Prologue* to the compendium:

Þjóðólfr inn fróði ór Hvini var skáld Haralds konung ins hárfagra. Hann orti kvæði um Rognvald konung heiðumhæra, þat er kallat Ynglingatal. Rognvaldr var sonr Óláfs Geirstaðaálfs, bróður Hálfðanar svarta. Í því kvæði eru nefndir þrír tigir langfeðga hans ok sagt frá dauða hvers þeira ok legstað....Eyvindr skáldaspillir talði ok langfeðga Hákonar jarls

¹³ Jaume Aurell, 'From Genealogies to Chronicles: The Power of the Form in Medieval Catalan Historiography', *Viator* 36 (2005), 235-62.

¹⁴ Anthony Faulkes, 'Descent from the Gods', *MS 11* (1982), 97.

¹⁵ The question of Snorri's authorship is too large to treat fully here. Sverre Bagge has discussed the exact extent to which Snorri was the author or compiler of *Heimskringla*, as well as the many different voices in that debate. He concludes that we may safely consider Snorri to be the main authorial influence behind the text. I will refer to Snorri as the author of the prose text in this thesis. See Bagge's *Society and Politics in Snorri Sturluson's Heimskringla* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1991), 23-25.

ins ríka í kvæði því, er Háleygjatal heitir, er ort var um Hákon. Sæmingr er þar nefndr sonr Yngvifreys. Sagt er þar ok frá dauða hvers þeira ok haugstað.¹⁶

Þjóðólfr's *Ynglingatal*, as Snorri observes, fulfils three main functions: to name the kings of the Yngling dynasty, to report the manner of their deaths, and to record the locations of their burials. Fewer stanzas of Eyvindr's *Háleygjatal* have survived but the poet's focus on commemorating the deaths, rather than the lives, of his subjects is analogous. *Ynglinga saga*, the first saga in Snorri's collection, is thus a declaration of the exalted lineage of the noble houses of Norway, a narrative in which Snorri employs *Ynglingatal* and *Háleygjatal* to trace the families' distant ancestors all the way to the Norse gods. Unlike his sagas of such Viking-age kings as Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr Haraldsson, *Ynglinga saga* contains relatively few details about the lives of the early kings; Snorri focuses instead on the longevity and continuity of the noble families of Norway. The two genealogical poems, and Snorri's engagement with them, stand in direct contrast to the later poems and sagas, in which, as Snorri writes, 'ferðir...eða orrostur' [journeys or battles] are the focus (*Hkr* I, 5). Snorri's genealogical account conforms instead to the Anglo-Saxon, Irish and Continental models discussed above: in *Ynglinga saga* he traces noble families to their legendary forefathers, asserting in particular the ruling dynasty's right to govern Norway.

¹⁶ 'Þjóðólfr the wise from Hvini was a skald for King Haraldr hárfagri. He made a poem about King Rognvaldr heiðumhár which is called *Ynglingatal*. Rognvaldr was the son of Óláfr the elf of Geirstaðir, the brother of Hálfdan svartí. In the poem are named thirty of his ancestors, and the deaths and burial-places of each one are related...Eyvindr skáldaspillir also enumerated the ancestors of Earl Hákon the mighty in the poem called *Háleygjatal*, which was composed about Hákon. Sæmingr is there called the son of Yngvi-freyr. The deaths and the burial-mounds of each are also related there' (*Hkr* I, 4).

The poems at the heart of Snorri's narrative, however, do not provide a homogeneous portrayal of the origins and status of Norway's ruling class. Rather, the two sequences function in opposition as Þjóðólfr in *Ynglingatal* asserts the claims of Haraldr hárfagri's family to the Norwegian royal throne, while in *Háleygjatal* Eyvindr promotes the rival claims of the Earls of Hlaðir. The two poets' genealogical texts are rooted in the political power struggles of the ninth and tenth centuries and reflect the bitter conflict between these two families. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the unresolved tensions between these early poems and their later prose framework, and also to compare the poets' use of competing genealogical traditions as they employ the commemoration of the dead to assert their warring patrons' claims to authority.

I. *Ynglingatal*: Passive Kings and Powerful Poets

Ynglingatal is unusual in the corpus of skaldic praise poetry.¹⁷ Unlike the great courtly eulogies of the eleventh century – the *Óláfsdrápur* and the *Knútsdrápur*, for example – Þjóðólfr's focus is not on kings contemporaneous with the skald himself. Rather, the poem functions as indirect praise of the current ruler, Rognvaldr Ólafsson, king of Vestfold and cousin of King Haraldr hárfagri of Norway, by enumerating his many ancestors.¹⁸ Þjóðólfr does not praise Rognvaldr's ancestors for the deeds they performed while alive; rather, he portrays them as the

¹⁷ It is edited in *Skj* BI, 7-14 and in *Norsk* I, 4-9.

¹⁸ *Skáldatal* records that Þjóðólfr also served Haraldr himself and composed for him the shield-poem *Haustlǫng* (*Skáldatal*, 342). A biography of the skald is given by Richard North in *The Haustlǫng of Þjóðólfr of Hvinir* (Enfield Lock: Hisarlik, 1997), xxxi-xli. See also Fidjestøl, 'The King's Skald from Kvinesdal', 68-92.

powerless puppets of a history already complete. Each kingly death, however, becomes the catalyst that prompts the king's followers to play an active and powerful role in their ruler's commemoration: as the king's retainers raise burial mounds and his skald raises memorial poems they all participate in the preservation of the history of the Ynglingar and in the promotion of that dynasty's claims to power. Þjóðólfr shows himself to be acutely aware of the significance of his own act of commemoration, and the deaths of his patron's ancestors allow the poet to assert the importance of poetic commemoration as a political statement. As with the genealogies discussed above, *Ynglingatal* is a 'charter' in which the poet uses the past to justify and even glorify the present, proclaiming both the superiority of his king over other Norwegian rulers as well as his own integral role as public spokesman at Rognvaldr's court.

Ynglingatal records twenty-seven generations of the royal families of Uppsala through to Rognvaldr. *Ynglingatal* is now preserved only in Snorri's *Ynglinga saga* and many early scholars of the poem consequently assumed that it was a deliberately antiquarian piece composed during the twelfth century or later.¹⁹ However, Walter Åkerlund successfully rejected this view on linguistic grounds in 1939.²⁰ The *kviðuháttr* metre of the poem, 'the most ancient of metres' according to

¹⁹ So E. Jentsen, *Undersøgelser til nordisk Oldhistorie* (Copenhagen: n.p., 1871), Sophus Bugge, *Bidrag til den ældste Skaldedigtningens Historie* (Kristiania [Oslo]: H. Aschehoug, 1894), and Gustav Neckel, *Beiträge zur Eddaforschung mit Exkursen zur Heldensage* (Dortmund: F. W. Ruhfus, 1908).

²⁰ Walter Åkerlund, *Studier över Ynglingatal*, Skrifter utgivna av Vetenskaps-societeten i Lund 23 (Lund: H. Ohlsson, 1939).

Gabriel Turville-Petre, also supports an early dating.²¹ More recently, Olof Sundqvist has suggested that Þjóðólfr's account is based on oral sources and that in particular the poet may have had access to a poetic tradition tracing the king's Swedish ancestors. Sundqvist cites the *kviðubáttir* verse inscribed on the ninth-century Rök stone in Östergötland, Sweden, as evidence of an interest in genealogical poetry in early medieval Scandinavia.²² The authenticity of the poem is now largely accepted, with the notable exception of Claus Krag.²³ Krag's conclusion that the poem is the product of learned, Christian culture in the twelfth century is problematic, however, as he bases his reading on anachronisms found in the later prose framework rather than in the poem itself. John McKinnell has recently expressed serious doubts about Krag's method and McKinnell's own solution is to read the sequence as entirely separate from the prose.²⁴ My own reading attempts to walk the middle road in this debate: my focus is indeed the poem itself, which I assume to date from the late ninth or early tenth century, but I also acknowledge its preservation in Snorri's later

²¹ Gabriel Turville-Petre, 'Gísli Súrsson and his Poetry: Traditions and Influences', *Nine Norse Studies* (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1972), 389. See also Russell Poole, 'Metre and Metrics', *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. Rory McTurk (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 267-68.

²² Olof Sundqvist, 'Aspects of Rulership Ideology in Early Scandinavia – With Particular References to the Skaldic Poem *Ynglingatal*', *Das frühmittelalterliche Königtum: ideelle und religiöse Grundlagen*, ed. Franz-Reiner Erkens (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), 97.

²³ Claus Krag, *Ynglingatal og ynglingesaga: En studie i historiske kilder*, *Studia humaniora* 2 (Oslo: Norges allmenvitenskapelige forskningsråd, 1991). In response to Krag, Christopher Sapp has provided strong metrical evidence for an early dating of the poem in 'Dating *Ynglingatal*: Chronological Metrical Developments in *kviðubáttir*', *Skandinavistik* 30.2 (2000), 85-98.

²⁴ John McKinnell, 'Ynglingatal: A Minimalist Interpretation', 14th International Saga Conference, Uppsala, Sweden, 10 August 2009. There is a short summary of his paper in the conference preprints edited by Agneta Ney, Henrik Williams and Fredrik Charpentier Ljungqvist, *Á Austrvega: Saga and East Scandinavia. Preprint papers of the 14th International Saga Conference, Uppsala, 9th-15th August 2009*. (Gävle: University of Gävle, 2009), I, 3-4.

narrative and the influence the prose context can have on an audience who reads the poem in what is, after all, its only extant form.

I therefore consider *Ynglingatal* to be a rare example of early commemorative poetry and a work that begins to establish a context for the great skaldic memorials of the eleventh century and later.²⁵ It is not, however, an obviously unified poem as the twenty-seven stanzas contain within them distinct sections which can give the genealogy a haphazard and jumbled quality. Many scholars have attempted to find order in these stanzas. Lars Lönnroth divides the poem into two sections in which stanzas of ‘Type A’ contain the legend of a king but give no information about his burial, while ‘Type B’ stanzas primarily give information about commemoration ceremonies.²⁶ Olof Sundqvist divides the sequence into three sections, noting that stanzas 1-8 describe the deaths of mythical and heroic kings, stanzas 9-21 describe mythical Swedish kings, and stanzas 22-27 recount the details of historical Norwegian kings.²⁷ Joan Turville-Petre has focused on the first twenty-one stanzas of the poem and she also divides this section into two groups. Stanzas 1-8, she suggests, contain not merely mythical but possibly even divine names: the name Fjölfnir could be read as a name for the god Freyr, while Sveigðir appears in a mid-tenth-century kenning for a deity.²⁸ The second group, stanzas 9-21, contains a list of kings linked by vocalic alliteration, ‘an ancient genealogical convention’ used to multiply names in order to reach a particular number of

²⁵ I discuss these in Chapter Four of this thesis.

²⁶ Lars Lönnroth, ‘Dómaldi’s Death and the Myth of Sacral Kingship’, *Structure and Meaning in Old Norse Literature*, eds. John Lindow, Lars Lönnroth and Gerd Wolfgang Weber (Odense: Odense UP, 1986), 87.

²⁷ Sundqvist, ‘Aspects of Rulership Ideology’, 89.

²⁸ Joan Turville-Petre, ‘On Ynglingatal’, *MS 11* (1978-79), 63.

generations.²⁹ She concludes that these stanzas are characteristic of the genealogies produced in preliterate, tribal societies.³⁰ McKinnell's interpretation echoes these earlier readings, but McKinnell has also examined the importance of 'link figures' such as King Agni in stanza 10, who links the first nine mythical kings with the victims of extreme violence found in stanzas 11-28. In stanza 29, King Óláfr is a link figure between the Swedish kings and their descendants who emigrate to Norway. Not unlike Turville-Petre, McKinnell suggests that the poet used mythological material to increase the dynasty to twenty-seven generations, perhaps responding to the mystical importance of three groups of nine.³¹ This is supported by the genealogical lists thought to come from a manuscript copied in the middle of the thirteenth century; the lists record twenty-seven generations of both the Yngling and the Hlaðajarl families and it has been suggested that they represent an ancient tradition followed by the poet of *Ynglingatal*.³²

²⁹ 'On Ynglingatal', 65. Similarly, for the year 855 the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records a genealogy of Æðelwulf that is both alliterative and metrically regular in the style of Old English poetry (G. P. Cubbin, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, vol. 6: MS D (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1996), 22-3). Kenneth Sisam does point out, however, that poetic structure cannot be a guarantee of historical accuracy as ancient kings likely lacked the foresight necessary to give alliterative and rhythmical names to their offspring (*Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies*, 300-01).

³⁰ Turville-Petre, 'On Ynglingatal', 66.

³¹ McKinnell, 'Ynglingatal: A Minimalist Interpretation'.

³² The manuscript AM 1 e β II fol., 85v-91r is a copy made by Árni Magnússon of an original owned by the Danish scholar P. H. Resen (1625-88) that was destroyed in the Copenhagen fire of 1728. On this, see Anthony Faulkes in 'The Genealogies and Regnal Lists in a Manuscript in Resen's Library', *Sjötiú ritgerðir helgaðar Jakobi Benediktssyni 20. júlí 1977*, eds. Einarr G. Pétursson and Jónas Kristjánsson (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 1977), 177. The complete genealogical list is given by Faulkes in 'The Earliest Icelandic Genealogies and Regnal Lists', *SBVS* 29 (2005), 177. It is curious that Icelandic scholars working from the twelfth century onwards valued lists of thirty generations rather than twenty-seven. In his prologue to *Heimskringla*, Snorri writes that *Ynglingatal* tells of thirty generations of Rognvaldr's family; citing only the twenty-seven stanzas we know, he supplies three extra divine progenitors in the

Unlike *Háleygjatal*, in which a number of stanzas begin with the temporal linking word ‘þann’ [then], in *Ynglingatal* there are so such markers of the progression of time between the stanzas.³³ No stanza in the earlier poem ever refers to the events described in other stanzas; eleven begin with the generic words ‘ok’ [and] or ‘en’ [but], five begin with ‘þat’ [that] or ‘þar’ [there], referring to the events of the stanza in question, and the rest begin with a verb relating to the action described in that stanza. The passage of time and explicit explanations of the father-son relationships are provided not by the poet but by Snorri in *Ynglinga saga*: he explains for example, ‘Sveigði tók ríki eptir föður sinn’ [Sveigðir took the kingdom after his father] (*Hkr* I, 27), and ‘Dómarr hét sonr Dómalda, er þar næst réð ríki’ [Dómarr was the son of Dómaldi, who next ruled the kingdom there] (*Hkr* I, 32). Only in the final stanza is the time identified as ‘nú’ [now], creating a dramatic break with the past and a shift into the present day. However, among the groups of past kings, there is little sense of a chronological progression; the structure of the poem would not be significantly affected if the order of the stanzas, at least within the subsections discussed above, were altered. All is past, in contrast to the present *nú* in the final stanza.

prose narrative. In his *langfeðgatal* at the end of *Íslendingabók* Ari Þorgilsson also lists thirty descendants from a figure called Yngvi Tyrkjakonungr, unknown from earlier sources (*Ísl-Land* I, 27-8). Joan Turville-Petre notes that this places both Óláfr hvíti, founder of the Breiðfirðingar, and King Haraldr hárfagri as the thirtieth descendants through different branches of the family (‘On Ynglingatal’, 49). The move from lists of twenty-seven to thirty generations does suggest that *Ynglingatal* is representative of an older tradition. In contrast, the twelfth-century poet of *Nóregs konunga-tal* brags that he has named ‘nær þrjátögu’ [nearly thirty] generations of his patron’s family (*Skj* BI, 590, st. 82).

³³ This will be discussed in more detail in the section on *Háleygjatal*, below.

In my discussion of the poem, therefore, I will focus on three main groups of stanzas: the mythical and legendary Swedish kings (stanzas 1-29), the Norwegian immigrants (stanzas 30-6), and the final stanza in which Þjóðólfr praises his living patron (stanza 37).³⁴ There is a marked change in emphasis between the sections. In the ‘Swedish kings’ section, the kings are faceless rulers and the heart of the sequence lies in the complex, riddling kennings devised by the poet to aid the memorialization of the stories of these distant, shadowy figures. In the ‘Norwegian kings’ section, however, the poet dwells on the kings’ consolidation of their hold over the newly acquired land. The highly visible graves of these kings are the focus of commemoration in this section, and the poet serves the function not of riddler but of chronicler. Modes of commemoration differ in the two sections, but the importance of the poet and of his art remain constant. The final stanza contains praise typical of many skaldic eulogies, but its efficacy derives from the long list of famous ancestors previously enumerated. By asserting Rognvaldr’s power and legitimacy through a long list of ancestors, the poet not only supports the political *status quo*, but demonstrates how past deaths require a poet to derive meaning from them and to construct and disseminate the legitimizing story.

Is *Ynglingatal* a poem about kings or merely about the shadows of kings? Stanzas 1-29, the ‘Swedish kings’ section, is almost paradoxical in its role as a commemorative sequence: the royal

³⁴ In this reading I ignore stanza 38, tentatively suggested in *Skj* to form part of the poem; Finnur does, however, mark the stanza with a question mark to reflect his uncertainty about its attribution. Stanza 38 is not cited by Snorri in *Ynglinga saga* and its attribution is uncertain. It is syntactically incomplete, but appears to praise a king for glorious deeds he has performed. The manuscript context is discussed briefly in *Skj* AI, 15

figures the poet ostensibly describes are almost anonymous entities whose individual lives are unimportant and forgotten in the texts now extant. Conventional skaldic *heiti* refer to these kings – *siklingr* (1.5, 23.5), *jofurr* (2.12, 25.10, 29.8, 32.2, 34.4), *allvaldr* (4.9, 7.9) and *hilmir* (24.4, 25.8, 33.8) – to emphasize their common political role but not their personal differences. Some kings are also described as the enemies of someone else: ‘bani Goðlaugs’ [death of Guðlaugr] (14.7), ‘Ála dólgr’ [Áli’s enemy] (22.7), ‘Eista dólgr’ [enemy of the people of Eistland] (26.6). This construction further deflects attention away from the kings’ identities to those of their named enemies. Vague genealogical signifiers sometimes demonstrate a king’s place as merely one in a large family: ‘Skilfinga niðr’ [the Skilfingar’s son] (18.6), ‘Freys óttungr’ [Freyr’s descendant] (21.7), ‘áttkonr /...Lofða kyns’ [descendant of Lofði’s race] (29.9-11). Such phrases are conventional and do not distinguish one king from another.

The kings are not only faceless but powerless. They rarely affect the events of the poem; rather, nearly all of the stanzas follow a similar structure in which the mode of death is the subject of the main verb and the king is the powerless object of that action. The dominant grammatical construction in these stanzas is the auxiliary verb *skulu* followed by a verb for killing or dying. In the first twenty-nine stanzas this construction appears thirteen times. In seven of these cases a form of death is the subject:

a meat-vat ‘of *viða skyldi*’ [was to destroy] the king (1.8)

a witch ‘of *troða skyldi*’ [was to tread] on the king (3.6)

warriors ‘of *sóa skyldi*’ [were to sacrifice] the king (5.12)

Hel ‘*kjósa skyldi*’ [was to choose] the king (7.8)

- a pitchfork ‘of geta skyldi’ [was to get] the king (9.6)
- a gallows ‘of bera skyldi’ [was to carry] the king (14.8)
- a witch ‘of viða skyldi’ [was to destroy] the king (21.4).

E. V. Gordon tells us that the auxiliary verb *skulu* has connotations of necessity or inevitability, as in Old English.³⁵ In *The Battle of Maldon* an analogous Old English construction is used to describe a past event, the retrospective vantage point necessitating the use of the verb *sceoldon*: ‘wæs seo tid cumen / þæt þær fæge men feallan sceoldon’ [the moment had come that doomed men were to fall there] (ll. 104-105).³⁶ This is the sense I have used in my translation of *Ynglingatal*, particularly as the poem includes an idea similar to *fæge men* when it ascribes the kings’ deaths both to a ‘feigðar orð’ [fateful verdict] (1.3) and to the ‘norna dómr’ [norns’ judgement] (32.7). History is complete and irrevocable, the poet reminds us. Through their very inclusion in a genealogical poem the kings are the subjects of a story already told and they are powerless to change the course of events.

³⁵ E. V. Gordon and A. R. Taylor, *An Introduction to Old Norse*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1957), 313.

³⁶ D. G. Scragg, ed., *The Battle of Maldon*, Old and Middle English Texts (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1981). The use of the Old English verb *sculan* has also been much discussed in the context of Old English wisdom poetry. Carolyne Larrington traces the principle voices in this debate and observes that while *sculan* and *beon* can overlap semantically, ‘[t]he meanings “ought always”, “ought”, and “is appropriately” are assigned to *scéal* alone’. She also notes that *sculan* tends to describe human behaviour while *beon* is more often used to describe God or the natural world. See *A Store of Common Sense: Gnomie Theme and Style in Old Icelandic and Old English Wisdom Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 6-9. See also Marie Nelson, “Is” and “Ought” in the Exeter Book Maxims’, *Southern Folklore Quarterly*, 45 (1981), 109-21 and P. B. Taylor, ‘Heroic Ritual in the Old English *Maxims*’, *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 70 (1969), 387-407.

The construction of ‘*skulu* + verb of dying’ is also used five times with the king as the subject of the main verb, but such inversions do not indicate a greater degree of power on the part of the doomed man. In stanza 10 the poet uses this construction in an ironic way when the king ‘*temja skyldi*’ [was to tame] the gallows (10.10); the king does not overcome the gallows, but is inevitably overcome by them. Placing the king as the subject of the verb is simply poetic variation in other stanzas. In stanza 8, the king ‘*of fara skyldi*’ [was to journey] to death (8.4), but he has no choice in the matter, as death also ‘*of geta skyldi*’ [was to get] the same man (9.6). Similarly, the poet uses the ‘*skulu* + verb of dying’ construction as a refrain in which the mode of death is initially the subject of the verb – a witch ‘*of viðá skyldi*’ [was to destroy] the king (21.4) – and her actions provoke an echo in the following verbs when the king ‘*falla skyldi*’ [was to fall] from his horse and ‘*deyja skyldi*’ [was to die] (21.8; 22.6). Not only does the witch have power over the king; her actions affect the very language in which his are recounted.

The two remaining instances of the ‘*skulu* + verb of dying’ construction in which the king is the subject emphasize the kings’ own roles in their deaths. King Ingjaldr burns himself inside his own hall:

es hann sjalfr
 sínu fjörvi
 fræknu fyrstr
 of fara skyldi.³⁷

³⁷ ‘The man himself was to leave his valiant life first’ (28.5-8).

The phrase ‘hann sjálf’ [he himself] emphasizes the king’s active role in his own death. The poet uses the reflexive construction ‘dreppask’ [they beat each other] to achieve a similar emphasis when two brother-kings fight to the death (11.8). The king is also the subject of the verb *skulu* in stanza 15, the only stanza not to record a royal death. According to Snorri’s explanation in the surrounding narrative, King Aun sacrificed his sons in order to obtain a longer life from the gods, but he eventually became bed-ridden with old age (*Hkr* I, 47-9). Although the stanza itself only hints at this back story, the use of *skulu* as an auxiliary verb remains a construction signifying passivity and helplessness as the elderly king, unable to feed himself, ‘þiggja skyldi’ [was to receive] a drinking horn from his helpers (15.6). In these stanzas, the kings themselves are the instruments of their own loss of vitality. The repetition of the ‘*skulu* + verb of dying’ construction thus emphasizes the lack of agency kings in *Ynglingatal* have over their deaths, and suggests further that only way in which a king can acquire some measure of power equal to death is to kill himself.

The function of these powerless and anonymous kings is to provide an impressively large number of links in the chain of genealogy. The poet’s real focus in each stanza is not on the accomplishments of the kings he names but on their many and varied ways of dying. Compared to such commonplace terms for ‘ruler’ as *siklingr* and *jofurr*, complex kennings that describe the modes of death occupy the majority of lines in each stanza. The first verse of *Ynglingatal* is a good indication of the general pattern followed by the other stanzas in the first section of the poem. That is, the first four lines of this stanza establish the name of the king, Fjólfnir, and the place of death, Fróði’s hall, a king’s palace in Zealand (1.2-4). The lines also contain a general

announcement of death but not the details: '[v]arð framgengt, /...feigðar orð' [a fateful verdict came to pass] (1.1-3). In the second four lines, however, the mode of death is given pride of place in a complex kenning that obscures its rather prosaic meaning:

siklingi
 svigðis geira
 vágr vindlauss
 of viðá skyldi.³⁸

This pattern of announcing the death of the king in the first four lines and then elaborating on the exact mode of death in the following four lines is a pattern followed throughout the poem that focuses the audience's attention further on the mode of death rather than on the actions or identity of the king. This is particularly evident in cases where, as in stanza 1, the means of death is unheroic and unfitting of a king; death by drowning in mead is hardly praiseworthy material.

Stanzas 8-9 present a similar case in which a king bent on avenging his favourite sparrow is killed by a pitchfork to the head. After a general pronouncement of the king's name and death in the first four lines, the poet elaborates on the nature of that death. The pitchfork is described in a complex kenning with mythological overtones: it is a 'slongviþref / Sleipnis verðar' [slinging-stick of Sleipnir's food (hay)], a pitchfork (9.7-8). Unusually for *Ynglingatal*, the king is described in a kenning in this stanza, but it is one in which an overly flattering metaphor ironically emphasizes the unkingly fate of death by agricultural implement: the king is a 'valteins /...spakfrømuðr' [wise

³⁸ 'The windless sea of the ox's spears (ox's horns, drinking horns) was to destroy the king' (1.5-8).

swinger of the slaughter-stick (sword)] (8.5-7).³⁹ Stanzas 17-18 contain another example of a potentially embarrassing death cloaked in a complex kenning. In this instance, the king has had to flee his kingdom when it is taken over by a slave; he is then killed by a mad bull. This bull, like the pitchfork in stanzas 8-9, carries a mythological resonance: it is a 'jötuns eykr' [giant's draught-beast] (17.7). This fearsome animal is no excuse for kingly cowardice, however. The poet compares the bull's horn to a sword which, contrary to the usual order of a hunting expedition, the bull sheathes in the king's body:

en skíðlauss
 Skilfinga nið
 hœfis hjørr
 til hjarta stóð.⁴⁰

The mythological resonance of this bull and the complex periphrastic language in which his actions are described do initially lend the prosaic mode of death an importance and power it would not normally possess. However, the depiction of the bull as a heroic warrior is almost comic as the poet contrasts the shamed and dethroned king unfavourably to a hunted animal.

The kennings that describe these three deaths are complex and their meaning is opaque on first reading; it must have been even more so on first hearing. In the prose narrative Snorri betrays a great uneasiness with these verses, which he combats by elaborating excessively on the details

³⁹ Cleasby and Vigfusson define *valteinn* as 'a chosen chip, for soothsaying' (*CV*, 676), although the translation 'val-tén' [slaughter-twig or slaughter-stick] offered in the *Lexicon Poeticum* as a kenning for 'sword' seems more likely in this context, as it in turn forms part of a kenning for 'king' or 'warrior' (*LP*, 591).

⁴⁰ 'But the ox's sword (horn) without a sheath pierced the heart of the son of the Skilfingar' (18.5-8).

given in the poetry. Although the kings die in unusual ways, according to Snorri the deaths are caused by their inordinately good qualities. Dagr's attachment to his sparrow is understandable because the king 'var maðr svá spakr, at hann skilði fugls rødd' [the man was so wise that he could understand the language of birds] (*Hkr* I, 35). The sparrow who flies around the world collecting information for the king may be a laughably pale imitation of Óðinn's Huginn and Muninn, but Dagr himself is a warrior in Snorri's tale: '[f]ólkit flýði víðs vegar undan' [the people fled far away from him] (*Hkr* I, 36). Similarly, it is King Egill's bravery that causes him to ride ahead of his men when hunting a 'mannýgr' [vicious] and 'spellvirki' [damage-working] bull (*Hkr* I, 52). Egill is no fugitive but a 'veiðimaðr mikill' [great hunter] (*Hkr* I, 52). Such superlative language is also present in Snorri's account of Fjólnir's unfortunate drowning: 'Fróði átti mikinn húsabœ. Þar var gort ker mikit, margra álna hátt ok okat með stórum timbrstokkum' [Fróði had a large house. A huge pot was made there, many ells high and fastened with great timber trunks] (*Hkr* I, 26). Snorri's elaborate scenario of a mead-vat so large that it needs a platform with an opening above it in order to be filled makes the obscure language of the stanza obvious in meaning, albeit by creating a slightly unusual scenario for the king's death. In *Ynglinga saga*, then, the riddling quality of the poet's kennings is explained in the prose text before the reader encounters each verse. Potentially absurd deaths are explained and lent a greater solemnity by Snorri's prose narrative, perhaps more in keeping with the later author's view of the early kings and the introductory function of *Ynglinga saga* to his history of the kings of Norway.

Can we, however, dismiss absurdity so easily? As Snorri himself writes in the *Prologue*:

sumt þat, er finnsk í langfeðgatali, þar er konungar eða aðrir stórættaðir menn hafa rakit kyn sitt, en sumt er ritat eptir fornum kvæðum eða sǫguljóðum, er menn hafa haft til skemmtanar sér.⁴¹

Are lists of ancestors so easily separated from stories of amusement, or have the two been combined in this poem? The descriptions of these ancient kings are strikingly different from the eulogies that form the majority of early skaldic verse and Snorri's evident unease with these unkingly kings, as well as the controversies the poem has provoked in modern scholarship, demonstrate how incongruous later audiences have found these stanzas with their assumed function of praising a living ruler.⁴² Incongruity, however, has been identified by, among others, Guy Halsall as a central aspect of humour. Halsall's studies are based in particular upon the late antique and early medieval worlds.⁴³ It is incongruity in this poem that gives rise to the absurdity of these stanzas: we find many accounts of drink, revenge and warriors in the corpus of Old Norse literature, but the unanticipated images of a colossal mead-vat, revenge sought for a sparrow, and bulls taking on the trappings of warriors are incongruous images that subvert these expectations. This does not mean that the absurd must therefore be silly or unimportant. Halsall notes that,

⁴¹ 'Some of this matter is found in the lists of ancestors in which kings or other men of good birth have reckoned their families, and some of it is written following old songs or lays that men have had for their amusement' (*Hkr* I, 3-4).

⁴² Indeed, Bergsveinn Birgisson has recently suggested that due to its grotesque elements, the poem is not designed to praise the Norwegian kings at all but functions rather a *níð* or insult-poem directed at the Norwegians' neighbours. See his doctoral thesis, 'Inn i skaldens sinn: Kognitive, estetiske og historiske skatter i den norrøne skaldediktingen', Dr. art. thesis (University of Bergen, 2007), 208-24.

⁴³ Guy Halsall, 'Introduction: "Don't Worry, I've Got the Key"', *Humour, History and Politics in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Guy Halsall (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), 1-21.

very serious points can be made through satire, irony or ridicule. To say that a passage in the sources is satirical or ironic is not to denude it of serious content. To study late antique and medieval texts to find instances of humour is not to belittle them or to miss the point by looking at peripheral ephemera.⁴⁴

The incongruity discussed in the above examples does not belittle the royal family but it does, as all incongruity tends to, act as a signpost for the reader or listener of the poem. Incongruity forbids passivity on the part of the listener or reader and instead jolts him or her into an active role. The incongruity of the sparrow-revenge juxtaposition forces audiences to engage with the text more closely as their expectations are challenged.

Challenging the audience is, of course, an inherent characteristic of all poems that use such complex periphrastic language. Kennings act as metaphors and the substitution of one word for another in the kenning system demands that the audience deduce the similarities between the words of the kenning and the object they signify. Often kennings are formulaic and predictable, requiring minimal effort from an audience well versed in the conventions of periphrasis.⁴⁵

However, the incongruity of the kennings in *Ynglingatal* requires a process more active than that of decoding a well known formula. Such audience engagement with metaphorical language is not unlike the process of decoding a riddle, and indeed the riddling quality of the kennings in skaldic

⁴⁴ Halsall, 'Introduction: "Don't Worry, I've Got the Key"', 3.

⁴⁵ Clunies Ross, *Poetry and Poetics*, 112.

verse has been much commented upon.⁴⁶ From the perspective of cognitive linguistics, Bergsveinn Birgisson has examined the kennings in *Ynglingatal* and he argues that a highly mnemonic system of aesthetics governs the poem. He suggests that the unusual images and kennings found in *Ynglingatal* are characteristic of pre-Christian poetry, aiding in its transmission before writing was widely practiced in Scandinavia.⁴⁷ I think it probable that the absurdity of these kingly deaths is a deliberate demand for active audience involvement in the production of meaning, and that such a process functions essentially as a mnemonic device to ensure that kings from the distant past, about whom little information is known, are remembered.

Ynglingatal's catalogue of absurd kingly deaths continues throughout the 'Swedish kings' section as the poet increasingly follows the kings into the realm of the supernatural and fantastical. While the poetic language ironically invokes the mythological in the kennings for Egill's bull and Dagr's pitchfork, in other stanzas the poet explicitly attributes the deaths of kings to magical beings, setting up an opposition between the semi-divine Yngling dynasty and the lesser supernatural creatures who cause their deaths. In such cases, the nature of the otherworldly being is mutable even within the same stanza, supplying the audience with a range of apparently conflicting metaphors to complicate the riddle of its identity and to further challenge the audience. The second stanza is a case in point. Describing the death of King Sveigðir, the poet introduces a

⁴⁶ They are described as such in standard reference works such as *MSE*, 351. Indeed, it is a very old observation on the character of kennings: Bragi, the god of poetry himself, is said in *Skáldskaparmál* to compare poetry to 'rúnar' [secrets] (*Skm*, 3).

⁴⁷ Birgisson, 'Inn í skaldens sinn', 131-47.

supernatural creature in the first line of the verse when the king encounters a malevolent dwarf on his way home after a rowdy night (2.1).⁴⁸ A clear dichotomy is set up between this strange being and the king: the phrase ‘dagskjarr / Dúrnis niðjar’ [day-fearing Dúrnir’s kinsmen (dwarfs)] (2.1-2) mirrors the structure of ‘stórgeði / Dusla konr’ [great-minded Dusli’s kinsman (Sveigðir)] (2.6-7).⁴⁹ The race of Dúrnir and the race of Dusli are in opposition. The exact nature of which group of supernatural beings causes the death of the king becomes more unclear at the end of the stanza, however, as the dwarf is said to be guarding a ‘salr /...jötunbyggðr’ [hall peopled by giants] (2.11). When this dwelling gapes or yawns, *gína*, around the king in the final line, it is as if the whole of the supernatural underworld has conspired to swallow this one representative of the human race.⁵⁰

As in the previous examples, Snorri’s explanation of this curious incident of the dwarf in the night-time rests on an inconsistent characterisation of the king: he is both drunk and pious. Echoing the actions of the previous king, Fjölfnir, Sveigðir is intoxicated after a night of drinking when he encounters the dwarf. The dwarf is a trickster figure who exploits the king’s devotion to

⁴⁸ It should be remembered that drunkenness has long functioned as a humorous device in literature and may well add to the comedy of this stanza. See for example Mark Humphries, ‘The Lexicon of Abuse: Drunkenness and Political Illegitimacy in the Late Roman World’, *Humour, History and Politics in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Guy Halsall (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), 75-88.

⁴⁹ The name Dusli is otherwise unattested, but the kenning must refer here to the king (*LP*, 90).

⁵⁰ Håkon Aspeborg has discussed the presence of ancient burial-mounds in the landscape and suggests that this stanza is an indication of early Viking-age attitudes to stone and its supernatural connotations as the road to the realm of the dead and to that of the gods in ‘The Dead in the Hills: Reflections on the Cult of the Dead in the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age of Uppland’, trans. Fiona Campbell, *Dealing with the Dead: Archaeological Perspectives on Prehistoric Scandinavian Burial Ritual*, eds. Tore Artelius and Frederik Svanberg, Riksantikvarieämbetet Arkeologiska undersökningar Skrifter 65 (Stockholm: National Heritage Board, 2005), 201.

the gods: '[d]vergrinn stóð í durum ok kallaði á Sveigði, bað hann þar inn ganga, ef hann vildi Óðin hitta' [the dwarf stood in the doorway and called to Sveigðir, and told him to go inside if he wished to meet with Óðinn] (*Hkr* I, 27). The king clearly misses the sinister connotations that equate 'meeting Óðinn' with dying, a relatively common metaphor in the Old Norse corpus.⁵¹ A similar comparison between travel and death is implied in the Old English rune poem in the stanza for the rune Ʒ, or Ing, and thus tantalizingly – but it is difficult to know how closely – related to the genealogy of the Ynglingar. According to the poem,

(Ing) was ærest mid East-Denum
 gesewen secgun, oþ he siððan est
 ofer wæg gewat; wæn æfter ran;
 ðus hearingas ðone hæle nemdun.⁵²

Describing metaphorically the death of a mythical hero, this stanza has much in common with the 'Swedish kings' section in *Ynglingatal*, offering an Anglo-Saxon analogue to the riddling aspects of the Old Norse sequence.⁵³

⁵¹ In stanza 3 the poet explicitly likens death to a journey to Óðinn: '[e]n á vit / Vilja bróður / vitta véttr / Vanlanda kom' [but a creature of witchcraft brought Vanlandi towards Vili's brother (Óðinn)] (3.1-4). In stanza 8 the king's figurative journey when he 'dauða of fara skyldi' [was to travel to death] (8.2-4) mirrors his actual journey as he travels east to avenge his sparrow. On the metaphor of death as a journey and its relationship to boat-graves, see Frands Herschend, 'Material Metaphors - Some Late Iron and Viking Age Examples', *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross, Viking Collection 14 (Odense: UP of Southern Denmark, 2003), 47-62.

⁵² 'Ing among the East-Danes was first / beheld by men, until that later time when to the east / he made his departure over the wave, followed by his chariot; / that was the name those stern warriors gave the hero' (st. 22). Text and translation from Maureen Halsall, ed., *The Old English Rune Poem: A Critical Edition*, McMaster Old English Texts and Studies 2 (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1981), 90-91.

Such riddles engage the mind of the listening or reading audience in a process of decoding the text, an active engagement with the poem that aids in memorialisation. However, riddles are metaphors; the subject of a riddle is displaced by a series of metaphors that describe things like the subject, not the subject itself. In this way, *Ynglingatal* does much to support H  l  ne Cixous' assertion that, '[m]en say there are two unrepresentable things: death and the feminine sex'.⁵⁴ *Þj  d  lfr* includes many examples of female figures who cause the deaths of kings, and who are themselves shifting and unstable – unrepresentable – figures. Two sorceresses make an appearance in *Ynglingatal*, each described as a 'vitta v  ttr' [a witchcraft-being] (3.3 and 21.3). In the first of these cases, the exact species of supernatural being is, like the dwarf in stanza 2, ambiguous. This *vitta v  ttr* is also of 'trollkund' [troll- or giant-kin] (3.5), 'gr  mhildr' [night-battle, valkyrie] (3.7) and a 'mara' [nightmare] (3.12). The exact species of the enemy being is unclear, and the final epithet *mara* is especially ambiguous.⁵⁵ I take *mara*, the final word that characterizes this being, to be a deliberately unclear description of the mode of death, a resistance on the part of the poet to represent accurately this threatening female figure. Snorri, however, is ill at ease with the

⁵³ Richard North has discussed extensively the possible relationship between Ing in the Old English and Old Norse traditions in *Heathen Gods in Old English Literature*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), esp. 38-42. See also Walter Baetke, *Yngvi und die Ynglinger: eine quellenkritische Untersuchung   ber das nordische 'Sakralk  nigtum'*, Sitzungsberichte der S  chsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig, Philologisch-Historische Klasse, Bd. 109, Ht. 3 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1964), esp. 139-64.

⁵⁴ H  l  ne Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs* 1.4 (1976), 885. Cixous' call for women to supplant male writers' focus on death is peculiarly prescient in the context of this poem: '[l]et us defetishize,' she writes. 'Let's get away from the dialectic which has it that the only good father is a dead one' (885).

⁵⁵ This word is elsewhere unattested in the skaldic corpus (*SkP*).

unresolved nature of this creature and adds a further element of ‘otherness’ to it in the prose context: King Vanlandi marries a Finnish woman and deserts her (*Hkr I*, 28-9). The woman engages the help of a local witch to call the king back to Finland. When the magic causes him to wish to return, his counsellors forbid it and an old woman called the *Mara* steps on him until he dies. This prose explanation of poetic ambiguity not only clarifies the nature of the supernatural being but also attributes the primary motivation to a human woman. By explaining it, Snorri renders the supernatural less terrifying; the more conventional targets of the woman and the foreigner take its place. In the prose narrative, the death of the king is not caused by his own powerlessness but by the evil deeds of some well-established literary antagonists.

Stanzas 21-2 similarly attribute the king’s death to the machinations of a *vitta vétttr*, but in these verses the focus is not on the witch’s nature, but her effect on King Aðils’ body:

Þat frá k enn,
 at Aðils fjörvi
 vitta vétttr
 of við a skyldi
 ok dáðgjarn
 af drasils bógum
 Freys óttungr
 falla skyldi.⁵⁶

Ok við aur
 ægir hjarna

⁵⁶ ‘I also heard that a witch-being was to destroy Aðils’ life. And Freyr’s bold (*lit.* deed-eager) descendant fell from the horse’s shoulders’ (21.1-8).

bagnings burs
of blandinn varð.⁵⁷

There is an ironic contrast between the use of words that praise the king's heroic actions – he is 'dáðgjarn' [deed-eager] (21.5) and 'dáðsæll' [deed-happy] (22.5) – and his inability to prevent the accident.⁵⁸ The bold king ends ingloriously with his brains in the mud. Strangely, Snorri does not mention the *vitta véttir*, but it is implied that she may be one of the female beings 'um dísarsalinn' [in the temple of the goddess] to whom, at the moment of his death, the king was sacrificing (*Hkr* I, 58). The use of the verb *blanda* in this verse emphasizes the shame of the king's downfall. Zoe Borovsky has examined the use of the adjective *blandinn* as an insult in *Njáls saga*, demonstrating that it can be used as an insult with connotations of sexual impurity or forbidden relationships.⁵⁹ Cleasby and Vigfússon, she observes, record multiple meanings for the verb *blanda*.⁶⁰ Literally meaning 'to blend' or 'to mix', it is also used metaphorically for sexual intercourse, often pejoratively. The adjective *blandinn* carries connotations of a mixed or bad character. She explores the word's importance in the eddic poem *Lokasenna*: Loki threatens to mix poison into the mead

⁵⁷ 'And the sea of the brains of the son of the king became mixed with the mud' (22.1-4).

⁵⁸ The construction *-gjarn* is a relatively common praise-term for kings in skaldic verse. It is found in Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld's phrase 'tirar gjarn' [eager for glory] in his *Óláfsdrápa* (*Skj*, BI, 150, st. 9) for Óláfr Tryggvason and in the phrase 'fremðar gjarn' [eager for fame] in Sigvatr Þórðarson's *Vikingarvísur* (*Skj*, BI, 216, st. 15). However, Roberta Frank has pointed out that such Old English cognates as 'lofgeornost' may carry negative connotations of 'too boastful, ostentatious', and the meaning may be similar here. See her 'Skaldic Verse and the Date of *Beowulf*', *Beowulf: Basic Readings*, ed. Peter S. Baker (New York: Garland, 1995), 166.

⁵⁹ Zoe Borovsky, "En hon er blandin mjök": Women and Insults in Old Norse Literature', *Cold Counsel: Women in Old Norse Literature and Mythology*, eds. Sarah M. Anderson and Karen Swenson (New York: Routledge, 2002), 1-15.

⁶⁰ Borovsky cites *CV*, 67 in 'Women and Insults', 1.

and he invokes his blood-brotherhood, a relationship formed by the mixing of blood, with Óðinn in order to secure a place at the table. Loki then insults Freyja with the adjective *blandinn* when he says, '[þ]egi þú, Frejja, / þú ert fordæða / ok meini blandin miðk' [be quiet Freyja! You are a sorceress and mixed greatly with harm] (st. 32), an insult, Borovsky suggests, that refers to her incestuous relationship with her brother, as well as to her Vanir origins.⁶¹ It is notable that in this poem the reprehensible 'mixing' is associated with genealogies and with the proper or improper relationships between family members. The connotations of the king's brain *blandinn* in the mud in the genealogical record in *Ynglingatal* is therefore more than just a grisly visual image: the mixing of brains and mud is inappropriate, unorthodox and shocking. There is a further mixing of gender as the earth, Jörð, is a female entity, and the sexual connotations of the verb *blanda* may be implied here too, suggesting an unholy union between the earth and the king. That a female witch causes all these layers of unsuitable mixing further emphasizes the woman's own deviance from normal roles and renders her an even more powerful figure, one who can cause others to deviate from the norm as well.

The most subversive, as well as the most changeable, supernatural presence in *Ynglingatal* is that of Hel. According to Snorri, Hel is a female deity, daughter of the trickster god Loki and appointed by Óðinn to rule over the land of the dead (*Gylf*, 27).⁶² Hel appears as another powerful female presence ordering the deaths of the most powerful kings who, in contrast, have little agency

⁶¹ Borovsky, 'Women and Insults', 4.

⁶² Chris Abram provides an excellent overview of Hel in both eddic and skaldic verse; he also discusses the related linguistic backgrounds of the name of the goddess and her realm in 'Hel in Early Norse Poetry', *VMS* 2 (2006), 1-29.

and must passively accept their lots. However, this may well be simply heroic rhetoric on the part of the poet: in the prose narrative at least, all of the kings who are chosen to die by Hel die in their beds, many as old men. Although Hel appears to have a strong say in the matter of the kings' deaths in the verses, she may also provide a suitably supernatural and memorable death for kings about whom little else was known.

Snorri has strikingly few details to recount about King Dyggvi: 'Dyggvi hét sonr hans, er þar næst réð lǫndum, ok er frá honum ekki sagt annat en hann varð sótt-dauðr' [his son was called Dyggvi, who ruled the land after him and about him there is nothing said other than that he died of illness] (*Hkr* I, 33). In the poem *Ynglingatal* Dyggvi's death is only implied; the focus is on what happens to his 'hrør' [corpse] (7.2). The verse is twelve lines long and, like most of the other stanzas, composed of four-line mini-stanzas, each of which is a grammatically complete package:⁶³

Kveðkat dul,	þvít jódis	ok allvald
nema Dyggva hrør	Ulfs ok Narfa	Yngva þjóðar
Glitnis gnó	konungmann	Loka mær
at gamni hefr,	kjósa skyldi;	of leikinn hefr. ⁶⁴

Each four-line section is structurally identical. First, the king is named or described:

⁶³ As Lönnroth notes, many of the stanzas in this poem are divided into such sections, with each section repeating information given elsewhere in the stanza. He suggests that the repetitive nature of these sections might reflect the originally oral transmission of the poem, as sections may be added or forgotten without significantly changing the details given about each king ('Dómaldi's death', 88).

⁶⁴ 'I do not deny it, but Glitnir's goddess (Hel) has Dyggvi's corpse for amusement, so that the sister of the wolf and Narfi (Hel) was to choose the kingly man. And Loki's daughter (Hel) has the all-powerful king of Yngvi's people in play (7.1-12).

Dyggva hrør [the king's corpse]
 konungmaðr [kingly man]
 allvald / Yngva þjóðar [all-powerful king of Yngvi's people].

This is followed by a periphrastic naming of Hel:

Glitnis gnó [Glitnir's goddess]
 jóðis / Ulf's ok Narfa [sister of the wolf and Narfi]
 Loka mæx [Loki's daughter].

The focus, however, is on the final line of each quatrain, in which a verb describes the relationship between the two characters:

at gamni hefr [has for amusement]
 kjósa skyldi [was to choose]
 of leikinn hefr [has in play].

Variations between each quatrain therefore present different interpretations of the nature of this powerful figure and – importantly – of her relationship with the king as the stanza progresses.

In the first quatrain, the phrase *hafa gaman* initially suggests that the king is a powerful warrior, a soldier who wrestles with Hel in battle. This is the meaning used elsewhere in the poem when a later king is praised for his final battle, the 'jófur at gamni' [the king at sport] (25.10-12).

Such battle imagery is typical of skaldic verse.⁶⁵ The king's name, related to the adjective *dyggr*, likely means 'trusty' or 'valiant' and would seem initially to support this warlike reading.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ In his memorial poem for Haraldr gráfeldr, for example, Glúmr Geirason looks back at the king's battles as 'gumna vinr at gamni' [the friend of men in the game (war)] (*Skj* BI, 66, st. 2). Egill Skalla-Grímsson similarly speaks in verse of a 'gamanleikr' [play-game] when he fights and wins a duel (*Skj* BI, 49, st. 32).

⁶⁶ *LP*, 91-2.

However, while the phrase *at gamni* often denotes acts of sport and war, it can also refer to sexual pleasure, particularly when used in a poetic context to describe male-female relationships.⁶⁷ Hel is characterized in this quatrain as *Glitnis gnó*, a kenning that could denote either a valkyrie or more specifically Hel.⁶⁸ Her valkyrie-like aspect in this phrase plays on the *double entendre* of the phrase *hafa gaman*: the valkyries were frequently portrayed in a sexual relationship with the most heroic of warriors.⁶⁹ In this context, the phrase *hafa gaman* clearly takes on erotic overtones as the poet exploits its double meaning.

The poet refers again to the woman's valkyrie-like aspect in the second four lines of the stanza through his use of the verb *kjósa*: the word *valkyrja* has the same verb as its base and literally means 'chooser of the slain'.⁷⁰ However, the woman described is, we now learn, far more powerful than a mere valkyrie. She is clearly identified as Hel when the poet calls her 'jódis Ulfs ok Narfa'

⁶⁷ CV, 188. *Vafþrúðnismál* attests to this meaning when Óðinn asks the giant Vafþrúðnir 'hvé sá born gat...er hann hafðit gýgiar gaman' [how he (a giant) had children when he had no play with giantesses] (32.3-4). It is used in the same sense in *Skírnismál* (sts. 39 and 41).

⁶⁸ This is the meaning in Meissner, 397. The kenning is explored more fully by Eggert Ó Brim in 'Bemærkeninger angående en del vers i "Noregs konungasögur"', *ANF* 11 (1895), 7-8. Abram notes that *Glitnir* may be read either as a *heiti* for 'horse' or as a reference to the mythical hall Glitnir mentioned both in *Grímnismál* and in Snorri's *Poetic Edda* in 'Hel in Early Norse Poetry', 15-16.

⁶⁹ On this see Judy Quinn, 'The Gendering of Death in Eddic Cosmology', *Old Norse Religion in Long-Term Perspectives: Origins, Changes, and Interactions*, eds. Anders Andrén, Kristina Jennbert and Catharina Raudvere (Lund: Nordic Academic P, 2006), 54-7. Neil Price observes that valkyries are called 'óscmeyjar' [wish-maidens] in the eddic poem *Oddrúnargrátr* (st. 16) and that this name puns on their double role as Óðinn's messengers in battle and as objects of desire for the slain men. See *The Viking Way: Religion and War in Late Iron Age Scandinavia* (Uppsala: Department of Archaeology and Ancient History, 2002), 331.

⁷⁰ This etymology was originally suggested by Jakob Grimm and is still accepted. See his *Teutonic Mythology, Volume 1*, 1883, trans. James Steven Stallybrass (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2004), 417.

[the sister of the wolf and Narfi] (7.5-6).⁷¹ She is thus shown in the company of Loki's other offspring, the Fenris-ulfr and his son Narfi.⁷² The malevolent wolf will, we know from the *Eddas*, appear at Ragnarøk, the final battle, and will be instrumental in the downfall of the gods (*Skm*, 5-6).⁷³ Hel is in august company here and the final battle that is invoked attributes great power to her: she is no valkyrie but the ultimate chooser of the slain in a final, apocalyptic war. However, echoing the *double entendre* of *hafá gaman*, *kjósa* means not only 'to choose', but also 'to desire'. This play on the meaning of *kjósa* can be found in the love verses of the star-crossed skald Kormákr when addressing his sweetheart:

Hvern myndir þú hrundar
 Hlín skapfrømuð línu,
 líknsýnir mér lúka,
 ljós, þér at ver kjósa?⁷⁴

⁷¹ The word *jódis*, translated here as sister in accordance with the notes in *Hkr* I, 34, is also an older form of the word *dís*, meaning goddess or woman (*CV*, 100). Johan Fritzner gives many examples of the word *dís*, particularly where it is applied to women from the mythological poetry. He notes that it is cognate with the Old English word *ides* in his *Ordbog over det gamle norske sprog*, 3 vols (Kristiania [Oslo]: Den norske Forlagsforening, 1886-96), I, 246-7. Bosworth and Toller define the word to mean 'woman', taking the majority of their examples from Old Testament figures and noting that, 'it is supposed by Grimm to have been applied, in the earliest times...to superhuman beings, occupying a position between goddesses and mere women' in Joseph Bosworth and T. Northcote Toller, eds., *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1882-98), 586.

⁷² Abram notes that when Hel appears in skaldic verse as a kenning referent, she is most often identified by her familial relationship with Loki and his offspring. Although most of Abram's examples of this are taken from *Ynglingatal* itself, he demonstrates that Bragi Boddason and Egill Skalla-Grímsson also construct such kennings ('Hel in Early Norse Poetry', 12).

⁷³ The story is also alluded to in *Völuspá* sts. 40, 49, 53, 54.

⁷⁴ Finnur's edition reads *leika* in line 3 instead of *lúka*, which gives a better sense. This stanza is therefore cited from the Íslenzk fornrit edition and may be translated: 'Lady of linen, which promoter of the valkyrie (warrior) would you

The ‘promoter of the valkyrie’ is a kenning for ‘warrior’, and the valkyries’ penchant for taking human lovers was also well known.⁷⁵

This image of a powerful woman choosing or desiring a man transforms dramatically in the final quatrain, challenging the audience to re-evaluate yet again their understanding of the Hel-riddle. In this final section, Hel is described as ‘Loka mæR’ [Loki’s daughter] (7.11). The word *mæR* sits in startling contrast to the previous descriptions of Hel as a powerful, sexualised being; *mæR* carries connotations of innocence and even childishness and the modern English word ‘maid’ is related to it.⁷⁶ The final verb reflects this new characterisation of Hel: Loki’s daughter has the king ‘of leikinn’ [in play] (7.12). The verb *leika* creates an image of the king as a child’s plaything; the related noun is commonly used to denote a doll or puppet.⁷⁷ There is an ironic juxtaposition between this characterisation of the female Hel and the king, who is praised as the ‘allvald / Yngva þjóðar’ [all-powerful king of Yngvi’s people] (7.9-10). Such excessive praise of the king’s power does not match his status as a bauble of Loki’s daughter. *Leika* can carry the same metaphorical

choose/desire for your husband? Your calming looks show me brightness’ (Einarr Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Vatnsdæla saga*. Íslenzk fornrit 8 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1939). Finnur’s edition may be found in *Skj* BI, 74, st. 19.

⁷⁵ The most famous of these is certainly Brynhildr who takes the hero Sigurðr as a lover in the *Poetic Edda* and *Völsunga saga*. Matthias Egeler observes that the valkyries’ affinity with death in battle and their overt sexuality link them to a pan-European pattern of female battle-demons with parallel examples in Irish, Etruscan and Greek sources. See his article, ‘Textual Perspectives on Prehistoric Contacts: Some Considerations on Female Death Demons, Heroic Ideologies and the Notion of Elite Travel in European Prehistory’, *Journal of Indo-European Studies* (forthcoming).

⁷⁶ *CV*, 443. This is also the translation suggested in *Hkr* I, 34, although Fritzner notes that it can also simply denote a young girl (Fritzner, *Ordbog*, II, 769).

⁷⁷ *CV*, 382.

meanings as *hafa gaman* and *kjósa* in poetry. In *Eyrbyggja saga* the noun *leika* appears in a stanza meaning ‘mistress’; the speaker, Þórarinn, is answering an accusation of effeminacy, and he uses the word as a contemptuous epithet for his accuser’s partner.⁷⁸ The gender reversal of this word in *Ynglingatal* emphasizes even further the king’s weakness in contrast to the powerful Hel. The characterisation of Hel is thus constantly changing, and the way in which she exerts power over the king is equally volatile. Such contradictory metaphors expressed in the kennings demand a constant, active decoding on the part of the audience, a process that enhances the mnemonic power of the stanza.

Hel is thus an unstable and destabilizing character. It is perhaps surprising that the skaldic poet’s representation of this female figure of death is comparable to far more recent conceptions of death. In their introduction to *Death and Representation*, a collection of essays focusing primarily on nineteenth- and twentieth-century texts, Sarah Webster Goodwin and Elisabeth Bronfen observe:

Like the decaying body, the feminine is unstable, liminal, disturbing. Both mourning rituals and representations of death may seek strategies to stabilize the body, which entails removing it from the feminine and transforming it into a monument, an enduring stone. Stable object, stable meanings: the surviving subject appropriates death’s power in his monuments to the dead.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds., *Eyrbyggja saga, Brands þáttur örva, Eiríks saga rauða, Grænlandinga saga, Grænlandinga þáttur*, Íslensk fornrit 4 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1935), 42.

⁷⁹ Sarah Webster Goodwin and Elisabeth Bronfen, eds., *Death and Representation*, Parallax Re-Visions of Culture and Society (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1993), 14.

The importance of monuments in *Ynglingatal* will be discussed more fully below, but it is notable that Hel becomes neutralised in the later stanzas of the poem in this very way. In stanza 30 the poet declares:

ok hallvarps
 hlífi-nauma
 þjóðkonung
 á Þótni tók.⁸⁰

This image is one of maternal care, of an older female power rather than that of a young girl or of a sexualized woman. Hel acts as a motherly protector for the king, who is mourned by all of his followers: ‘Halfdanar / sǫkmiðlendr / sakna skyldu’ [the strife-mediators (his followers) were to feel the loss of Hálfðan] (30.2-4). This verse is the first in the sequence of historical Norwegian kings and the focus has shifted: the means of death is less important than the commemoration of the king, enacted by the raising of a burial mound by those followers. No longer the prime motivator of the king’s death, Hel becomes no more than a marker of commemoration ‘drooping’ over the bones of the king.⁸¹

In the next stanza Hel fully recedes from her active role in the king’s death and becomes no more than a metaphor for dying. An ‘ási’ or shipmast is the cause of the king’s death and he journeys to Hel in the same way that earlier kings journeyed to Óðinn (31.2). The focus is again

⁸⁰ ‘And the protecting-woman of the hill-edge took the people’s king at Þótn’ (30.5-8).

⁸¹ Przemysław Urbańczyk has identified Skareið as the name of the cemetery overlooking Skiringssal at Kaupang in ‘What was “Kaupang in Skiringssal”? Comments on Dagfinn Skre (ed), Kaupang in Skiringssal. Kaupang Excavation Project Publication Series, Vol. 1, Aarhus UP, Århus (2007)’, *Norwegian Archaeological Review* (2007), 176-212.

Accessed 14 March 2009 through < <http://www.informaworld.com>>.

on commemoration in this world rather than the king's life in the next, and the stanza contains a detailed description of the location of the king's cairn:

þars élkaldr
 hjá jöfur gauzkum
 Vøðlu straumr
 at vági kømr.⁸²

Hel has become a poetic trope for death, but as the kings come closer to remembered history, their cause of death is less obscure and there is no need to attribute it to a death-goddess. In stanza 32, Hel is merely business-like in her allotment of death:

Ok til þings
 þriðja jöfri
 Hveðrungrs mærr
 ór heimi bauð.⁸³

It is significant that in these stanzas Hel no longer appears at the end of the verse, the location that has formerly been devoted to a detailed description of the cause of the king's death. Rather, she appears in the opening lines, the space formerly reserved for a general announcement of the king's death. This suggests that Hel herself is no longer considered to be the cause of death but merely a metaphor for it.

Supernatural females are not the only causes of a king's death in *Ynglingatal*. Human women also play a memorably destructive role in *Ynglingatal* as they disrupt the male space of the court. In

⁸² 'Where the stream of the Vaðla, cold as a snow-storm, flows to the sea near the king of Gautland' (31.9-12).

⁸³ 'And Hveðrungr's daughter (Hel) invited the third king away from the world to a meeting' (32.1-4).

a scene reminiscent of the Finnish sorceress in stanza 3, stanza 10 is also, according to Snorri, the account of a Finnish woman's revenge on a Swedish king. Although no witchcraft is involved in this instance, Skjálfr, the queen, is still a powerful and subversive figure. She is called 'Loga dís' [Logi's sister] (10.7); the word *dís* means sister but is also related to the older form 'jódis' [goddess], as found in stanza 7 in a kenning for Hel.⁸⁴ Skjálfr parodies the actions expected of the king when she hangs her husband with a 'gollmen' [gold necklace] (10.6). Her actions mock those performed by a king in his role as treasure-giver and indeed the title 'menglotuðr' [necklace-destroyer] is applied to another king earlier in the poem (3.11). This female inversion of the male act of treasure-giving echoes (or prefigures) Guðrún's vengeful scattering of Atli's treasure at the end of *Atlakviða*:

Gulli seri
 in gaglbiarta,
 hringom rauðom
 reifði hon húskarla.
 Skop lét hon vaxa,
 en skíran málm vaða –
 æva flióð ekki
 gáði fiarghúsa.⁸⁵

Just as Skjálfr uses her husband's treasure to hang him, so Guðrún subverts the role of the ring-giver by taking gold from the temple, not in combat, and by giving it to her husband's servants,

⁸⁴ *Jódis Ulfs ok Narfa*, as discussed above in footnote 70 of this chapter.

⁸⁵ 'Bright as a goose, she scattered gold, made the servants rich with red rings. She let doom increase and pure metal flow – the woman did not at all take care of the gods' houses' (40.1-8).

not to noble retainers.⁸⁶ Skjálfr's treacherous use of the golden necklace also echoes the story of Hildir, who uses a golden necklace to incite a never-ending war between her father and brothers.⁸⁷

The prowess of Skjálfr's husband, King Agni, as a leader is further questioned when he is said to tame, *temja*, the gallows upon which he is hanged, but as noted above it is clear that this horse is not one from which he will dismount alive. The mythological echoes in the kenning for Agni's gallows – 'svalan hestr / Signýjar vers' [the chill horse of Signý's husband] (10.11-12) – mirrors Skjálfr's reversal of the role of the sexes. In Signý's story the woman is powerless to stop the king from hanging her lover, but in *Ynglingatal* the woman is firmly in control and hangs the king herself.⁸⁸ Snorri's identification of the woman as Finnish suggests that, as with his explanation of the Finnish *mara*, he felt the need to contextualise the dangerous woman as foreign; there is no mention of her otherness in the stanza itself (*Hkr* I, 37-8). Stanza 14 also describes the death of a king by hanging, but in contrast to stanza 9 the gallows are described with the man's name prominent: 'Hagbarðs haðna' [Hagbarðr's halter] (14.9-11). In this stanza the kenning 'hábrjóstr / hǫrva Sleipnir' [high-breasted hemp-Sleipnir (hemp-horse)] (14.5-6) is similarly part of

⁸⁶ David Clark notes that, although there is no overt condemnation of Guðrún in this poem, 'there is a clear sense of horrified admiration' for her and for her subversive actions. See 'Undermining and En-Gendering Vengeance: Distancing and Anti-Feminism in the *Poetic Edda*', *SS* 77.2 (2005), 184.

⁸⁷ As told in *Ragnarsdrápa* by Bragi Boddason (*Skj*, BI, 2-3, sts. 8-12) and in *Skáldskaparmál* by Snorri (*Skm* I, 72). It is notable that in *Ragnarsdrápa* a kind of alliance exists between the two female figures, Hildir and Hel: in an echo of the kenning for Hel in *Ynglingatal* st. 7, Hildir eggs the men into battle, urging them, 'jǫfrum ulfs at sinna / með algífris lifru' [to travel to the wolf's most monstrous sister (Hel)] (st. 9).

⁸⁸ See Saxo Grammaticus, *History of the Danes*, trans. Peter Fisher, ed. Hilda Ellis Davidson, 2 vols. (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1979), I, 210-18.

the masculine world of warriors through its reference to Óðinn's horse. These kennings are fitting in a verse in which the king dies while harrying, a properly masculine activity; the use of Signý's name is more fitting to describe a gallows made by a woman.

The poet himself remarks on the queen's unexpected deviance when he says,

Þat telk undr,
 ef Agna her
 Skjalfar rjóð
 at sköpum þóttu.⁸⁹

According to the poet, Skjálfr's plan is not only shocking in itself, but it is still more shocking that the king's followers, *Agna her*, did nothing about it. The powerful woman, the poet implies, must be controlled by the men around her, particularly those close to the king. Uncontrolled, her actions tear apart the king's retinue. A similar upset occurs two stanzas later with the deaths of the brother-kings Yngvi and Álfr. Snorri tells of a love triangle in which one brother becomes jealous of the other's attentions to his wife and kills him (*Hkr* I, 40-1). In the verse, however, Queen Bera is the primary motivator of events and, like Skjálfr's, her actions are condemned by the poet:

Vasa þat bært
 at Bera skyldi
 valsœfendr
 vígs of hvetja.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ 'I call it a scandal if Skjálfr's plan seemed reasonable to Agni's army' (10.1-4). Cleasby and Vigfússon give two definitions for the word *undr*: the more common meaning 'wonder' as well as a sense denoting 'shame' or 'scandal', which I have used here (*CV*, 654).

⁹⁰ 'It was unbecoming that Bera should encourage the slaughter-killers (warriors) to battle' (13.1-4).

This stanza depicts the ‘inciting woman’; the verb *hvetja* in line 4 is even cognate with our modern English verb ‘to whet’.⁹¹ In *Old Norse Images of Women* Jenny Jochens writes of this figure:

heroic poetry’s most lasting contribution...was the images of the inciting and egging woman, who, by hurling insinuations and accusations at her relatives, accomplished the revenge she was unable to otherwise obtain because of her lack of physical strength.⁹²

Brynhildr, rather than Guðrún, is the heroic prototype of the ‘whetter’, and just as the valkyrie manages to force one blood-brother to kill another in the *Edda*, so Bera causes strife between siblings in the world of *Ynglingatal*. Thus, just as their counterparts Guðrún and Brynhildr undermine the male relationships described in the mythology, so Skjálf and Bera embody a subversive female presence in the male space of the Yngling court as their actions disrupt the homosocial bonds of brotherhood (in the case of Yngvi and Álfr) and of the warrior band (in the case of Agni’s retinue).

In addition to the deaths caused by kingly incompetence, supernatural beings, and human woman, a final group of stanzas in the ‘Swedish kings’ section blurs the line between the cause of the king’s death and his funeral pyre. Descriptions of fire occupy the majority of lines in these stanzas just as, in the other stanzas discussed above, kennings describing the mode of death take centre stage. In stanza 29, the poet imagines fire as the king’s living antagonist. Like a savage animal, the ‘ǫlgylðir’ [alder-wolf] swallows the king’s corpse (29.4). Fire is also personified as the destructive son of a god: ‘glóðfjalgr / gǫrvar leysti /sonr Fornjóts’ [Fornjótr’s son (fire), safe in

⁹¹ CV, 301

⁹²Jenny Jochens, *Old Norse Images of Women* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1996), 167.

embers, loosed the mailcoat] (29.5-7).⁹³ This description is similar to that of the funeral fire in stanza 6, which portrays fire as an equally fearsome opponent; it is the ‘dynjanda / bani Hóalfr’ [showering death of Hóalfr] (6.6-7).⁹⁴ In the prose text, however, Snorri attributes the fire to a purely human cause: the king’s followers blame him for their poverty and burn him alive in his house (*Hkr* I, 74). In this way, funeral pyre and cause of death become one in the saga.

The flames described in other stanzas also occupy an ambiguous position between the funeral pyre and burning as an act of war. The kennings used to describe the fire are similar whether they describe the fire of war or the ceremonial fire of the funeral, and it is difficult without the prose narrative to determine which is which. Stanza 4 seems to relate a burning through enmity: ‘øttu / setrs verjendr / á sinn fōður’ [the defenders of the throne (princes) contended with their own father] (4.6-8). In this stanza, fire is an act of war perpetrated by the king’s sons upon their father. Another kenning for that fire, however, echoes the *dynjanda* fire in stanza 6: ‘glóða garmr / glymjandi beit’ [the dog of embers (fire) bit, howling] (4.11-12). The present participle shows the fire in both cases to be an active, dog-like being that devours the king. Fire is also a ‘meinþjóf / markar’ [harming-thief of the forest] (4.5-6) in this stanza. In stanza 27, the phrase ‘húspjófr / hyrjar leistum sté’ [the house-thief of the deep stepped in stocking feet’]

⁹³ Margaret Clunies Ross has discussed this kenning and the portrayal of the personified elements: ‘it was principally the destructive or harmful qualities of these natural phenomena that were translated into human form as the sons of Fornjótr’. See ‘Snorri Sturluson’s Use of the Norse Origin-Legend of the Sons of Fornjótr in his Edda’, *ANF* 98.1 (1983), 48-49.

⁹⁴ Such descriptions of fire are strikingly similar to that of the pyre on which Hildeburh cremates her family in *Beowulf*: ‘wand to wolcnum wælfýra mæst, / hlynode for hlawe...Lig ealle forswalg’ [the greatest of funeral fires wound to the clouds, roared before the burial-mound...fire swallowed up all of them] (*Bwf*, ll. 1119-22).

(27.1-4) at first suggests the image of fire, but the phrase is more likely a kenning for the king who sets his own hall ablaze.⁹⁵ There is thus a blurring between the king who starts the fire, the king who is the victim of fire, and the flaming funeral pyre itself.

In Stanza 23 not only does the king die in a fire, but his followers are also burned. The poet begins the stanza by describing the fate of the king alone – ‘[v]eitk Eysteins / enda folginn / lokins lífs’ [I know that Eysteinn’s hidden course of life (death) came about] (23.1-3) – but in the next stanza we learn that the same king was burned in his hall, ‘flotna fullr’ [full of sea-warriors] (24.7-8). The kenning for fire in this stanza belongs to the same family of fire-kennings as *meinþjóf markar* in stanza 4: it is the ‘bitsótt /...hlíðar þangs’ [contagious disease of hill-weed] (24.1-3). Its victim, along with the king and his followers, is the ‘timbrfastr’ hall [built with strong timbers] (24.5), the ironically inaccurate adjective only emphasizing the destructive power of the flames. After the total annihilation of the king, his hall, and his followers, it is surprising that the story is still remembered; however, the poet notes that the story was ‘með Svíum kvóðu’ [told among the Swedes] (23.6). The total incineration of the king’s retinue thus functions as its own

⁹⁵ The word ‘goðkynning’ [the acquaintance of the gods] is a neuter noun and could therefore be either nominative or accusative in this stanza. The verse could thus be translated to suggest that the *húsbjófi* is stepping towards the object of the verb, the *goðkynning*, in which case the phrase should be taken as a kenning for a fire which is moving towards the king. However, I think it is more likely that this kenning describes the *goðkynning* himself as the subject of the verb; the word ‘þás’ [who is] that precedes the kenning suggests that the *goðkynning* and the *húsbjófi* are one and the same person (27.5).

memorial pyre, even when there is a lack of followers to tell the story. This fire, although not a funeral pyre, is so large that it is also one of commemoration.⁹⁶

Thus, in the first twenty-nine stanzas of *Ynglingatal* the poet crafts a series of highly memorable descriptions of shocking, absurd, or fantastical deaths in order to commemorate kings from the distant past about whom few other details were presumably known. Through the use of complex, riddling kennings, the poet creates a poetic memorial for the kings that acts as a reminder of their existence in the absence of visible grave-mounds or other corroborating evidence accessible to the poet's tenth-century audience. The kings are faceless figures whose achievements are not remembered, but their presence in the genealogical record augments Røgnvaldr's lineage, increasing the legitimacy and prestige of these shadowy kings' living descendant. However, when such grave mounds did exist, the poet had no need of such periphrastic and mnemonic language. Stanzas 30-37, which describe the most recent Norwegian rulers to precede Røgnvaldr, reveal a dramatic shift in the poet's engagement with different modes of commemoration.

In stanzas 30-37 the poet no longer describes the kings' deaths in any great detail. Instead, he focuses on the role the kings' followers play in commemoration as they raise burial mounds to

⁹⁶ Recent archaeological evidence corroborates the existence of a powerful ruling family in the Uppsala area in the sixth and seventh centuries that cremated their dead (Sundqvist, 'Aspects of Rulership Ideology', 96). Neil Price notes that although there was no standard burial practice at the time, cremation was the most common way of disposing of a body. The ashes were then deposited in an unmarked grave or mound. See his article on 'Dying and the Dead: Viking age Mortuary Behaviour', *The Viking World*, eds. Stefan Brink and Neil Price, Routledge Worlds (London: Routledge, 2008), 259-60. It is not surprising, therefore, that the poet describes the giant fire rather than a place of burial, as the fire would have been highly visible and memorable, while the king's final resting place would have been unmarked and forgotten.

honour the dead. There are no complex kennings describing the mode of death in these stanzas and the final four lines, which in previous stanzas described that death, now contain geographical descriptions of the location of each king's grave or monument. Thus, in the construction of each of these later stanzas, the place of death has literally displaced the cause. King Hálfðan is buried at Borre (32.10-12); King Óláfr lies in a mound at Geirstaðir (36.6-8).⁹⁷ An earlier Hálfðan is commemorated with three place-names and, as noted above, Hel herself guards his burial mound:

ok hallvarps
 hlífi-nauma
 þjóðkonung
 á Þótni tók;
 ok Skereið
 í Skíringssal
 of brynjalfs
 beinum drúpir.⁹⁸

One of the kings lacks a monument because he was killed unexpectedly at sea. However, he is commemorated with a similar attention to location despite his lack of a burial mound:

ok buðlungr
 á beði fornum
 Stíflusunds
 of stunginn vas.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ It is thought that the ninth-century ship-burial at Gokstad is the site of Óláfr's grave and that the ship-burials at Vík and Oseberg commemorate members of the same family (Turville-Petre, 'On Ynglingatal', 51).

⁹⁸ 'And the protecting woman of the hill-edge (Hel) took the king of the people at Þótn. And Skereið in Skíringssal droops over the bones of the armoured elf (warrior)' (30.5-12).

⁹⁹ 'And the king was stabbed on the ancient bank of Stíflusund' (34.5-8).

Location is important: the grave-mounds described in this poem would have provided visible corroboration of the poet's tale. Nine burial mounds have been excavated at Borre, mentioned in stanza 32 as a gravesite. It is thought that the site was used from c. 600-900 by a powerful ruling family. The mounds would have been visible expressions of the kings' power: ranging from five to seven metres in height, they are situated on the shore of Oslofjord at a point where it would have been possible to control traffic in and out of the fjord.¹⁰⁰ It is clear from both the literary and the archaeological record that kings were expected to leave a visible mark on the landscape after their deaths.

Ynglingatal resembles later skaldic poems in this focus on place-names, a characteristic directly linked to its poet's interest in commemoration. There are fourteen place-names listed in the poem as sites of death or burial and a further six detailed geographic descriptions.¹⁰¹ The historical function of this catalogue is not unlike later skaldic verses that list the sites of kings' battles; Sigvatr's Þórðarson's *Vikingarvísur*, with its numbered list of battles in different parts of the

¹⁰⁰ Bjørn Myhre, 'The Iron Age', *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia*, ed. Knut Helle, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), 7.

¹⁰¹ Caroline Arcini has recently shown that graves traditionally thought to have been burials are in reality cremation sites and that collective cremation sites are rare. Unlike those buried at the great mounds at Borre, early kings may have been cremated in many different places, even if they were of the same family. A poem like *Ynglingatal* is therefore an important record of all these different sites. See her 'Pyre Sites Before Our Eyes', trans. Fiona Campbell, *Dealing with the Dead: Archaeological Perspectives on Prehistoric Scandinavian Burial Ritual*, eds. Tore Artelius and Frederik Svanberg, Riksanantikvarieämbetet Arkeologiska undersökningar Skrifter 65 (Stockholm: National Heritage Board, 2005), 71.

Viking world, is a good example of this.¹⁰² *Ynglingatal* is also analogous to the Irish tradition of *dindsenchus*, or ‘place-name lore’, composed by poets from the late seventh century onwards.¹⁰³

Lists of grave-sites are particularly well attested in that tradition, most notably a list of graves of the Fianna by Cinaed Ó hArtucán, an Irish poet who lived in the second half of the tenth century and who may have served Óláfr, the Viking king of Dublin.¹⁰⁴ This Irish example records the deaths of heroes rather than those of a single ruling family, but the poet’s emphasis on remembering the sites of the graves is the same: among the thirty-eight stanzas attributed to Cinaed, the poet records sixteen gravesites and thirty-three places of death. In both cases, place-names and geographical descriptions act as a map for the commemoration of the dead.

As the poet turns in these final few stanzas to focus on the kings’ burial mounds he introduces the king’s followers as key figures in the wider social process of commemoration. The king’s followers are largely absent or, in the case of the sacrificed Dómaldi (stanza 5), hostile in the first two sections of the poem. However, the followers of the Norwegian kings are prominent mourners and constructors of monuments. They are described as a group, the active subjects of the verbs of mourning. After King Hálfðan’s death, ‘søkmiðlendr / sakna skyldu’ [the strife-mediators (warriors) were to feel the loss] (30.3-4), while after his grandson’s death, ‘sigrhafendr fólú’ [the victorious ones buried] the king (32.11-12). Conversely, the poet uses words for the

¹⁰² *Skj* BI, 213-16.

¹⁰³ On this see James Carney, ‘Language and Literature to 1169’, *A New History of Ireland*, ed. Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon, 2008), 451-510.

¹⁰⁴ James Carney, ‘The Dating of Early Irish Verse Texts, 500-110’, *Revue Celtique* 19 (1982-83), 177-216. The poem has been edited by Whitley Stokes, ‘On the Deaths of Some Irish Heroes’, *Revue Celtique* 23 (1902), 303-48.

king that emphasize his role as a leader of men: the king is a ‘þjóðkonungr’ [king of the people] (30.7), ‘rekks lǫðuðr’ [warriors’ encourager] (31.7), ‘jǫfurr gauzkum’ [king of the Gautar] (31.10), ‘virða vinr’ [men’s friend] (36.3) and a ‘herkonungr’ [army-king] (36.7). Such language demonstrates the close ties between the king and his group of followers; it also concentrates the audience’s attention on the role of the followers after the death of a king, rather than on the circumstances of the king’s death itself. In *Memory and the Medieval Tomb*, Elizabeth Valdez del Alamo and Carol Stamatis Pendergast observe that the remembrance of the dead is best understood as a process of ‘social cognition’, noting:

Commemoration consolidates ties among the living through communal participation in defining and mourning the past. Sepulchral environments permit the timeframe of the dead, the day of death, to intersect with the collective time of the living, thereby perpetuating their relationship to the dead.¹⁰⁵

The locations of the kings’ monuments are uniquely linked to the rituals of commemoration practiced by their followers, and the poet’s role is to record these locations while declaring the continued role such monuments play in the community of the living.

It is fitting, therefore, that the poet’s engagement with the process of commemoration develops over the course of the poem. The poet’s voice is absent from the first five stanzas of the ‘Swedish kings’ sequence: these introductory verses give the impression of factual, impersonal accounts through the use of third-person verbs and the poet’s repetition of personal and place-

¹⁰⁵ Elizabeth Valdez Del Alamo and Carol Stamatis Pendergast, eds., *Memory and the Medieval Tomb* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 6.

names. First-person verbs appear only in the sixth stanza as the poet adds another layer to this guise of reliable, well known information: ‘[o]k þess opt fróða menn /...of fregit hafðak’ [and I have often heard this from wise men] (6.1-4). Bjarne Fidjestøl suggests that this stanza ‘offers one of the clearest pieces of evidence we have to show that the poet himself had actively engaged in gathering material for his work.’¹⁰⁶ Certainly the stanza creates the illusion of a diligent researcher; whether or not the poet may be taken at his word, he emphasizes the authority of other poets whose material he appears simply to transmit to the audience. This creation of an authority in the background, of wise men who are the keepers of the kings’ histories, seems to be a necessary conceit before the poet’s own voice can be heard; the same stanza concludes with the poet’s assertion of his own authority when he says, ‘nú þat veitk’ [now that I know] (6.9), with the *nú* emphasizing a shift from the third person to the first. Stanzas 7-29, describing the deaths of the Swedish kings, are thereafter full of first-person verbs recounting the poet’s own engagement with his material: ‘frák’ [I heard] (8.1, 20.1, 21.1), ‘veitk’ [I know] (23.1) and ‘kveðkat dul’ [‘I do not deny] (7.1). The poet self-consciously explores his own role in the transmission of these stories, noting near the end of one stanza, ‘fráat maðr áðr’ [one didn’t hear that before] (11.9). Another stanza celebrates the longevity of poetic compositions:

Þau frák verk
Váts ok Fasta

¹⁰⁶ Fidjestøl, ‘The King’s Skald from Kvinesdal’, 85.

sönskri þjóð
 at sögum verða.¹⁰⁷

Implying that the poem is based on an ancient oral tradition, the poet establishes the authority of his material. He also proclaims his own role in the preservation and transmission of that history as he retells the story to his listeners.

The poet links this oral tradition with Sweden and the distant past. He attributes an almost organic transmission of history to the east and its inhabitants:

ok austmarr
 jöfri sönskum
 Gymis ljóð
 at gamni kveðr.¹⁰⁸

Sweden is the land of the mythical kings, the early forefathers of the Norwegian line the poet now celebrates. ‘Hitt vas fyrr’ [it was an earlier time], Þjóðólfr notes (5.1), a phrase that echoes his other poem, *Haustlǫng*, in which he observes that the time of distant mythological events ‘vas...fyr lǫngu’ [was long ago].¹⁰⁹ This invocation of an ancient poetic tradition based in the far-away realm of the near-mythical Swedish kings mirrors the poet’s celebration – or invention – of that ancient Swedish dynasty.

¹⁰⁷ ‘I heard that the deeds of Vǫttr and Fasti became stories among the Swedish folk’ (20.1-4).

¹⁰⁸ ‘And the eastern sea tells of the Swedish king at battle in the ocean’s roar’ (25.9-12).

¹⁰⁹ *Skj* BI, 15, st. 6.

As the poet moves into the realm of the Norwegian kings in stanzas 30-37, however, there is a dramatic change. The poet gives up his privileged position as the depository of an ancient oral culture in the first line of the first stanza to discuss the recent kings:

Þar frá hverr,
 at Hálfðanar
 sǫkmiðlendr
 sakna skyldu.¹¹⁰

As discussed above, this final section of the poem concentrates on the commemoration of the king by his followers, and in this stanza the poet acknowledges that he is no longer alone in his commemoration of these more recent rulers. The universality of *hverr* in this stanza demonstrates that Þjóðólfr is aware of the collective nature of commemoration. His shift into the present tense and the third person includes the audience in this process of remembering. The first person disappears from the poem after this point and the poet's function is afterwards to record dispassionately the places of the kings' burial mounds. There is thus a substitution of the burial mound as a visible reminder of the king's death for poetry as an oral reminder. The massive physical presence of the burial mound seems to negate the need for a mnemonic device such as the complex periphrastic language that the poet uses when no such evidence is present. In contrast to the challenging kennings of the 'Swedish kings' section, the straightforward geographical descriptions of the 'Norwegian kings' section reposition the poet – formerly a word-smith and riddler – as the impartial chronicler of a common, widely known history.

¹¹⁰ 'Everyone heard that the strife-mediators felt the loss of Hálfðan' (30.1-4).

In the final two stanzas of the poem Þjóðólfr turns away from the genealogy of the dead as he declaims an exultant eulogy for the living. The penultimate stanza is a bridge between the long line of dead ancestors and the living patron as the poet praises Rognvaldr's father, Óláfr. While in this stanza the poet does chronicle the king's death, one rather prosaic word suffices: the king dies of 'fótverkr' [foot-disease] (36.1). Unlike all of the previous stanzas, the poet details aspects of the king's life and reign: we are told that Óláfr ruled Norway, Upsi, Vestmarr and Grenland (35.5-10).¹¹¹ This catalogue of royal dominion is far more in keeping with non-genealogical skaldic verse that praises a king for his power and success in battles.¹¹² In an efficient summing-up of the previous verses and a segue into the final stanza, the poet announces triumphantly:

Ok niðkvísl
 í Nóregi
 þróttar Þrós
 of þróazk hafði.¹¹³

The family has grown, as has its kingdom. The final stanza shifts into the present tense as Þjóðólfr praises Rognvaldr: '[þ]at veitk bazt' [that I know best] (37.1), he assures us. In direct contrast to the seven descriptions of kings buried in the ground that precede him, Rognvaldr is an image of open-air vitality, 'und blóum himni' [under the blue skies] (37.2). The poet concludes his poem with a self-congratulatory eulogy of both king and poetry: 'kenninafn /...konungr eigi' [the king

¹¹¹ Finnur notes that the phrase *godum líkr / ok grenlandz fylke* is recorded only in Flateyjarbók (*Skj* AI, 15). He suggests that *Grenland* refers to the county of Bratsberg, now Telemark (*LP*, 203).

¹¹² For example, Glúmr Geirason's *Gráfeldardrápa* and Einarr skálaglamm's *Vellekla*, as noted above.

¹¹³ 'And the race of Þrór's strength had increased in Norway' (35.1-4).

has the best known (family) name] (37.3) and ‘heiðum-hárr / of heitinn es’ [is called high-of-honours] (37.7-8). This living king has as yet no burial mound as a visible object of commemoration; in its absence, poetry has recovered its former place as the public mode of celebrating the ruler. In this final stanza Þjóðólfr proclaims the inextricable and circular link between a king’s genealogy and his praise: declaring Rognvaldr’s ancestors worthy of praise during the previous thirty-six stanzas, the poet creates a suitably exalted family name that can then be used to praise the king. The present king, we are assured, is not powerless like his ancestors; through the skilful construction of a commemorative sequence, those ancestors have been used by the poet to proclaim their descendant’s illustrious position in the present.

II. *Háleygjatal*: A Poetic Challenge

The author of *Fagrskinna* names the poet Eyvindr Finnsson ‘skáldaspillir’ [poet-spoiler] when he first introduces the poem *Háleygjatal* into the text (*Ágr-Fsk*, 65).¹¹⁴ Perhaps for this reason Eyvindr’s originality has suffered a poor reputation among some modern scholars;

¹¹⁴ He notes elsewhere that Eyvindr composed *Hákonarmál* in imitation of the earlier poem *Eiríksmál* (*Ágr-Fsk*, 86). The author of *Ágrip* similarly gives Eyvindr’s nickname and attributes *Háleygjatal* to the poet, but does not cite him (*Ágr-Fsk*, 18). Eyvindr’s nickname is traditionally translated as ‘the plagiarist’, as in Gabriel Turville-Petre, *Scaldic Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), 43.

Háleygjatal, his genealogical poem composed for Earl Hákon of Hlaðir, has received the bulk of the criticism directed towards him. Folke Ström is representative of this approach:

At the time of his composition of *Háleygjatal*, Eyvindr is an elderly man, and the poem's artistic qualities cannot be rated high...Above all, one is struck by the poem's heavy dependence upon *Ynglingatal*, on which it is, with its genealogical content, faithfully modelled. When we note that the number of ancestors in the jarl's family is identical with that in the model's, it becomes clear that the overall correspondences are intentional and deliberately contrived.¹¹⁵

Háleygjatal, dated approximately to the year 985, does bear a striking resemblance to *Ynglingatal*. Composed in the *kviðuháttir* meter, it too traces the genealogy of a noble – although not royal – family.¹¹⁶ The Resen manuscript records twenty-seven generations of the earls of Hålogaland, and it is possible that the poem at one time comprised twenty-seven stanzas, also following the model of *Ynglingatal*.¹¹⁷ The poem that is extant today, however, is far less structurally coherent than is *Ynglingatal*. Stanzas from *Háleygjatal* are preserved in diverse sources: five verses recorded in *Skáldskaparmál* give little information about the reigns of the earls, demonstrating instead a number of unusual kennings; three stanzas are interspersed with *Ynglingatal* in *Ynglinga saga* to

¹¹⁵ Ström, 'Poetry as Propaganda', 446.

¹¹⁶ This is Finnur's dating of the poem, edited in *Skj* BI, 57- 60. It is also edited in *Norsk* I, 35-9.

¹¹⁷ Faulkes, 'The Earliest Icelandic Genealogies', 117. For a list of the twenty-seven earls and their counterparts in the poem, see Russell Poole on 'Myth and Ritual in the *Háleygjatal* of Eyvindr skáldaspillir', *Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World: Essays in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross*, eds. Judy Quinn, Kate Heslop, and Tarrin Wills, *Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe* 18 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 154-5.

provide corroborating evidence to Snorri's history; and six are scattered through *Fagrskinna* and the later sagas of Snorri's *Heimskringla*.¹¹⁸

Despite the obvious similarities between the two poems, Eyvindr is no mere plagiarist. Rather, he is a poet who engages directly with the works of other poets, crafting his stanzas in response to theirs. I would argue that *Háleygjatal* is not a plagiarism of *Ynglingatal* but a deliberate challenge to the earlier poem. This poetic challenge mirrors the political environment of the late tenth century and the struggle for power between the royal family of Rognvaldr heiðumhár and Haraldr hárfagri, patrons of Þjóðólfr ór Hvini, and the semi-autonomous earls of Hlaðir, served by Eyvindr. Earl Hákon's grandfather, Hákon Grjótagarðsson, had been appointed earl under King Haraldr hárfagri, but his power was in reality that of an independent ruler of northern Norway.¹¹⁹ Hålogaland, along with such territories as Trøndelag, Møre and Hordaland, had its own identity and a population who resisted fiercely the centralizing efforts of Haraldr and his descendants.¹²⁰ Fölke Strom has shown that as Haraldr and his descendants increasingly aligned themselves with Christianity to consolidate their positions, Earl Hákon ostentatiously promoted his adherence to the pagan religion and sponsored many skaldic poems to assert his allegiance to it.¹²¹ *Háleygjatal* stems from these propagandizing efforts. Russell Poole describes *Háleygjatal* as a 'spin-off' from

¹¹⁸ *Haralds saga hárfagri* (sts. 7 and 8), *Haralds saga gráfeldar* (sts. 9 and 10), and *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* (st. 11). See *Skj* A1, 7-15 for a complete list of the manuscript context of each stanza.

¹¹⁹ Ström, 'Poetry as Propaganda', 442. Daphne Davidson gives an excellent summary of these events in her doctoral thesis, 'Earl Hákon and His Poets', D. Phil. thesis (University of Oxford, 1983), 25-9.

¹²⁰ Claus Krag, 'The Creation of Norway', *The Viking World*, eds. Stefan Brink and Neil Price, Routledge Worlds (London: Routledge, 2008), 645.

¹²¹ Ström, 'Poetry as Propaganda', 445.

Ynglingatal,¹²² and it is possible to take this even further: in *Háleygjatal* the poet Eyvindr crafts a political statement that deliberately confronts and exceeds the genealogical claims of the ruling family as made in the earlier poem by Þjóðólfr. Moreover, this argumentative skald demonstrates far more vigorously than his rival the power of poetry to confer political prestige, asserting the mutual dependence of poet and earl. The two ruling houses are in conflict, and their poetic spokesmen rise to the challenge.

Mythology and history unite in *Háleygjatal* as the speaker begins by recounting the divine ancestry of the earls of Hlaðir.¹²³ Unlike Þjóðólfr, who, in the extant poem at least, traced his patron's family only as far as the mythical Svea kings, the later poet boldly proclaims Óðinn himself to be the progenitor of the earl's family:

Viljak hljóð
 at Hóars líði,
 meðan Gillings
 gjöldum yppik,
 meðan hans ætt
 í hverlegi

¹²² Poole, 'Myth and Ritual', 156.

¹²³ While we cannot be entirely certain that this stanza was indeed first in the original sequence, the formal call for hearing in the first line does support such an order and is accepted by Finnur as such in *Skjaldedigting*. Snorri must have interpreted the stanza in a similar way as he cites it as one of thirteen verses demonstrating the 'mead of poetry' kennings in *Skáldskaparmál*. The majority of these verses have been identified as the opening stanzas of their respective poems. They include the introductory stanzas to Glúmr Geirason's *Gráfeldardrápa*, Úlfr Uggason's *Húsdrápa*, the first two stanzas from Ormr Steinþórsson's 'Digt om en Kvinde', and the first four stanzas from Einarr skálaglamm's *Vellekla* (*Skm* I, 12-14).

galga farms
 til goða teljum.¹²⁴

It is a bold statement, and one which clearly asserts the superiority of the Hlaðajarl family over all others. This inclusion of the gods in the family history is certainly a widespread phenomenon in medieval literature, as noted in the introduction to this chapter. Bede recorded one of the earliest Anglo-Saxon genealogies tracing the Anglo-Saxons back to Óðinn in his *Ecclesiastical History*.¹²⁵ In his influential study of the Anglo-Saxon genealogies and regnal lists, David Dumville discusses the proliferation of such texts in the ninth century and concludes that such genealogies were ‘intended first to establish for the dynasty a commanding position within the world of Germanic heroic legend, and then to anchor it firmly in universal history and a Christian context’.¹²⁶ More recently, Craig Davis has located such texts firmly within the conversion process, noting that the demotion of the pagan gods to heroic human ancestors allowed their incorporation into the Christian history of the world:

kings could now gaze down the length of their pedigree to God’s creation of the cosmic order in the world. They could contemplate there the direct source of their own political

¹²⁴ ‘I wish for silence for Hár’s ale (Óðinn’s ale, poetry) while I lift up Gillingr’s payments (poetry), as we trace his family to the gods in the pot-liquid of the gallows’ cargo (liquid of Óðinn, poetry)’ (1.1-8). Gillingr’s son demands the mead of poetry from the dwarves Fjalarr and Galarr as compensation for their role in his father’s death (*Skm*, 3-4).

¹²⁵ Book 1, Chapter 15 in Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, trans. Leo Sherley-Price and R. E. Latham, ed. D. H. Farmer (London: Penguin, 1990), 63. It has been suggested, however, that Bede himself did not consider Óðinn to be a divine progenitor and that he regarded Óðinn as a mythical figure rather than as a pagan god (Anlezark, ‘Origins of the Anglo-Saxons’, 13-14).

¹²⁶ Dumville, ‘Kingship, Genealogies and Regnal Lists’, 95.

authority. And as importantly, their genetic, blood-lineal descent from divinity, which had been obscured for centuries after the conversion, was neatly and triumphantly restored.¹²⁷

A similar synthesis between divine pagan progenitors and Christian world history occurs in the earliest Irish genealogies dating from the seventh to the ninth centuries, as well as in the earliest Welsh genealogical collection, composed in the mid-tenth century.¹²⁸ It is clear, therefore, that a Christian context was well established for divine progeniture in the early medieval period.

Anthony Faulkes has discussed extensively the development of divine progeniture in Old Norse texts. He notes that early, albeit somewhat unreliable sources, such as Tacitus' *Germania* and Jordanes' *De Origine Actibusque Getarum* describe the forefathers of the Germanic peoples as divine, although it is often unclear whether the legends refer to the origins of a specific tribe, family or nation, or are simply a list of kings.¹²⁹ He finds some indication of a pre-Christian tradition of divine progeniture in the eddic sources, in which such words as *reginkunnigr* and *gøðborinn* seem to indicate a divine origin for the heroes they describe.¹³⁰ He concedes, however, that such words are not conclusive proof.¹³¹ Divine and semi-divine figures are much easier to find in the overtly Christian genealogies, and Margaret Clunies Ross shows that in the later Icelandic sagas, euhemerism was the means by which Icelanders established a literary relationship with pre-

¹²⁷ Davis, 'Cultural Assimilation', 36.

¹²⁸ Although it is thought that these poems date from a relatively early period, they are only preserved in later manuscripts (Thornton, 'Orality, Literacy and Genealogy', 83-84).

¹²⁹ Faulkes, 'Descent from the Gods', 92-94.

¹³⁰ From *Helgakviða hundingsbana* I, st. 32 and *Hamðismál* sts. 16 and 25 ('Descent from the Gods', 92).

¹³¹ Faulkes, 'Descent from the Gods', 95.

Christian Scandinavia. Basing their divine genealogies on Anglo-Saxon models that embraced both pagan gods and Old Testament figures, as well as adopting classical forefathers from the legends of Troy, Icelandic authors wrote their families into the accepted model of learned, European history.¹³² It is reasonably certain, therefore, that the divine progeniture advocated by Eyvindr is not an indigenous, pre-Christian tradition. Þjóðólfr, when composing *Ynglingatal*, even appears to have been unaware of the rhetorical strategy of divine descent.¹³³ Assuming that the poem as recorded in *Ynglinga saga* is complete, Joan Turville-Petre suggests that Þjóðólfr escaped mainstream European influences by living fifty years earlier than Eyvindr and in the southeast of Norway where cultural links were with eastern Scandinavia. Living in the northwest, however, Eyvindr had access to Anglo-Saxon and Irish traditions.¹³⁴ Thus, with his claim of divine descent, Eyvindr positions *Háleygjatal* within a much wider European context than does the poet of *Ynglingatal*. Claiming Óðinn as the earl's ancestor, Eyvindr embraces the traditions of the learned, Christian world, but provocatively sets Earl Hákon against the royal sponsors of the new religion by placing his poem firmly within the pagan context with a powerful pagan forefather. His rival genealogy is a statement both of genealogical and of cultural superiority, a signal that Hákon's poet

¹³² Margaret Clunies Ross, 'The Development of Old Norse Textual Worlds: Genealogical Structure as a Principle of Literary Organisation in Early Iceland', *JEGP* 92.3 (1993), 373-74.

¹³³ Attempts have been made to show that *Ynglingatal* contains a pre-Christian record of divine kingship but Walter Baetke in particular has presented strong arguments against it in *Yngvi und die Ynglinger*, esp. 39-68. A review of the scholarship on this subject can be found in R. W. McTurk, 'Sacral Kingship in Ancient Scandinavia: A Review of Some Recent Writings', *SBVS* 19 (1975-6), 139-69 and in his follow-up article, 'Scandinavian Sacral Kingship Revisited', *SBVS* 24.1 (1994), 19-32.

¹³⁴ Turville-Petre, 'On Ynglingatal', 63.

knew of artistic developments outside his home territory and could adapt them to promote a dissenting political message.

In the introductory stanza cited above, therefore, the poet's focus is firmly on Óðinn and his mythological progeny rather than on the earl and his human ancestors. Indeed, Eyvindr does not explicitly name any member of the human family in his introductory stanzas. In this, he differs significantly from Þjóðólfr and his long list of kingly names in *Ynglingatal*. In the first stanza of *Háleygjatal* the phrase 'hans ætt' [his family or lineage], is the only reference to the human descendants of Óðinn. However, through the ambiguity of this pronoun the poet boldly places the race of poets, rather than that of the earls, first in the line of Óðinn's family by telling the story of how the god acquired the mead of poetry. Óðinn's descent into 'Surts sǫkkdǫlum' [Surtr's deep abyss (*lit.* sunken dale)] to acquire the mead is a suggestive parallel to the metaphorical descent, *ætt*, of the earl's family.¹³⁵ *Háleygjatal*, Eyvindr declares in the opening stanza, is not a poem about one family descended from Óðinn, but two: the noble earls and the race of poets. *Hans ætt* may refer to either or both of these progeny.¹³⁶ In further contrast to *Ynglingatal*, Óðinn is a dynamic

¹³⁵ A similar concept seems to lie behind the word *níðr*, which as a noun denotes a kinsman or descendant, but as an adverb suggests a movement downwards (*CV*, 454-5). This polysemy is exploited in the later genealogical poem *Nóregs konunga-tal* when the poet compares his craft to whaling: '[r]óa skal fyrst / fjarri reyði, / koma þó níðr / nær áðr lúki' [one shall first row far off from the whale, but come down close before it is finished] (*Skj* BI, 575, st. 2). Davidson notes that Eyvindr's kenning is unparalleled in all accounts of the mead of poetry and suggests that there may have been some confusion about the similar names of Surtr and Suttungr, the giant named in *Hávamál*. She suggests also that the deep abyss may suggest the underworld, or that it may be related to the story of Sǫkmímír in st. 2 of *Ynglingatal* as both stories involve a quest for wisdom ('Earl Hákon and His Poets', 78-80).

¹³⁶ It is of course possible that part or all of a strophe is lost, along with a more specific antecedent for *hans*, but this is impossible to determine.

individual, far removed from the passive kings whose deaths were earlier celebrated by Þjóðólfr.

Stanza 2, which completes the opening verse, is dominated by verbs of action and movement as the god returns triumphant from his travels:

Hinn es Surts
ór sǫkkðolum
farmǫgnuðr
fljúgandi bar.¹³⁷

This quatrain shows the acquisition and creation of poetry to be an energetic, proactive process, and one that requires considerable physical strength. Moreover, it is notable that Óðinn's gift of poetry to the world takes pride of place in the introductory stanzas, while the act of procreation, which results in the earl's family, does not appear until the third stanza.

Mythological characters also dominate the verse comprised of Finnur's stanzas 3-4, in which there is a clear focus on reproduction and inter-generational links that is not found in *Ynglingatal*. As discussed above, *Ynglingatal* is a lengthy catalogue of shocking and unusual forms of death; in contrast, this verse in *Háleygjatal* is a celebration of birth. The very structure of the stanza highlights the importance of Óðinn and the giantess Skaði's union: the middle four lines identify the location of their sexual activity, while the first and last four lines are mirror images of each other that reiterate the same procreative action. That is, in the first section Óðinn begets the next generation with Skaði:

¹³⁷ 'Which the one strong in the journey carried, flying from Surtr's pit-dales (deep abyss)' (2.1-4).

Þann skaldbloetr
 skattfæri gat
 ása niðr
 við jarnviðju.¹³⁸

In the last section object and subject are inverted as Skaði begets the next generation with Óðinn:

Sævar beins,
 ok sunu marga
 Qndurdís
 við Óðni gat.¹³⁹

The middle lines record the location, Manheimar, which Snorri interprets as Sweden (*Hkr* I, 22), although many other interpretations have been suggested.¹⁴⁰ Unlike Þjóðólfr's catalogue of deaths in *Ynglingatal*, in *Háleygjatal* Eyvindr depicts scenes of life and reproduction.

Gro Steinsland has suggested that the genealogical poems in general and this stanza in particular demonstrate the existence of a myth of *hieros gamos*, a holy wedding, in the origins of ruling families in pre-Christian Scandinavia. She argues that the marriage of a god and a giantess gave their offspring the powers of both groups and that such a marriage may also have been related to the concept of sacral kingship with the goddess functioning as a personification of the land,

¹³⁸ "Then the shield-worshipper (warrior), the gods' son, begot the tribute-bringer (king) with the iron-giantess' (2.1-4). *Járnviðja* seems to have been coined by Eyvindr through a combination of 'íviðjur' [ogress] and 'Járnviðr' [Iron Wood], both terms found only in *Völuspá*. Davidson notes that the border-land *Járnviðja* is associated with fertility in the *Poetic Edda*, as it is here ('Earl Hákon and His Poets', 87-8).

¹³⁹ "The ski-goddess of the sea's bone begot many sons with Óðinn' (4.1-4).

¹⁴⁰ For a summary of these see Poole, 'Myth and Ritual', 161-6.

conquered by the male ruler.¹⁴¹ The union of the king and the goddess Jǫrð is certainly a common image in the poetry composed for Earl Hákon, and it appears again in a fragmentary stanza from this poem:

Þeims alt austr
 til Egða býs
 brúðr val-Týs
 und bægi ligg.¹⁴²

Such images dominate other poems from Hákon's court, such as Einarr skálaglamm's *Vellekla* and Hallfreðr Óttarsson's *Hákonardrápa*; they proclaim the land to be under the dominion of her rightful ruler, protected by the king's adherence to pagan customs.¹⁴³ In *Háleygjatal*, Skaði's Jǫrð-like fertility sits in direct opposition to the many deaths enumerated in *Ynglingatal*. She is the 'sævar beins /...Qndurdís' [ski-goddess of the sea's bone] (4.1-3), a phrase that echoes but cleverly inverts similar descriptions in *Ynglingatal*. In the earlier poem a king is killed in a landslide: he 'foldar beinum /...of horfinn vas' [was covered by the earth's bones] (26.10-12). Another king, drowned, lies 'und lagar beinum' [under the sea's bones] (31.6). In both instances, a similar phrase is used to describe the mode of death and the subsequent resting place of a king; the focus is on the end of his life and on the commemorative potential of knowing where his body lies. However,

¹⁴¹ Gro Steinsland, *Det hellige bryllup og norrøn kongeideologi: en analyse av hierogami-myten i Skírnismál, Ynglingatal, Háleygjatal og Hyndluljóð* (Oslo: Solum, 1991), 214-26.

¹⁴² 'Under whose shoulder lies the bride of the lord of the slain (bride of Óðinn, Jǫrð) all that is in the east, as far as the home of the Egðir' (15.1-4).

¹⁴³ On this, see Ström, 'Poetry as Propaganda', 448. *Vellekla* is edited in *Skj BI*, 117-24 and *Hákonardrápa* in *Skj BI*, 147-8.

in Skaði's case the phrase describes the mother of a mighty dynasty and is associated with life and beginnings, rather than with death and endings.

In *Háleygjatal* the poet praises the many offspring of this fruitful union, emphasizing the continuity between generations in a manner wholly absent from *Ynglingatal*. The human progeny, *sunu marga*, are described but not named in this stanza; their plurality further enhances the success and generative ability of the first generation, although the phrase also de-emphasizes, as in stanza 1, the person to whom the poem is ostensibly addressed, that is, Earl Hákon. The poet reminds his audience that his is a story about the many offspring of Óðinn and Skaði, not merely of one dominant branch. It may be no more than a tantalising coincidence, but Joan Turville-Petre has pointed out that Eyvindr was likely a near relation to the earl, as *Landnámabók* states that he was a descendant of Grjótgarðr, Hákon's great-grandfather.¹⁴⁴ Ström too observes:

We must not overlook the significance of Eyvindr's own pedigree: he was himself of very high birth, with deep family roots in Hålogaland, the hereditary territory of the Hlaðir jarls. He might well have been familiar with the genealogical traditions of his native area.¹⁴⁵

As a member of the earl's family, Eyvindr was in a unique position reciting this genealogical sequence: the poet's enumeration of the many descendants of Óðinn becomes not only a list of the

¹⁴⁴ According to *Landnámabók*, 'Sighvatr hinn rauði hét gofugr maðr á Hålogalandi; hann átti Rannveigu dóttur Eyvindar lamba, fōður-systur Eyvindar skáldaspillis; hennar móðir var Ingibjörg Hávarsdóttir, Grjótgarðssonar Háleygjajarls' [Sighvatr the Red was a noble man from Hålogaland. He married Rannveig, daughter of Eyvindr Lamb, aunt of Eyvindr skáldaspillir; her mother was Ingibjörg daughter of Hávarr, son of Grjótgarðr the earl of Hlaðir] (*Ísl-Land* II, 349). Also see Turville-Petre, 'On Ynglingatal', 62.

¹⁴⁵ Ström, 'Poetry as Propaganda', 447.

earl's family but also one of his own, based in the traditions of his home territory. Óðinn's role as the father of poetry and of the earl's family is further blurred through the person of Eyvindr himself, both a poet and a member of the family whose descent he recounts.

Surprisingly, this verse from *Háleygjatal* is the first of the genealogical stanzas to be cited by Snorri in *Ynglinga saga* (*Hkr* I, 21-2). Snorri thus (perhaps inadvertently) introduces the poetic heritage of the family of the earls of Hlaðir into the kings' sagas before he cites material about the royal family of Haraldr hárfagri, who are elsewhere his primary focus. However, Snorri, as ever, explains away the ambiguities of this stanza in his prose narrative, writing that Eyvindr's stanza is about *one* of the sons of Óðinn and Skaði, Sæmingr: '[t]il Sæmings talði Hákon jarl inn ríki langfeðgakyn sitt' [Earl Hákon reckoned Sæmingr among his ancestors] (*Hkr* I, 22). Sæmingr is not named anywhere in the extant version of *Háleygjatal* and certainly not in this stanza. Snorri's reinterpretation of Eyvindr's genealogy as the description of one line of father-son relationships is not attested by the opening stanzas of the poem; rather, *Háleygjatal* must be manipulated by the author of the prose narrative in order to fulfil that function. The stanzas are more complicated than their inclusion in the saga would suggest as they open up the line of descent to many offspring, rather than rigidly conforming to a single patrilineal schema.

Time, too, is a dynamic presence in *Háleygjatal*, and one all but absent from the episodic verses of *Ynglingatal*. Eyvindr locates the action of the third stanza in relation to the second with the opening word '[þ]ann' [then]. Stanzas in *Ynglingatal*, in contrast, begin with the words *ok*, *en*, *þar* or *þat*; the earlier poem contains no sense of a progression in time and the order of the stanzas

could easily be rearranged without disrupting the poem's overall function. The number, not the exact order, of generations is important in Þjóðólfr's sequence. Eyvindr's portrayal of time in the genealogy of the Hlaðajarlar, however, has much in common with Richard Schrader's understanding of time in *Beowulf*. Discussing the conflation of mythic, legendary and human time in the poem, Schrader observes that a strict chronology pervades all these various dimensions in the text:

one event begets another and was itself begotten; any event can be looked at as a beginning, middle or end. History is generated...The "parentage" of any event may have several "generations"; that is, its arrival now is the result of a complex history that gets more complicated and arguable, and less factual, the farther one takes it back.¹⁴⁶

In *Háleygjatal*, history and time follow a similarly strict progression from the distant past to the present day; time is generated just as poetry and the race of earls are generated. Strikingly, however, the first stanza shows Óðinn's acquisition of poetry to exist outside the generational time-scheme that governs the procreation of the earl's family in the rest of the sequence. The acquisition of poetry is the first act described in the sequence, and it generates – literally – the rest of the stanzas that follow. Genealogy and poetry evolve together as the poem is composed.

The poet's interest in generation in the early stanzas of *Háleygjatal* dissipates somewhat in subsequent stanzas, in which he takes his cue even more closely from Þjóðólfr's *Ynglingatal*. Stanzas 6 and 7 are preserved only in *Ynglinga saga* next to stanza 14 of *Ynglingatal*. It is impossible

¹⁴⁶ Richard J. Schrader, *Old English Poetry and the Genealogy of Events*, *Medieval Texts and Studies* 12 (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1993), 80.

not to compare the rival accounts the two poems portray; the stanzas are juxtaposed in the prose context and the two sets of verses are so similar that it is difficult not to assume that one was composed with the other in mind, and as a deliberate answer to it. They demonstrate further Eyvindr's admirable skill at copying and undermining the earlier verses. The two stanzas from *Háleygjatal* describe the death of Guðlaugr, king of Hålogaland, at the hands of Jǫrundr and Eiríkr, sons of the Yngling king Yngvi Alreksson. The story of Jǫrundr's death is recounted in *Ynglingtal*. Snorri cites the verses from *Háleygjatal* first, writing:

ok þá hittu þeir Guðlaug Háleygjakonung ok áttu við hann orrostu, ok lauk svá, at skip Guðlaugs var hroðit, en hann varð handtekinn. Þeir fluttu hann til lands á Straumeyrarnes ok hengðu hann þar. Urpu menn hans þar haug eptir hann.¹⁴⁷

When Jǫrundr became king in Uppsala he continued to go raiding in Denmark. One summer he encountered Gýlaugr, son of the hanged earl, who attacked:

Verðr þá Jǫrundr ofrliði borinn ok hroðit skip hans. Hljóp hann þá á sund ok var handtekinn ok leiddr á land upp. Lét þá Gýlaugr konungr reisa gálga, leiðr hann Jorund þar til ok lætr hengja hann. Lýkr svá hans ævi.¹⁴⁸

I find the historical reliability of these accounts doubtful; they are too alike and too many sons and fathers with similar names are involved. They seem to represent, rather, the same story told from

¹⁴⁷ 'And then they met Guðlaugr the king of the people of Hålogaland and had a battle with him, and it ended so that Guðlaugr's ship was cleared (of men) and he was captured. They took him to land at Straumeyrarnes and hanged him there. His men put up a burial mound for him there' (*Hkr* I, 44).

¹⁴⁸ 'Then Jǫrundr was overcome and his ship cleared (of men). He then leapt into the water but was captured and taken up upon the land. Then King Gýlaugr caused a gallows to be raised, he leads Jǫrundr there and orders that he be hanged. So his life ends' (*Hkr* I, 46).

opposite sides. Snorri must be right, however, in presenting the rival ‘hanging stanzas’ side-by-side, as they are remarkably similar. As in the introductory stanzas, this episode in the poem demonstrates Eyvindr’s admirable skill at copying and undermining his rival’s verses.

Looking more closely at these stanzas, it is evident that Þjóðólfr’s stanza 14 is typical of *Ynglingatal* as a whole. Jǫrundr is a powerless king who gives his descendant one more memorable link in the chain of genealogy:

Varð Jǫrundr,
 hinn ’s endr of dó,
 lífs of lattr
 í Limafirði,
 þás hábrjóstr
 hǫrva Sleipnir
 bana Guðlaugs
 of bera skyldi;
 ok Hagbarðs
 hersa valdi
 hǫðnu leif
 at halsi gekk.¹⁴⁹

As discussed in the previous section of this chapter, the king here is a powerless and almost anonymous figure, while the mode of death takes centre stage. Death is the subject of the verbs and the gallows is described by two relatively complex kennings based on mythological referents:

¹⁴⁹ ‘Jǫrundr was taken from life; he died in the end in Limafjördr. The high-breasted hemp-Sleipnir (hemp-horse, gallows) was to carry Guðlaugr’s killer. And Hagbarðr’s goat’s trappings (halter, noose) went around the neck of the ruler of warriors’ (14.1-12).

‘hábrjóstr / hǫrva Sleipnir’ [the high-breasted hemp-Sleipnir] (14.5-6) and ‘Hagbarðs /...hǫðnu leif’ [Hagbarðr’s goat’s trappings] (14.9-11). The animal imagery of a rope used to tie a horse, in the first case, and a goat, in the second, reinforces the powerlessness of a king trussed up by the hangman’s noose, and there is an emphasis on his physical vulnerability as the rope winds around his neck. This is a king thoroughly defeated. The poet’s emphasis is not on the victim but on the complex, riddle-like kennings describing his death.

In stanza 6 of *Háleygjatal*, the poet describes a similar scene, the death of Guðlaugr, the ancestor of Earl Hákon killed by King Jǫrundr:

En Goðlaugr
 grimman tamði
 við ofrkapp
 austrkonunga
 Sigars jó,
 es synir Yngva
 menglǫtuð
 við meið reiddu.¹⁵⁰

The earl is a far more dynamic character than King Jǫrundr. In contrast to the passive kings of *Ynglingatal*, Guðlaugr is the active subject of the initial verb: he ‘tamði’ [tamed] the gallows (6.2). Compare this to King Agni in *Ynglingatal* who, with a sense of inevitability, ‘temja skyldi’ [was to tame] his own gallows (10.10). Davidson notes that the verb *temja* is not found elsewhere to refer

¹⁵⁰ ‘And Guðlaugr tamed the stallion of Sigarr because of the grim fierceness of the eastern kings. Those sons of Yngvi made the necklace-destroyer ride the tree’ (6.1-8).

to the act of riding a gallows.¹⁵¹ Lacking the auxiliary verb *skulu* found in *Ynglingatal*, *temja* in *Háleygjatal* is associated with sport and activity and reveals the earl's energetic acceptance of his fate. Strangely, this ancestor of the pagan Earl Hákon has much in common poetically with the heroic figure of Christ in the Old English tradition who hurries to 'gestigan' [climb] onto his own gallows in the *Dream of the Rood* (ll. 34, 40), for one well known example.¹⁵² However, the kenning used to describe the gallows in *Háleygjatal* places it firmly within the Old Norse tradition, echoing the two kennings in *Ynglingatal*: not only is the phrase 'Sigars jór' [Sigarr's stallion] (6.5) structurally similar to the gallows-kennings in *Ynglingatal*, but the character of Sigarr comes from the same tragic story as Hagbarðr and Signý; both names are used as modifiers in the earlier poem's gallows-kennings.¹⁵³ Invoking his predecessor's periphrastic language for the gallows, Eyvindr invites a comparison between the two hanged rulers; however, the similarity between their killers only emphasizes the contrast between Jǫrundr's passive death in *Ynglingatal* and Guðlaugr's active, heroic death in *Háleygjatal*.

The death of Guðlaugr may lack the shame and animal-like disgrace found in the hanging verses of *Ynglingatal* because hanging itself functions very differently in this poem. For a family descended from Óðinn, hanging carries perhaps not positive, but certainly not wholly negative

¹⁵¹ Davidson, 'Earl Hákon and His Poets', 99.

¹⁵² George Philip Krapp, ed., *The Vercelli Book*, Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records 2 (London: Routledge, 1932), 61-5.

¹⁵³ As discussed in the previous section: 'Hagbarðs høðnu leif' [Hagbarðr's goat's trappings] (14.9-11) and 'svalan hest / Signýjar vers' [the chill horse of Signý's husband] (10.11-12). For the full story, see Saxo Grammaticus, *History of the Danes*, I, 210-18. Birgisson offers a detailed cognitive analysis of the metaphor that compares riding a horse with hanging on a gallows. See 'Inn i skaldens sinn', 296-343.

connotations. In the first stanza of *Háleygjatal* the hanging episode in the god's life is alluded to in the kenning 'galga farmr' [gallows' cargo] (1.7) in the highly positive context of the god acquiring the mead of poetry. The earls' affinity with the hanged god is reiterated in kennings for battle later in the poem: one earl dies in 'Hóars veðri' [Óðinn's weather] (8.2) while his descendant falls in the 'stóran gný / vinar Lóðurs' [great din of the friend of Lóðurr (Óðinn)] (10.6-7). The martial ability of Earl Sigurðr is attested when he 'svönum veitti / hróka bjór / ...Farmatýs' [gave the beer of crows (blood) to the swans of Hanged-Týr (swans of Óðinn, ravens)] (11.2-5). Identifying the gallows as a 'meiðr' [tree, pole] (6.8) and especially as a 'vingameiðr' [windy tree] (7.3) aligns the death of the earl with Óðinn's sacrifice of himself to himself on the *vindgameiðr* Yggdrasill in the eddic poems.¹⁵⁴ Richard North has suggested that the compound *Ygg-drasill* or 'Terror-steed' indicates a close analogy between hanging and horse-riding, and that Óðinn's horse Sleipnir may have been developed from the image of the world tree.¹⁵⁵ Eyvindr's verse exploits this association of riding and hanging to show that hanging is a triumph for the Hlaðjarl family, just as Christ's crucifixion in *The Dream of the Rood* is, paradoxically, a battle won. Hanging is a reiteration of the family's divine progeniture, not another instance of grotesque death that it represents in *Ynglingatal*.

Stanza 7 of *Háleygjatal* reveals further the relationship between the two poems as Eyvindr describes the burial-place of another earl of Hlaðir:

¹⁵⁴ As in *Hávamál*, st. 138. There is also an echo of that sacrifice in the hanging of Randvér in *Hamðismál*, st. 17.

¹⁵⁵ North, *Heathen Gods*, 300.

Ok náreiðr
 á nesi drúpir
 vingameiðr,
 þars víkr deilir,
 þar 's, fjólkunt
 of fylkis hrør,
 steini merkt
 Straumeyjarnes.¹⁵⁶

The imagery of the gallows drooping over the headland is a near echo of *Ynglingatal* stanza 30:

ok Skereið
 í Skíringssal
 of brynjalfs
 beinum drúpir.¹⁵⁷

In *Ynglingatal*, the many grave-sites are described retrospectively by Þjóðólfr, that is, from the point of view of the poet at the moment of composition. At that moment, they are simply geographical locations where only grave-mounds remain to remind the audience of the person commemorated in the poem. In *Háleygjatal*, however, the poet combines his grisly picture of the earl's death by hanging in stanza 6 with a detailed description of the location of his grave. Time moves rapidly forward through the two stanzas as the man who once swung on the gallows in

¹⁵⁶ 'And the corpse-bearer, the windy tree (gallows), droops on the headland where the inlet divides. The corpse of the renowned man is marked there with a stone in the district of Straumeyjarnes' (7.1-8). Davidson differs from other editors of the poem when she translates *fjólkunnr* as 'rife with magic', a meaning which may be related to the Odinic context of hanging. She does note, however, that the word is never applied to inanimate objects, as here ('Earl Hákon and His Poets', 109-11). I follow *Skj* in my translation because the idea of a well-known man is more in keeping with the stone marker that is mentioned in line 7.

¹⁵⁷ 'And Skereið in Skíringssal droops over the bones of the armoured elf (warrior)' (30.9-12).

stanza 6 is replaced by a ‘vingameiðr’ [windy tree] (7.3) on the headland in the subsequent verse. The brave rider who once tried to tame the gallows is replaced after death by the similarly equine ‘náreiðr’ [corpse-bearer or rider] (7.1). Such imagery invites a comparison between the two riders, just as the earl tossing in the wind in death and the windy tree are like images. The gallows, rather than the earl, has become the visual focal point of the stanza, and the moment of death blurs into the moment after death to a time when the earl’s body is lifeless or perhaps even absent. All that can be seen, though the poet’s eyes, is the gallows. Eyvindr then rushes further forward in time, describing the headland long after the death when even the gallows has disappeared and the place is marked simply by a stone (7.7-8). This is the only mention of a grave marker in *Háleygjatal*, in contrast with the mighty pyres and burial mounds described in *Ynglingatal*, but it functions in a far more affective and powerful way. The location described remains static, but time accelerates through the moment of death to the years that follow, juxtaposing the heroic death of the person killed with the mute objects of his death and commemoration. Only the poet, Eyvindr demonstrates, can evoke through his story-telling the full force of what that stone marker represents.

Stanzas 9 and 10 form another pair of verses, this time commemorating an earl killed in battle. The two stanzas are recorded together both in the anonymous chronicle *Fagrskinna* and in Snorri’s *Haralds saga ins hárfagra* in *Heimskringla*. Both sagas relate the rise of the family to the earldom of Hlaðir, but the authors tell rather different stories of the conflict between two noblemen, Earl Atli mjóvi and Hákon Grjótgarðsson, as they jockey for position under the young

King Haraldr hárfagri. In *Fagrskinna*, Earl Atli becomes angry that the king has not visited him for three years and he drives the king's men away when they do arrive in the fourth. Hákon, who is feasting with the king when he hears the news, asks for Atli's land in order to avenge this slight on the king. When he attacks Atli both men are killed and Hákon's son Sigurðr is given the title of earl (*Ágr-Fisk*, 65-6). In this narrative, the conflict that will later arise between the royal family and the earls of Hlaðir is surprisingly absent; the rise of the king and of Hákon's family occurs simultaneously, one supporting the other. In *Haralds saga ins hárfagra*, however, Snorri shows Hákon to be a troublesome upstart who is not so easily contented by the king's orders:

Haraldr konungr setti eptir í Fjórðum Hákon jarl Grjótgarðsson ok fekk honum Firðafylki at yfirsókn. En er konungr var austr farinn, þá sendi Hákon jarl orð Atla jarli inum mjóva, at hann skyldi fara braut ór Sogni ok vera jarl á Gaulum, sem hann hafði fyrr haft. Atli sagði Harald konung hafa veitt sér Sygnafylki ok kvezk því mundu halda, til þess er hann fyndi Harald konung.¹⁵⁸

Although in this case Atli wishes to keep the king's peace, Hákon attacks and both are killed. Snorri's characterisation of Hákon as a troublemaker and challenger of the king's authority is in keeping with his portrayal of the ruling house of Norway throughout *Heimskringla*. This episode foreshadows the trouble the earls of Hlaðir will later cause to that family.

¹⁵⁸ 'King Haraldr set Hákon Grjótgarðsson to rule over the district of Fyrði and gave him authority over the district. And when the king had gone into the east, Earl Hákon sent word to Earl Atli the slender, saying that he should go away from Sogn and be earl in Gaular as he had been before. Atli replied that King Haraldr had entrusted the district of Sogn to him and declares that he would therefore keep it until he found King Haraldr' (*Hkr* I, 107).

Although Eyvindr himself makes no explicit mention of the circumstances behind the conflict, his stanzas echo *Ynglingatal* ever more closely as the two families increasingly come into confrontation with each other. In stanza 9 of *Háleygjatal* the earl ‘es vega skyldi’ [who was to be killed] (9.4) is as passive as his Yngling counterparts and the *skulu* auxiliary verb in this stanza functions as it does in *Ynglingatal*, to emphasize his powerlessness to avoid his fate. However, the earl is not alone in death, nor is his death the focus of the next stanza: his followers, ‘vinir /...magar Hallgarðs’ [the friends of Hallgarðr’s son], are the subjects of the plural verb *falla* (10.2-3) and thus direct the action of the stanza. While the characterisation of the earl’s followers as *vinir* appears highly complimentary – it is an indication of close friendship in many skaldic verses¹⁵⁹ – the use of the word in a kenning for a battle in which all the earl’s followers are killed undercuts this positive image. The repetition of the word five lines later in another kenning for battle, the ‘stórr gnýr / vinar Lóðurs’ [great clash of the friend of Lóðurr (Óðinn)] intensifies its ominous resonance (10.6-7). Using a seemingly positive image of friendship, Eyvindr interrogates the relationship between the earl and his followers as his verse subtly invites the audience to consider the cost of friendship with this unpredictable ruler.

Significantly, it is in this stanza that the poet reuses one of the most gruesome images from *Ynglingatal*: in that poem, a king falls from his horse ‘ok við aur / ægir hjarna /...of blandinn varð’ [and the sea-king’s brain became mixed with the mud] (22.1-4). I discussed above Þjóðólfr’s use of

¹⁵⁹ For example, in his *Erfiðrápa Óláfs Tryggvasonar* Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld describes the king as a ‘vinr jarla’ [friend of earls] as he sweeps into battle with his men (*Skj* BI, 152, st. 9). In *Austrfjararvísur* Sigvatr Þórðarson describes the Swedish king Rognvaldr as a ‘vinr miklu’ [great friend] for Óláfr Haraldsson (*Skj* BI, 225, st. 21).

the word *blandinn* and the connotations of shock or impropriety it carries; it is therefore striking that the same word is used to describe the deaths of the earl's followers in the later poem: 'manna blóði /...vágr of blandinn' [the water was mixed with men's blood], notes Eyvindr grimly (10.4-8). The use of this image censures further the actions of the upstart earl of Hlaðir. In *Ynglingatal* the act of *blandinn* is attributed to witchcraft that kills the king. While no witchcraft is implied in *Háleygjatal*, it is difficult to consider the word to be a positive one. Eyvindr's verse recalls another early poem, Bragi Boddason's *Ragnarsdrápa*, in which a description of the drunk king Jormunrekkr incorporates the concept of being *blandinn* in an unflattering and shocking way: 'fell í blóði blandinn / brunn...at hofði' [he fell on his head into the well (of drink) mixed with blood].¹⁶⁰ While Eyvindr does not explicitly blame the earl for causing the deaths of his men in *Háleygjatal*, the poet's use of such an image indicates disapproval and it shifts the focus, once again, away from the earl's immediate family to those around him.

Moving away from the lord's relationship with his followers, in stanzas 11 and 12 the poet explores the next earl's relationship with his royal enemies, the descendants of Haraldr hárfagri. The final group of verses in *Háleygjatal*, like the penultimate stanza in *Ynglingatal*, has much in common with the genre of battle poetry as Eyvindr praises Earl Sigurðr, Hákon's father, for his struggles against the sons of King Eiríkr blóðøx. As discussed above, it is unusual, both in *Háleygjatal* and in *Ynglingatal*, for the deeds of a king to be described in periphrastic language;

¹⁶⁰ *Skj* BI, 1, st. 4. I follow Gabriel Turville-Petre's reading of the stanza in *Scaldic Poetry*, 2-3.

complex kennings are more often reserved for the mode of death or a description of his place of burial. However, Sigurðr is clearly a special case as the poet describes the earl as,

hinn 's svǫnum veitti
 hróka bjór
 Haddingja vals
 Farmatýs.¹⁶¹

In the following stanza the kenning ‘ǫðlingr /...alnar orms’ [prince of the forearm’s serpent (arm’s serpent, ring)] (12.1-3) is used to remark on the king’s magnificence and perhaps even generosity.

His killers, however, are favoured with no such praise. Eyvindr tersely calls the royal brothers ‘jarðráðendr’ [earth-rulers] (11.7) and ‘landrekar’ [land-protectors] (12.6), grimly ironic labels in light of the instability of their reigns. Eyvindr’s comparison of the ‘ófælinn’ [fearless] (12.4) earl with those who ‘í tryggð sviku’ [in trust betrayed] (12.8) is a strong indictment of Eiríkr’s sons, who, he reminds the audience, needed help from traitors close to the earl to kill him. In *Haralds saga gráfeldar* Snorri writes that the treachery alluded to in the verses was perpetrated by Sigurðr’s brother Grjótgarðr in a secret alliance with the sons of Eiríkr; this prompted the revenge of Sigurðr’s son, Hákon (*Hkr* I, 207-8). The death of Sigurðr is thus an important moment both in *Háleygjatal* and in Snorri’s history. Strangely, in *Fagrskinna* these stanzas about the life of Earl Sigurðr sit incongruously within a prose narrative that praises the actions of his killers, the sons of Eiríkr. After citing the verse the saga-author continues, ‘[s]ynir Eiríks drápu ok Tryggva Óláfsson

¹⁶¹ ‘He who gave crows’ beer of the Haddingjar (blood) to the swans of the slain Freight-Týr (swans of Óðinn, ravens)’ (11.2-5). The Haddingjar do not appear elsewhere in early skaldic verse, but Davidson suggests that the kenning likely refers to a group of heroic warriors (‘Earl Hákon and His Poets’, 137-41).

ok marga aðra konunga ok jarla ok aðra rikismenn' [the sons of Eiríkr killed Tryggvi Ólafsson and many other kings and earls and other powerful men] (*Ágr-Fsk*, 102). At this point in the narrative, the author of *Fagrskinna* is clearly not concerned with the commemoration of the earls of Hlaðir; these stanzas are, rather, a good example of commemorative fragments reused as praise for other kings in the sagas.

In the concluding stanza of *Háleygjatal*, Eyvindr moves from the third-person voice he has used to describe the lives of past kings to the first person plural with which he called for attention in the opening stanza: 'vér góttum, / stillis lof' [we have produced the praise of a king] he declares (16.2-3). The poet refers again to Óðinn's acquisition of the mead of poetry in the kenning 'Jólna sumbl' [banquet of the feast] (16.1), but in this final stanza he also portrays poetry as something in the realm of humans, a 'steinabrá' [stone bridge] (16.4). This kenning differs considerably from those that precede it. In *Háleygjatal* poetry is almost exclusively referred to in its 'mead-kenning' form: the kenning appears twice in the first stanza, while later a kenning for blood, 'hróka bjór' [crows' beer] (11.3) also suggests the intoxication of both battle and poetry. Distinctions between these liquids continually collapse throughout the sequence: the blood that men shed in battle becomes the beer that crows drink; beer becomes poetry when Óðinn drinks it and carries it to the human world. The mother figure of the dynasty is a giantess of the sea, but later her descendants' blood mixes with the sea in a startling and grisly image of death. The multifaceted and interwoven nature of these liquids is an excellent metaphor for Eyvindr's portrayal of the many forms of *ætt* in this poem, as blood and race merge with the mead of poetry.

Thus, the image of a stone bridge is a surprising finale to the sequence. The solidity and everyday aspect of this image mark a break with the images of divine liquid that have so far been used to describe poetry and this signals a shift in the poem. *Háleygjatal* has been transformed from a tale of Óðinn's family to that of the Hlaðajarlar; poetry has also changed form as Eyvindr describes it not as divine intoxication but as a constructed monument raised by a skilled human craftsman. Poetry in this stanza is likened to the bridges built to commemorate both the pagan and Christian dead at the time.¹⁶² Such bridges were, like the burial-mounds of the Ynglingar, visible modes of commemoration, metaphorically bridging the gap between the dead and those who remembered them. The bridge is also an apt comparison for a poem that traces the familial links between the gods and men, suggesting the most famous *brú* in the Norse cosmos, the rainbow Bifröst.¹⁶³ Þjóðólfr himself had sardonically invoked the image of poetry as a bridge in the opening line of *Haustlǫng*, asking with apparent doubt, '[h]vé skalk góðs at gjöldum / gunnveggjar brú leggja?' [how shall I build a bridge in payment for a good battle-wall?].¹⁶⁴ Eyvindr's poem is another such bridge, spanning the gap between the gods and their human descendants, between

¹⁶² Julie Lund argues that ritualistic deposits of weaponry and animal bones near bridges and fords demonstrate the importance of such sites in the Norse landscape. Of particular note are those deposits found near the many bridges linking settlements and cemeteries. Examples can be found in all areas of Viking settlement including Scandinavia, the British Isles and the Continent, and are dated from the late pagan to the early Christian periods. See her 'Thresholds and Passages: The Meaning of Bridges and Crossings in the Viking Age and Early Middle Ages' *VMS* 1 (2005), 109-136. For a complete catalogue of such sites, see also Birgit Sawyer, *The Viking-age Rune-Stones: Custom and Commemoration in Early Medieval Scandinavia* (Oxford, 2000), esp. 134-35.

¹⁶³ In *Gylfaginning*, Bifröst is called the bridge to heaven (*Gylf*, 15-16). It is also explicitly referred to as a bridge in *Grímnismál*, sts. 29 and 44 and in *Fáfnismál*, st. 15.

¹⁶⁴ *Skj* BI, 14, st. 1.

the world of the living and that of the dead. He demonstrates how poets have the power to construct kinship and to legitimate kingship, and he does so not by plagiarizing poets who have gone before him, but by challenging them and the political masters they represent. Thus, the distinctions between poetic commemoration and objects in the landscape collapse at the end of *Háleygjatal*. Whereas Þjóðólfr had shown poetry to be an effective way of preserving the memory of ancient kings who lacked the visual commemoration of burial mounds, Eyvindr declares such human-made objects to be powerless without the voice of a poet to give them meaning.

As Jacques le Goff writes, '[i]ndividuals composing a society almost always feel the need to have ancestors, and one of the roles of great men is to fill that need.'¹⁶⁵ It may be overly simplistic to label Þjóðólfr and Eyvindr great men and, moreover, to attribute the political security of their patrons to their poetic efforts alone. There is no record of other poets composing for Rognvaldr, king of Vestfold, but *Skáldatal* does list many other men who served Haraldr hárfagri and Hákon Sigurðarson.¹⁶⁶ Þjóðólfr and Eyvindr are not alone in their poetic support of these lords, but they are the only skalds we know of who used their patrons' genealogies as 'charters' for the present, celebrating their rulers in innovative and sometimes even humorous ways. Both skalds are keenly aware of their role in the construction of history, and particularly in the commemoration of dead rulers. In this, they are joined by poets from a multitude of times and places. In the twentieth

¹⁶⁵ Jacques le Goff, *History and Memory*, trans. Steven Rendall and Elizabeth Claman, European Perspectives (New York: Columbia UP, 1992), 10.

¹⁶⁶ Five poets, apart from Þjóðólfr, are recorded under Haraldr's name, while Hákon has a staggering total of eight poets in addition to Eyvindr (*Skáldatal*, 342, 349).

century Robinson Jeffers also explored the tensions between poetry and monuments in his poem

‘To the Stone-Cutters’:

Stone-cutters fighting time with marble, you foredefeated
 Challengers of oblivion
 Eat cynical earnings, knowing rock splits, records fall down,
 The square-limbed Roman letters
 Scale in the thaws, wear in the rain. The poet as well
 Builds his monument mockingly;
 For man will be blotted out, the blithe earth die, the brave sun
 Die blind and blacken to the heart:
 Yet stones have stood for a thousand years, and pained thoughts found
 The honey of peace in old poems.¹⁶⁷

Effective modes of commemoration can be in conflict, as Þjóðólfr observes in *Ynglingatal*, or dependent upon each other, as Eyvindr declares in *Háleygjatal*. Both poets, however, demonstrate the commemoration of past kings to be a politically charged venture, ideally suited to the service of present political aims.

¹⁶⁷ Robinson Jeffers, *The Selected Poetry of Robinson Jeffers*, ed. Tim Hunt (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2001), 18.

Chapter Two: Dying is an Art: The Role of the Afterlife in Three Memorial Poems

The poets of *Ynglingatal* and *Háleygjatal* locate the deaths of their rulers' ancestors within a mythic past, exploiting the process of commemoration in order to legitimate the rule of their living patrons. Two early commemorative poems, the anonymous *Eiríksmál* and Eyvindr skáldaspillir's *Hákonarmál*, also depict the supernatural world of gods and heroes. However, these two poems show not the kings' ancestors but the kings themselves as inhabitants of that world. In the genealogical poems, the supernatural world was the place from which the noble families originated; in the memorial poems, it is the realm to which the kings must return after death. Both Eyvindr and his anonymous counterpart explore the transition their patrons make as they leave the human world to become members of the celestial community of Valhøll. In the third poem considered in this chapter, Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld Óttarsson also examines the king's transition from the world of the living to that of the dead. However, Hallfreðr cannot depict his Christian king entering the pagan afterlife, and in his *Erfidrápa Óláfs Tryggvasonar* the poet records instead the anxiety and despair expressed by the king's followers as they witness his final defeat in battle. In all three examples the process of dying is figured as the genesis of poetic discourse. That is, in *Eiríksmál* and *Hákonarmál* death furnishes matter for poetry as the kings enter the supernatural realm and become, like the mythical inhabitants of that world, subjects suitable for heroic verse. In the *Erfidrápa Óláfs Tryggvasonar* the poet shows himself in the very process of crafting such verse, demonstrating that only the ordered structure of poetic

language can control the chaos that follows the loss of a king. As Sylvia Plath reminds us, ‘[d]ying / is an art, like everything else.’¹

I. *Eiríksmál* and *Hákonarmál*: Arrivals in Valhøll

The poets of *Eiríksmál* and *Hákonarmál* both celebrate sons of King Haraldr hárfagri. *Eiríksmál* is a memorial poem honouring King Eiríkr blóðøx, Haraldr’s favourite son and the man who succeeded him to the Norwegian throne around the year 930. Eiríkr’s was a troubled reign and he was eventually forced into exile in England by his younger half-brother, Hákon, the king commemorated in *Hákonarmál*. Eiríkr’s tumultuous life as occasional ruler of Northumbria is partially recorded in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, while the Icelandic sagas give a fuller, albeit potentially exaggerated, picture of his reign as Norway’s pagan arch-villain.² Hákon, on the other hand, became known as ‘inn góði’ [the good], and as a hero of the *konungasögur* he was celebrated as a law-maker and as the first Christian king of Norway.³ In revenge for their father’s death, Eiríkr’s three sons killed Hákon at the Battle of Storð in 961. Despite the differences in the events of their lives, the two kings both had memorial poems commissioned for them after their deaths. The poems are similar, with each poet describing his

¹ ‘Lady Lazarus’, ll. 43-4 in Sylvia Plath, *Ariel* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965), 16-19.

² Eiríkr appears in the *konungasögur* *Heimskringla*, *Fagrskinna*, *Ágrip* and *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, as well as in *Orkneyinga saga* and *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, in which he and his wife Gunnhildr are the poet’s antagonists. His actions are also recorded in the D and E texts of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

³ Snorri devotes an entire saga to Hákon, the first half of which focuses largely on the king’s unsuccessful attempts to Christianise his subjects (*Hkr* I, 166-73). In *Ágrip*, Hákon is shown to be an almost knightly figure, excelling at ‘ridderaskap ok korteisi’ [chivalry and courtesy] (*Ágr-Fsk*, 8). His story is also related in *Fagrskinna*.

king's entrance into the pagan afterlife of Valhøll and his welcome by Óðinn into the god's retinue of warriors. In addition to this, both poems are composed in an unusual combination of *fornyrðislag* and *ljóðabáttr* metres, a combination that occurs more often in mythological than in courtly verses.⁴ Indeed, both *Eiríksmál* and *Hákonarmál* sit uneasily on the border modern editors have placed between eddic and skaldic verse, combining as they do the heroic and divine protagonists common to eddic poetry with the eulogistic function and human subjects of skaldic verse.⁵

In some ways, however, both *Eiríksmál* and *Hákonarmál* present surprisingly straightforward examples of poetry from the Viking age. The stanza order of *Eiríksmál* is relatively easy to establish as all stanzas but the first are recorded in only one work, *Fagrskinna*, and as a continuous sequence (*Ágr-Fsk*, 77-9). It is thus convention to accept the order of the stanzas as found in that text. In addition to this, Snorri records the first stanza as an example of an Óðinn-kenning in *Skáldskaparmál*, in which he also gives the title of the poem (*Skm*, 10). The author of *Fagrskinna* records neither the title nor the author of the poem, but he does give information about the circumstances of its composition: '[e]ptir fall Eiríks lét Gunnhildr yrkja kvæði um hann, svá sem Óðinn fagnaði hönnum í Valhøll, ok hefr svá' [after Eiríkr's death (his

⁴ Notably in *Hárbarðsljóð* and *Reginismál*. There is a complete table of verse forms used in the *Edda* in Terry Gunnell, *The Origins of Drama in Scandinavia* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1995), 191-92.

⁵ Edith Marold emphatically identifies both poems as eddic (*MSE*, 161-2) while Terry Gunnell dismisses the poems in a footnote as skaldic, and therefore unrelated to his discussion of eddic poetry (*The Origins of Drama*, 290). Finnur and Kock both include the poems in their editions of skaldic verse. *Eiríksmál* is edited in *Skj* BI, 164-66 and in *Norsk* I, 89. *Hákonarmál* can be found in *Skj* BI, 57-60 and in *Norsk* I, 35-9.

wife) Gunnhildr ordered a poem to be composed about him in which Óðinn greeted him in Valhöll, and it begins like this] (*Ágr-Fsk*, 77). It is notable that Gunnhildr, the reviled pagan queen of *Egils saga*, is credited with the artistic impetus for this overtly pagan poem. Her influence on the sequence asserts a fully pagan identity for a king who, as the historical records suggest, may have had a far more ambivalent relationship with both paganism and Christianity.⁶ Despite this uncertainty about the king's religious affiliations in the historical context, the function of the poetic sequence itself is clearly to commemorate the king within a pre-Christian framework. Finnur Jónsson has dated the poem to around the time of the king's death in 954 and with some exceptions, that dating is generally accepted.⁷

⁶ Conversely, John Lindow suggests that Icelandic authors may have associated the queen with the poem in order to vilify her. However, he also points out that Eiríkr had been killed by a predominantly Christian army and that a pagan response would therefore be a suitable reaction to that event. See 'Norse Mythology and Northumbria: Methodological Notes', *Scandinavian England: Norse-English Relations Before the Conquest*, eds. John D. Niles and Mark Amodio, Old English Colloquium Series 4 (Lanham, MD: UP of America, 1989), 27. Snorri, however, writes in *Heimskringla* that both Eiríkr and Gunnhildr were baptised at the behest of King Aðalsteinn, and indeed it is difficult to believe that a pagan leader would have been acceptable to the king as an under-lord in Anglo-Saxon England (*Hkr I*, 152-3).

⁷ The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records the year 954 as the date of Eiríkr's second expulsion from York (Cubbin, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 45), while the authors of *Heimskringla* (I, 153-4) and *Fagrskinna* (76-80) write that he was killed soon after along with many of his followers. However, Klaus von See dismisses the account given in *Fagrskinna* and argues that *Eiríksmál* was, rather, a poor imitation of *Hákonarmál* ('Zwei eddische Preislieder: *Eiríksmál* und *Hákonarmál*', *Festgabe für Ulrich Pretzel zum 65. Geburtstag: dargebracht von Freunden und Schülern*, eds. Werner Simon, Wolfgang Bachofer and Wolfgang Dittmann (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1963), 107-17). Edith Marold agrees with von See that the image of Valhöll presented in *Hákonarmál* is more frightening and archaic than that in *Eiríksmál*, but she does not believe this justifies a reversal of the traditional dating of the poems ('Das Walhallbild in den *Eiríksmál* und den *Hákonarmál*', *MS 5* (1972), 19-33).

More contentious than the date and function of the poem is the debate about its place of origin and the linguistic background of its anonymous poet. Dietrich Hofmann and Hans Kuhn both argue that the poem originated either in the Viking kingdom of York or in the Orkneys.⁸ Axel Seeberg suggests that Gunnhildr employed a Norse-Northumbrian court poet.⁹ More recently however, John Lindow has examined Kuhn's methodology and found it unconvincing; he notes that it is not so easy to identify an English influence on the language of the poem and suggests instead that it may have been composed in Denmark after Gunnhildr left England.¹⁰ He notes that there are no analogous sources in Old English but that the Norwegian examples of *Haraldskvæði* and *Ynglingatal* have much in common with the poem.¹¹ John McKinnell likewise sees few traces of Old English in the sequence and Judith Jesch deliberately excludes it from her list of poems composed in the Danelaw.¹² I think it reasonable, therefore, that a Scandinavian or even Norwegian provenance be assigned to the verses.

⁸ Dietrich Hofmann, *Nordisch-englische Lehnbeziehungen der Wikingerzeit*, Bibliotheca Arnemagnæana 14, ed. Jón Helgason (Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1955), 42-52, and Hans Kuhn, *Kleine Schriften: Aufsätze und Rezensionen aus den Gebieten der germanischen und nordischen Sprach-, Literatur- und Kulturgeschichte*, eds. Dietrich Hofmann, Wolfgang Lange and Klaus von See, vol. 2, 4 vols. Kleinere Schriften zur Literatur- und Geistesgeschichte (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1969-71), 303.

⁹ Axel Seeberg, 'Five King', *SBVS* 20 (1978-81), 106.

¹⁰ Lindow, 'Norse Mythology and Northumbria', 26-28. Gunnhildr was a Danish princess.

¹¹ Lindow, 'Norse Mythology and Northumbria', 28-29.

¹² John McKinnell, 'Eddic Poetry in Anglo-Scandinavian Northern England', *Vikings and the Danelaw: Select Papers from the Proceedings of the Thirteenth Viking Congress*, eds. James Graham-Campbell, Richard Hall, Judith Jesch and David Parsons (Oxford: Oxbow, 2001), 327, and Judith Jesch, 'Skaldic Verse in Scandinavian England', on page 318 of the same volume.

Hákonarmál shares not only its subject matter and metrical structure with *Eiríksmál*; the two poems' states of preservation are also remarkably similar. Just as *Eiríksmál* has been preserved as one continuous sequence in *Fagrskinna*, *Hákonarmál* is cited by Snorri at the end of his *Hákonar saga góða* as an apparently complete poem (*Hkr* I, 193-7). Some stanzas are also preserved elsewhere: Snorri cites three of the stanzas in *Skáldskaparmál*, while several have also been incorporated into *Fagrskinna*.¹³ In the sagas, the later poem is explicitly linked with *Eiríksmál*. The author of *Fagrskinna* writes of *Hákonarmál*:

Eyvindr segir í kvæði því, er hann orti eptir fall Hákonar, ok setti hann þat eptir því sem Gunnhildr hafði látit yrkja um Eirík sem Óðinn byði hönnum heim til Valhallar, ok segir hann marga atburði í kvæðinu frá orrostunni.¹⁴

Snorri, on the other hand, does not mention *Eiríksmál*, but his explanation of the custom of poets creating memorial texts is similar to the description of Gunnhildr commissioning a poem for Eiríkr. In *Hákonar saga góða*, Snorri describes the king's burial:

Vinir hans...urpu þar haug mikinn ok lögðu þar í konung með alvæpni sitt ok inn bezta búnað sinn, en ekki fé annat. Mæltu þeir svá fyrir grepti hans sem heiðinna manna siðr var til, vísuðu honum til Valhallar. Eyvindr skáldaspillir orti kvæði eitt um fall Hákonar konungs ok svá þat, hversu honum var fagnat.¹⁵

¹³ Stanzas 1 and 14 are included in a list of Óðinn-kennings, while stanza 4 is part of a discussion about kings (*Skm*, 8, 102). Stanzas 1-7, 16, and 19-20 form part of *Fagrskinna* (86-95) and Snorri cites stanzas 2-6 in the text of *Hákonar saga góða* as well as at the end (*Hkr* I, 186-8, 193-7).

¹⁴ 'Eyvindr tells [of events] in the poem that he composed after Hákon's death, which he made like the one that Gunnhildr had had composed for Eiríkr, in which Óðinn invited him home to Valhøll, and in the poem he tells of many events from the battle' (*Ágr-Fsk*, 86).

¹⁵ 'His (Hákon's) friends...built there a large mound and laid the king inside with all of his armour and the best of his equipment, but with no other goods. They spoke there before his grave as was the custom of heathen men,

In both cases, the authors of the prose texts betray a keen interest in the genesis and production of *Hákonarmál*, just as the author of *Fagrskinna* discusses Gunnhildr's role in the composition of *Eiríksmál*. This may be explained by Hákon's ambivalent spiritual stance. Like his brother Eiríkr, Hákon had a foot in both the pagan and Christian camps. As the foster-son of King Aðalsteinn of England, Hákon was said to have been raised a Christian, but the authors of the prose texts note that he was buried according to pagan customs: the decision to have a pagan burial is made by the king himself in *Fagrskinna* (94), while in *Heimskringla* the king allows his followers to bury him according to the religion they deem most fitting (I, 193). In this way the saga-authors obliquely offer explanations for the existence of such an overtly pagan poem with an ostensibly Christian protagonist. The poet himself, however, is far more concerned with the king's entrance into the pagan afterlife and the question of his Christianity is barely raised in the verses themselves.

The main difference between the preservation of the two poems is the repetition of some stanzas from *Hákonarmál* in the main body of Snorri's *Hákonar saga góða*, in addition to their inclusion at the end of the saga as an apparently complete sequence like *Eiríksmál* in *Fagrskinna*. There has been much discussion about the implications of this repetition and about the scribal tradition in which only the first lines of stanzas cited previously are copied at the end of the text. Judy Quinn has observed that the verses quoted in the prosimetric saga are those which

and showed him the way to Valhöll. Eyvindr skáldaspillir composed one poem about the death of King Hákon and about how he was welcomed (there)' (*Hkr* I, 193).

describe the king's final battle and which make little or no reference to the supernatural framework of the poem. She likens this section of the saga to the *fornaldarsögur* and other genres in which authors quote extensively from eddic poetry, in marked contrast to the conventions of the *konungasögur* in which authors more commonly cite stanzas of skaldic verse by multiple poets.¹⁶ She suggests that the citation of the complete poem at the end of the saga constitutes an uncomfortable response by Snorri to the pagan elements of the poem:

In its extant form, perhaps the narration of *Hákonar saga góða* could be read as displaying the narrator's reluctance to incorporate the king's welcome in Valhøll within his own history of Hákon's reign...By quoting the poem in full without incorporating individual stanzas about Valhøll into his narrative, the narrator can both dissociate himself from the beliefs implicit in the poem and enjoy the artistic effect of the panegyric to Hákon sounding a celebratory note at the end of his history.¹⁷

Joseph Harris, on the other hand, suggests that it is simply a way for Snorri to separate this saga from the others in the compilation and 'to give artistic shape to his biography of Hákon'.¹⁸ However, the simplest answer may be that the king's journey to the afterlife has no place in Snorri's political history of Norway. The 'skaldic-style' battle sequence is cited to support Snorri's description of the conflict, but the 'eddic-style' framework can add no further information to his narrative.¹⁹ It can be no coincidence that Snorri also declines to include

¹⁶ Judy Quinn, "Ok er þetta upphaf"—First-Stanza Quotation in Old Norse Prosimetrum', *Alvísmál* 7 (1997), 75-76.

¹⁷ Quinn, 'First-Stanza Quotation', 77.

¹⁸ Harris, 'The Prosimetrum of Icelandic Saga', 141.

¹⁹ I adapt these terms from Clunies Ross in *Poetry and Poetics*, 6-18.

Eiríksmál and part of *Hrafnsmál* in his history, both of which purport to record dialogues between mythological characters.²⁰ He does, however, include skaldic verse in his accounts of the final battles of such kings as Haraldr gráfeldr (*Hkr* I, 238-9), Óláfr Tryggvason (*Hkr* I, 359-72) and Óláfr Haraldsson (*Hkr* II, 376-94). *Hákonarmál* is an unusual combination of these genres and the citation of the poem at the end of the saga allows Snorri to record the full sequence of what is, after all, the artistically innovative memorial of an important figure in Norwegian history.

What, then, of the stanzas themselves? The death of a king must be a difficult event to portray in skaldic verse: if skaldic convention dictates that a ruler be praised as the best who ever lived, is it possible to celebrate the king in defeat? If the king is the strongest and most skilled warrior in battle, how did he come to die? Why does Óðinn choose his army for Ragnarøk from among those who lost? These are the questions asked in both *Eiríksmál* and *Hákonarmál*. The poet of *Eiríksmál* answers playfully as he presents a flamboyant and theatrical romp through the afterlife, confidently asserting the king's rightful place in Óðinn's chosen bodyguard. As in *Ynglingatal* and *Háleygjatal*, the relationship between king and poet is shown to be mutually beneficial even after death: thanks to the poet's eulogy, the king's reputation is maintained, while his heroic death furnishes matter for poetry in the human world. In *Hákonarmál* however, the king is far more reluctant to obey the gods' decision that he should die. Hákon asserts his right to win the battle and declares the gods' decision unjust. Although the king's

²⁰ *Hrafnsmál* is cited in *Ágr-Fsk*, 59-65 and edited in *Skj* BI, 22-5.

challenge is ultimately unsuccessful, Eyvindr uses poetry to give Hákon a voice before he is killed; afterwards, eulogy provides a place in which the king's followers are able to reflect on their loss.

The poet of *Eiríksmál* establishes a celebratory tone from the very beginning as Óðinn tells the audience about the dream he has had announcing Eiríkr's imminent arrival in Valhøll.²¹ Just as a Chorus in the theatre sets the scene and introduces the main characters, Óðinn in this stanza describes Valhøll and introduces its inhabitants: the dead warriors that form his elite retinue, the valkyries, and the unknown prince approaching the hall. It is a speech full of narrative action in which the repetitive structure of Óðinn's commands – each line ends with a verb of movement – creates quick, dynamic sentences that emphasize the rhythmic bustle of preparation:

baðk upp rísa,
 bekki at stráa,
 bjórker at leyðra,
 valkyrjur vín bera
 sem vísi kæmi.²²

²¹ Finnur divides the sequence into nine stanzas, as does Kock. Bjarni Einarsson, however, combines stanzas 1 and 2 in a single fourteen-line stanza (*Ágr-Fsk*, 77-8). Finnur's and Kock's divisions likely reflect the inclusion of the first ten lines of the poem in *Skáldskaparmál*, but I see no other reason to break the stanza in two. The metre is consistent throughout and the final four lines, foreshadowing the arrival of Eiríkr and his companions, are an excellent answer to Óðinn's initial question, '[h]vat 's þat drauma?' [what sort of dream is that?] (1.1). I favour Bjarni's division of the stanzas for this reason and will consider stanzas 1-2 as a single verse in my reading of the poem.

²² 'I told the valkyries to rise and cover the bench with straw, to wash out the beer-tubs, and to carry the wine, as if a prince were coming' (1.6-10). Unlike the text in *Skj*, Bjarni Einarsson's edition of the poem in *Ágr-Fsk*, 77-9 uses

Here, Óðinn appears as the master of revels speaking directly to the audience as he sets the scene and narrates the course of events. The theatricality of this opening stanza is, however, just that. The actions that Óðinn so energetically narrates happen only in his dream: Eiríkr arrives before the god can command that the same actions be completed in the waking world. Utterance takes precedence over action in this opening speech as the only action performed is that of Óðinn speaking to the audience. Valhøll is thus shown from the very beginning of the sequence to be a place constructed by highly stylised poetic discourse and one in which the inhabitants do not act, but converse.

The mixing of prophetic dreams with the realm of the dead found in *Eiríksmál* also appears in the later eddic poem *Baldurs draumar*, in which Óðinn travels to the borders of Hel and raises a *vǫlva* to explain the ominous dreams his son Baldr has been having. The following conversation parallels closely the opening stanza of *Eiríksmál*:

quotation marks to denote direct speech throughout the poem; Bjarni also adds the phrase *kvað Óðinn* to the first line of this stanza and continues to add such clarifications about who is speaking throughout the rest of the stanzas. The phrase *kvað Óðinn*, however, clearly interrupts the *fornyrðislag* metre of the stanza and breaks the alliteration that binds the first two lines together; the manuscript evidence itself is mixed in its support of this emendation. Of the *Fagrskinna*-manuscripts extant, AM 761 b 4^ox (761bx) 105r includes the words *qvað oðen* but separates the phrase from the rest of the stanza with vertical lines; in AM 303 4^ox (FskAx) 36, AM 52 folx (52x) 14v and AM 301 4^ox (301x) 13r, the phrase appears in the second line of the stanza, which is separated from the prose framework and written in lines of verse. In the manuscripts of Snorri's *Edda* the stanza is written as continuous prose. The phrase is not recorded in AM 757 a 4^o (B) 4r, while various phrases identifying Óðinn as the speaker are inserted into the stanza in GKS 2367 4^o (R) 21r, Traj 1374x (Tx) 21v, AM 242 fol (W) 45 and DG 11 (U) 26v. For consistency I have followed Finnur's edition of the poem, but I have inserted information about the speaker in my translation of a stanza if such information is given in any of the manuscript versions. Images and transcriptions of each manuscript may be found on *SkP*.

‘hveim eru bekkir
 baugum sánir,
 flet fagrliga
 fló[u]ð gulli?’²³

‘Hér stendr Baldri
 of brugginn miðr,
 skírar veigar
 liggir skiöldr yfir

 en ásmegir
 í ofvæni.’²⁴

This hall too is prepared for the arrival of a dead hero and the celebrations in Hel stand in stark contrast to the *ofvæni* of the Æsir who will mourn his loss. In *Eiríksmál* the situation is reversed. Óðinn’s hall is now ready for a celebration: ‘svá ’s mér glatt hjarta’ [therefore my heart is cheerful] (2.4), says the god. As will be discussed below, Hákon’s arrival into the afterlife will be much less joyful than Eiríkr’s.

The stanzas that follow comprise a dialogue between Óðinn, waiting impatiently for Eiríkr, and other members of the god’s retinue. As in the opening stanza words take precedence over actions. It is vital to the function of the poem that Eiríkr not arrive immediately as the time between Óðinn’s dream and the hero’s arrival allows a game of highly rhetorical flattery to be played out. Eiríkr has not been named, and the poet creates the comical illusion that the

²³ ‘For whom are the benches strewn with rings, the floor flooded beautifully with gold?’ (6.3-4)

²⁴ ‘Here stands mead brewed for Baldr, bright, pure liquid. A shield lies above, and bitter anxiety over the mighty gods’ (7.1-3).

gods do not know who is coming to their hall. This allows them to suggest possible options and to compare the human king flatteringly to a series of mythical and divine heroes. It can be no coincidence that Óðinn's first interlocutor is Bragi, the god of poetry himself and the 'æztr scálda' [best of skalds]:²⁵

Hvat þrymr þar Bragi
 sem þúsund bifisk
 eða mengi til mikit?
 Braka öll bekkþili
 sem myni Baldr koma
 eptir í Óðins sali.²⁶

Bragi's hyperbolic description of Eiríkr's approach takes the form of three similes, each more exaggerated than the last, in a stanza that almost parodies the use of poetic language in eulogy. Comparing Eiríkr first to a thunderous noise, then to an army of men, and finally to the much loved god Baldr, Bragi not only praises Eiríkr but frames his coming as that of the god himself.²⁷ If Snorri may be believed, all of creation – apart from Loki – wept for Baldr's death

²⁵ *Grímnismál*, st. 44. Gabriel Turville-Petre notes that there is some ambiguity about whether this character is meant to be interpreted as the god of poetry or as a historical poet, perhaps Bragi Boddason, who has joined Óðinn's retinue of heroes. See his *Myth and Religion of the North: The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964), 185. Turville-Petre gives a short biography of the human skald in *Scaldic Poetry*, xxi-xxiii.

²⁶ 'Bragi: What resounds there as if a thousand moved, or a multitude too great? All the bench-boards are breaking as if Baldr were coming again into Óðinn's hall' (3.1-6). All manuscripts simply record the word *Bragi* at the end of this line; *Ágr-Fisk* adds *kvað* in parentheses.

²⁷ The mighty multitude thundering towards Óðinn's hall is in direct contrast to the deep silence that descends when Baldr is killed in Snorri's version of this story (*Gylf*, 46). John Lindow suggests that the 'eerie' silence in this episode may signal the expectation of a poetic recitation or memorial, but that it is frustrated because the gods

(*Gylf*, 47). His return to Ásgarðr marks the end of one world and the beginning of the next (*Gylf*, 53). Such an analogy frames Eiríkr's death in the most heroic and apocalyptic terms possible. If the poem blurs the lines between eddic and skaldic conventions, this is entirely in keeping with the poet's characterisation of Eiríkr himself, a human king likened to a god. Such a comparison implicitly excuses Eiríkr from dying, as not even all the efforts of the gods could save his divine counterpart (*Gylf*, 45-6).

Bragi's exuberant praise is a wry reflection of the actual circumstances of recitation. Just as Bragi performs a eulogy before Óðinn, so the human poet declaims before a king. A poet reciting this memorial holds up a mirror to the listening audience and in so doing he mimics himself, revealing to the audience the pure theatricality of eulogistic discourse. It is surely unlikely that the listening audience of the poem would not have known the identity of Óðinn's guest, and the reading audience of *Skáldskaparmál* and *Fagrskinna* have been told the name of the king in the prose introductions to the sequence. In a scene that is thus rife with dramatic irony it is only the divine inhabitants of Valhøll who appear not to know the identity of their illustrious visitor; the human audience, we may assume, knows quite well the name of the king approaching Óðinn's hall and could easily answer Bragi's question if asked.

The god of poetry thus praises the king all the while pretending to remain ignorant of his identity. This rhetoric of a hero's arrival, the challenge to prove one's identity and the

cannot adequately express their grief. See 'The Tears of the Gods: A Note on the Death of Baldr in Scandinavian Mythology', *JEGP* 101.2 (2002), 161.

apparent ignorance on the part of those welcoming him is a well-established literary trope in heroic literature. Beowulf is famously challenged three times as he approaches Hroðgar's hall, and each time the person who questions his identity uses the opportunity to praise him. A guard on the sea-shore demands of his company,

Hwat syndon ge searohæbbendra?
 ...Næfre ic maran geseah
 eorla ofer eorþan ðonne is eower sum,
 secg on searwum.²⁸

A second guard then asks where they have come from and exclaims, '[n]e seah ic elþeodige / þus manige men modiglicran' [I have not seen strangers braver in appearance, so many men] (*Bwlf*, ll. 333, 336-7). Even Unferð's unfriendly inquiry, '[e]art þu se Beowulf se þe wið Breca wunne?' [are you that Beowulf who contended with Breca?] (*Bwlf*, l. 506) invites the hero to speak to the court and to prove his worth. Unferð's challenge is not unlike the Green Knight's grumpy question upon his entrance in Arthur's court: '[w]her is...þe gouvernour of þis gyng?' (ll. 224-5).²⁹ However, Óðinn's response to Bragi's elaborate rhetoric punctures this lofty praise. Óðinn abruptly tells his poet to stop talking 'heimska' [nonsense] (4.1) and forces the audience to acknowledge the artifice of the convention by rebuking the god, 'þú vel hvat vitir' [you well know the truth] of the guest's identity (4.3).

²⁸ 'What are you, armour-bearers?...Never have I seen a mightier warrior on earth than is one of you, a man with weapons' (*Bwlf*, ll. 237, 247-9).

²⁹ J. R. R. Tolkien, E.V. Gordon and Norman Davis, eds., *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967).

In contrast to Eiríkr's ostensibly surprise arrival in the afterlife, Hákon's appearance in Valhøll is the product of a conscious choice on the part of Óðinn. The god sends the valkyries Gøndul and Skoḡul as his delegates to 'kjósa of konunga' [choose from among the kings] who should be the newest addition to his army (1.3).³⁰ Their choice is restricted by the stipulation that the king must be of 'Yngva ættar' [Yngvi's lineage], and Hákon is later in the poem described as a 'døgligr' [descendant of Dagr] (1.4; 9.1). Both epithets refer to Yngling kings and stress Hákon's genealogical legitimacy, as discussed in the previous chapter.³¹ However, Hákon is not a passive recipient of death like his Yngling ancestors and it will become evident that the king's vehement challenge to the god's authority is equal to Óðinn's more active involvement in summoning him to Valhøll.

The first battle-stanza of *Hákonarmál* recalls but exceeds the action-packed narrative that introduces *Eiríksmál*. Just as Óðinn uses short sentences and multiple verbs in the earlier poem, so this stanza is one of movement: 'drúpðu dolgráar, /en darraðr hristisk / upp vas þá hildr of hafin' [battle-oars (swords) drooped, spears trembled – the battle was begun] (2.5-7).

In the first nine stanzas of the poem, Eyvindr describes the king's final battle using conventional descriptions of events that might occur in many other skaldic verses composed for kings both

³⁰ The valkyries' role in choosing warriors was discussed in Chapter One.

³¹ It seems a curious move for Eyvindr: as discussed in the previous chapter, he cleverly challenged the claims of the Yngling dynasty in his poem *Háleygiatal*, as well as the poetic conventions promoted in *Ynglingatal*. Bjarne Fidjestøl suggests that this poem represents 'an attempt to enlist the popular dead king on the side of the Hlaðajarlar and their party' in 'Skaldic Poetry and the Conversion, with Some Reflections on Literary Form as a Source of Historical Information' (1987), *Selected Papers*, trans. Peter Foote, eds. Odd Einar Haugen and Else Mundal, Viking collection 9 (Odense: Odense UP, 1997), 145.

living and dead.³² The verses centre on the deeds of Hákon, as one might expect. Stanzas 3-5 portray the king's actions in a rapid succession of active verbs and short, alliterative phrases that emphasize the energy and tumult of the encounter:

Hrauzk ór hervóðum,
 hratt á vøll brynju,
 vísi verðungar,
 áðr til vígs tæki;
 lék við ljóðmøgu,
 skyldi land verja
 gramr enn glaðværi,
 stóð und gollhjalmi.³³

Michael Speidel suggests that Hákon's laughter and removal of his mail-coat could be read as a 'berserk-gesture' that characterises the king as a hero in the folkloric tradition.³⁴ While Speidel's analysis of the *berserkr* is intriguing, I think the king's laughter is more important as a descriptor of the playfulness of the battle, emphasized by the adjective 'glaðværi' [cheerful] (4.7) and the verb 'leika' [to play] (4.5).³⁵ The author of *Fagrskinna* brings this playfulness to the forefront of his narrative when he digresses from the eulogy to describe a poetic exchange

³² See my discussion of *Gráfeldardápa* in Chapter Three for an example.

³³ 'The chief of the retinue threw off his armour; he hurled his mail-coat to the ground before the battle began. The cheerful king played with his people – he should defend the land. He stood under a golden helmet' (4.1-8).

³⁴ Michael P. Speidel, 'Berserks: A history of Indo-European "Mad Warriors"', *Journal of World History* 13.2 (2002), 271.

³⁵ As noted in Chapter One, battle as play is a common metaphor in early skaldic verse. Einarr skálaglamm's *Vellekla* provides an example of this when the poet calls battle the 'leikmiðjungar odda' [Miðjungur (giant) of the play of swords] (*Skj*, BI, 122, st. 29).

between the king and his poet. Although in the saga stanzas 1-3 of *Hákonarmál* are cited without any prose interruptions, before continuing to stanza 4, cited above, the saga-author writes, ‘[í] þessum þys kvað Eyvindr skáldaspillir einn gamankviðling til Hákonar konungs áðr en fylkingarnar hlœpisk at’ [in this conflict Eyvindr skáldaspillir recited a playful ditty to King Hákon before the armies rushed at each other] (*Ágr-Fsk*, 87). This *gamankviðlingr* is a four-line *lausavísa* found only in *Fagrskinna*. In it Eyvindr praises the king for his defence of the kingdom, while the king’s poetic response, the only verse attributed to him in the whole of the skaldic corpus, focuses rather on his relationship with his men:

Vel launa mér mínir
 menn, æxlum styr þenna –
 hrið vex Hamðis klæða,
 hodd ok rekna brodda.³⁶

The king adopts the first-person plural voice in this verse, emphasizing the joint effort of his entire retinue. The saga-author notes approvingly that, ‘á þvílíku má sjá, hversu óhræddr konungr var, er hann íhugaði svá sína hluti’ [it may be seen from such things how unafraid the king was, when he considered his fate so] (*Ágr-Fsk*, 88). This exchange demonstrates the saga-author’s awareness of the intimate relationship between battle and verse. In the poem *Hákonarmál* the king urging his soldiers on is described only in the third person; there is no representation of direct speech in the battle section of the poem. However, the saga-author

³⁶ ‘My men reward me well for gold and swords worked in silver – we make that tumult increase! The storm of Hamðir’s clothing (storm of armour, battle) grows’ (*Skj* BI, 54).

clearly felt the need to make the king's verbal involvement with his men more explicit, foregrounding Hákon's conversation in verse with the warrior-poet Eyvindr.

After this opening section of the poem the battle begins to turn against the king and he ceases to dominate both the actions and the spoken language of the sequence. The passive voice in stanza 6 – 'trøddusk torgur' [shields were trampled] (6.1) – no longer directly attributes violent action to the king, while in stanza 7, axes, swords and arrows become the grammatical subjects of the verbs and cut down all warriors in their way, friend and foe alike.³⁷ Comparing these weapons to such implacable forces of nature as thunderstorms and blizzards, the poet emphasizes the relentless momentum of the fight and the increasing powerlessness of the warriors to control it. It is the valkyries, not the king, who direct the play of battle in stanza 8:

Blendusk við roðnum
 und randar himni,
 Skoðglar veðr léku
 við ský of bauga,
 umðu oddláar
 í Óðins veðri,
 hné mart manna
 fyr mækis straumi.³⁸

³⁷ It is a construction similar to that found in *The Battle of Maldon*, when Byrhtnoð's forces are similarly engaged in a doomed battle: '[b]ogan wæron bysige, bord ord onfeng' [bows were busy, shield received spear-point] (Scragg, ed., *The Battle of Maldon*, ll. 110-11).

³⁸ 'Skoðgul's winds (battle) churned under the heaven of the red shield, played with the cloud of shields. Spear-waves (blood) howled in Óðinn's wind (battle); many men sank before the sword's current (battle)' (8.1-8). Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson disagrees with Finnur's text in this verse, emending *roðnum* to *roðnar* and *ský* to *skýs* (*Hkr* I, 194).

The same verb, *leika*, which had previously described the king's battle-deeds among his followers, is now attributed to the valkyrie; the king has lost control over the battle. As the swords and shields finally break apart in stanza 9, the warriors know they are dying and the poet creates an ironic inversion of the opening of *Eiríksmál*: unlike Óðinn, whose heart is gladdened by the arrival of his new warriors, the protagonists of *Hákonarmál* are understandably displeased. Told from the perspective of the newly dead, 'vasa sá herr,' says Eyvindr, 'í hugum ok átti / til Valhallar vega' [that army was not glad of heart and had to go the way to Valhøll] (9.5-6).

As noted above, both *Eiríksmál* and *Hákonarmál* are composed in a combination of *ljóðabáttir* and *fornyrðislag* metres. In *Eiríksmál* the stanzas are uneven and the poet appears to switch between metres to indicate to the audience that a new character is speaking. This is best seen in stanzas 6 and 7, in which Sigmundur asks a question in two lines of *fornyrðislag* verse and Óðinn answers in three lines of *ljóðabáttir*. Eyvindr's use of metre is more specific: he uses *ljóðabáttir* when there are supernatural characters present and reserves the *fornyrðislag* metre for the long battle sequence in stanzas 2-9. However, this battle sequence is sandwiched between verses that bridge the gap between the two metres and the opposing worlds that they represent. In stanza 2 the metres are combined in a single seven-line stanza just as the supernatural world meets the human: '[b]róður fundu Bjarnar / í brynju fara' [they (the valkyries) found Bjørn's brother (Hákon) putting on a mail-coat] (2.1-2), says the poet, the literal coming together of

Kock also emends the text to *roðnar* (*NN*, § 1054). I follow Bjarni's reading of the verse in my translation here because to construe *roðnum* with *ský* seems an unusually convoluted word order.

valkyrie and king mirroring the juxtaposition of the two metres. Similarly, in stanza 9, the first four lines are couched in *fornyrðislag*, while the last three are in *ljóðabáttr*. This intrusion of a new metre and an extra half-line breaks into the action-packed rhythm of the battle sequence.³⁹ Just as the meeting of the two worlds in stanza 2 was expressed through the combination of the two metres, in this stanza the *fornyrðislag* structure disintegrates; this too mirrors the action described in the stanza as ‘sverð of togin, / með skarða skjöldu / ok skotnar brynjur’ [swords (were) drawn, shields broken and mail-coats pierced] (9.2-4). Whereas the first stanza to combine the metres concluded with an exultant announcement of battle – ‘upp vas þá hildr of hafin’ [the battle was begun!] (2.7) – the ninth stanza performs an equal and opposite action as the poet grimly announces the conclusion of that conflict: ‘sá herr...átti / til Valhallar vega [that army had to go the way to Valhøll] (9.5-7). Thus, the battle sequence is carefully framed by two stanzas in which the poet knits together the earthly world of the conflict with the supernatural world of the gods.

It should be noted that this movement between metres, as well as that between the supernatural and human worlds, is evident only when the whole of the sequence is recorded, as at the end of *Hákonar saga góða*. In *Fagrskinna* the effect is very different: only battle-stanzas 1-7 are cited before the saga-author mixes the four extant stanzas of Þórðr Særeksson’s *Þórálfs drápa Skólmssonar* into his narrative (*Ágr-Fsk*, 86-95). The corresponding episode in Snorri’s

³⁹ *Ljóðabáttr* is the only metre in Old Norse that consists of a three-part, rather than a two-part structure. For a technical definition of the two metres and further examples of each, see Poole, ‘Metre and Metrics’, 265-6 and 268-9.

Hákonar saga góða is similarly polyvocal (*Hkr* I, 186-93). The saga-authors' juxtaposition of Þjóðólfr's *dróttkvætt* stanzas with verses from *Hákonarmál* suggests a need on the part of later writers to include more information or corroboration than Eyvindr's sequence alone provides. As Þórðr Særeksson is also said to have composed an *erfiðdrápa* for the eleventh-century saint Óláfr Haraldsson, his verses must have been composed many decades after the battle described; they therefore provide a far more retrospective account than Eyvindr's (*Hkr* II, 281). Þórðr's stanzas describe in great detail the suffering of the king's followers as they die:

Þrot vas sýnt þás settusk
 sinn róðrs við þrøm stinnan
 mannr lét ǫnd ok annarr
 ófár, búendr sárir.⁴⁰

In this way the later *drápa* complements and elaborates on Eyvindr's rather laconic assertion that the army was unhappy with their defeat.

Returning to the long sequence recorded by Snorri at the end of *Hákonar saga*, the depiction of battle rushing inexorably on comes to a sudden and abrupt halt when one of the valkyries readies her spear to throw at Hákon: 'Ǫndul þat mælti, / studdisk geirskapti' [Ǫndul announced it, leaned on her spear-shaft] (10.1-2). This formal declaration – one introduced by the verb *mæla* and accompanied by the ceremonial planting of a spear – introduces four stanzas of dialogue. However, Hákon is not Eiríkr and he does not immediately accept the valkyries'

⁴⁰ 'Exhaustion was visible where the wounded farmers were seated beside their heavy-edged oars. One man let his life go, and not a few others' (*Skj* BI, 303, st. 3).

authority to decide his future. In stanza 12 the king speaks for the first time to challenge their decision. Hákon demands,

Hví þú svá gunni
skiptir, Geir-Skǫgul,
órum þó verðir gagns frá goðum?⁴¹

It is a question Hákon's followers might have asked. The eight stanzas that follow constitute a dialogue, first between Hákon and the valkyries and then between Hákon and the inhabitants of Valhǫll, in which the king argues against his inclusion in Óðinn's supernatural retinue. Verbs denoting speech such as *mæla* (10.1; 11.2; 15.1), *kveða* (13.2; 14.2; 16.6; 17.2), and *segja* (13.4) dominate these stanzas; there is also a verb for listening, *heyra* (11.1). The word *hví* (12.1) introduces another form of utterance, the direct question, and the formal welcome in stanza 16, 'Einherja grið / skalt þú allra hafa, / þigg þú at ósum ǫl' [you shall have the home of all the Einherjar (*lit.* unique warriors); receive the ale of the Æsir] (16.1-3) is a performative speech act that ushers the king into the divine community. Hákon's inclusion in the world of Valhǫll is thus clearly enacted through spoken language.

This long, suspenseful conversation stands in direct contrast to the fast paced action of the battle that precedes it. Stanza 11 is one of stasis rather than movement as the valkyries sit on their horses and wait for Hákon to die:

Vísi þat heyrði,
hvat valkyrjur mæltu

⁴¹ 'Why have you arranged the battle so, Geir-Skǫgul, although we were worthy of victory from the gods?' (12.1-4).

mærar af mars baki,
 hyggiliga létu
 ok hjalmaðar sótu
 ok hofðusk hlífar fyrir.⁴²

Indeed, this prolonged moment of time is itself part of Hákon's challenge: he is able to temporarily stop the clock and demand an explanation before he dies. Clearly, words are more effective than weapons at this moment. However, the moment described is also quite clearly an artifice, as both the audience and the poet already know the fatal ending. The valkyries explain that they are taking Hákon and his army to join the gods' forces (10.3-6), and they defend their decision by reminding him that they have granted the king victory as his foes have fled (12.5-7). Hákon's reputation remains intact and he is eventually forced to go to Valhöll.

Hákon's challenging questions to the valkyries are wholly unlike the parallel dialogue that takes place in *Eiríksmál*. In the stanza that follows Bragi's mini-eulogy, Óðinn orders two human heroes to welcome the king:

Sigmundr ok Sinfjötli,
 rísið snarliga
 ok gangið í gøgn grami,
 inn þú bjóð,
 ef Eiríkr séi;
 hans es mér nú vön vituð.⁴³

⁴² 'The prince heard what the valkyries said, those famous women from the horse's back – they acted wisely – who sat, helmeted, holding their shields in front' (11.1-6).

⁴³ 'Sigmundr and Sinfjötli, rise quickly and go greet the lord; invite him in, if it is Eiríkr, the one I expect to see now' (5.1-6).

Having been compared to the god Baldr, Eiríkr is in this stanza placed in the company of two equally famous human warriors. Sigmundr becomes Óðinn's interlocutor as he interrogates the god about his actions: '[h]ví 's þér Eiríks vón / heldr an annarra?' [why do you expect Eiríkr rather than any other?], he asks (6.1), and '[h]ví namt hann sigri þá, / es þér þótti snjallr vesa?' [why then take away his victory if you thought him to be valiant?] (7.1-2). The wording of the latter question is similar to Hákon's challenge to the valkyries, cited above, but the function of the question is very different. Sigmundr is not really questioning Óðinn's decision but rather inviting Óðinn to praise Eiríkr's military prowess and to demonstrate the king's usefulness to the gods. Sigmundr's questions, like Bragi's, form part of the flattering rhetoric of welcome with which Eiríkr is inducted into the hall.

Unlike Eyvindr, the anonymous author of *Eiríksmál* locates the entire poem within Valhöll. The audience is therefore unable to 'see' Eiríkr until he finally arrives at the end of the sequence. However, as Óðinn speaks with his followers the second half of each stanza describes the movement of the unidentified guest as he approaches, his ever increasing physical proximity fanning the flame of flattery by those inside. The phrase 'í Óðins sali' [into Óðinn's hall] is repeated in the last lines of stanzas 3 and 4, while the moods of the verbs describing Eiríkr's movement in that direction become more certain: in stanza 3, Bragi speaks in the subjunctive with an air of doubt, saying it is 'sem myni Baldr koma / eptir í Óðins sali' [as if Baldr were coming again into Óðinn's hall] (3.5-6), while in stanza 4 Óðinn declares decisively in the

indicative that the guest ‘mun inn koma’ [will come in] (4.5-6). In the final stanza of this section Óðinn offers a direct invitation to the guest through an imperative command: ‘inn þú bjóð, / ef Eiríkr séi’ [invite him in, if it is Eiríkr], he tells Sigmundr or Sinfjotli (5.4-5).

Excitement grows as the king becomes a larger-than-life figure nearing the hall.

It is fitting, therefore, that the king is only named as he finally enters Valhøll: ‘[h]eill þú Eiríkr’, says Sigmundr as the king arrives, ‘vel skalt hér kominn / ok gakk í holl horskr’ [greetings now, Eiríkr – you are welcome here. Enter the hall, wise man] (8.1-3). This formal welcome is a performative speech act that both names the king – rather than comparing him to any other god or man – and explicitly locates him within the physical space of Óðinn’s hall. As in *Hákonarmál* this utterance marks the hero’s completion of the transition from earthly king to member of the supernatural world. Dialogue in this poem is a way of indicating membership in the divine community; it is only after Eiríkr’s successful transition to the afterlife that he is offered his own place in the conversation of the hall as Sigmundr asks the names of the king’s companions (8.4-6). This question gives Eiríkr the opportunity to identify his colleagues in turn and to speak as a full member of Óðinn’s retinue. Indeed, there is more than a hint of circularity about this final exchange, as if the entire process of guessing Eiríkr’s identity and welcoming him into the hall is about to be repeated with each of his companions. It is, however, at the moment when Eiríkr has finally been welcomed into the hall and is about to

take his place in the divine *drótt* that the poem ends in *Fagrskinna*, and no further stanzas survive elsewhere.⁴⁴

Dialogue is thus of crucial importance in the construction of dying in *Eiríksmál*. The poem is not only a eulogy for the dead king but an exploration of the transition the king makes as he leaves behind his political and warrior roles in the human world to become, after death, a character in the supernatural realm. The king himself is dead but the character Eiríkr is created as the poem comes into being. In anthropological terms, the king's transformation from human monarch into mythical hero has much in common with the process accomplished in the aboriginal Australian *rites de deuil* discussed by Claude Lévi-Strauss:

au lieu de confier à des hommes vivants la charge de personnifier de lointains ancêtres, ces rites assurent la reconversion, en ancêtres, d'hommes qui ont cessé d'être des vivants...les rites de deuil [transportent] le present dans le passé.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ There is of course much debate as to whether the poem is complete or whether in subsequent (now lost) stanzas Eiríkr continued to name his companions. Seeberg has suggested that the five kings may be identified with five anonymous kings of the Amorites who opposed the Children of Israel, as recorded in the Bible. He concludes that because the kings in *Eiríksmál* could not be named, the poet could not continue and thus that the poem is complete as we have it today ('Five Kings', 108-12). Hollander writes that, although the poem is generally regarded as a fragment, the action that is described 'seems clear and self-sufficient' (*Old Norse Poems: The Most Important Non-Skaldic Verse Not Included in the Poetic Edda* (New York: Columbia UP, 1936), 63). It is also interesting to note that *Eiríksmál* follows another ninth-century dialogic poem, *Haraldskvæði* (*Hrafnsmál*) in the text of *Fagrskinna* (*Ágr-Fsk*, 59-65). The quotation of this poem also concludes (or breaks off) in the middle of a dialogue, and this suggests that such a conclusion is not as unusual as we might expect.

⁴⁵ 'Rather than giving the task of embodying distant ancestors to living men, these ceremonies ensure the transformation into ancestors of the men who have ceased to live...Rites of mourning transport the present into the past' (Claude Lévi-Strauss, *La Pensée Sauvage* (Paris: Plon, 1962), 314).

This is a move opposite to that performed in the genealogical poems *Ynglingatal* and *Háleygjatal*. The authors of the genealogical texts use the memory of the dead to give greater prestige to the living: in Lévi-Strauss' terms, the past is transported into the present in such texts. In *Eiríksmál*, however, the king ceases to be an *homme vivant* and is transported back into the realm of myth. I do not think any verses have been lost from *Eiríksmál*. The process of commemoration is complete in this poem as Eiríkr takes his place among the supernatural members of Valhøll; the king's successful transition between the two worlds is far more important than any speech he might have made or any deeds he might have performed once that transition was accomplished.

As Hákon moves into the realm of the dead he, like Eiríkr, becomes a figure of story, more cliché than character. Indeed, Eyvindr's description of the king's entrance is an obvious imitation – or perhaps parody – of the scene in *Eiríksmál*, suggesting that as the king leaves the world of humans, the world of story-telling takes over, and that this story has already been told many times. In *Eiríksmál* Óðinn had commanded the human warriors Sigmundr and Sinfjötli to usher Eiríkr into the hall (5.1-6). The corresponding stanza in *Hákonarmál* is nearly identical:

Hermóðr ok Bragi,
 kvað Hroptatýr,
 gangið í gøgn grami,
 því konungr ferr,

sás kappi þykkir,
til hallar hinig.⁴⁶

Bragi, the eloquent god of poetry in *Eiríksmál*, is appropriated by Eyvindr to welcome the rival king, while Eyvindr's use of Hermóðr mimics the earlier poet's comparison of Eiríkr with Baldr. Just as Hermóðr was the god sent by Frigg to fetch Baldr out of Hel (*Gylf*, 46-7), in this poem the same god is sent to bring Hákon into Valhøll.⁴⁷ It is a rhetorical one-upmanship: unlike Eiríkr, Hákon is welcomed into the afterlife by gods rather than by men. If, as Lindow suggests, the essential tragedy in Baldr's story is the slaying of one family member by another, then the analogy is even more pointed: killed by Eiríkr's sons, Hákon is himself the victim of internecine conflict.⁴⁸ Despite the obvious similarities between the supernatural welcoming committees of the two poems, Hákon's entrance into Valhøll is not nearly as joyous as is Eiríkr's. Óðinn appears 'illúðigr mjök' [very ill-minded] (15.4) to the king. Hákon admits, 'séumk vér hans of hugi' [I fear his thoughts] (15.6). Margaret Clunies Ross has suggested that the king's reluctance to enter Valhøll may reflect the absence of Christian comforts in an

⁴⁶ 'Hermóðr and Bragi,' said Hropta-týr (Óðinn), 'go and greet the lord, because a king who appears to be a champion is coming hither to the hall' (14.1-6).

⁴⁷ Hollander suggests that as Bragi and Hermóðr are the two gods sent to bring Baldr back from Hel the scene may reflect Hákon's return to the pagan religion after having converted to Christianity (*Old Norse Poems*, 67).

⁴⁸ On this, see Lindow's 'The Tears of the Gods', 160. For the full argument, see his *Murder and Vengeance Among the Gods: Baldr in Scandinavian Mythology*, FF Communications 262 (Helsinki: Suomalainen tiedeakatemia, 1997). For a psychological interpretation of this episode, see Vésteinn Ólason's 'The Un/Grateful Dead - From Baldr to Bægifótr', *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross, Viking Collection 14 (Odense: UP of Southern Denmark, 2003), 153-7. Praising the king in this way, the poet does neglect to mention that Hákon had earlier driven his own half-brother out of the country.

afterlife with the heathen gods.⁴⁹ This reluctance may also stem from the role Hákon will be expected to play in Óðinn's retinue. The poet notes that the king stands in front of the gods 'allr í dreyra drifinn' [all spattered in blood] (15.3). This gore acts as a visible reminder of the violent world the king has just left and the means by which he left it. It is also a grim image that foreshadows Hákon's presence in the final doomed battle at Ragnarøk and reminds the audience that the king's duties in the afterlife will involve more danger than the drinking and feasting depicted in *Eiríksmál*.

The king's caution may therefore be justified, and the gods' welcome reflects Hákon's own unease in his new situation. Whereas in *Eiríksmál* Sigmundr invited Eiríkr into the common conversation of Valhøll by asking him the names of his companions, in *Hákonarmál* Bragi does not invite the king to speak: he states simply, 'þú átt inni hér / átta bræðr' [you have eight brothers in here] (16.5-6). Hákon has come to Valhøll alone and under duress; he is a potential source of discord. This is also evident in the title used to welcome the king: in *Eiríksmál* Sigmundr welcomed the guest as 'horskr' [wise man] (8.3), while in *Hákonarmál* Bragi calls the king 'jarla bági' [contender with earls] (16.4), a description that emphasizes not only his military prowess and the many conflicts he engaged in while alive, but also his intractability and reluctance to join the *comitatus* of Valhøll. It is a perceptive remark on Bragi's part. Hákon, unlike Eiríkr, does speak in the hall but his words are defiant and he ominously declares his intention of keeping a close watch on his weapons:

⁴⁹ Clunies Ross, *Poetry and Poetics*, 51.

Gerðar órar,
 kvað enn góði konungr,
 viljum vér sjálfir hafa;
 hjalm ok brynju
 skal hirða vel,
 gótt 's til gors at taka.⁵⁰

As with his challenge to the valkyries, Hákon is proud, refusing to submit to the gods' decisions without another verbal bid for power. Hákon has the last word in this conversation and his integration into Valhöll consequently remains unresolved. The stanzas that follow, in which the poet blithely assures his audience that Hákon was welcomed into Valhöll, seem overly formulaic and untrustworthy in this context.

The three stanzas that conclude the poem also bring to an end the conversations related in the preceding sections. The action in Valhöll has been conducted in the present; proverbial phrases in such as 'hjalm ok brynju / skal hirða vel' [one should look after the helmet and mail-coat well] evoke the eternal present of gnomic wisdom (17.4-5).⁵¹ In the afterlife, it is implied, there is no past or future. However, in the final three stanzas the poet shifts his focus back to earth, and with it he returns to the past tense that was used in the battle sequence to describe earthly events. Stanza 18 evokes an elegiac contrast between then and now when the poet observes, '[þ]á þat kyndisk, / hvé sá konungr hafði / vel of þyrmt véum' [that was known then

⁵⁰ "The good king said, "we wish ourselves to keep our armour; one should look after the helmet and mail-coat well. It is good to have them at hand" (17.1-6).

⁵¹ Compare this to the advice offered in *Hávamál*: '[v]ápnom sínom scala maðr velli á / feti ganga framarr' [a man should not go one step away from his weapons on the open heath' (st. 38).

how the king had dealt reverently with the temples] (18.1-3). In the final stanza he mourns, ‘síz Hókon / fór með heiðin goð, / mǫrg es þjóð of þéuð’ [since Hákon went with the heathen gods, many people have been (*lit.* are) enslaved] (21.4-6). Just as Eiríkr has completed his transition to the mythical afterlife, so Hákon now exists only in the past. Only the misery of his people remains in the present. In these stanzas the poet articulates the common skaldic motif of declaring Hákon the best king ever to rule but he also aligns the poem with mythological and gnomic literary conventions. The final expression of earthly transience is an echo of the poem *Hávamál* in the *Poetic Edda*. Eyvindr concludes his poem,

Deyr fé,
 deyja frændr,
 eyðisk land ok láð;
 síz Hókon
 fór með heiðin goð,
 mǫrg es þjóð of þéuð.⁵²

In *Hávamál*,

Deyr fé, deyja frændr,
 deyr sjálfr it sama;
 enn orðztírr deyr aldregi,

⁵² ‘Cattle are dying, kinsmen are dying, land and fief are laid waste; since Hákon went with the heathen gods, many people have been (*lit.* are) enslaved’ (21.1-6). I follow R. D. Fulk’s translation of *deyr* and *deyja* in this stanza because the construction ‘cattle are dying’ creates a sense of immediacy and a more obvious contrast between the past and present situation than does the usual translation, ‘cattle die’. That translation is more appropriate to the proverbial present of *Hávamál* and I have translated it accordingly. This was suggested at Fulk’s paper on ‘*Eiríksmál* and *Hákonarmál*: A *Forschungsbericht* and an Opinion or Two’, at the 44th International Congress on Medieval Studies, University of Western Michigan, Kalamzoo, May 2009.

hveim er sér góðan getr.⁵³

It is impossible to know which poem came first, but the similarity between them makes clear Eyvindr's move into the realm of proverb and wisdom poetry.⁵⁴ The difference between the two stanzas is nevertheless significant. The gnomic verse offers some consolation for the loss of goods and kinsmen; an honourable reputation is similarly offered to Hákon by the valkyries as they kill him. *Hákonarmál*, however, does not offer such consolation in this final stanza. Shifting his perspective back to the human point of view, the poet concludes grimly by emphasizing the hardships the people have faced since Hákon's death. In *Hákonarmál*, the king's reputation and his new status as a heroic warrior are not enough to provide comfort to his people. Such a conclusion suggests that the conventions of poetic commemoration have been found wanting. As a eulogy, the poem ensures Hákon's good reputation, but the act of praising the king only reminds the poet and his audience of the destitution the king's followers have suffered since Hákon's death.

The poet of *Eiríksmál* betrays no grief at the passing of his king. His is a celebratory work focused solely on the dead, rather than on those who survive. Eiríkr is a character who cheerfully accepts his place among the heroes of the supernatural world. Hákon, on the other

⁵³ 'Cattle die, kinsmen die, the self dies likewise; but the fame of the one who has acquired a good reputation never dies' (76.1-4).

⁵⁴ Eyvindr's assertion that, '[m]un óbundinn / á ýta sjöt / fenisulfr fara' [unrestrained, the Fenris-wolf will attack the home of men] (20.1-3) before another such king rules also invokes the apocalyptic imagery of such eddic poems as *Völuspá*, in which the arrival of the wolf Garmr acts as a refrain as the speaker heralds the end of the world (sts. 44 and 49).

hand, expresses a far more ambivalent attitude towards the gods as he challenges the injustice of their decisions. Despite this, the two poems are alike in the ways in which they dramatise the process of dying and the kings' transition to the afterlife. Both kings are transported from the human world to the realm of legend. The two poets construct an imaginary theatre in which the dead kings can act out this process. As Bronfen and Goodwin write,

Many of the cultural systems concerned with death are in fact constructed to give a voice to the silenced dead. The question might be asked, Who or what represents the corpse?...What kind of "voice," authority, presence or repose does each marker give the dead?⁵⁵

Eiríksmál and *Hákonarmál* are 'markers' of death in which commemorative verse combats the enforced silence of dead kings. In the Viking-age court, the poet represents the corpse and has the power to give him a voice before he disappears fully into the land of the dead.

II. *Erfidrápa Óláfs Tryggvasonar*: Political Chaos and Poetic Order

Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld's *Erfidrápa Óláfs Tryggvasonar* depicts, like the two poems discussed above, the immediate aftermath of a king's death. However, while Eiríkr and Hákon are, according to the poets who eulogize them, assured positions in the divine *comitatus* of Valhøll, no such pagan afterlife awaits Óláfr Tryggvason, the first missionary king of Norway. The king himself disappears from the poem as soon as he dies and the poet offers his audience a troubled picture of the chaos that follows. In this poem, political unrest is translated into

⁵⁵ Bronfen and Goodwin, *Death and Representation*, 6-7.

poetic turmoil as conflicting rumours about the king's fate take the place of heroic verses praising his actions. Unlike Eyvindr and the anonymous author of *Eiríksmál*, who both construct an imagined Valhöll in order to give a voice to their dead kings, Hallfreðr explores the many and contradictory voices of the dead Óláfr's followers. He demonstrates how the skald himself could – and perhaps had an obligation to – re-establish order in the tumultuous moments following the king's defeat through the construction of a commemorative poem.

The majority of the *Erfdrápa* is preserved in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, although stanzas also appear in other works, including *Fagrskinna* and *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in Heimskringla*.⁵⁶ Óláfr Tryggvason, the great-grandson of Haraldr hárfagri, plays a prominent role in all of these texts, which relate his exile as a child in Sweden and Russia, his early years as a Viking raider, and the events of his short reign from 995–1000.⁵⁷ Much is made of Óláfr's destiny to convert Norway to Christianity: in Snorri's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* the young man encounters a hermit who promises him, '[p]ú munt verða ágætr konungr ok ágæt verk vinna. Þú munt mǫrgum mǫnnum til trúar koma ok skírnar' [you will become a renowned king and will accomplish glorious work. You will bring many men to the true faith and to baptism] (*Hkr*

⁵⁶ *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* contains all but one stanza; all but eight stanzas are also cited in *Flateyjarbók*. *Fagrskinna* contains nine stanzas, while *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in Heimskringla* includes six. Odd stanzas also appear in *Hallfreðar saga*, Oddr Snorrason's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, *Þiðriks saga af Bern* and *Skáldskaparmál*. The poem is edited in *Skj* BI, 150–7 with the full manuscript context of each verse given in *Skj* AI, 159–66. It is also edited in *Norsk I*, 82–5.

⁵⁷ Many standard reference works provide accounts of the king's life and final battle. See in particular *MSE*, 446–7 and Claus Krag, 'The Early Unification of Norway', *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia*, ed. Knut Helle, vol. 1: Prehistory to 1520 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), 191–6.

I, 266). The author of *Fagrskinna* notes that although he had ‘mikit starf ok mǫrg vandræði’ [great trouble and many difficulties] during his reign, Óláfr successfully converted to Christianity Norway, Iceland and Greenland, as well as the Orkney, Faroe, and Shetland islands (*Ágr-Fsk*, 145). He died in the battle of Svǫldr fighting the combined forces of Earl Hákon’s sons, the Danish king Sveinn tjúguskegg Haraldsson and the Swedish king Óláfr en soenski Eiríksson. It is primarily in recounting this battle that the prose authors cite Hallfréðr’s *Erfidrápa*. Unlike the poems so far discussed, the *Erfidrápa* is composed in *dróttkvætt* metre, the court metre used for formal poems delivered before kings and other members of the nobility.⁵⁸ The order of the stanzas is roughly consistent throughout and comments by the prose authors are generally confined to narrating the course of the battle. My focus in this section, therefore, will be on the poem as reconstructed by Finnur Jónsson rather than on its role within the prosimetric context.

In the first half of the reconstructed sequence, the king is presented as the dominant character in both words and deeds. He fights against an increasingly intimidating enemy who grows in size as the poem progresses. The king battles first ‘einn við jǫfra / ...tváa... / ok jarl enn þriðja’ [alone with two valiant lords and an earl, thirdly] (3.5-8); in stanza 5 he has encountered a ‘herr hundmargr’ [hundred-fold host] (5.1-2); and finally in stanza 13 he fights ‘[h]verr maðr und sólar’ [every man under the sun] (12.1-4). He is a hero in the tradition of

⁵⁸ For more on this metre see especially Poole, ‘Metre and Metrics’, 269-73, Frank, *Old Norse Court Poetry*, 21-89, and Kari Ellen Gade, *The Structure of Old Norse Dróttkvætt Poetry*, *Islandica* 49 (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1995).

Byrhtnoð and Gísli, one who stands alone against overwhelming odds. In addition to his martial pre-eminence, the king is a skilled orator who urges his men on into battle:

Geta skal máls, þess 's mæla
 menn at vápna sennu
 dolga fangs við drengi
 dáðoþflgan þor kvóðu;
 baða hertryggðar hyggja
 hnekkir sína rekka
 (þess lifa þjóðar sessa
 þróttar orð) á flóttu.⁵⁹

Devoting an entire stanza to a description of the king's pre-battle speech, the poet places Óláfr's public speaking role on par with the physical act of fighting. Moreover, Hallfreðr evidently expects the king's bravery to furnish material for more verse after the conflict: '[g]eta skal máls' [the tale will be told], he announces confidently near the beginning of the sequence (2.1). In contrast to the king, the poet is a passive, relatively minor, presence in this initial battle sequence. He rarely speaks in the first person, preferring instead to authenticate his account of the battle by attributing the information to common knowledge: the story is 'hvarkunnr' [known everywhere] by 'ýtar þeirs víðast nenna' [men who travel most widely] (4.6; 10.1-2). He declares, moreover, that '[g]ótt es gǫrva at fréttu /...at því mǫnnum' [it is good therefore to ask men] who is said to have been the bravest fighter (15.1-4). At this point in the poem, the

⁵⁹ The tale will be told that, say men, the tree of the coat of war (tree of the mail-coat, warrior), growing strong in deeds, spoke to the warrior in the weapons' quarrel (battle). The obstruction of the army's truce (king) did not order his men to think about flight – so the words of bravery of the people's bench-mate (king) live on' (2.1-8).

words of other men are reliable. There is agreement and harmony in public speech while the king lives, and the king's words successfully urge his men on into war.

It is surely no coincidence that, in stanza 3, cited above, battle itself takes on the language of a spoken argument when the poet uses the kenning 'vápna senna' [weapons' quarrel] (2.2). Such a kenning for battle is not unusual; it appears particularly in the *lausavísur* of the *Islendingasögur* heroes Kormákr Ógmundarson, Grettir Ásmundarson and Skarpheðinn Njálsson.⁶⁰ However, Hallfreðr extends the legal metaphor implicit in this kenning throughout the rest of the poem as he emphasizes the importance of formal public speech in this conflict. In stanza 7, the poet uses the verb *lýsa*, with the legal connotations of 'proclaiming' or 'bearing witness' to substantiate his account:⁶¹ 'en þat lýsik' [I bear witness of that], he says, as if giving evidence in court (7.2). Similarly, Óláfr's warriors metaphorically 'segja lög' [proclaim the law aloud] on their opponents in the 'geigurþing' [danger-assembly], while the king himself fights 'søk sanna' [to prove his suit] (8.1; 9.4; 11.5). The grim language of the law in this poem stands in marked contrast to other battle sequences in which the noise of battle is compared to music or singing. In *Glymdrápa*, for example, Þorbjörn hornklofi makes explicit the association of battle-music with victory:

⁶⁰ *Skj* BI, 75, st. 75; *Skj* BII, 475, st. 49; and *Skj* BII, 218, st. 28, respectively.

⁶¹ *CV*, 402. See 'Um lýsingar' ('On Publishing') in *Grágás* for some of the legal uses of the word in Gunnar Karlsson, Kristján Sveinsson and Mörður Árnason, eds., *Grágás: Lagasafn Íslenska Þjóðveldisins* (Reykjavík: Mál og Menning, 1992), 372-73. While the Icelandic law-codes post-date much of the skaldic verse and could conceivably be using the word in a way the skalds did not, the relatively large amount of other legal terminology in the poem supports this reading of the word.

þás (hugfyltra hǫlða)
 hlaut andskoti Gauta
 (hór vas sǫngr of svírum)
 sigr (flugbeiddra vigra).⁶²

In contrast to this, when Hallfreðr casts Óláfr's battle as a spoken legal dispute, the metaphor is not merely one of ironic understatement; the battle is indeed a violent legal contest between Óláfr and his enemies as they fight for political control over his kingdom.

The death of the king signals a shift in the poem. Stanza 18 is the climax of the battle sequence, a watershed of two carefully structured *helmingar* that portray the king's defeat and the capture of his ship:

Ítrferðum réð Ormi
 orðsæll jǫfurr norðan
 (snǫrp varð at þat sverða
 snót) Eireki á móti,
 en húfjǫfnum hefuir
 hlýrs þeim gota stýrði
 (áðr óx of gram góðan
 gunnr) Hókonar sunnan.⁶³

⁶² 'Then the adversary of the Gautar won victory – the song of the flight-wanting spears rang high around the necks of courageous men' (*Skj* BI, 21, st. 7).

⁶³ 'The well-reputed lord attacked Eiríkr with the excellently-laden serpent from the north; the severe gentlewoman of swords (valkyrie) was there. But the avenger of Hákon (Eiríkr) steered the even-hulled bow-horse from the south before the battle grew around the king' (18.1-8).

In the first half of the stanza Óláfr leads the ship south against his foe; in the second Eiríkr, son of Earl Hákon, steers the ship north away from the battle.⁶⁴ The opposite directions reflect the transfer of the ship from one ruler to another with the name of the conqueror, Eiríkr, placed directly in the middle of the stanza at line 4.⁶⁵ The two *helmingar* create a mirror image around this central line as two other names, Ormr and Hákon, appear in the first and last lines of the stanza.⁶⁶ Emphasizing further the transfer of the ship, King Óláfr is the grammatical subject of the first *helmingr* while Eiríkr is the subject of the second: one king gains agency at the expense of another. The three-syllable adjective *húfjofnum* (nom. *húfjafn*) in line 4 echoes *ítrfermðum* (nom. *ítrfermðr*) in line 1, both referring to the ship. Such syntactic parallels recall the complicated inlay patterns of Viking-age art; Margaret Clunies Ross has observed that medieval Scandinavians often spoke of poetry using technical terms derived from wood- and metal-working and that the structure of such skaldic stanzas may be the reason for this.⁶⁷ It is significant that Hallfreðr depicts the moment of defeat and transfer of power in such tightly controlled language: the structure of the verse serves to contain the political disorder it

⁶⁴ Russell Poole notes that descriptions of sea-battles often depict the convergence of enemy ships and that poets frequently emphasize this in the patterning of their verses in *Viking Poems on War and Peace*, 81-2.

⁶⁵ My description of this stanza is, for the sake of simplicity, expressed in terms of its modern eight-line structure. Although this reflects an editorial practice that post-dates the assumed composition of the stanza by many centuries, I believe that the stress patterns and syllable-counting inherent in skaldic metre would have encouraged the listening audience to divide the stanza into two halves as we do now, and to hear the syntactic parallels that we now see on the page.

⁶⁶ Ormr is the name of Óláfr's ship, the Long Serpent, but could also be a man's name.

⁶⁷ Clunies Ross, *Poetry and Poetics*, 84-91.

describes. It is significant too that the poet depicts not the king's death, but rather a transfer of goods as Eiríkr captures the ship. Not only does this allow Hallfreðr to avoid describing his king being killed in battle, it emphasizes again the legal theme of the poem: this is not meaningless carnage but a politically important transfer of property and power.

As noted above, in the battle sequence of the poem King Óláfr is a lone fighter faced with an overwhelmingly large force of anonymous but deadly foes. After the capture of his ship, however, the poet steps into the king's place of prominence: Hallfreðr depicts himself as a similarly isolated figure challenging a wave of rumours spread by an equally faceless multitude. This second section does appear at first glance to be, in Diana Whaley's words, a series of 'dispatches from the front line' as the poet reports the many rumours caused by the king's death.⁶⁸ However, studies in the field of discourse analysis have demonstrated that reported speech is never as transparent as it purports to be. Hallfreðr's poem is, to use Deborah Tannen's term, a 'constructed dialogue'; such a dialogue is 'not a "report" at all; rather, it is the recontextualization of words in a current discourse.'⁶⁹ The reconstruction of such a dialogue serves not to represent reality but to express the speaker's view of that dialogue and of the events narrated therein to his audience.⁷⁰ Hallfreðr's 'dispatches' are no less the products of creative recontextualization and should not be taken as representations of reality. As the poet

⁶⁸ Whaley, 'A Useful Past', 167.

⁶⁹ Deborah Tannen, *Talking Voices: Repetition, Dialogue, and Imagery in Conversational Discourse*, Studies in Interactional Sociolinguistics, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007), 17.

⁷⁰ Tannen, *Talking Voices*, 18.

reminds us, ‘stóðk ferri, / mest þars malmar brustu’ [I stood far from where the most weapons clashed] (27.2-3). With this declaration of his absence from a battle he so vividly describes, the poet reminds both the listening and the reading audience that his is not an eye-witness account but a creative reconstruction of events after the fact. In representing and re-presenting in verse the cacophony of rumours that proliferated immediately following the death of the king, Hallfreðr’s technique is analogous to that of later saga-authors who incorporate verse dialogue into prose narratives. Heather O’Donoghue observes that this process involves a significant degree of *littérarité* in which authors of prosimetric texts are ‘(re)producing a textual illusion for literary effect, rather than relating a naturalistic event’.⁷¹ Hallfreðr’s verses are not realistic but literary, and the poet openly invites his audience to acknowledge the literary illusion of his text. As in *Eiríksmál* and *Hákonarmál*, eulogy is a performance that recreates, rather than accurately records, the king’s departure from the world.

A dramatic shift takes place as Hallfreðr ceases his account of the battle and begins instead to relate the rumours that follow it. Unlike the battle sequence, which is primarily described in the past tense, the verbs in the second section are nearly all expressed in the present: ‘veitkat’ [I don’t know], ‘segja’ [they say], and ‘kveðr’ [he says] (20.1; 20.8; 22.5). The repetition of the word ‘nú’ [now] (24.5; 25.2) further emphasizes this sense of immediacy, creating the illusion that the audience is hearing the rumours even as the poet himself does. At

⁷¹ O’Donoghue, *Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative*, 12.

the beginning of this sequence, Hallfreðr appears far more hesitant than in the battle-stanzas, no longer using the authority of other men to back up his claims:

Veitkat hitt, hvárt Heita
 hungrdeyfi skalk leyfa
 dynsæðinga dauðan
 dýrbliks eða þó kvikvan,
 alls sannliga segja
 (sárr mun gramr at hvóru,
 hætt 's til hans at fréttu)
 hvárt tveggja mér seggir.⁷²

The words *eða*, *tveggja*, and *hvárr* each hold up two possibilities in this verse, emphasizing the lack of reliable news. Through three stanzas Hallfreðr reports rumours that tell of the king's survival, although the skald sets himself in opposition to them at the end of each stanza: 'geta þykkjat mér gotnar / glíkligs' [what men say does not seem likely to me], he says, and resolves to ignore men's 'veifanar orð' [wavering words] (23.7-8; 24.8). It is a bleak inversion of the poet's exultant exclamations at the beginning of the poem when he remarked, '[g]eta skal máls'

⁷² 'I don't know whether I should praise, dead or still living, the blunter-of-hunger of sea-birds of the noise of the light of the beast of Heiti (the warrior). All men say both things to me as truth. The king is wounded either way; it is difficult to get intelligence about him' (20.1-8). The seven-part kenning in this stanza refers simply to the king as a warrior. *Heiti* is the name of a sea king and is often used in ship-kenning as a word for the sea (*LP*, 241). In this case, *dýr Heita* is a typical ship-kenning, but the addition of *-blik* suggests the shine of a metallic object attached to the ship; this added referent thus denotes a shield. The compound word *dynsæðingr* can be translated as 'raven' because the raven is a bird of battle. That is, *dýnr* is the noise of war which, when it modifies the kenning for 'shield' becomes 'the noise of the shield' or 'battle'; the seagull of battle is a raven. Finally, the word *hungrdeyfir* means simply 'hunger-soother' or 'one who blunts hunger' and refers to the king who feeds ravens on the battlefield by providing them with dead bodies for food.

[the tale will be told] and ‘frægt ’s til slíks at segja / síðar’ [it is fair to speak of such things afterwards] (2.1; 3.7-8). Hallfreðr’s expectation of a victory to praise in poetry is proved false after the king’s death as men report only conflicting tales of defeat.

In the next two stanzas rumours of the king’s loss are confirmed. Stanza 21 begins with a clear declaration of reliable news, ‘[s]agðr vas mér’ [it was said to me], notes the poet (21.1). Hallfreðr learns that the king has lost his country (21.1-4), but hopes that Óláfr may yet live (21.5-8). Through stanzas 21-24 the poet holds onto this possibility, ostensibly repeating the conflicting rumours as he is told them. This creates a drawn-out moment of suspense not unlike the exchange in *Hákonarmál* in which Hákon asks the valkyries why they are killing him. What has happened? Does the king live? What will we, the audience, hear next? These stanzas are an almost theatrical reconstruction of the moments that might have been experienced by any of the king’s followers as they waited for news. However, just as the valkyries bring to an end their dialogue with Hákon by taking him to Valhöll, so Hallfreðr finally concludes this moment of suspense with a definitive announcement of the king’s death. In stanza 25 the poet rejects all reports of the king’s survival not once, but in five apposite phrases:

Norðmanna hykk nenninn
 (nú ’s þengill framm genginn,
 dýrr hné dróttar stjóri)
 dróttin und lok sóttan;
 grams dauði brá gœði

góðs ófárar þjóðar.
 Allr glepsk friðr af falli
 flugstyggss sonar Tryggva.⁷³

The repetition of the same information in each couplet – the king is dead, the king is dead, the king is dead – creates an incessant, pounding refrain of defeat that rejects all the rumours of the king’s survival held up in the previous stanzas. It is also a highly formalised public announcement in which Hallfreðr returns to the legal language that characterised his stanzas in the opening battle sequence. The verb *glepja* means ‘to confuse or confound’, especially at a *þing*.⁷⁴ The term ‘friðr’ [peace] also carries connotations of personal security and to forfeit property and peace (*fé ok friðar*) was to be outlawed.⁷⁵ Such legal vocabulary re-establishes control over the chaotic, indecisive language of the previous stanzas, just as Hallfreðr’s public declaration imposes order over the conflicting rumours by proclaiming the king’s death. This legal terminology also reminds the audience of the formulaic aspect of Hallfreðr’s public speech, demonstrating yet again that this sequence of ‘dispatches from the front line’ is in reality an overtly theatrical reconstruction of the events following the king’s death, couched in stylised

⁷³ ‘I think the active lord of the Northmen been put to death; now the prince has gone away; the noble ruler of the court has fallen. The good king’s death has ended prosperity for no few men. All peace is confounded by the fall of Tryggvi’s flight-shy son’ (25.1-8).

⁷⁴ *CV*, 203. See the discussion of *Þingsafglöpun* (‘Assembly-balking’), for which the penalty was lesser outlawry, in Andrew Dennis, Peter Foote and Richard Perkins, eds., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás: The Codex Regius of Grágás with Material from Other Manuscripts*, University of Manitoba Icelandic Studies 3 and 5, 2 vols. (Winnipeg: U of Manitoba P, 1980, 2000), II, 366.

⁷⁵ *CV*, 173.

poetic and legal discourse. Proclaiming publicly the true version of events, the skald declares the importance of his craft to political stability in a time of turmoil.

Having announced the fact of the king's fall, Hallfreðr then meditates on his personal grief and his reaction to that loss. As with so many of the stanzas in the *Erfidrápa*, Hallfreðr uses the complementary two-part structure of the *dróttkvætt* stanza to express his grief. In the first *helmingr* of stanza 27, he regrets that he was not able to fight with the king in the battle:

Ilt vas þats ulfa sultar,
opt, þverri stóðk ferri,
mest þars malmar brustu,
mein, þótt smátt sé und einum.⁷⁶

The second *helmingr* expands on this image of separation, but the poet is now parted from the king by death: 'skiliðr em ek við skylja / skalmöld hefr því valdit' [I am parted from the king; the battle has determined it so (27.5-6)]. The first *helmingr* thus reflects the geographical separation between king and poet while the second evokes the permanent separation caused by the king's departure from the world. Stanza 28 grows even more personal when Hallfreðr talks about his relationship with the king, his godfather, and notes the impossibility of compensation for the death of his surrogate family member:

Hefk, þanns hverjum jöfri
heiptfíknum varð ríkri
und niðbyrði Norðra

⁷⁶ 'It was an evil hurt that I stood far from the diminisher of wolves' hunger (warrior), most where the weapons clashed – though often one alone is of small use' (27.1-4).

norðr, goðföður orðinn;
 bíða munk þess, es breiðan
 barðmána vann skarðan,
 margaukanda mækis
 móts aldrigi bótir.⁷⁷

The legal term for compensation, *bót*, links the poet's loss to the battle, previously described as a legal dispute. Similar language is used in Egill Skalla-Grímsson's *Sonatorrek* when the poet mourns the loss of his two sons, saying 'hefr Míms vinr / mér of fengnar / þolva bætr' [Mímir's friend has given compensation to me for my misfortunes].⁷⁸ Joseph Harris has suggested that the composition of Egill's poem functions as a pseudo-sacrifice to Óðinn, taking the place of the compensation Egill cannot claim from the god for the loss of his son. Harris links this sacrifice to rituals of patrilineal descent, and it is notable that Hallfréðr also discusses his father-son relationship with Óláfr in conjunction with his inability to obtain compensation for the death of his lord.⁷⁹ Hallfréðr locates his relationship with Óláfr within an explicitly Christian context when he calls the king his *goðfaðir*, but compensation is similarly impossible.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ 'I have lost a god-father who was more powerful than every hatred-seeking lord north under Norðri's son's load (sky). I shall never receive compensation in return for the great increaser of swords (king), who hacked broad hull-moons (shields)' (28.1-8).

⁷⁸ *Skj* BI, 37, st. 23.

⁷⁹ Joseph Harris, 'Homo necans borealis: Fatherhood and Sacrifice in *Sonatorrek*', *Myth in Early Northwest Europe*, ed. Stephen O. Glosecki, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 320 (Turnhout: Arizona Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies and Brepols, 2007), 153-74.

⁸⁰ Russell Poole has noted that examples of a skald claiming kinship with a ruler are relatively rare, but that the Christian relationship of godfather to godson would likely have been interpreted in medieval Scandinavia as similar to that between a foster-father and his son. He suggests that the king's gift of a sword to Hallfréðr in *Hallfréðar*

Egill's poem is, ostensibly at least, a deeply personal text that concludes with an image of the speaker waiting alone for death.⁸¹ Hallfreðr, however, turns from his personal lament back to his public role as spokesman for the community as he focuses on the effect the king's death has had on his entire realm, just as Eyvindr does in *Hákonarmál*. Whereas in the battle sequence the poet had described the king as a lone fighter, he now uses titles that call attention to Óláfr's position as a leader of the community: 'norðmanna dróttin' [lord of the Northmen], 'þengill' [captain of the *þing*], 'dróttar stjóri' [ruler of the *drótt*] (25.1-4). It is clear that the community that Hallfreðr describes in these final few stanzas can only exist after the poet has re-established order through a definitive declaration of the king's death. The poet has gained sufficient control over language to turn the conflicting rumours of the masses into an announcement of the king's fate, and this allows the faceless multitude to become once again a community, one that mourns together the loss of its leader. Hallfreðr's expression of personal grief acts as a model for and a microcosm of the community he describes. In the refrain stanza, the poet further reminds his audience of the effect the king's death has had on the entire land: '[n]orðr- eru ǫll of orðin / auð -lǫnd at gram dauðan' [all the northlands have become desolate because of the king's death (19.1-2)]. The poet's personal loss has made way for public mourning and commemoration.

saga indicates a surrogate familial bond. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four. See 'Claiming Kin Skaldic-Style', *Verbal Encounters: Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse Studies for Roberta Frank*, eds. Antonina Harbus and Russell Poole, Toronto Old English Series 13 (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2005), 272-81.

⁸¹ *Skj* BI, 37, st. 25.

Asking '[w]hat was Viking poetry for?' Anthony Faulkes has noted that Óðinn, in stealing the mead of poetry from the giants, acts as 'the great orderer or controller of the power of chaos', with chaos personified in that account by the giants. Thus, 'poetry was seen as imposing order on the chaos of experience, which is a characteristically divine activity, though one in which men participate'.⁸² Hallfreðr's *Erfdrápa Óláfs Tryggvasonar* was 'for' the same purpose. The moment of a king's death, particularly a king as powerful as Óláfr Tryggvason, would have been one of massive instability and change. Such a moment forces poets to think about the role their highly political, public art form plays in the disorder that follows the loss of a ruler. Hallfreðr reconstructs such a moment in his *erfdrápa* and in so doing he moves beyond the role of commemorator established by the poets of *Eiríksmál* and *Hákonarmál*. While the two early poets use the moment of the king's death to explore his transition from human warrior into a character in the realm of myth and legend, Hallfreðr proclaims the artificiality of all poetic discourse; but by drawing attention to the constructed aspect of his craft, he paradoxically declares the importance of commemorative verse as an ordering force in the face of political chaos.

It is not a new observation to say that Old Norse poetry is highly self-referential,⁸³ but the degree to which these three skalds examine the role of poetic discourse in the

⁸² Faulkes, *What was Viking Poetry For?*, 20.

⁸³ Faulkes also makes this point in *What was Viking Poetry For?*, 12. The many ways in which skalds draw attention to their verse have also been summarised by Clunies Ross in *Poetry and Poetics*, 83-96.

commemoration of rulers is striking. Perhaps this is because skaldic poetry excels at describing actions, events, and even objects, but not absences. As Bronfen and Goodwin write,

Death is...necessarily constructed by a culture; it grounds the many ways a culture stabilizes and represents itself, and yet it always does so as a signifier with an incessantly receding, ungraspable signified, always pointing to other signifiers, other means of representing what finally is just absent. Representations of death thus often serve as metatropes for the process of representation itself: its necessity, its excess, its failure, and its uses for the polis.⁸⁴

Commemoration is essentially the representation of someone who is absent. For the Viking-age skalds, commemoration was a highly public act, one in which the representation of the king's absence was performed in front of the entire courtly community. In each of the three sequences the poet constructs a character who represents the king in his absence, who speaks and acts for the king in an imaginary theatre built by verse. The commemoration of the king does indeed become an interrogation of the 'process of representation' as the poets self-consciously examine the role of language and poetic discourse in their construction of the absent lord.

⁸⁴ Bronfen and Goodwin, *Death and Representation*, 4.

Chapter Three: 'My Hope of Wealth Died': Death and the Poet-Patron Relationship

Finnur Jónsson, responsible for editing and translating the corpus of skaldic verse in its modern form, was also one of the earliest scholars to theorise the poet-patron relationship as one of trust and mutual reliance:

opstod der som oftest et meget inderligt hengivenheds- og venskabs-forhold, idet fyrsten på sin side ærede og agtede skjalden, ja gjorde ham til sin fortrolige rådgiver og mest betroede mand og tildelte ham de højeste hof-æreposter, medens skjalden på den anden side gav fyrsten venskabelige og oprigtige råd.¹

This conception of the trusted skald to a large degree still stands and skaldic poets are often praised for forging a close relationship with their patrons that allowed them to serve as friends, confidants and even ambassadors.² However, as so many scholars also point out, the relationship is ultimately one based on financial exchange: the king pays the poet for his works and the poet's verses act as propaganda for the king.³ Consequently, some skalds are shown in

¹ 'There often sprang up much intimate affection and friendship, as the prince for his part honoured and esteemed the skald, and indeed made him his confidential advisor and most trusted man and assigned to him the highest, most honourable office, while the skald for his own part gave the prince friendly and candid counsel' (Finnur Jónsson, *Den oldnorske og oldislandske litteraturs historie*, 2nd ed., 3 vols. (Copenhagen: G. E. C. Gad, 1920-4), I, 338).

² This was discussed in the introduction to the thesis. Roberta Frank has compiled a comprehensive list of scholars' depictions of the skald in 'Skaldic Poetry', *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*, eds. Carol J. Clover and John Lindow, *Islandica* 45 (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985), 180-1. Margaret Clunies Ross is one of the most recent scholars to reiterate the view that skalds served as close companions and advisors to kings in *Poetry and Poetics*, 44-7.

³ See for example, Bjarne Fidjestøl in "'Have You Heard a Poem Worth More?' A Note on the Economic Background of Early Skaldic Praise-Poetry' (1984), *Selected Papers*, trans. Peter Foote, eds. Odd Einar Haugen and Else Mundal, *Viking Collection* 9 (Odense: Odense UP, 1997), 117-32.

the sagas as grasping courtiers greedy for commissions. When the poet Sigvatr Þórðarson offers to compose praise for one of King Óláfr Haraldsson's chieftains, the man scornfully refuses, protesting that skalds only 'ginna fé af bændum' [con money out of the farmers] when the king tires of them (*Flat* III, 360). Elsewhere, the poet Einarr skálaglamm is described as being 'optast félítill' [often short of money] and he composes the poem *Vellekla*, 'Lack of Gold', presumably to encourage his patron to be more generous.⁴ The trusted friend, it turns out, may become the needy employee very suddenly. The death of the king causes a crisis in this seemingly contradictory relationship as the skald is forced to transfer his allegiance to a new patron. The bonds of emotional attachment as well as those of financial dependence must be re-established with a new ruler. Through commemorative verse the poet effects this transfer, and the sequences discussed in this chapter will demonstrate that the commemoration of a king has as much to do with pleasing the king's successor as it does the poet's relationship with his dead lord.

This chapter examines three sequences of verse in which skalds react to a forced change in allegiance from one patron to another. As Glúmr Geirason's *erfídrápa* for King Haraldr gráfeldr demonstrates, financial considerations could emerge at the forefront of a memorial poem. In *Gráfeldardrápa*, Glúmr cleverly constructs a eulogy that exhibits his own poetic abilities in an attempt to secure new patrons. Conversely, an exchange of verses

⁴ Sigurður Nordal, ed., *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1933), 269-70.

commemorating King Hákon inn góði reveals the tension between Glúmr and his rival poet Eyvindr skáldaspillir as they support rival kings. Eyvindr's emotional response to his patron's death stands in stark contrast to Glúmr's more pragmatic approach. Finally, Sigvatr Þórðarson is faced with a different problem when he is accused of deserting his patron for a more powerful king during his patron's lifetime. In the sequence *Vestfararvísur*, Sigvatr attempts to counter the accusations of disloyalty levelled at him by members of the *drótt*, rejecting the bond created by the exchange of poetry for financial reward and advocating instead a lifelong poet-patron relationship predicated on emotional attachment. Sigvatr is forced to engage with the problem of patron loyalty before his king has actually died, demonstrating that the anxieties surrounding the end of the poet-patron relationship could occur even before the final defeat of the king.

I. *Gráfeldardrápa*: A Performance in Pragmatism

Glúmr Geirason's *Gráfeldardrápa* was composed around the year 970 after the death of King Haraldr gráfeldr, son of Eiríkr blóðøx.⁵ As discussed in the previous chapter, Haraldr and his brothers killed Hákon inn góði in 961 and established themselves as joint kings of Norway. The *konungasögur* are united in presenting Haraldr, the oldest brother, as the leader of this group: he is 'vaskligastr' [the most valiant] in *Fagrskinna* (*Ágr-Fsk*, 102), 'mest fyrir þeim' [foremost among them] in Snorri's *Haralds saga gráfeldar* (*Hkr* I, 198), and 'merkiligastr' [the

⁵ According to Finnur, Glúmr Geirason was an Icelandic skald active from about 950-75. The poem is edited in *Skj* BI, 66-68 and in *Norsk* I, 41-2.

most distinguished] in *Ágrip* (*Ágr-Fsk*, 9).⁶ The brothers' rule, however, was troubled by famine and unrest as the kings fought with Hákon, earl of Hlaðir, for control over the north of Norway. Haraldr was killed in Denmark fifteen years after the brothers came to power.⁷

Haraldr's memorial poem is not preserved, like *Hákonarmál*, in one complete redaction, nor even, like *Ynglingatal*, in a single prosimetric text. Glúmr's sequence has been preserved piecemeal in many manuscripts. The stanzas can be roughly divided between those which are preserved in the historical sagas and which convey information about Haraldr's reign, and those which have survived in the poetic treatises and which – unsurprisingly – are more notable for their poetic language than for their historical detail.⁸ It is therefore necessary to focus on Finnur's carefully reconstructed text in order to gain an understanding of how the poem functions as a whole. In the reconstructed sequence Glúmr mourns the loss of the king and provides a comprehensive survey of his reign. Charting both the rise and fall of the king, these verses blur the line between eulogy and memorial, and the economic value of the sequence is fundamental to its dual nature: while commemorating his dead patron in a suitable way, Glúmr

⁶ In addition to this, one of the seven verses recorded in *Ágrip* praises the king's beauty: '[æ] standa mér augu / of eld til Gráfeldar' [always over the fire my eyes remain on Gráfeldr] (*Skj* BI, 168). The original provenance of this intriguing verse is unknown.

⁷ His story is told primarily in Snorri's *Haralds saga gráfeldar* (*Hkr* I, 198-224) and his death is related in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* (*Hkr* I, 237-40). *Fagrskinna* and *Ágrip* contain shorter accounts of his reign.

⁸ Stanzas 1, 4, 8 and 12 are cited in *Skáldskaparmál* as examples of kennings, while the rest are scattered through Snorri's *Hákonar saga góða*, *Haralds saga gráfeldar*, and *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* in *Heimskringla*, *Fagrskinna*, and *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*. The name of the poet is given with each stanza in *Skáldskaparmál*, while the name of the poem is also given numerous times in *Haralds saga gráfeldar* (*Hkr* I, 162, 238, 243). See *Skj* AI, 75-78 for the full manuscript context of each verse.

must also show that his poetic ability is such that is both transferable and valuable to the next patron.

Glúmr's introduction to the sequence reflects the complexity of his task. Echoing Eyvindr's *Háleygjatal*, the poem as reconstructed by Finnur begins with a formal call for hearing and a declaration that the poet is going to serve up the mead of poetry:⁹

Hlýði, hapta beiðis,
 hefk, mildingar, gildi;
 því biðjum vér þagnar,
 þegna tjón at fregnum.¹⁰

This is typical of the call for hearing that often appears at the beginning of a formal eulogy, but there is a curious ambiguity about who is being praised. When Glúmr announces the main topic of his poem, 'þegna tjón at fregnum' [we hear of the loss of warriors] (1.4), it is unclear precisely who these warriors are, and thus what the function of the poem will be. Are they enemy soldiers, and is the poet praising a king victorious in battle? Or are they members of the poet's own retinue, and is he announcing the death of his patron? Glúmr's use of the word *tjón* in this stanza is by far the earliest in skaldic verse. It occurs several times in later verses in compounds such as 'fétjón' [loss of wealth] and 'fjortjón' [loss of life], but such uses tend to be

⁹ Indeed, Eyvindr's stanza follows directly after Glúmr's in *Skáldskaparmál*, where both are given as examples in a list of poetry-kennings (*Skm*, 11-14). Such stanzas are typical of the *upphaf*, or opening, of a poem. On this, see Clunies Ross, *Poetry and Poetics*, 38-9.

¹⁰ 'Listen! I raise the banquet of the gods' ruler of princes (Óðinn's banquet, mead of poetry). We ask for silence, for we hear of the loss of warriors' (1.1-4).

abstract and appear in gnomic or penitential contexts.¹¹ The sense Glúmr must be using occurs only twice in skaldic verse: Óláfr hvítaskáld Þórðarson describes the destruction of an entire army using the simplex *tjón*, while Earl Rognvaldr kali Kolsson uses the compound ‘líftjón’ [life-loss] to describe widespread slaughter in battle.¹² Glúmr’s use of the word *tjón* thus implies not simply the loss of men, but death on a massive scale. The ominous ambiguity of his opening statement is well crafted, articulating in the very first stanza the complex dual nature of this praise – or is it a memorial? – poem.

Stanzas 2-5 are typical of the genre of praise-poetry, containing conventional descriptions of a king skilled at war.¹³ In these stanzas, the poet encourages the audience to read the phrase *þegna tjón at fregnum* as a declaration of victory as the king ostentatiously engages in carnage and slaughter. In stanza 4 Haraldr reddens his sword in the blood of the Gautar, while in stanza 7 the whole battle-field runs red with blood. The king’s reddened sword becomes a frightening visual image as the poet uses fire-metaphors to describe it: the king’s sword is a ‘dólgeisa’ [ember of enmity] (2.1) and a ‘brandr brinnanda’ [burning blade] (5.3-4). The gruesome imagery of such stanzas leaves the audience in no doubt as to which warriors have been lost, and the poet reinforces his praise of Haraldr’s military prowess by repeatedly announcing the king’s victories: ‘vas sigr of orðinn’ [victory was won] (2.7) and ‘hann fekk gagn

¹¹ For example, in *Plácitusdrápa* (*Skj* BI, 610, st. 13) and in *Márluigrátr* (*Skj* BII, 519, st. 50).

¹² *Skj* BII, 109, st. 2 and *Skj* BI, 485, st. 25, respectively.

¹³ Compare, for example, the stanzas in Roberta Frank’s chapter on ‘War Poetry’ in *Old Norse Court Poetry*, 142-153. Glúmr betrays a similar interest in ‘physical strength, equanimity in the face of death, self-control, and bravery in battle’ as the poets cited by Frank (142).

at gunni' [he won victory in war] (3.3). Each stanza is structured around battle with a specific group of people: the king fights the Irish (2), men from the east (3), the Gotlanders (4) and the Bjarmalanders (5). This structure recalls *drápur* performed for kings at the height of their power: Sigvatr Þórðarson's *Víkingarvísur* and Óttarr svarti's *Knútsdrápa* similarly chronicle the rise of a king through a list of his individual battles.¹⁴ Taking *Víkingarvísur* as an example, Judith Jesch has argued that these lists of battles in skaldic verse functioned as recorded history in a preliterate culture as poets not only praised the king but established a narrative of events for posterity.¹⁵ The effect of Glúmr's poem is no different: through the aggregation of these many battles the poet proclaims the king's reputation as a fearsome warrior and establishes a suitably magnificent official history of his reign.

The poet portrays a model king and a leader of men. Interspersed by such common epithets for the king as 'gumna vinr' [friend of men] (2.3) and 'allvaldr' [all-powerful king] (3.2), many of the kennings used to describe him are based on a sword-referent that emphasizes his position as a military leader. The king is a 'seggr mækis eggjar' [man of the sword edge] (2.8), 'sverðleiks reginn' [Reginn of sword-play] (3.6) and 'mætra hjalta / malm-Óðinn' [metal-Óðinn of the valuable sword-guard] (7.1-2). Glúmr also notes that Haraldr is a generous king, 'sás gaf sköldum /...gunnhørga...mørgum' [who gave war-cairns (shields) to many skalds] (3.2-

¹⁴ *Skj* BI, 213-16 and BI, 272-275 respectively.

¹⁵ Judith Jesch, "The "Meaning of the Narrative Moment": Poets and History in the Late Viking Age", *Narrative and History in the Early Medieval West*, eds. Elizabeth M. Tyler and Ross Balzaretti, Studies in the Early Middle Ages 16 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 257.

4). While the king's generosity will become important when the poet mourns the loss of his patron and his patron's wealth later in the poem, in this stanza such praise affirms the king's position of authority. His ability to buy skalds and to command their praise is mirrored by his power to make swords sing in the same stanza as he 'slíðrtungur lét syngva' [let the scabbard-tongues (swords) sing] (3.5).¹⁶ Through his use of such kennings, the structure of one battle per stanza, and grisly visual images of war, Glúmr adheres in the first five stanzas of the reconstructed sequence to the conventions of praise-poetry and gives only the ambiguous opening line, *þegna tjón at fregnum*, to hint at the more problematic nature of his poem.

Structuring each stanza around one of the king's battles has the effect of charting the king's rise to power through conflict, while stanza 6 shows him at the apex of his reign.¹⁷ It is the first stanza in which Haraldr is called 'Nóregs konungr' [king of Norway] (6.4). His enemies in this stanza are more formidable than the cowardly Irish or Bjarmalanders, who ran away at the king's approach in the early part of the poem. In this stanza, the warriors are no longer described by their place of origin but by war-kennings almost as fearsome as those describing the king. They are 'brynju njóta /...stóra' [mighty enjoyers of the mail-coat] and 'valgaltar

¹⁶ A similar effect occurs in stanza 8 when the king 'lét hvína / hrynjeld at þat brynju' [made whine that ringing fire of the mail-coat] (1-2). This stanza follows immediately after a description of the king verbally urging his warriors into battle.

¹⁷ Found only in *Fagrskinna*, the stanza is cited just as the chronicler begins to recount the events of Haraldr's last battle (*Ágr-Fsk*, 102).

/...þorna' [thorns of the carrion-boars (helmets)] (6.1-4; 6.5-8).¹⁸ These kennings for mail-coats and helmets complement perfectly the sword-kennings used for the king: just as mail-coats and helmets threaten to neutralise the sword, so Haraldr's enemies threaten to overcome the king. Such complementary images highlight the poet's assertion that Haraldr suppressed 'jofra / jafnborna' [kings of equal birth] to himself (6.7-8). However, the king still appears as the dominant provider of goods in this stanza. In the first *helmingr*, the king is a 'naddskúrar...nœrir' [nourisher of nail-showers] (6.3); in the second he is a 'vargfœðandi' [wolf-feeding one] (6.6). The king's grisly generosity in battle mirrors his generosity to skalds in stanza 3 and demonstrates his pre-eminence even over other, albeit increasingly powerful, kings.

As ruler of Norway, Haraldr fights to protect his land rather than to conquer. Having accumulated lands to rule in the preceding stanzas, Haraldr is now called 'víðlendr' [owner of wide lands] (7.5) and 'foldar vqrðr' [guardian of the land] (8.3). The act of reddening things in blood is still one the king performs, but the focus has changed to reflect the king's rise in power. In stanza 7 the king does not redden human enemies as before. Rather, he reddens the land on behalf of his people: 'þorði / þjóðum vqll at rjóða' [he dared to redden the field with the people] (7.3-4). The exact resonance of word *þjóðum* is unclear, as the dative could mean either that the king fought with or for the people, but it certainly stands in direct contrast to the earlier stanzas in which the king fought with (or for) the 'ðisar /...gjóðum' [birds of the goddess

¹⁸ This reading follows *LP*, 589. *Valgoltr* is obscure, but one might think of the boars that decorate the Sutton Hoo helmet and shoulder-clasps, as well as the references to boar-images on the cheek-guards of Beowulf's company (*Bwf*, ll. 303-4) for an analogy.

(ravens)] (2.1-4). As Norway's monarch, Haraldr's relationship with the land and the people comes to the fore in these later stanzas. Moreover, the poet not only shows the king as the active encourager of his followers, but as a leader whose words are crucially important to the outcome of the final fight.¹⁹ I have discussed how this trope of the eloquent king is a staple of early memorial poems such as Eyvindr skáldaspillir's *Hákonarmál*, in which Hákon similarly moves through his troops, encouraging them on all sides:

Hét á Háleygi
sems á Holmrygi
jarla einbani,
fór til orrostu.²⁰

Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld echoes this when describing Óláfr Tryggvason's final battle:

baða hertryggðar hyggja
hnekkir sína rekka
(þess lifa þjóðar sessa
þróttar orð) á flóttu.²¹

Haraldr gráfeldr is no different. According to Glúmr, he too speaks 'þróttar orð' [words of courage'] (7.3). The poet continues:

¹⁹ Stanzas 7-11 are all incorporated in the historical texts *Fagrskinna* (st. 7-10), *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* in *Heimskringla* (st. 7, 9 and 11) and *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* (st. 7, 9 and 11) as supporting verses in the authors' accounts of Haraldr's final battle.

²⁰ 'The single-handed slayer of earls egged on the Háleygir, and also the Holmrygir; he went forth into battle' (*Skj* BI, 57, st. 3).

²¹ 'The obstruction of the army's truce (warrior) did not order his men to think about flight – so the words of bravery of the people's bench-mate (king) live on' (*Skj* BI, 150, st. 2).

víðlendr of bað vinda
 verðung Haraldr sverðum,
 frægt þótti þat flotnum
 fylkis orð, at morði.²²

Thus, as the king urges his troops into battle, he is at his most heroic, but his heroism is demonstrated through a poetic convention that in other verses describes kings who are about to die.

The trope of the doomed king urging his followers into battle emphasizes the importance of public speech in the arena of warfare, and it can be no coincidence that Haraldr is killed by an enemy who is equally skilled with words. In stanza 9, his antagonist is nameless, called simply the ‘jǫfra spjalli / orðheppinn’ [ready-tongued (*lit.* lucky with words) converser with kings] (9.7-8). The rival king is as skilled with words as Haraldr, and the epithet *spjalli* suggests an element of treachery in the killing, as if this well-spoken antagonist has been speaking to Haraldr’s followers behind his back.²³ Indeed, the term *jǫfurr*, normally a generic title denoting a king or ruler, has only been used previously in this sequence of verses to refer to kings Haraldr has

²² ‘Ruler of broad lands, Haraldr bade the troops to raise their swords to the slaughter; the king’s words seemed famous to the sea-farers’ (7.5-8).

²³ The connotations of the word *spjalli* and its related forms are mixed. The noun *spjall* can mean spoken tidings, such as an answer or a reply, but it is also cognate with the modern English word ‘spell’, denoting a spoken incantation, and is consequently also used to suggest mischief or danger. Cleasby and Vigfússon translate the phrase *jǫfra spjalli* as ‘the secret friend of kings’ (*CV*, 583). In poetry, *spjalli* is used in kennings for Óðinn and the giants that are not always full of praise: in *Sonatorrek* Egill accuses ‘Gauta spjalli’ [Óðinn] of betraying him (*Skj* BI, 37, st. 21), while the giant Hymir is called ‘Hrungnis spjalli’ in *Hymiskviða* (st. 16). However, the word was also used by skaldic poets in kennings for princes (*LP*, 530).

fought and subordinated; the repetition in this stanza of the same term implies that these conquered *jofrar* are the kings who have betrayed him.²⁴ The description of Haraldr's death further highlights his loss of control over language: whereas in stanza 7 he urged his troops to 'vinda sverðum at morði' [raise (their) swords to the slaughter], in stanza 9 the *jofra spjalli* himself causes Haraldr's death, also called a 'morð' [slaughter or murder] (9.8). This reappropriation of the word *morð* by his enemy mirrors the shift in power away from Haraldr. The king's previous speech act, urging his followers to accomplish *morð*, is shown to be powerless as Haraldr himself becomes the victim of that very act. The troops are no longer engaging in a battle under Haraldr's command, but in a murder orchestrated by his enemy. At this point the sequence moves from praise-poem to memorial.

After Haraldr's fall, Glúmr does not take part in the type of lamentation that poets such as Hallfreðr Óttarson would later express over the death of Óláfr Tryggvason. Rather, his approach to changing patrons is straightforward and the language used to describe his loss is financial rather than emotional. He says:

Fellumk hǫlf, þás hilmis
 hjǫrdrífa brá lífi
 (réðat oss til auðar)
 auðvǫn (Haralds dauði),
 en ek veit, at hefr heitit
 hans bróðir mér góðu

²⁴ In stanza 5 Haraldr is called the 'jofra þrýstir' [crusher of kings] (5.1) and in stanza 6 he 'réð jofra, / jafnborna sér' [ruled over kings as high-born as himself] (6.7-8).

(sæa getr þar til sælu
seggfjölð) hvaðarr tveggja.²⁵

In this stanza ‘auðván’ [hope or expectation of wealth] is a prosaically economic term, while the dryly understated complaint, ‘réðat oss til auðar /...Haralds dauði’ [Haraldr’s death did not bring us riches] (11.3-4), betrays a disappointment that has, at least ostensibly, little to do with the poet’s regard for his patron. If the poet felt some measure of grief about Haraldr’s defeat, his poem indicates nothing of it, nor does this sequence suggest that such emotions were expected by the contemporary audience. The poet looks forward in time rather than back: having demonstrated his poetic abilities by praising Haraldr, he focuses on gaining the patronage of the kings who follow him. His *auðván* must be answered by a new patron.

While the loss of Haraldr is seen in terms of the tangible, the benefits that his successors might bestow are imagined in the abstract: the poet does not ask the king’s brothers for money in such direct terms, but instead uses the figurative ‘góðu’ [good things] and ‘sælu’ [happiness or joys] (11.6; 11.7). This request for money is far more subtle than his mourning of its loss, but Glúmr cleverly pressures the kings into giving him ‘happiness’ by declaring that they have already vowed to do so: ‘hefr heitit / hans bróðir mér góðu /...hvaðarr tveggja’ [each of his two brothers has promised me good things] (11.5-6). In a poem of predominantly preterite verbs, the poet’s shift in this stanza into the present tense is striking: ‘en ek veit’ [but I know], ‘getr

²⁵ ‘Half my expectation of wealth fell from me when the sword-storm (battle) broke off the life of the king. Haraldr’s death did not bring us riches. But I know that each of his two brothers has promised me good things. The host of men get happiness from them there’ (11.1-8).

þar' [they get there] (11.5; 11.7). Russell Poole has examined the use of the historic present, a tense traditionally thought to have come from idiomatic Latin and used primarily in later verse, sagas and *rímur*.²⁶ However, Poole argues that the use of the present tense mixed with the preterite was part of an indigenous skaldic tradition, and it is notable that many of his pre-Conversion examples come from the ekphrastic poems *Ragnarsdrápa*, *Haustlong* and *Húsdrápa*.²⁷ Glúmr's change in tense from preterite to present in *Gráfeldardrápa* shifts the action of his poem from the historic past of the eulogy to the present scene at court and, like the composers of the shield-poems, Glúmr shows himself in the moment of composition, presenting his patrons with a valuable *object d'art*. Such a presentation implies a request for financial remuneration. In addition to this, Glúmr includes the rest of the court in this request: the two *helmingar* have the same structure in which Glúmr first speaks in the singular – *fellumk* and *ek veit* – and then repeats his lament or request with a plural subject – *rēðat oss* and *seggfjöld getr* – to extend his predicament to the entire court. By framing his personal loss and hope for wealth within the desires of the retinue as a whole, Glúmr is able to portray himself as the voice of the many and so to increase his bargaining power. The loss suffered by the poet is not shown to be felt in an emotional way. The king's death is merely an opportunity to compose a praise-poem that shows off Glúmr's abilities in the hope that the new rulers will commission similar eulogies for themselves.

²⁶ Poole, *Viking Poems on War and Peace*, 25-32, 43.

²⁷ Poole, *Viking Poems on War and Peace*, 44-7, 54.

Glúmr's sequence belies the idea that a memorial poem is necessarily about the past. His memorial is about the future, and about future poems that he hopes will be commissioned. Commemoration is shown to be a process of negotiation between two regimes, describing the interim period during which the poet has no patron but must seek another as quickly as possible. Eulogizing the fallen king gives the skald the opportunity to demonstrate his abilities and to signal his desire for a new patron; it is an exercise undertaken without any great show of emotion but with a great deal of pragmatism. The eulogy may be called *Gráfeldardrápa*, but it is as much about the poet and his abilities as it is about the king's.²⁸ Perhaps this is a reason the sequence has become scattered through so many different prose texts: rather than using the verses to discuss Haraldr's reign in the histories, later writers have focused on Glúmr's admirable poetic prowess, while the figure of the king he praises has faded into the background to become simply the vehicle that enables his display.

II. *Orðaskipti*: Exchanges on the Death of King Hákon inn góði

Although the saga-authors describe the performances of eulogies such as *Gráfeldardrápa*,²⁹ these poems are rarely cited in full, and the sequence as represented above is a

²⁸ This sequence certainly supports Anthony Faulkes' observation that when skaldic poets draw attention to their craft they assert the importance of the poet and his control over language as much as they promote the reputation of the king (*What was Viking Poetry For?*, 12).

²⁹ For example, scenes in which the poet performs upon his arrival at court, such as Arnórr jarlaskáld's recitation before Kings Magnús Ólafson and Haraldr Sigurðarson (*Mork*, 116-18), 'head-ransom' scenes such as Egill Skalla-

modern reconstruction.³⁰ In this form *Gráfeldardrápa* is a lengthy text that would have commanded the attention of its original audience for a considerable amount of time, as it does now the modern reader's. In the performance context, the recitation of the poem would presumably have silenced all voices but that of the poet.³¹ Modern readers experience a similar effect when presented with the reconstructed text and must engage, as they read it, with one poet's work only rather than with the heteroglossia of the prosimetric saga. In both cases, this focuses the audience's attention on the poet and on a single representation of the patron's death. However, exchanges between poets or quotations of verse by many poets are far more common occurrences in the sagas.³² Such exchanges may, like a formal *drápa*, also explore the death of a patron, but in such instances multiple poets may express a variety of different reactions to that death. Both the audience described in the saga and the audience reading or

Grimsson's *Höfuðlausn* (Sigurður Nordal, ed., *Egils saga*, 183-97) and recitations in battle, such as Þormóður Kolbrúnarskáld's performance of *Bjarkamál* before the battle of Stiklarstaðir (*Hkr* II, 361-3).

³⁰ Finnur's reconstruction of the sequences is discussed by Bjarne Fidjestøl in *Det norrøne fyrstediktet*. Universitetet i Bergen, Nordisk institutt skriftserie 11 (Øvre Ervik: Alvheim og Eide, 1982), 81-5. On the difficulties of such reconstructions, as well as the possibility that some *drápur* now read as long poems may have been prosimetric sequences even before their inclusion in the sagas, see O'Donoghue, *Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative*, 63-8. On the difficulties of distinguishing between *lausavísur* and stanzas excerpted from longer poems, see Poole, *Viking Poems on War and Peace*, 6-23. On the reconstruction of poems for the new *SPSMA* II edition, see Diana Whaley, 'Reconstructing Skaldic Encomia: Discourse Features in Þjóðólfr's "Magnús verses"', *Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World: Essays in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross*, eds. Judy Quinn, Kate Heslop, and Tarrin Wills, *Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe* 18 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 75-101.

³¹ This may perhaps be the ideal rather than the reality, to judge from the number of calls for silence in the skaldic corpus.

³² One may think for example of the many acrimonious exchanges between poets in the *skáldasögur*, or the plethora of different poets Snorri cites in *Heimskringla*.

listening to it are invited by the juxtaposition of different poets' verses to consider more than one point of view.

Such a conversation is presented as occurring between Glúmr Geirason and his rival Eyvindr skáldaspillir upon the death of King Hákon in góði, Eyvindr's patron, and the assumption of power by Haraldr gráfeldar, Glúmr's patron. The poets compete with each other, Glúmr by praising Haraldr for his victory and Eyvindr by mourning the loss of Hákon. In addition to this, their verses are set within various prose frameworks and each prosimetric version of the exchange inevitably adds another voice – that of the saga-author – to the mix. This particular conversation is recorded both in the anonymous chronicle *Fagrskinna* and in Snorri Sturluson's *Haralds saga gráfeldar* in *Heimskringla*. The same skaldic stanzas appear in both texts. However, the narratives surrounding the verses are very different: in *Fagrskinna*, the loss of Hákon inn góði is shown to affect his followers emotionally, while in *Haralds saga gráfeldar* the same episode prompts the king's skald simply to mourn his loss of patronage and wealth in a manner similar to Glúmr in *Gráfeldardrápa*, as discussed above. Such differences reveal how influential the prosimetric texts can be to the interpretation of these verses and to the poets' representations of commemoration. Although the modern reconstruction of long poems encourages the reading of texts that no longer exist in that exact form, the saga-authors too reveal a process of literary reconstruction in their preservation of these verses.

Chapter 14 of *Fagrskinna* describes the aftermath of King Hákon's death and the consolidation of power by his killer, Haraldr, son of Eiríkr blóðøx. During this process, Eyvindr

skáldaspillir's transfer of loyalty from one king to the next acts as a microcosm of the process undergone by the king's entire retinue. The chronicler writes:

Var þá Haraldr til konungs tekinn. En þá er Haraldr hafði tekit konungs nafn ok þeir bræðr, gekk hirð Hákonar konungs til handa hónum, ok varð brátt hirðin lítt samhuga, fyrir því at þeir er Hákonir hófðu þjónat ok þeir er áðr váru með sonum Gunnhildr, hófðu átt mǫrg vandræði áðr sín á milli, ok þótti hvárum sínir hófðingjar betri. Þat lýsisk í orðaskipti þessa tveggja skálda.³³

This *orðaskipti* mirrors the conflict between the two camps with each of the poets representing an opposing side: Glúmr serves the new king, Haraldr, while Eyvindr had a particularly close relationship with the dead Hákon. Just as the Norse word for conversion, *siðarskipti*, denotes a change in custom or tradition,³⁴ so the term *orðaskipti* here implies not only an exchange of words, but a watershed moment in which one poet is replaced by another as spokesman for the social group. Glúmr's praise of Haraldr precipitates a skaldic argument when he uses Hákon's death to celebrate the king's successor:

Vel hefr hefnt, en (hafna
hjórs berdraugar fjörvi)
folkrakkr of vant fylkir
framligt, Haraldr Gamla,

³³ 'Then Haraldr was taken as king. And when Haraldr and his brothers had taken the title of king, King Hákon's followers became his men and soon after there was little agreement among the retainers because those who had served Hákon and those who had earlier been with Gunnhildr's sons had had many difficulties between them before, and each thought their own chieftain the better. This is shown by the exchange of words by these two skalds' (*Ágr-Fsk*, 95).

³⁴ Dagfinn Skre, 'Missionary Activity in Early Medieval Norway: Strategy, Organization and the Course of Events', *Scandinavian Journal of History* 23.1 (1998), 23.

es dǫkkvalir drekka
 dolgbrands (fyr ver handan
 roðin sák benja rauðra
 reyr) Hókonar dreyra.³⁵

Gamli was one of Haraldr's brothers, killed by Hákon.³⁶ When Eyvindr hears this verse, he retorts,

Fyrr rauð Fenris varra
 flugvarr konungr sparra
 (malmhriðar svall meiðum
 móðr) í Gamla blóði,
 þás óstirfinn arfa
 Eiríks of rak (geira
 nú tregr gæti-Gauta
 grams fall) á sæ alla.³⁷

³⁵ 'Well has Haraldr avenged Gamli! Sword-bearing logs (warriors) abandon life. Battle-bold king, you performed a great deed where the dark hawks of the battle-flame (hawks of the sword, ravens) drink Hákon's blood. I saw the reed of red wounds (sword) reddened beyond the sea' (*Skj* BI, 68). In accordance with the information given in the sagas, Finnur dates this poem to 961-2. This is the only *lausavísa* attributed to Glúmr in the corpus of skaldic poetry, although in tone and form it is typical of stanzas from the longer skaldic encomia. It is extant in nine manuscripts and is therefore well attested.

³⁶ As recounted three chapters earlier in the text. The brothers Haraldr, Sigurðr and Gamli attack from Denmark but are beaten back by Hákon. During the retreat Hákon wounds Gamli, who dives into the sea to escape and drowns. According to the author of *Fagrskinna*, Hákon seems to have celebrated this victory in an ostentatiously public way, burying three ship-loads of Gamli's men and raising burial mounds over them. This public exultation may have particularly irritated Gamli's brothers and may be responsible for Glúmr's savage joy over Hákon's death in the verse (*Ágr-Fsk*, 81-2).

³⁷ 'Before that, the flight-wary king reddened the gag of Fenrir's lips (sword) in Gamli's blood. Anger swelled the poles of the weapon-storm (warriors) when the steadfast man drove all the sons of Eiríkr into the sea. Now the lord's fall grieves the guarding-Gautar of spears (Óðinns of spears, warriors)' (*Skj* BI, 63, st. 6).

The narrative frame has thus clearly set up the parameters of a skaldic competition, one in which the two political factions debate through poetry the merits of their respective rulers, and in which the two poets display their different relationships with those rulers.

Glúmr's verse is an accomplished piece of praise that incorporates many of the techniques found in *Gráfeldardrápa*. His verse extols King Haraldr as a great warrior while Haraldr's opponents are passive and cowardly. The king is 'folkkrakkr' [battle-bold] (l. 3), and his opponents are so outmatched that they actively run away from life to escape him: 'hafna / hjǫrs berdraugar fjǫrvi' [sword-bearing logs abandon life] (ll. 1-2). Hákon, the opposing king, is not a presence in the verse; only his lifeless body remains as ravens drink from his open wounds (ll. 7-8). The verse contains highly visual language in its depiction of the killing, with the repetition of colour-words 'rauðr' [red] (twice in line 7) and 'dökkur' [dark] (l. 5) bringing vivid pictures to mind. Glúmr's first-person declaration 'sák' [I saw] (l. 7), brings an immediacy to these images and invites the audience to see with him the course of events. In addition to this, Glúmr's use of nature-kennings places Haraldr's actions within an almost superhuman context: enemy troops are called 'hjǫrs berdraugar' [sword-bearing logs] (l. 2), a fitting description as they flee from Haraldr's burning sword, the 'dolgbrandr' [battle-flame] (l. 6). Likened to a destructive force of nature, Haraldr dominates the action of the verse.

Eyvindr's response is to all appearances a masterful reworking of Glúmr's, one which subverts the rival poet's language to reposition Hákon, not Haraldr, as the dominant king. Countering Glúmr's characterisation of Hákon's forces as cowardly, Eyvindr creates the image of

a king indefatigable in battle: he is ‘flugvarr’ [flight-wary] and ‘óstirfinn’ [steadfast] (6.2; 6.5).

The king is the subject of two active verbs, *rauða* and *reka*, dominating the actions of war.

Eyvindr inverts Glúmr’s vivid descriptions of blood and dead bodies when he declares that the king ‘rauð Fenris varra /...sparra... / í Gamla blóði’ [reddened the gag of Fenrir’s lips (sword) in Gamli’s blood] (6.1-4). It is the same verb, *rauða*, that Glúmr used to describe Haraldr killing Hákon, and the same action, reddening the sword. Here, however, the sword is not part of the natural world, but part of the mythological, and the person heroically reddening it is King Hákon. The visual image, as in Glúmr’s verse, evokes the liquidity and redness of the corpse’s blood, but Eyvindr echoes Glúmr’s image only to apply it to Gamli rather than to Hákon. A mythological kenning for the warriors, ‘geira /...gæti-Gautar’ [the guarding-Gautar of spears (Óðinns of spears, warriors)] (6.6-8), mirrors the mythological kenning for Hákon’s sword. Eyvindr’s use of mythology places the fight, like Glúmr’s verse, in a larger context, but in this case it is not the context of nature but the more impressive context of divine strife.

Eyvindr’s ringing praise is imbued with the emotions caused by the prince’s downfall, giving it a psychological complexity lacking in Glúmr’s verse. The two *helmingar* in this stanza are tightly structured with the second mirroring the first. In the first *helmingr*, Eyvindr describes events in the past, emphasized by the first word of the stanza, *fyr*. Both verbs in this section are in the past tense. The first describes the king reddening his sword and the second, the emotion of battle-anger felt by his followers: ‘malmhríðar svall meiðum / móðr’ [anger swelled the poles of the weapon-storm] (6.3-4). The *Lexicon Poeticum* defines *móðr* used in this

way as *lidenskabelighed*, or a strong emotion or passion; the word is used elsewhere to denote temperament, courage, or even elation, and in later Icelandic it also came to mean grief or affliction.³⁸ However, in conjunction with the verb *svella*, the word most probably refers to a feeling of strong anger caused by the battle. The same expression, *móðr svall*, occurs in *Haustlǫng* to refer to Þórr's battle-anger as he attacks a giant.³⁹ Structurally, the second half of the stanza echoes the first, as the initial verb also describes the king's actions as he drives Eiríkr's sons into the sea. It is an inversion of Haraldr driving Hákon's warriors from life in Glúmr's verse. The second verb then describes another emotion felt by Hákon's troops. In this case, it is the king's death that is the subject of the verb and it 'tregr' [grieves] his followers (6.7). *Trega* is more commonly found in eddic poetry than in skaldic, acting as a straightforward word for mourning. In *Sigrdrífumál* it is used in the gnomic statement, 'fjǫlð er, þat er tregr fira' [many are the things that grieve men] (30.4), and appears numerous times in

³⁸ *LP*, 412.

³⁹ *Skj* BI, 17, st. 14. In his edition of the poem, Richard North notes that there are similar expressions in *Ragnarsdrápa* in which Hǫgni swells in rage – 'þá svall heipt í Hǫgna' [then hatred swelled in Hǫgni] (*Skj* BI, 2, st. 10) – and a reference in *Vǫluspá* in which Þórr is 'þrunginn móði' [swollen up with rage] (26.1) when the giant-builder wins Freyja in the building competition. He suggests that the expression is an ancient poetic trope, as it has analogues in *Beowulf* and in the Old Saxon *Heliand* (*The Haustlǫng of Þjóðólfr of Hvinir*, 62). Carrolyne Larrington notes that the Old English *gebolgen* and *bolgenmod*, and the Old Norse *þrunginn móði*, and *þrúttinn* both describe realistic physiological markers of anger that are recognizable to both medieval and modern readers. See her article, 'The Psychology of Emotion and the Study of the Medieval Period', *Early Medieval Europe* 10.2 (2001), 251-6, esp. 254-5.

the laments of such characters as Guðrún and Völundr.⁴⁰ The action described in the second *helmingr* is no longer *fýrr* but *nú*; verbs are in the present tense as the battle-anger of the past turns to present and immediate grief. Unlike Glúmr, who in his verse praises Haraldr as a lone hero, Eyvindr intersperses his description of the actions of his king with the emotions of Hákon's followers as they react to his victories and then to his defeat. In this way Eyvindr shows his patron to be a leader of men, bolstered by a retinue of devoted followers; in comparison, Haraldr is shown to be a killer standing alone in the carnage of war.

Throughout this exchange the saga-author presents the verses as *lausavísur*, improvisations composed in the heat of the *orðaskipti* moment. The verses are predominantly introduced by the words *þá kvað hann*, a phrase associated with impromptu or 'situational' verses.⁴¹ To what extent, however, should a modern reader trust the saga-author in his representation of such verses? The similarities in the diction of the two stanzas do indeed suggest a relationship between the two, while the killing of Gamli by one king and the vengeance taken for him by another identifies a common source for the conflict. It may be that

⁴⁰ See *Guðrúnarkviða III*, st. 2, *Guðrúnarhvöt*, st. 2, *Völundarkviða*, st. 37, and *Sólarljóð*, st. 34 (*Skj* BI, 641). It also became common in later religious *drápur* about the saints, such as *Márituvísur II*, st. 7 (*Skj* BII, 534), *Plácitusdrápa*, st. 9 (*Skj* BI, 609), and Einarr Skúlason's *Geisli*, st. 59 (*Skj* BI, 442).

⁴¹ The differences between 'situational' and 'authenticating' verses will be discussed more fully in the following chapter. The terms are taken from Whaley, 'Skalds and Situational Verses', 251. Whaley follows in large part the division made earlier by Bjarni Einarsson in his article 'On the Rôle of Verse in Saga-Literature', *MS* 7 (1974), 118-25.

the story of the skaldic competition was constructed to account for these similarities.⁴²

However, the verses may also be extracts from longer poems, which, to heighten the drama of the moment, the saga-author has reduced to one-verse sound-bites, creating the illusion of an extempore conversation. Russell Poole has argued that the corpus of verses now known as *lausavísur* may have been enlarged over time as excerpts from longer poems were abridged during scribal and oral transmission.⁴³ If that is the case here – and it is tempting to assume although impossible to prove – the conversation between the skalds as recorded in the sagas represents a much longer and more complex exchange of complete poems in which they argued in favour of their two patrons. The narrative frame of the sagas obscures this potentially more complicated textual background by encouraging the reader to see Eyvindr’s reply as a quick and simple answer to Glúmr’s verse, rather than the carefully constructed riposte that his subversion of Glúmr’s language suggests that it is.

Eyvindr’s assertion that Hákon drove all the sons of Eiríkr into the sea would seem an excellent way of annoying King Haraldr, himself one of Eiríkr’s sons. Despite this, in the prose text of *Fagrskinna*, the king reacts instead to Eyvindr’s depiction of emotion. He complains, ‘[e]nn elski þér meirr Hákon konung, fari þér enn með (hónum) ok verið hans menn’ [you still love King Hákon more; go be with him, then, and be his men] (*Ágr-Fsk*, 97). The king’s use of

⁴² Whaley notes that the authors of *Heimskringla* and *Fagrskinna* probably used common sources for their works, including *Hryggjastykki* and *Morkinskinna*, as well as other texts that are no longer extant. The story of the skaldic competition may have its roots in one of these earlier sources. See her *Heimskringla: An Introduction*, Text Series 8 (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1991), 72.

⁴³ Poole, *Viking Poems on War and Peace*, 23.

the verb *elska*, ‘to love’, is surprising in this context. It is not a word that is used in skaldic poetry until the mid-eleventh century and only became popular with the introduction of Christian concepts denoting bonds of humanity or kindness.⁴⁴ It is possible that an earlier compiler or the author of *Fagrskinna* introduced this incongruous description of love into the text, perhaps basing his ideas on the close relationship between eleventh-century skalds and their Christian kings.⁴⁵ Eyvindr himself does not use that language of love; grief and anger are the dominant emotions in his commemoration of Hákon.

This framing of the verses with the vocabulary of Christian love between king and poet sits in stark contrast to what the prose narrative represents as Eyvindr’s unemotional attempts to buy the new king’s friendship through the motif of the *hofuðlausn*:⁴⁶

Þá váru þeir hræddir um Eyvind vinir hans ok ætluðu, at konunginn myndi láta drepa hann. Ganga til beggja vinir ok biðja konung friðar ok segja, at Eyvindr má bæta á þá leið, sem brotit var ok biðja hann yrkja aðra vísu ok kaupa sér svá vináttu konungs.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ *CV*, 127. The skalds Arnórr jarlaskáld and Þorgeirr flekkir use the verb to describe the love between Magnús inn góði and his subjects (BI, 310-11, st. 19 and BI, 305, st. 1). All other examples occur in later Christian verse, such as *Hugsvinnsmál*, *Pétursdrápa* and *Lilja*, as a search of *SkP* reveals.

⁴⁵ This will be discussed in Chapter Four.

⁴⁶ On the characteristics and function of the ‘head-ransom’ poem, see Margaret Clunies Ross, ‘Hofuðlausn and *Egils saga*’, *Notes and Queries* 51.2 (2004), 114-18, John Hines, ‘Egill’s *Hofuðlausn* in Time and Place’, *SBVS* 24.2-3 (1995), 83-104, and Alan Swanson, ‘Keeping One’s Head: The Rhetorical Strategy of the “Head-Ransom” Episode in *Egils saga*’, *Loyal Letters: Studies on Mediaeval Alliterative Poetry and Prose*, eds. L. A. J. R. Houwen and A. A. MacDonald, *Mediaevalia Groningana* 15 (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1994), 105-12.

⁴⁷ ‘Then Eyvindr’s friends were frightened for him and thought that the king would have him killed. The friends of both go to the king and ask him for peace, and say that Eyvindr might atone for his offence in the same way as he had caused it, and ask him to make another verse to buy the king’s friendship for himself (*Ágr-Fsk*, 97).

The verse Eyvindr recites next in order to buy his peace with the king contrasts greatly both with his and with Glúmr's previous stanzas:

Lítt kvóðu þik láta
landvörðr, es brast, Hǫrða,
benja hagi á brynjum,
(bugusk almar) geð falma,
þás ófolgin ylgjar
endr ór þinni hendi
fetla svell til fyllar
fullegg, Haraldr, gullu.⁴⁸

Instead of images of liquid blood and hot battle-flame, Eyvindr's second stanza presents images of cold and hardness. Arrows are 'benja hagi' [hail of wounds] and swords 'fetla svell' [icicles of the belt] (7.3; 7.7). Arrows break, *brasta*, on armour and the sword is 'fullegg' [very sharp] (7.2; 7.8). Whereas both Glúmr and Eyvindr created visual images of colour in their earlier verses, the predominance of hard metal objects emphasizes the sound of battle in this stanza: the king's sword is said to shriek, *gjalla*, when he draws it (7.8). The poet does praise the king, but indirectly: in contrast to Glúmr's first-hand assertion, 'sák' [I saw] (l. 7), Eyvindr distances his involvement with king when he notes, 'kvóðu' [they said] (7.1). The king performs no actions in the verse as weapons are personified and seem to conduct the battle without him: 'bugusk almar' [elm-bows curved], arrows 'brast' [broke] and the sword shrieked from the king's

⁴⁸ 'They said, land-guardian of the Hordalanders, that you let your spirit hesitate little when the wound-hail broke on armour. Elm-bows curved when, earlier, icicles of the sword-belt (swords), very sharp, shrieked from your hand, Haraldr, so that the she-wolf was sated' (*Skj* BI, 63-64, st. 7).

hand (7.4; 7.2; 7.6). The contrast is no longer between the poetic productions of Glúmr and Eyvindr, but between Eyvindr's own representations of Hákon and Haraldr.

In the prose narrative that follows, Glúmr expresses a low opinion of this verse and the king concludes that Eyvindr will never show proper loyalty towards him (*Ágr-Fsk*, 97-8). Urged to compose one final verse, Eyvindr's last effort is direct and uncloaked by the complex metaphors that characterise his stanzas cited previously:

Einn dróttin hefk áttan
 jøfurr dyrr an þik fyrra
 (bellir bragningr elli)
 biðkat mér ens þriðja;
 trúr vask tyggja dýrum,
 tveim skjöldum lékk aldri,
 fyllik flokk þinn stillir,
 fellr á hendr mér elli.⁴⁹

This is the most personal of Eyvindr's verses, one in which the poet uses five first-person verbs and two first-person pronouns. Kings are referred to by the simple skaldic vocabulary of *dróttinn*, *jøfurr* and *stillir*; the mythological kennings found in Eyvindr's praise-poetry seemingly have no place when Eyvindr talks about himself. The syntax too is simpler than in his previous verses, with seven subject-verb pairs – nearly one per line – ensuring short, unadorned sentences. Loyalty is at the centre of the verse: Eyvindr declares himself 'trúr' [true] (7.5) and

⁴⁹ 'I have followed one lord before you, magnificent prince. I do not look for another. King, old age presses upon me. I was faithful to the dear king; I never played with two shields. I join (*lit.* complete, fill up) your troop, king. Old age falls upon me' (*Skj* BI, 64, st. 10).

invokes the gnomic-sounding phrase, ‘tveim skjöldum lékk aldri’ [I never played with two shields] (7.6).⁵⁰ It is, however, a conflicted loyalty: for the first time in this exchange, Eyvindr addresses Haraldr using the intimate pronoun *þú*. The repetition of this pronoun twice, in lines 2 and 7, balances Eyvindr’s two protestations of loyalty to his former patron in the previous stanzas. Eyvindr does, however, provide a clever excuse for this sudden reversal of loyalty: the opposition set up between the two kings is excused by the onset of old age. The refrain of old age approaching, also repeated twice in lines 3 and 8, to some measure resolves the conflict set up between the kings as Eyvindr turns his focus to this new, more powerful master.⁵¹ Whereas the two kings were the powerful subjects of both Glúmr and Eyvindr’s verses, in this stanza the most powerful force is old age, and in the face of its approach the opposition between the kings ultimately pales into insignificance.

The construction of past happiness and present sorrow presents yet another opposition.

Recalling the opposition between *fyrir* and *nú* in stanza 6, stanza 10 begins with the word *fyrir*,

⁵⁰ *Trú* and the related verb *trúa* carry connotations of swearing loyalty and allegiance to one’s lord. Ruth Mazo Karras has written about the use of *trúa* in the context of conversion, noting that the conversion from one religion to another was not seen as a change in belief but of political loyalty in ‘God and Man in Medieval Scandinavia: Writing - and Gendering - the Conversion’, *Varieties of Religious Conversion in the Middle Ages*, ed. James Muldoon (Gainesville, FL: UP of Florida, 1997), 105. From Snorri’s *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, she cites the case of Eyvindr Kinnrifa, tortured by the king until he agrees to trust, *trúa*, in Christ (*Hkr* I, 322-3).

⁵¹ A more explicit personification of ‘Old Age’ can be found in the mythology when Snorri tells the story of Þórr wrestling the giantess Elli. In this episode the figurative language of the skald is made literal as Elli, literally ‘Old Age’, wrestles the god to the ground. Útgarðaloki explains Elli’s strength in a gnomic phrase that roughly echoes Eyvindr’s image of old age falling upon him: ‘fyrir því at engi hefir sá orðit, ok engi mun verða ef svá gamall er at elli bíðr, at eigi komi ellin qllum til falls’ [therefore there has never been, nor will there be, anyone so old that they experience old age, that old age will not bring them all to a fall] (*Gylf*, 43).

but, strangely, this thought is completed by the prose text, in which Eyvindr adds, ‘áðr en ek týnda Hákon’ [before I lost Hákon] (*Ágr-Fsk*, 98). Verse running over into the prose like this is unusual, and it only happens with this stanza in *Fagrskinna*, but not when the stanza is cited elsewhere.⁵² This prose conclusion to the verse may be an attempt to resolve Eyvindr’s strangely contradictory stanza in which, despite his protestations of loyalty to the dead Hákon, he does eventually join Haraldr’s retinue. The concluding prose phrase reiterates the death of Hákon, making Eyvindr’s desertion appear less treacherous. It also moves Eyvindr into the realm of everyday prose discourse, suggesting that, although he might conclude by joining Haraldr’s troop, he will not do so as a poet. In combination with the lack of kennings and other poetic language, this move into prose reveals a silencing of his poetic voice under the new regime. Eyvindr merges fully with the non-skaldic members of the *drótt* in the paragraph that follows his verse:

Eptir þat var Eyvindr með Gunnhildarsonum litla hríð; fór síðan til búa sinna, ok svá gørðu flestir Hákonar menn, at þeir þjónuðu (skamma hríð) Eiríkssonum ok settusk heima at búum sínum.⁵³

The conflict between Eyvindr and Glúmr is thus a reflection of that between Hákon and Haraldr: in the end, Hákon is killed and Eyvindr silenced. The chapter is infused with the

⁵² Although the stanza is cited in *Heimskringla* and in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, the phrase ‘áðr en ek týnda Hákon’ does not follow the verse in either.

⁵³ ‘After that Eyvindr was with Gunnhildr’s sons for a short time; afterwards he returned to his properties and so did the majority of Hákon’s men, so that they served Eiríkr’s sons for a little while and then settled back home on their lands’ (*Ágr-Fsk*, 98).

sadness and anger felt by all the followers of Hákon as their loss is shown through the microcosm of the skald's experience. In this way the author of *Fagrskinna* negates the possibility that any true change of patrons is possible, and suggests that the close association between the king and his followers must preclude any transfer of loyalty on the part of the skald.

The same episode is described by Snorri in *Haralds saga gráfeldar*, but this retelling is one of financial exchange. In Snorri's narrative, poetry is important not as an indication of emotion or of loyalty, but as a commodity that conveys prestige and which may be bought by the victorious king. There is no explicit conflict between the two skalds in this narrative. Glúmr is introduced simply as 'skáld Haralds konungs ok hreystimaðr mikill' [King Harald's skald and a very valiant man] (*Hkr* I, 198); introducing Eyvindr's verse, Snorri writes only, '[þ]essi vísa varð allkær, en er þetta spyrr Eyvindr Finnsson, kvað hann vísu' [this verse was well liked, and when Eyvindr Finnsson hears about it, he said this verse] (*Hkr* I, 199).⁵⁴ As in *Fagrskinna*, the two verses sit side-by-side in Snorri's narrative, but the tension they reveal about their two composers is only implied; the audience of *Heimskringla* must infer for themselves the relationship between the skalds. Unlike the king's protestation that Eyvindr

⁵⁴ Snorri also gives a short summary of the exchange in *Hákons saga góða* when he uses Eyvindr's *lausavísa* 6 to corroborate an account of Hákon's conflict with Gamli: 'Eyvindr skáldaspillir orti vísu þessa, þá er Glúmr Geirason höeldisk í sinni vísu um fall Hákonar konungs' [Eyvindr skáldaspillir made this verse when Glúmr Geirason boasted in his verse about the death of King Hákon] (*Hkr* I, 181).

does not love him in *Fagrskinna*, in *Heimskringla*, Haraldr fears for his own prestige when

Eyvindr composes a verse about his dead rival:

En er þat spyr Haraldr konungr, þá gaf hann Eyvindi þar fyrir dauðasök, allt til þess at vinir þeira sættu þá með því, at Eyvindr skyldi gerask skáld hans, svá sem hann hafði áðr verit Hákonar konungs. Var frændsemi milli þeira mikil.⁵⁵

Here, Eyvindr is both kinsman and paid employee and it is the king's expectation that both relationships should trump the skald's previous attachment to Hákon. In this narrative, Haraldr's anger is caused less by the content of Eyvindr's actual verse and more by the fact that he has composed any verse at all about a rival patron. In this narrative, it is not the poet's loyalty that is being transferred, but the poet himself. Haraldr is only appeased when Eyvindr becomes *hans skáld* – the possessive pronoun is very telling.

Snorri continues his portrayal of the financial aspect of the change in power by including two verses that are not in *Fagrskinna* at this point and which highlight the miserliness of the new kings. He writes, '[a]llir synir Gunnhildar vǫru kallaðr sínker, ok var þat mælt, at þeir fæli lausafé í jorðu. Um þat orti Eyvindr skáldaspillir' [all the sons of Gunnhildr were called stingy and it was said that they had hidden goods in the earth. About that Eyvindr skáldaspillir composed poetry] (*Hkr* I, 200). The two verses which follow provide evidence for this

⁵⁵ 'But when King Haraldr hears about it, he threatened Eyvindr with a death-sentence until the friends of both reconcile them with each other, so that Eyvindr would become his skald just as he had been King Hákon's before. There was a close kinship between them' (*Hkr* I, 199).

statement and highlight the financial, rather than the emotional, attachment of the skald to his former patron:

Bórum, Ullr, of alla,
 ímunlauks, á hauka
 fjöllum Fýrisvalla
 fræ Hókonar ævi;
 nú hefr folkstriðir Fróða
 fáglyjaðra þýja
 meldr í móður holdi
 mellu dolgs of folginn.⁵⁶

Fullu skein á fjöllum
 fallsól bráa vallar
 Ullar kjóls of allan
 aldr Hókonar sköldum;
 nú 's alfrøðull elfar
 jötna dolgs of folginn
 (røð eru ramrar þjóðar
 rík) í móður líki.⁵⁷

The two verses are similar and indeed the kennings for earth in the second *helmingr* of each stanza are nearly identical: in the first *lausavísa* earth is called ‘móður hold / mellu dolgs’ [the

⁵⁶ ‘Ullr of the war-leek (man of the sword, warrior), we carried Fýrisvellir’s seed (gold) on the hills of the hawks (arms) all through Hákon’s lifetime. Now the people’s adversary has hidden the flour of Fróði’s joyless maid-servants (gold) in the flesh of the mother of the giantess’ enemy (mother of Þórr, Jǫrð, earth)’ (*Skj* BI, 64, st. 8).

⁵⁷ ‘The setting sun of the field of Fulla’s brow (gold) shone on the hills of Ullr’s keel (hills of the shield, arm) for poets all through Hákon’s time. Now the elf-halo of the river (sun of the river, gold) is hidden in the body of the mother of the giants’ enemy (mother of Þórr, Jǫrð, earth). Great are the counsels of the mighty people’ (*Skj* BI, 64, st. 9).

flesh of the mother of the giantess' enemy] (8.7-8) while in the second it is 'jotna dolgs /...móður lík' [the body of the mother of the giants' enemy] (9.6-8). The order of the words changes but the basic image is the same.⁵⁸ The kennings for arm in the first *belmingr* of each stanza also echo each other: first the poet uses the kenning 'hauka / fjöll' [hills of the hawks] (8.2-3), and then expands it to 'fjöll /...Ullar kjóls' [hills of Ullr's keel] (9.1-3). In the first, the image is that of a hunting bird resting on the arm, while the second kenning is more overtly martial, with *Ullar kjóll* functioning as a kenning-within-a-kenning for shield. Such ostentatiously periphrastic phrases for gold place monetary exchange at the forefront of each verse, along with the poet's insistence that the previous king paid his skalds well: in both stanzas Eyvindr stresses the duration of this time of wealth: 'of alla /...Hókonar ævi' [all through Hákon's life] (8.1-4) and 'of allan / aldr Hókonar' [all through Hákon's age] (9.3-4).

Such similarities only make the differences between the stanzas more evident, inviting both the listening and the reading audience to examine the relationship between them. In the first stanza, the poet addresses the king directly, formally speaking for the rest of the poets at court using the first person plural, 'borum' [we bore] (9.1). In the second, the skalds and the king alike are described from a more detached, third-person perspective: Haraldr's reign is bad for *sköldum*, the dative case placing the poet in the role of observer rather than participant. The miserly king too is more active in *lausavísa* 8, having hidden, 'hefr /...folginn' (8.5-8), the gold

⁵⁸ Meissner lists four such 'mother of Þórr' kennings along with many others that refer to the god's familial relationship with other gods (87).

himself, while in *lausavísa* 9 the gold is simply ‘folginn’ [hidden] (9.6) by an unnamed person. The effect of these tiny changes is dramatic: while *lausavísa* 9 reads as a detached, third-person narrative of events, *lausavísa* 8 presents a direct conflict between the skald, who has personally felt the loss of his patron, and the usurping king who has actively caused this loss. In *lausavísa* 8 the poet introduces the audience to his own situation, while in *lausavísa* 9 he widens his scope to include all of the king’s subjects in his expressions of anger at his financial loss.

The similarities between these verses might suggest that they represent two versions of the same composition. However, the manuscript tradition tends to preserve both stanzas together: in the historical texts *Fagrskinna*, *Heimskringla* and *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* the two verses are recorded one after the other with no prose interjection. It is only in the poetical treatises that they are found separately to illustrate kennings.⁵⁹ This suggests that both stanzas were valued equally in the historical context and were not considered to be alternative versions of the same tradition. It therefore seems reasonable to assume that the small changes between the two verses are deliberate, with the first verse presenting the personalised conflict between king and skald, and the second opening up that conflict to represent the wider implications of the change in rulership to other members of the court. In a move not dissimilar to Eyvindr’s reworking of Glúmr’s praise-stanzas, Eyvindr’s reworking of his own verse creates a tension between the two stanzas that encourages the audience to weigh them against each other.

⁵⁹ In *Skáldskaparmál*, for example, both *lausavísur* are cited as examples of gold-kennings, while *lausavísa* 9 is an example of a kenning for the earth (*Skm*, 35, 43, 59-60). See *Skj* AI, 73 for the full manuscript context of each verse.

However, the emphasis throughout is on the poet's financial loss, in marked contrast to the emotional loss portrayed by Eyvindr's reworkings in *Fagrskinna*. As a result, when Eyvindr recites *lausavísa* 10, the verse in which he declines to follow the king out of loyalty to his last patron, this verse lacks the emotional framework that is found in *Fagrskinna*. Eyvindr's final capitulation to Haraldr appears far more self-serving and practical in the context of Snorri's narrative as this final stanza lacks the plaintive prose conclusion, *áðr en ek týnda Hákon*. The theme of financial exchange continues in *Haralds saga* when the king makes Eyvindr pay him a gold ring in penance for his verses (*Hkr* I, 202-3). This exchange is an inversion of the pattern of kings giving rings to their skalds for poetry and it resolves the tension between Eyvindr and Haraldr. In this narrative, financial exchange can smooth the transfer of power between two rulers, while poetry is shown to inhibit that transition. Poetry is a subversive commodity that, in the end, must be neutralised by the transfer of gold.

The two 'loss of wealth' verses are also cited in the text of *Fagrskinna*, but they appear after Eyvindr has rejected (and then accepted) King Haraldr as his new patron (*Ágr-Fsk*, 99-100). In this way, his decision not to *leika tveim skjöldum* lacks the motive of financial self-interest that it carries in *Haralds saga gráfeldar*. In *Fagrskinna*, the chronicler has already completed the story of Eyvindr by the time he incorporates these verses; the stanzas support instead his characterisation of the sons of Gunnhildr. Eyvindr's loss of wealth appears not as an episode in the story of the life of the poet but as corroborating evidence for the saga-author's assertion that the kings were miserly (*Ágr-Fsk*, 100). Eyvindr does continue to be used as the

poetic voice of protest in this chapter when two stanzas of his *Háleygjatal* are later cited as corroborating evidence for the kings' killing of Sigurðr, earl of Hlaðir (*Ágr-Fsk*, 101). However, the end of the chapter mirrors its beginning: as Glúmr Geirason has the opening poetic words, so he closes the chapter with a verse of ringing praise for Haraldr gráfeldr (*Ágr-Fsk*, 102). The stanza chosen is taken from Glúmr's memorial, *Gráfeldardrápa*, and in it Glúmr hails Haraldr as *Nóregs konungr* and proclaims his pre-eminence over other kings.⁶⁰ The citation of this stanza concludes the poetic competition begun at the beginning of the chapter: just as Haraldr rises to prominence at the expense of his rival kings in the verse, Glúmr, his poetic representative, successfully gains prominence over Eyvindr. Both king and skald are victorious. However, what seems to be a simple praise-stanza is really taken from a memorial poem. As the name of the poem is given in the prose introduction to the verse, any audience familiar with the skaldic corpus will be reminded of the memorial context of the stanza that follows (*Ágr-Fsk*, 102). Thus, the citation of this stanza concludes the chapter by foreshadowing the king's death and reminding the audience that the problem of changing patrons is one doomed to be repeated over and over again.

The stanzas discussed above portray two poets caught in the moment of transition between one ruler's death and another's assumption of power. Whether they wish to remain loyal to the dead patron or not, both ultimately transfer their allegiance to a new ruler. Neither Glúmr, after the death of Haraldr, nor Eyvindr, after the death of Hákon, really has a choice;

⁶⁰ This is stanza 6, cited above.

the commemoration of one's patron can only ease, in Glúmr's case, or complicate, in Eyvindr's, a process that is inevitable. Poets rely on the patronage of living kings. Although the possibility of remaining loyal to a deceased patron may be entertained temporarily in the verse, it is shown in these sagas not to be a viable option in the world of patronage.

III. *Vestrfararvísur*: Expressions of Loyalty

In the stanzas known as *Vestrfararvísur*, Sigvatr Þórðarson presents an inversion of the situation experienced by Eyvindr skáldaspillir and Glúmr Geirason.⁶¹ At the time of its composition, Sigvatr's patron, king and later saint Óláfr Haraldsson of Norway, was still very much alive, and it was the skald himself who precipitated a crisis of allegiance when he visited England and composed praise-poetry for Óláfr's rival, King Knútr Sveinsson. Consequently, these verses represent not a transfer of allegiance but rather Sigvatr's attempt to counter accusations that he has done so. He demonstrates the same preoccupation with financial reward as Glúmr in *Gráfeldardrápa*, but he decisively rejects the idea that a skald could be persuaded to change patrons simply through a desire for money and treasure. Instead, Sigvatr, like Eyvindr, posits an emotional bond between poet and patron. Unlike Eyvindr, Sigvatr successfully shows that the rhetoric of emotional attachment could excuse the skald's financial relationships with other kings. *Vestrfararvísur* is not a commemorative sequence, but rather one in which the poet anticipates the problems of commemoration. In this unusual sequence of verses the poet is

⁶¹ The poem is edited in *Skj* BI, 226-8 and in *Norsk* I, 117-18.

forced to engage with the anxieties that accompany the end of the poet-patron relationship even before the death of his king. The sequence demonstrates the increasing importance of expressions of emotional attachment in the early eleventh century, and the bond between poet and patron that Sigvatr promotes will become fundamental to the poet's reaction to his patron's death that will be discussed in the final chapter.

Although the title, *Vestrfararvísur* ('Verses about a Western Journey') is assigned to the sequence by Snorri in his *Óláfs saga helga* (*Hkr* II, 271), the poem of eight stanzas as reconstructed by Finnur Jónsson is not recorded complete in any manuscript. Stanzas 1-7 are preserved in *Flateyjarbók* and in Snorri's *Óláfs saga helga* in *Heimskringla*, while stanza 3 is also recorded in *Fagrskinna* and stanza 5 in *Knýtlinga saga*.⁶² In the latter two texts, the name of the poem is not mentioned, nor is it important; the stanzas have clearly been excerpted from the longer sequence to stand alone as 'authenticating' records for the sake of a narrative that has little to do with the story told in the poem. The author of *Knýtlinga saga* offers stanza 5 as proof of Knútr's generosity. While his main focus is on Þórarinn loftunga's *Tögdrápa* and the fifty marks of silver Knútr paid for that poem, the saga-author also notes that, 'Knútr konungur gaf Bersa Skáld-Torfusyni tvá gullringa, er báðir stóðu mörk, ok þar með sverð gullbúit' [King Knútr gave Bersi Skáldtorfusyni two gold rings, both a mark in weight, along with a gold-adorned sword].⁶³ He offers Sigvatr's stanza as evidence of this. The author of *Fagrskinna*

⁶² See *Skj* AI, 241-3 for the full manuscript context.

⁶³ Bjarni Guðnason, ed., *Danakonunga sögur*, Íslensk fornrit 35 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag 1982), 126.

provides even less information about the provenance of the poem, stating simply that Knútr planned to invade Norway, and offering stanza 3 as evidence (*Ágr-Fsk*, 190-1).

The story of the poem's supposed genesis is therefore told primarily by Snorri in his version of the story. The circumstances are related to those of the *hofuðlausn*, in which the poet has angered the king and must present a poem to win back his favour.⁶⁴ Sigvatr has been on a trading voyage and has had to return to Norway via England. While in England, he received money from Knútr and recited praise-poetry for him. Although *Vestfararvísur* is not a commemorative sequence *per se*, in the prose narrative it is ominously set in the year 1025-6 during the decline of Óláfr's rule and his imminent expulsion from the country by Knútr's forces.⁶⁵ The king's anxiety about his skald's loyalty is understandable because at this point in the narrative Knútr has begun bribing Óláfr's noblemen in order to persuade them to support his own bid for the Norwegian throne (*Hkr* II, 221-6). Even Sigvatr's fervent protestations of loyalty in *Vestfararvísur* are woven into a framework of verses that problematize his claims: the first four stanzas of the sequence are preceded by two stanzas from Sigvatr's *Knútsdrápa* and followed closely by four more from the same poem. In these stanzas Knútr is flatteringly described as a 'jöfurr ársæll' [bountiful lord] and the 'fylkis niðr / fráneygr Dana' [bright-eyed son of the king of the Danes].⁶⁶ When the skald returns to Norway, King Óláfr is unwilling to welcome him and echoes Haraldr gráfeldr's peevish complaint that Eyvindr will never be *hans*

⁶⁴ As discussed in the previous section.

⁶⁵ This is the date assigned to the poem by Finnur and it accords well with the chronology of Snorri's saga.

⁶⁶ *Knútsdrápa* stanzas 3 and 7, respectively (*Skj*, BI 232-33), cited in *Hkr* II, 270 and 274.

skáld: ‘[e]igi veit ek, hvárt þú ætlar nú at vera minn stallari. Eða hefir þú nú gøzrk maðr Knúts konungs?’ [I don’t know whether you plan to be my marshal now. Or have you now become King Knútr’s man?] (*Hkr* II, 293). Sigvatr responds with stanza 7 of *Vestrfararvísur*, repudiating Knútr and declaring his loyalty to Óláfr. The poet is then restored to favour.

Unusually, the sequence as reconstructed by Finnur begins as an intimate exchange between two poets. Addressing a friend rather than a patron, Sigvatr uses the informal first-person voice to create the illusion that the audience is listening in on a private conversation, a memory shared by two companions:

Bergr, hǫfum minzk, hvé, margan
 morgin Rúðuborgar,
 bǫrð létk í fǫr fyrða
 fest við arm enn vestra.⁶⁷

Such a beginning does not herald a formal, courtly *drápa* but rather a poem of the genre Roberta Frank has called the ‘versified travelogue’.⁶⁸ Sigvatr is certainly the skald whose works dominate this form, and Frank gives his sequence *Austrfararvísur* (‘Verses about an Eastern Journey’), likely composed before *Vestrfararvísur*, as an example typical of this genre.⁶⁹ In *Austrfararvísur*, Sigvatr recounts a diplomatic mission during which he travelled to Sweden with another member of Óláfr’s court, Björn stallari. Just as *Vestrfararvísur* begins by demonstrating

⁶⁷ ‘Bergr, I remember how we had many mornings in Rúðuborg – I moored the prow of the ship with rope in the western bay during the journey of warriors’ (1.1-4).

⁶⁸ Frank, *Old Norse Court Poetry*, 154-7.

⁶⁹ *Austrfararvísur* is edited in *Skj* BI, 220-5.

the poet's close friendship with Bergr, the *lausavísa* that immediately precedes Sigvatr's *Austrfararvísur* in *Óláfs saga helga* similarly alludes to Sigvatr's close friendship with his travelling companion: 'Björn, fagt opt at arna, / ...fyr mér at vísa / góðs' [Björn, you often went to ask for good for me from the king].⁷⁰ Emphasizing their physical discomfort along the way and humorously describing the unwelcoming pagans they encounter, Sigvatr in *Austrfararvísur* evokes the differences between home and away in an almost satirical contrast.⁷¹ The two travellers finally find comfort back at the court of King Óláfr: 'høll es dýr með øllu' [the hall is glorious with all things] Sigvatr says upon his return.⁷² *Vestrfararvísur* similarly describes the wanderings of two poets in a potentially hostile world. As in *Austrfararvísur*, Sigvatr establishes an emotive contrast between home and away, but in this case the contrast is between the halls of the two kings. The poet finds Knútr's hall dark and foreboding, while he takes joy in Óláfr's. This purely emotional reaction to each king's court functions as a metonym for the poet's relationship with his two patrons. His affection for Óláfr is shown to stand in direct opposition

⁷⁰ *Skj* BI, 247, st. 6, cited in *Hkr* II, 92.

⁷¹ O'Donoghue has discussed Snorri's presentation of *Austrfararvísur* in *Heimskringla*, noting that he divides the account of the voyage east into two parts, separating the chatty travelogue section from his account of the diplomatic mission itself. She observes that Snorri's object in citing this lively poem seems to be entertainment rather than instruction. See *Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative*, 64-8.

⁷² *Skj* BI, 224, st. 16. Frank notes that this satirical description of a journey is typical of classical and medieval Latin works. The satirical travel-narrative also appeared in poetry composed at Charlemagne's court, and she notes that there are similarities between such poetry and *Austrfararvísur*. She concludes that 'the literary genres within which Sigvatr worked seem deliberately and almost aggressively international' (*Old Norse Court Poetry*, 155). It is fitting that Sigvatr would depict his conflicting relationships with kings of two different countries in a type of poetry that is itself the product of many cultures.

to the financial relationship that exists between Knútr and the skald. Sigvatr rejects accusations of disloyalty by proving his emotional attachment to Óláfr's hall and in so doing he successfully postpones the end of his relationship with the king.

The poet first speaks of Knútr's hall in stanzas 2 and 3. Describing the locked door barring him from the king, Sigvatr immediately emphasizes his status as outsider: '[ú]tan varðk' [I was outside], he says at the beginning of the stanza (2.1). In *Austrfararvísur* the house of the pagan family was similarly unwelcoming: 'hurð vas aptr' [the door was shut], he notes.⁷³ However, in this instance the door to Knútr's hall is not simply locked; the figurative language Sigvatr uses, of the hall being 'meld...fyr hǫlði' [held in a noose] (2.3), is one of danger and transgression. The skald himself is prepared for trouble, wearing armour to the meeting (2.7-8). His apprehension is not without cause: in stanza 3 he learns of a plot to kill King Óláfr and there is a sense of the poet listening in through the locked door as he overhears the details of a conspiracy. Óláfr's enemies are shown to be plotting in tandem as 'Knútr ok Hǫkun' [Knútr and Hákon] (3.4) and 'Knútr ok jarlar' [Knútr and the earls] (3.6). There is a juxtaposition between Knútr's conspiracy and the lone, vulnerable figure of Óláfr: Knútr 'alt hefr' [has everything] (3.2), while he wishes to make the Norwegian king 'fjǫrvaltan' [life-faltering] (3.2). Sigvatr's description of the conspiracy is interspersed with his own emotional response to Knútr's plans as he remarks, 'konungs dauða munk kvíða' [I feel apprehension for the king's

⁷³ *Skj* BI, 221, st. 4.

death] (3.3). Knútr's hall is thus presented as a space of unknown danger and ominous possibilities.

This stands in direct contrast to Sigvatr's return to Óláfr's court. The sequence is no longer presented as an intimate conversation between the two skalds. Rather, in stanza 6, Sigvatr utters a formal call for attention:

Heim erum hingat komnir,
hygg þú at, jǫfurr skatna
(menn nemi mǫl sem innik
mín) stallarar þínir.⁷⁴

This stanza has all the characteristics of an *upphaf* that would normally occur in the first stanza of a *drápa*: adopting the formal, plural voice of the poet in line 1, Sigvatr addresses the king directly and announces his intent to recite poetry.⁷⁵ This sudden adoption of formal, courtly discourse in the middle of the sequence mirrors his resumption of courtly duties and the role of *stallari*. He does not ask the king for his position back, but assumes it, commanding,

seg, hvar sess hafið hugðan
seims þjóðkonungr beimum

⁷⁴ 'King of men, your marshal has come home to this place – behold that! Let men hear my verses as I perform' (6.1-4).

⁷⁵ As characterized by Clunies Ross in *Poetry and Poetics*, 38. See also Quinn, 'First-Stanza Quotation', 61-80. Although this verse conforms to the pattern of the *upphaf*, Snorri does identify the first stanza as the opening to the poem (*Hkr* II, 271), and that is the order that Finnur follows in *Skj*.

(allr es þekkr) með þollum
 (þinn skáli mér innan).⁷⁶

Unlike the trembling poet waiting outside the door to Knútr's hall, Sigvatr in this stanza is a member of the courtly community, entering the hall with confidence. The social bonds between the king's retainers are represented by the social space of the hall itself. That is, Sigvatr's position as a member of the community is represented by the physical 'sess' [bench] he assumes will have been reserved for him (6.5). He describes himself as one among many heroes, the 'seims /...þollar [trees of gold] (6.6-7), a kenning which describes both the warriors and the decorated pillars holding up the hall.⁷⁷ Contrasted to the poet *útan* Knútr's hall, the poet is now firmly ensconced *innan* Óláfr's, and he responds to this environment emotionally: 'allr es þekkr /...þinn skáli mér innan' [your hall is all pleasant to me inside], he assures the king (6.7-8).⁷⁸

The emotive contrast between the two halls serves to counteract the accusations, implied by the verse and elaborated on in the prose, of disloyalty thrown at Sigvatr upon his return.

⁷⁶ 'Say, king of the people, where you have provided a bench for heroes among trees of gold (warriors). Your hall is all pleasant to me inside' (6.5-8).

⁷⁷ The *Lexicon Poeticum* records many uses of *þollr* in kennings for men (*LP*, 642). However, the word could also be used metaphorically to denote Yggdrasill, as in *Völuspá* (st. 20) and the pillars of a hall, as in *Hymiskviða* (st. 13) when Hymir breaks the pillars of his hall in two.

⁷⁸ Cleasby and Vigfússon define *þekkr* as 'agreeable, pleasant, liked' (*CV*, 733). The *Lexicon Poeticum* associates *þekkr* with the somewhat stronger words *kær* and *yndet* [cherished or favourite] (*LP*, 637). Early poets also use the word with a sense of welcoming or valuing: in *Haraldskvæði* Þorbjörn hornklofi describes how men are not *þekkir* to a valkyrie (*Skj* BI, 22, st. 2), while in his *erfidrápa* for Óláfr Tryggvason, Hallfreðr uses the related verb *þekkjja* to say that the king welcomed or encouraged courage shown by his men (*Skj* BI, 150, st. 1).

Mirroring the opposition established between the two rival halls, Sigvatr sets up a contrast between himself and Bergr, demonstrated by the gifts they received from Knútr.⁷⁹ In stanza 5, Sigvatr again addresses his companion. In an unusual move for a skaldic poet, he focuses his attention on the gifts *not* given to him; rather, he praises Knútr's generosity to his fellow skald. Sigvatr leaves the exact amount of Bergr's reward unspecified, implicitly exaggerating the value of the gift. Bergr, says Sigvatr, received a 'mork eða meira' [mark or more] (5.5). He also received a 'hjør bitran' [keen sword] (5.6). This description of one skald's apparently ungrudging admiration for another's reward is not unprecedented but it is unusual; tales such as *Sneglu-Halla þáttr* and sagas such as *Bjarnar saga Hítðlakappa* and *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu* all describe the fierce rivalries rather than friendships that develop between poets as they jockey for success at court and in love. It is unlikely that Sigvatr's willingness to praise a fellow skald stems only from his admiration for the quality of the reward. By stressing the amount paid by Knútr to Bergr, Sigvatr establishes a similar, albeit more subtle, opposition of loyalty to that found in the exchange between Eyvindr and Glúmr, discussed above. Sigvatr and Bergr are shown to be friends, but they function in Sigvatr's poem as Eyvindr and Glúmr do in the saga narrative: Bergr's reward and consequent relationship with Knútr serve as a foil to emphasize Sigvatr's contrasting relationship with Óláfr.

⁷⁹ In *Óláfs saga helga*, this stanza is separated from the other verses in the sequence. Snorri cites it fifteen chapters earlier as corroboration that Sigvatr served Knútr for a time and that he received gifts from him (*Hkr* II, 224).

Unlike Bergr, Sigvatr profits only a small amount at Knútr's court. He is precise in declaring himself the recipient of no more than a mere 'halfa' [half a mark] (5.8), an admission he reserves until the final line of the stanza as if the amount is so small that he only remembers it as an afterthought. The phrase 'ræðr gǫrva ǫllu / goð sjalfr' [God himself governs fully over all things] (5.7-8), a seemingly rueful admission that he did not receive as much gold as his companion, highlights Sigvatr's lesser reward and his consequent refusal to be bought by a rival king. This conversation, ostensibly between Sigvatr and Bergr, is one-sided. Only Sigvatr speaks in what is really an account staged for Óláfr's benefit of Sigvatr's rejection of Knútr, and Bergr's acceptance. Just as Hallfreðr's representation of the rumours that followed the death of Óláfr Tryggvason is a 'constructed dialogue', so Sigvatr's report of his conversation with Knútr is constructed not to represent reality but to assure Óláfr of his loyalty.

The theatricality of this ostensibly overheard conversation between the two skalds continues in stanza 7 as Sigvatr recounts his meeting with Knútr to Óláfr. In this stanza, the reconstructed nature of the exchange is made explicit, with the two *helmingar* couched in a question and answer format. Sigvatr presents Knútr's request that the poet enter his service as indirect speech:

Knútr spurði mik, mætra
mildr, ef hǫnum vildak

hendilangr sem, hringa,
hugreifum Áleifi.⁸⁰

Sigvatr's reply is also reported indirectly in the second *belmingr*:

einn kvaðk senn, en sǫnnu
svara þóttumk ek, dróttin
(gǫr eru gumna hverjum
gnóg dœmi) mér sœma.⁸¹

This reconstructed conversation makes the exchange highly believable: Óláfr is able to witness personally his skald rejecting a rival king as the skald acts out the scene before him. The staging of such an exchange also grants the poet full control over the situation, able to report or misreport the words of the conversation as he chooses. Having moved into the formal discourse of the court in the previous *upphaf*-like stanza, the poet demonstrates through this reconstructed conversation his mastery over language, even the language of so powerful a king as Knútr.

In a further layering of theatricality, the reported conversation between Sigvatr and Knútr is visually mirrored by the figures of the king and poet as Sigvatr stands before Óláfr performing the verse. The identities of the two kings merge as Sigvatr repeats his reply, once addressed to Knútr, to Óláfr. This collapse of identity is further emphasized when the poet reports that

⁸⁰ 'Knútr, the generous man of valuable rings, asked me if I wished (to be) his servant, just as (I was) cheerful Óláfr's' (7.1-4).

⁸¹ 'I said it honoured me to have one lord at a time; I thought I answered truthfully. All men are given sufficient example promptly' (7.5-8).

Knútr asked Sigvatr to become his servant ‘sem /...hugreifum Áleifi’ [as (he was) to cheerful Óláfr] (7.3-4). One king mirrors the other as he offers an identical poet-patron relationship to the same skald. The kings occupy the same space as Sigvatr performs for them, but the skald is in ultimate control of both language and situation with the ability to choose his own patron. It is a form of power to which skalds such as Eyvindr and Glúmr cannot aspire. However, Sigvatr echoes Eyvindr when, having established both kings as potential patrons, he rejects one of them in favour of a more exclusive relationship with the other: ‘einn kvaðk senn /...dróttin /...mér sœma’ [I said it honoured me to have one lord at a time] (7.5-8), he announces. The theatrical quality of this pledge is further emphasized by its complex syntax: unlike Eyvindr’s simple, one-line assertion, ‘fyllik flokk þinn stillir’ [I join (*lit.* complete, fill up) your troop, king] (10.7), Sigvatr’s pledge extends over all four lines of the *helmingr*, requiring from his kingly audience a more active participation in the decoding of its meaning. His assertion of loyalty is wrapped around intercalary clauses that use the language of legal defense: ‘en sǫnnu / svara þóttumk ek’ [I thought I answered with proof] and ‘gǫr eru gumna / hverjum / gnóg dæmi’ [all men are given sufficient example] (7.5-6; 7.7-8). These are curiously self-referential phrases. The proof and example of loyalty Sigvatr alludes to must be the poem itself as no other form of proof has been offered. Thus, Sigvatr turns the hall into a courtroom and the surrounding *drótt* into witnesses of his devotion to Óláfr. Performing loyalty to the king is shown to be a highly public demonstration as the private, emotional bond between king and poet is sanctioned and affirmed by the watching community.

Bjarne Fidjestøl has suggested that Sigvatr's poems for Óláfr functioned as a form of ideological warfare in his struggles against the more powerful King Knútr. The public relations battle that took place between the two was not truly won until after Óláfr's death and sanctification, but even in verses composed before the king's death, Sigvatr attempts to use the discourse of sainthood to establish Óláfr as morally superior to his rival.⁸² As Fidjestøl writes,

i den mon Knut brukte gullet som våpen, kunne kampen om makta i Noreg sjåast some ein strid mellom ein rettferdig konge og *mammonsmakta*. Og dette er nettopp konteksten for Sigvats allusjon, "Ingen kan tene to herrar...de kan ikkje tene både Gud og Mammon". Utan å seie nok usant om Knut får likevel skalden med ein allusjon karakterisert Olavs sak som Guds sak og Knut som Mammons mann.⁸³

Knútr's recourse to bribery is noted both by Snorri in prose and by Sigvatr in verse. In *Óláfs saga helga* Knútr sends messengers to Norway demanding that Óláfr become a tributary king. Óláfr promptly refuses and Knútr's defining characteristic is shown not to be generosity, as in *Knýtlinga saga*, but greed: Óláfr remarks angrily, '[k]unna skyldi hann hóf at um síðir um ágirni sína. Eða mun hann einn ætla at ráða fyrir öllum Norðrlöndum?' [he should learn at last to

⁸² Similarly, Sigvatr's comparison of Óláfr to Christ in the sequence *Nesjavísur* has been discussed by Russell Poole in 'How Óláfr Haraldsson Became St Olaf of Norway, and the Power of a Poet's Advocacy', 20 November 2004, Margaret and Richard Beck Lectures, Icelandic Symposium, University of Victoria (Victoria, Canada), 28 August 2010 <http://web.uvic.ca/~becktrus/assets/text/poole_01.php>.

⁸³ "To the extent that Knútr employed gold as a weapon, the struggle for power in Norway could be seen as a conflict between a righteous king and the power of Mammon. And this is exactly the context of Sigvatr's allusion, "No one can serve two masters...one cannot serve both God and Mammon". Without saying anything untrue about Knútr, the skald nevertheless manages through this allusion to characterise Óláfr's cause as God's cause, and Knútr as Mammon's man' (Bjarne Fidjestøl, 'Kongetruskap og gulletts makt: om nokre Bibel-allusjonar hjá Sigvat skald', *Maal og Minne*. 1-2 (1975), 8-9).

moderate his greed. Or else does he plan to control all the lands of the north on his own?]

(*Hkr* II, 223-4). Having failed to convince Óláfr, Knútr begins to bribe his followers. As

Sigvatr says in a *lausavísa* placed directly after the stanza in *Vestfararvísur* in which he describes the gifts Knútr gave to himself and Bersi,

Hafa allframir jofrar
 út sín höfuð Knúti
 færð ór Fífi norðan
 (friðkaup vas þat) miðju;
 seldi Áleifr aldri
 (opt vá sigr) enn digri
 haus í heimi þvísa
 (hann) engum svá manni.⁸⁴

In two further *lausavísur* Sigvatr declares that those who betray the king for gold will end up in hell (*Hkr* II, 294-5). Óláfr is shown to be morally superior both to his nobles and to the wily Knútr. He is a Christian king who is not susceptible to bribery and Sigvatr follows this in his own rejection of the Danish king in *Vestfararvísur*. In these verses, Sigvatr acknowledges the court's expectation that he might have transferred his allegiance to another king because of a financial reward, but he counters that expectation by boldly proclaiming his own attachment to Óláfr to be something more. Sigvatr's verses reject Glúmr's cheerful transfer of loyalty to the next patron, as well as Eyvindr's resigned stoicism. His portrayal of his affection for Óláfr

⁸⁴ 'The foremost lords have presented their heads to Knútr from the north, out of the middle of Fife – that was to buy peace. Óláfr the stout never sold his skull like that to any man in the world. He often won victory' (*Skj* BI, 249, st. 15 and *Hkr* II, 225).

embodies the close poet-patron relationship described by Finnur at the opening of this chapter: theirs is truly one of ‘meget inderligt hengivenheds- og venskabs-forhold’.⁸⁵

Vestfararvísur is in many ways the antithesis of a typical skaldic poem. Whereas most eulogies affirm the skald’s relationship with the patron, in this sequence, Sigvatr publicly renounces his ties with King Knútr. Although most skalds use their poetry to praise the gifts given to them by kings, in this sequence, Sigvatr praises the gifts given to a fellow skald. While the *dróttkvætt* form invokes a formal, courtly discourse, *Vestfararvísur* ostensibly begins as an intimate conversation between two friends. As a poetic product, its worth is that of a *hofuðlausn*, but *Vestfararvísur* is unlike other poems offered to kings to buy their indulgence; it contains little praise of the king addressed and is more akin to the ‘versified travelogue’ in its meditative, first-person description of a journey. Creating in this way a subversive mixture of genres and discourses, Sigvatr challenges the audience’s assumptions about poets and their patrons, declaring himself free from the conventions of financial exchange. The verses by Eyvindr and Glúmr demonstrate that while skalds might have composed commemorative poetry in which they explored the difficulties of transferring one’s allegiance, they rarely had the opportunity to refuse. Only Sigvatr, in the unusual position of rejecting a new patron in favour of his previous lord, has the freedom to do so; but as the next chapter will show, even his power is as fleeting as the life of the king he serves.

⁸⁵ ‘Much intimate affection and friendship’, as cited at the beginning of this chapter from Finnur’s *Den oldnorske og oldislandske litteraturs historie*, I, 338.

**Chapter Four: The Many Faces of Commemoration: Elegy, Hagiography,
and Advice to Princes in the Eleventh Century**

Of comfort no man speak!
Let's talk of graves, of worms and epitaphs,
Make dust our paper and with rainy eyes
Write sorrow on the bosom of the earth.
Let's choose executors and talk of wills...
For God's sake, let us sit upon the ground
And tell sad stories of the death of kings.

Richard II, III.ii.144-56¹

At the beginning of Act 3, Scene 2, Shakespeare's Richard II is an unhappy man. Returning from Ireland to find that Henry Bolingbroke holds his kingdom, he despairs of his prospects and invites his few remaining followers to contemplate the many disastrous deaths that have befallen monarchs throughout history. The Old Norse skaldic corpus contains just such a compendium as would have delighted Richard, and no more so than in court poetry of the eleventh century. The poets serving King Óláfr Haraldsson and his son Magnús in particular, as well as king-like rulers such as the earls of Orkney, all tell sad stories about the deaths of their lords in language far more emotional and grief-stricken than that of their predecessors. Such monarchs, however, were not obsolete icons of an earlier age like Shakespeare's King Richard; rather, they ushered in a process of cultural and political development as Christianity became firmly established in Norway and its colonies. The role of the king transformed in the eleventh century as the patchwork of petty kingdoms spread

¹ William Shakespeare, *King Richard II*, ed. Charles R. Forker (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2002).

across Sweden and Norway became consolidated through centralized governments based on medieval Christian models of kingship.² Along with the new religion came new forms of art and literature derived from classical culture and contemporary European models. Anglo-Saxon missionaries were especially influential in Norway, both in terms of church organization and in the texts they introduced to their Scandinavian converts.³

As the role of the king changed during this time, so too did the role of the poet. Formerly serving as propagandists and retainers in the king's service, skalds documenting the lives of Christian rulers could now occupy an almost infinite number of roles, from advising the king in occupied territory and interceding for him with the Pope in Rome, to leading the people in prayer after his death and commemorating his life in hagiography. Skalds became increasingly close to their lords through such Christian ceremonies as baptism and marriage, and the poet-patron relationship came to be reinterpreted as a familial one. When the ruler died, the poet mourned

² Standard works on the Christianization of Scandinavia include Birgit Sawyer and Peter Sawyer, *Medieval Scandinavia: From Conversion to Reformation, circa 800-1500*, Nordic Series 17 (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1993), 100-28, and Martin Carver, ed., *The Cross Goes North: Processes of Conversion in Northern Europe, AD 300-1300* (Woodbridge: York Medieval P, 2003). For a more detailed account of the process of conversion in specific regions of Norway, see Skre, 'Missionary Activity in Early Medieval Norway', 1-19.

³ On the close relationship between England and Norway at this time, see Stefan Brink, 'Christianisation and the Emergence of the Early Church in Scandinavia', *The Viking World*, eds. Stefan Brink and Neil Price (London: Routledge, 2008), 621-8, John Lindow, 'Saint Olaf and the Skalds', *Sanctity in the North: Saints, Lives, and Cults in Medieval Scandinavia*, ed. Thomas A. DuBois (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2008), 103-27, and Birgit Sawyer and Peter Sawyer, 'Scandinavia Enters Christian Europe', *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia, Volume 1: Prehistory to 1520*, ed. Knut Helle (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), 147-59. On Scandinavian contact with Continental cultures (especially in the life of the poet Sigvatr Þórðarson, discussed below), see Judith Jesch, 'Vikings on the European Continent in the Late Viking Age', *Scandinavia and Europe 800-1350: Contact, Conflict, and Coexistence*, eds. Jonathan Adams and Katherine Holman, *Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe 4* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 255-68.

him as both a friend and family member. Eleventh-century poets expressed this grief through highly emotional, elegiac juxtapositions of past happiness with present sorrow. However, consolation was sometimes possible as the poet could advise the new ruler how to emulate his predecessor so closely that the poet-patron bond became re-established with the dead king's heir and surrogate. Sad though their stories may be, poets composing at the end of the Viking age continued to wield considerable political power through their commemoration of dead rulers.

This chapter will examine four texts or groups of texts that exemplify the cultural and political changes of the eleventh century. In the first section, Þórarinn loftunga's *Glælognskviða* sets the stage for the sanctification of King Óláfr Haraldsson, as the commemoration of the king and saint is used by the poet to offer advice to his Danish successor. The second section traces Sigvatr Þórðarson's commemoration of Óláfr, starting with his *Erfdrápa* and its description of Óláfr's final battle. Next, in a series of *lausavísur* composed after the king's death, Sigvatr mourns the loss of his friend and patron, but in the sequence *Bersöglisvísur* the poet coaches Óláfr's son Magnús how to emulate his father, both in the government of the country and in his relationship with the poet. The third section of the chapter turns from Óláfr to Magnús, examining the great public displays of emotion that are described in poetry composed about his funeral. The fourth and final section examines Arnórr jarlaskáld's commemoration of Kings Magnús Ólafsson and Haraldr Sigurðarson of Norway as suitable heirs to Óláfr the saint before turning to Arnórr's commemoration of the earls of Orkney and the difficulty of the poet's position as he is caught between two warring patrons.

I. Prologue: *Glælognskviða* and the sanctification of Óláfr Haraldsson

Þórarinn loftunga's *Glælognskviða*, likely composed between 1031-1035, contains no emotional outbursts of the type discussed above, but in this sequence the poet does commemorate a king whose death would later cause intensely emotional outpourings on the part of his followers.⁴ As discussed in the previous chapter, the missionary king Óláfr Haraldsson was exiled in 1028 after the Danish king, Knútr Sveinsson, bought the allegiance of Óláfr's supporters. Óláfr was killed two years later at the Battle of Stiklarstaðir as he attempted to regain his throne. Knútr promptly took control of Norway and eventually set his son Sveinn to rule in his place.⁵ The composition of *Glælognskviða* may be seen as a prologue to the commemoration of Óláfr and of his son Magnús after the restoration of the Norwegian monarchy in 1035, and Þórarinn himself is an early example of a skald who enjoyed a close relationship with a royal family, albeit with the Danes rather than the Norwegians. *Skáldatal* lists the Icelander as having served both Knútr and his son Sveinn.⁶ Matthew Townend suggests that Þórarinn was thus a dynastic poet who served father and son in

⁴ Finnur gives a date of 1032 for the poem, which is edited in *Skj* BI, 300-1. It is also edited in *Norsk* I, 152-3. Jessica Rainford gives a good summary of the traditional arguments for and against this dating, noting that the poem must have been composed after the translation of Óláfr's relics to St Clement's Church in August of 1031 and Sveinn's flight into exile in 1035. See her doctoral thesis, 'Óláfr Haraldsson, King and Saint of Norway, and the Development of Skaldic Style (ca. 1015-ca. 1153)', D. Phil. thesis (University of Oxford, 1996), 74. Matthew Townend suggests that the poem must date from before the rebellion against Danish rule that started in the spring of 1034 in 'Knútr and the Cult of St Óláfr: Poetry and Patronage in Eleventh-Century Norway and England', *VMS* 1 (2005), 260. Rainford summarises the many interpretations scholars have suggested for the title of the poem in 'Óláfr Haraldsson, King and Saint of Norway', 84-5.

⁵ This is related by Snorri in *Hkr* II, 328-415.

⁶ *Skáldatal*, 351.

much the same way that Sigvatr Þórðarson would later serve Óláfr and his son Magnús.⁷ Asking whether the establishment of Óláfr's cult in Norway was a case of 'like father, like son', Townend notes that as king of England, Knútr was an avid supporter of the cults of the Anglo-Saxon royal saints, especially those martyred by Scandinavian raiders. Knútr was well acquainted with the political power of skaldic verse and Þórarinn may well be applying Knútr's successful methods of ruling England to Sveinn's analogous situation in Norway.⁸

It is therefore unsurprising that *Glælognskviða* is as much a *speculum principis* as it is a commemorative text. Þórarinn does describe the death of Óláfr and the miracles performed by the saintly king after his death, but his poem is addressed to Sveinn, Óláfr's successor. The poet not only praises the deeds of the living Óláfr, but also instructs his usurper on how best to use the saint's legacy in order to legitimize his own rule. In this, the poem is ideologically similar to the early genealogical poems *Ynglingatal* and *Háleygjatal*, in which the lives of past kings are recited in order to legitimize their descendants' regimes. The *kviðubáttr* metre in which *Glælognskviða* is composed further emphasizes the similarities.⁹ In this poem, however, Þórarinn uses the dead king to provide not an actual but a spiritual genealogy for Sveinn. His poem is one of the earliest literary works to establish the sanctity of the dead king and to assert the importance of

⁷ Townend, 'Knútr and the Cult of St Óláfr', 256.

⁸ Townend, 'Knútr and the Cult of St Óláfr', 256, 264.

⁹ Rainford provides a detailed metrical analysis comparison of the poems in 'Óláfr Haraldsson, King and Saint of Norway', 100-1. Martin Chase suggests that the use of this metre may be an ironic comment on Sveinn's usurpation of the royal throne and thus his interruption of the royal lineage in *EMS*, 74.

commemorating the saint properly in order to influence the affairs of the living.¹⁰ Þórarinn brings into the literary realm what was happening in the historical one – the translation of Óláfr’s remains and his unofficial canonization – and paves the way for the poets who would later mourn Óláfr and his immediate family members as models of Christian kingship.

Glælognskviða is included almost as a single sequence in Snorri Sturluson’s *Óláfs saga helga*: nine of the ten extant stanzas are cited without any prose interruption near the end of that saga as Snorri describes the disastrous reign of Sveinn and the first miracles witnessed around Óláfr’s relics.¹¹ On its own, however, the sequence is inadequate for Snorri’s hagiographic purposes and he elaborately excuses Þórarinn for not including as many miracles as he might have in his poem:

En svá sem Þórarinn segir, at til ins helga Óláfs konungs kom herr mans, haltir ok blindir eða á annan veg sjúkir, en fóru þaðan heilir, getr hann ekki annars eða greinir en þat myndi vera ótalligr fjöldi manna, er heilsu fengu þá þegar í upphafi af jartegnagørð ins helga Óláfs konungs.¹²

¹⁰ Rainford discusses the early sources and analogues for the rise of Óláfr’s cult, noting that *Glælognskviða* is an important source of historical information as well as the first step in a literary tradition. The poem predates Snorri’s *Óláfs saga helga* as well as the legendary, homiletic and oral material; such texts were likely influenced by hagiographic convention and may therefore be less historically reliable (‘Óláfr Haraldsson, King and Saint of Norway’, 75-83). As noted above, however, some scholars have observed Christ-like imagery in Sigvatr’s portrayal of the king even during his lifetime (Poole, ‘How Óláfr Haraldsson Became St Olaf of Norway’, and Fidjestøl, ‘Kongetruskap og gullets makt’, 4-11).

¹¹ Stanza 1 occurs earlier, in Chapter 239 of the saga (*Hkr* II, 399, as well as in *Ágr-Fsk*, 201), while stanzas 2-10 are recorded in Chapter 245 (*Hkr* II, 406-408). Snorri introduces the poem by stating both the name of the skald and the title, and concludes with a summary of the miracles related in it. Rainford suggests that the first stanza may originally have introduced a section on Sveinn’s journey to Norway and other events during his early rule, thus addressing the imbalance in the poem between Sveinn and Óláfr (‘Óláfr Haraldsson, King and Saint of Norway’, 85).

¹² ‘And when Þórarinn says in this way that a multitude of men came to King Óláfr the holy, lame or blind or in any other way sick, and that they went away from there healed, he does not say otherwise than that there would have been

Despite the paucity of miracles in Þórarinn's sequence, Snorri does still accord it pride of place in his prosimetric text, suggesting that not only the content, but also the status of the poem *as a poem* remained an integral part of the commemoration of the king two centuries after his death. As discussed in the second chapter of this thesis, it is unusual for Snorri to cite so many stanzas together as a set sequence; the placement of this sequence close to the end of the saga and its near-continuous citation recalls Snorri's quotation of the entire poem *Hákonarmál* at the end of *Hákons saga ins góða* (*Hkr* I, 193-7). *Glælognskviða* functions in a similar way to *Hákonarmál*, providing a suitably poetic bookend to the prose narrative of Óláfr's life.¹³ However, in the case of a Christian saint, the saga-author cannot, as in *Hákons saga*, end by describing the king's death and his entrance into Valhöll. The biography of such a king must demonstrate his extraordinary devotion to Christian values and include a record of the miracles performed after his death. *Glælognskviða*, therefore, is not so much a bookend as a bookmark in the saga, a poetic interlude that signals the conclusion of the saint's earthly life and the beginning of his celestial role. It is evident that skalds contemporary with this Christian king were not alone in expanding the conventions of their craft in order to accommodate his sainthood: even the later biographer Snorri reflects the changed nature of their commemorative verses and adapts the prosimetric form to fit the more complex case of a king who is also a saint.

a large multitude of men who got their health back then, as soon as the working of miracles by King Óláfr the holy began' (*Hkr* II, 409).

¹³ As noted in Chapter Two in my discussion of the poem, Joseph Harris suggests that the citation of *Hákonarmál* at the end of the saga gives 'artistic shape' to Snorri's large collection of biographies ('The Prosimetrum of Icelandic Saga', 141).

Although the poem is not set in the formal *dróttkvætt* metre that poets such as Sigvatr Þórðarson would later use in their commemorative verses, the first two stanzas open with conventional skaldic praise of Sveinn:

þar vill ey
ævi sína
bauga brjótr
byggðum ráða.¹⁴

This flattering declaration is firmly in the tradition of the skaldic praise poetry that has been discussed previously, and the epithet ‘þjóðkonungr’ [king of the people, nation] in the same stanza further emphasizes Sveinn’s status as a leader of the community (2.3). Curiously, the king is also referred to as a ‘döglíngr’ [prince (*lit.* descendant of Dagr)] (1.4), potentially evoking the royal genealogy of *Ynglingatal*. However, it is likely that the origins of this noun (if indeed Dagr was ever a historical figure) were obscure by this time and that the word was simply used to address a man of high status, not necessarily of the Norwegian royal family.¹⁵ Sveinn is thus praised as any king who received a *drápa* might expect to be, and it is therefore all the more surprising when the poet turns his attention to Óláfr, Sveinn’s rival, in the remaining verses of the sequence.

¹⁴ “The breaker of rings will rule the land (*lit.* the inhabited places) throughout his lifetime’ (2.5-8).

¹⁵ *Döglíngr* is a relatively common *heiti* for ‘king’, occurring twenty-eight times in the skaldic corpus (*SkP*). Eyvindr’s use of the word in *Hákonarmál* (discussed in Chapter Two) is the earliest recorded usage, but it is in the plural in that poem and refers to princes in general rather than to one king with a particularly illustrious line of descent. The majority of uses occur, like this example, in the eleventh century in such poems as Þjóðólfr Arnórsson’s *Sexsteffa* (*Skj* BI, 342, st. 15), and in Arnórr jarlaskáld’s *Hrynhenda* (*Skj* BI, 308, st. 11) and *Haraldsdrápa* (*Skj* BI, 325, st. 18). In later poems the word refers to God and kings in general: the thoroughly Christian Kálfr Hallsson’s *Kátrínardrápa* (*Skj* BII, 571, 581, sts. 7, 47) and *Leiðarvísan* (*Skj* BI, 622, 631, sts. 1, 35) provide examples of this.

This poem is not only the first extant sequence to commemorate Óláfr, but also one of the earliest poems to commemorate a Scandinavian king within the explicitly Christian framework of sainthood. As with any commemorative piece, the skald must portray the dead king as a victorious hero, a difficult rhetorical move to perform for one who had been defeated in battle. As in the early commemorative poems discussed in Chapter Two, pre-Christian poets could attribute the king's defeat to supernatural forces such as the valkyries and Óðinn; a king like Eiríkr blóðøx or Hákon inn góði who was killed at the behest of the pagan gods became an even greater warrior in the afterlife as his status as a warrior at Ragnarøk to some extent exonerated him of having lost the battle on earth. In Óláfr's case however, a depiction of the king entering the pre-Christian warrior's afterlife was not an option available to his skalds. Rather, Þórarinn shows the king himself actively choosing to relocate to heaven rather than to remain on earth: 'hann hvarf / til himinríkis' [he turned to the kingdom of heaven] (3.3-4), the poet notes, and '[h]afði sér / harðla ráðit / ...til himinríkis' [with determination, (he) had arranged himself to go to the kingdom of heaven] (4.1-4). It is a rhetorical move such as that found in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* poem commemorating the death of King Edgar in 975:

Her geendode eorþan dreamas:
 Eadgar, Angla cing, ceas him oþer leoht,
 wlytig ȝ winsum, ȝ ðis wace forlet,
 lif þis læne.¹⁶

¹⁶ 'Here ended the earthly joys of Edgar, king of the English. Beautiful and charming, he chose the other light and left this feeble, temporary life' (ll. 1-4). 'The Death of Edgar [975]' in Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, vol. 5: MS C (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001), 82.

Both royal saints follow a well-established model in Anglo-Saxon literature: in *Christ III*, Christ himself speaks to the reader of his choice to be crucified, saying it was through ‘willum minum’ [my own will] that he mounted the cross (l. 1492).¹⁷ Similarly, in this poem the agency is Óláfr’s alone as the king chooses to give up his life in order to attain salvation. In addition to this, his very condition of being dead is brought into question in the text as the poet does not describe the final battle and instead shows the king to be a ‘kykvasettir’ [living seat] (3.7)¹⁸, while his body displays signs of life with his hair and nails continuing to grow (5.5-8). Óláfr’s sanctity simultaneously defies and calls into question the function of poetic commemoration: is it possible to commemorate someone who is not quite dead? Can this poem truly be called a commemorative text when its political efficacy depends upon the poet’s ability to convince his audience that the person commemorated still has agency in the world of the living?

In *Glælognskviða*, Óláfr occupies a liminal space between heaven and earth. In Þórarinn’s words, the king now acts as a ‘sættir’ [peace-maker, mediator] between the two realms (4.6). Jessica Rainford notes that the trope of Óláfr as a mediator between men and God is repeated many

¹⁷ *Exeter*, 3-49. Christopher Chase discusses this trope as a staple of early medieval penitential literature throughout Europe, noting that both *Christ III* and *The Dream of the Rood* emphasize Christ’s voluntary suffering in order to move the audience to penitence. See his “‘Christ III,’ ‘The Dream of the Rood,’ and Early Christian Passion Piety”, *Viator* 11 (1980), 11-33. Rainford notes that the Anglo-Saxon royal saints Sigebert and Edmund are also shown choosing to fight in battle rather than retire to a monastery (‘Óláfr Haraldsson, King and Saint of Norway’, 76).

¹⁸ I follow Rainford’s translation here. Lindow suggests the somewhat different translation, ‘living burial’ (‘St Olaf and the Skalds’, 123). Rainford, however, notes that the concept of burial would not have applied to Óláfr’s relics after his body had been exhumed and translated to the church (‘Óláfr Haraldsson, King and Saint of Norway’, 111).

times in later poetry such as Einarr Skúlason's *Geisli*.¹⁹ Having established, as Rainford puts it, 'an intellectual definition of sanctity (coexistence in earthly and divine spheres, mediation between God and human supplicants)', the poet then turns to the relics, the medium through which the saint influences the human world.²⁰ The relics are as liminal as the king himself: dead and alive, they are part of Óláfr's lifeless body but also the means by which pilgrims' bodies are rejuvenated and healed. The power of these relics transcends the space in which they are contained, Óláfr's coffin, and affects a much larger space around it as the poet blurs the line between the relics and the church that houses them. Through the repetition of the word 'þar' [there] at the beginning of each of the four stanzas in which Þórarinn describes the miracles, the space in which the divine and the human come into contact is placed at the forefront of each verse. Compare the opening declarations of each of the four stanzas:

Þar svát hreinn / með heilu liggr / lofsæll gramr...²¹

Þar borðveggs / bjöllur kneigu / of sæing hans...²²

En þar upp / af altári / Kristi þæg / kerti brenna...²³

Þar kómr herr, / es heilagr es / konungr sjalfr...²⁴

¹⁹ As in stanzas 14, 18 and 31 of that poem. For a full list, see Rainford, 'Óláfr Haraldsson, King and Saint of Norway', 111-12, as well as Martin Chase's discussion in *Einarr Skúlason's Geisli* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2005), 21-44.

²⁰ Rainford, 'Óláfr Haraldsson, King and Saint of Norway', 112.

²¹ 'There, so that the famous lord lies pure with an unharmed...' (5.1-3).

²² 'There, bells of the board-wall are able, above his bed...' (6.1-3).

²³ 'And there, up on the altar, candles burn, pleasing to Christ...' (7.1-4)

²⁴ 'There comes a host, to where the holy [king] is...' (8.1-3). Finnur's edition here follows a manuscript variation, dismissed by Rainford. Rainford offers instead the base reading *Þar kómr herr* and notes that Finnur's reading appears to reflect Snorri's prose paraphrase introducing the stanza. I reflect her edition in my translation.

Four miracles – the preservation of the king’s body, the church bells that ring by themselves, the candles that burn upon the altar, and the healing of the deaf and dumb – occupy *þar*, the space of the church. *Þar* is not only the church, but also the location of the king’s body: the bells ring ‘of *sæing hans*’ [over his bed] (6.3) and ‘of *konungmanni*’ [over the kingly man] (6.8), while pilgrims come ‘es *heilagr es / konungr sjalfr*’ [to where the holy king himself is] (8.2-3). The king’s body (hair and nails), the fabric of the church (bells and candles), and the bodies of the pilgrims (eyes and limbs) who come to the church are all subject to miraculous acts. The sanctity of the king thus expands beyond his coffin and the church itself functions like the burial mounds of the pre-Christian kings: it is a memorable, highly visible reminder of the king and saint entombed inside.

Two complex kennings, the only two instances of such highly periphrastic language in this otherwise simple sequence, further emphasize the blending of the saint’s body with the fabric of the church. In stanza 6, the genitive compound ‘*borðveggs*’ [board-wall’s] (6.1) could modify either ‘*bjöllur*’ [bells] (6.2) or ‘*sæing*’ [bed] (6.3). If the former is intended, the kenning *borðveggs bjöllur* would suggest the idea of a belfry or of a wooden panel to which the bells are affixed; if the latter, the kenning refers to Óláfr’s wooden coffin, *borðveggs sæing*. Both readings have been proposed and the debate is irresolvable as both are, grammatically speaking, equally valid.²⁵ Either the coffin or the fabric of the church could be constructed out of *borðveggir*, and the ambiguity of

²⁵ Finnur and Rainford interpret the kenning to refer to the coffin. For a full discussion of the different definitions see Rainford, ‘Óláfr Haraldsson, King and Saint of Norway’, 112.

this modifier alerts the audience to the similarity of these structures.²⁶ A kenning in the final stanza also plays on this conflation of saint and church:

Þás þú rekr
fyr reginnagla
bóka-máls
bœnir þínar.²⁷

Describing Óláfr as the ‘reginnagli / bóka-máls’ [holy nail of book-language] (10.3-4), the poet describes the saint not only as a cornerstone of the Christian religion, but also as a very tangible piece of the church’s construction, a nail. A pun on the verb *reka* weaves the two meanings together as the poet instructs Sveinn to say or perform (‘reka’) his prayers; the same verb is also used of driving nails into wood.²⁸ It should be noted that Rainford acknowledges the possibility of this pun, but she suggests that such a meaning would destroy the kenning *reginnagli bóka-máls* and

²⁶ Frands Herschend discusses the metaphor of death as a house in the late Viking age and early medieval period, noting the many examples of coffins decorated or shaped as houses (‘Material Metaphors’, 41-6). One might also think of the Celtic house-shaped reliquaries, such as the eighth-century Monymusk Reliquary held in the National Museum of Scotland.

²⁷ When you (Sveinn) say (or hammer in) your prayers in the place of the holy nail of book-language (nail of the church, Óláfr). This kenning is a complex one and as such stands out among the otherwise simple syntax of Þórarinn’s verse. See Rainford ‘Óláfr Haraldsson, King and Saint of Norway’, 115 for a complete list of the many variants. I follow Kock (*NN*, § 2017) and Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (*Hkr* II, 408-9) in reading *reginnagla* as a dative singular referring to Óláfr himself. Finnur’s suggestion that the word is an accusative plural referring to priests, ‘pillars of the book-language’, seems unlikely in a poem in which Óláfr is clearly the main subject. For an entirely different reading, it is also possible that the kenning refers not to Óláfr but to a pointer (the *nagli*) that would mark one’s place in a Bible (the *bókamál*). My thanks to Russell Poole for this suggestion.

²⁸ *CV*, 492.

shift the emphasis away from Óláfr himself.²⁹ I find it more likely, however, that the kenning invites a deliberate comparison between the living, praying Sveinn and the dead King Óláfr: the verse may be read, ‘when you (Sveinn) hammer in your prayers in the place of the holy nail of book-language (Óláfr)’. In this reading, the emphasis of the poem does not shift away from Óláfr. Rather, the two kings are brought into concert in the holy space of the church and shrine as Óláfr grants and Sveinn receives the kingdom. In so doing, Sveinn successfully proves his legitimacy as Óláfr’s successor.

As well as announcing the continued vitality of both the king and his place of worship, Þórarinn speaks in the imperative and exhorts Sveinn to ask Óláfr for his blessing to further legitimize the transfer of power from one king to the next:

Bið Áleif,
at unni þér
(hann ’s goðs maðr)
grundar sinnar.³⁰

The language of lord-retainer relationships is used in this stanza to show that Óláfr is both giver and recipient, a ‘mediator’ who transfers land and prosperity from God to Sveinn. Óláfr is himself a vassal of God – *hann ’s goðs maðr* – and as such he ‘getr /...ár ok frið’ [receives peace and plenty] from his lord (9.5-7). Unlike the poets of the genealogical works, Þórarinn does not use the memory of the dead king to legitimize his successor’s rule *per se*; rather, he urges Sveinn to ask

²⁹ Rainford construes the phrase as ‘[þ]ás þú rekr fyr reginnagla [bókamáls böenir] þínar’ [when you hammer in like a sacred nail your prayers in learned language] (‘Óláfr Haraldsson, King and Saint of Norway’, 115).

³⁰ ‘Pray to Óláfr that he may bestow his land upon you – he is God’s man’ (9.1-4).

Óláfr for that legitimation himself. It is a striking shift in the balance of power between kings and skalds: whereas in the early genealogical poems Þjóðólfr and Eyvindr emphasized the craftedness of their commemorative stanzas and the importance of such utterances to the consolidation of the power of their rulers, in this later work the poet has moved aside to the seat of counsellor, urging Sveinn to speak for himself. This may reflect the intimate, personal relationship that prayer to a saint creates: Óláfr is now the intercessor between Sveinn and God, and the poet is no longer needed to mediate between the two kings. In the early commemorative works discussed earlier, the poet played a vital social role, speaking for the king after his departure for Valhøll, articulating the loss of his followers, and smoothing the transfer of power to a new ruler. In contrast, after the death of Óláfr the poet is no longer needed to proclaim publicly the king's death but rather to remind his followers of the king's continuing agency in the world. In *Glælognskviða*, the dead king is shown still to be present in the world of the living: physically, through the uncorrupted body, spiritually, through the performance of miracles, and politically, as the person who can affirm or deny the rights of his successor.

II. Sigvatr Þórðarson's Commemoration of Óláfr inn helgi: Loss and Consolation

Despite Þórarinn's best efforts, his advice to Sveinn did not stop the young prince from becoming an extremely unpopular figure in Norway. In one of only seven stanzas cited in *Ágrip*, Sigvatr Þórðarson caustically compares the destitution caused by the Danish occupation to the prosperity previously enjoyed under Óláfr:

Alfivu mun ævi
 ungr drengr muna lengi,
 es oxamat ótum
 inni skaf sem hafrar;
 annat vas, þás Áleifr,
 ógnbandaðr, réð landi;
 hverr átti þá hrósa
 hjalmþornuðu korni.³¹

Just as Þórarinn served two generations of the Danish ruling family, so Sigvatr served that of Norway, composing for both Óláfr Haraldsson and his son Magnús. In this section I will discuss the ways in which Sigvatr, Óláfr's friend, surrogate kinsman and skald, commemorates the king in the poems *Erfidrápa Óláfs helga* and *Bersögglisvísur*, as well as in a number of *lausavísur*. As this stanza from *Ágrip* indicates, Sigvatr in his commemorative verses creates an elegaic contrast between the happiness he experienced during Óláfr's reign and the distress that followed the king's death. However, Sigvatr, like Þórarinn, is also an advisor to princes and through his performance of this role he is able to find some consolation for his loss. Whereas Þórarinn advised Sveinn to ask for the dead king's blessing of his succession to the throne, Sigvatr teaches Óláfr's son Magnús to emulate his father so closely that the son becomes a surrogate for the father. Sigvatr's private grief is thus intimately wrapped up in the very public politics of kingship and the successful restoration of the Norwegian royal family to the throne.

³¹ 'The young warrior will remember Álfifa's age for a long time, when we ate the oxen's food indoors, scrapings like goats. It was otherwise when Óláfr, announcer of doom, ruled the land. Everyone could boast then of well-dried (*lit.* dried as or in the shape of a helmet) corn' (*Skj* BI, 253, st. 28, also cited in *Ágr-Fsk*, 31).

With over 160 stanzas to his name, Sigvatr was one of the most prolific Viking-age skalds.³²

Although he is not the protagonist of a skald's saga, much of his verse has been preserved in Snorri's *Óláfs saga helga* in *Heimskringla*.³³ Sigvatr's family typifies the pattern of Icelandic poet-dynasties: his father, Þórðr Sigvaldaskáld, is listed in *Skáldatal* as the only poet to have served the Danish earl Sigvaldi Strút-Haraldsson, while Sigvatr's nephew was the poet Óttarr svarti.³⁴ Sigvatr himself lived abroad for much of his adult life and forged close ties with the kings of Norway. As discussed above regarding his poem *Vestrfararvísur*, Sigvatr and Óláfr epitomise the poet-patron relationship based on friendship and trust. Such ties became possible in the late tenth and eleventh centuries as Norwegian rulers adopted Christian models of kingship prevalent in the rest of medieval Europe. The relationship between the king and his skalds became formalised through the introduction of such ceremonies as baptism and vassalage. In Snorri's *Óláfs saga helga* Sigvatr speaks a *lausavísa* that encapsulates this bond between king and poet. In this episode Sigvatr, as a young poet new to Óláfr's court, thanks the king for the gift of a gilded sword:

Ek tók lystr né lastak

³² Finnur attributes 164 stanzas or half-stanzas to Sigvatr, more than to any other skald (*Skj* BI, 213-54). Einarr Skúlason, composing in the twelfth century, holds second place at 147 (*Skj* BI, 423-57), while 122 stanzas are attributed to Egill Skalla-Grímsson (*Skj* BI, 30-53). In contrast, just under a hundred stanzas each are attributed to Viking-age skalds such as Arnórr jarlaskáld and Þjóðólfr Arnórsson, whose poetry dominates the kings' sagas (*Skj* BI, 305-27 and 332-53, respectively).

³³ Snorri cites 115 of Sigvatr's verses in *Óláfs saga helga* and a further 24 in *Magnúss saga ins góða*. Snorri's *Separate Saga* of King Óláfr includes ten fewer stanzas by Sigvatr. Whaley notes that Snorri's reliance on Sigvatr's verses is unique, and that neither the author of the *Legendary Saga* nor the author of *Fagrskinna* cites him at such length ('Skalds and Situational Verses', 249).

³⁴ *Skáldatal*, 352. As noted above, Townend discusses both Sigvatr's and Þórarinn's roles as 'dynastic poet[s]' to their respective royal families ('Knútr and the Cult of St Óláfr', 256-7).

(leyfð ið es) þat síðan,
 sóknar Njörðr, við sverði
 - sá 's mín vili - þínu;
 þollr, fekt húskarl hollan
 (høfum ráðit vel báðir)
 látrs, en ek lánardröttin,
 linns blóða mér góðan.³⁵

Russell Poole has argued that this verse contains veiled language alluding to the rituals of foster-brotherhood. The complex kenning for gold, he observes, exploits the political connotations of the word 'blóði' [blood-brother] (3.8), suggesting a quasi-familial relationship between the king and his poet.³⁶ The term 'lánardröttinn' [liege-lord] (3.7) lends a further nuance to the relationship between poet and skald, locating it within a feudal system in which the lord lends or grants land to his vassal. Poole writes:

With Sigvatr we have made the transition into a social dynamic of lordship, vassalage, and benefice. His 'sá es mín vili' (such is my will) could perhaps even be interpreted in this context as the prospective vassal's 'volo' or 'declaration of intention.' His self-identification as a 'húskarl' could encapsulate the vassal's duty to provide *auxilium*.³⁷

Discussing another *lausavísa* in which a gift of nuts given by Óláfr to Sigvatr and his fellow poet

³⁵ 'Eagerly I took your sword, Njörðr of battle (warrior); I do not speak ill of that afterwards. That deed is praised – that is my wish. Fir-tree of the litter of the serpent's blood-brother (generous king), you win a faithful follower and I a good lord. We have both benefited' (*Skj* BI, 246, st. 3, cited in *Hkr* II, 55).

³⁶ As Poole notes, such kennings are relatively common in the corpus of skaldic verse. They are based on the image of the snake or dragon guarding his treasure in a burial mound and thus denote gold. The king is praised as a generous man who gives gold to his retainers, and Poole suggests that the snake's *látr* may also represent metaphorically a place for the poet at the king's court ('Claiming Kin Skaldic-Style', 282).

³⁷ Poole, 'Claiming Kin Skaldic-Style', 283.

Óttarr is described as a *frður-arfi*, or paternal legacy, Poole suggests that these exchanges represent a close, almost ritualistic attachment between the king and his poets.³⁸

Sigvatr's relationship with the king was also cemented by ceremonies of baptism. Unlike Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld, whose baptism sponsored by King Óláfr Tryggvason had created a kind of father-son relationship between the two, Sigvatr and Óláfr reinforced a more brotherly relationship by sponsoring the baptisms of each other's children. In *Óláfs saga helga* Snorri relates a story in which Sigvatr baptises the newborn king's son Magnús. The poet reasons that, should the king kill him for impertinence, it is better to die himself than that the child die a heathen: 'ek vilda heldr gefa guði tvá menn, en einn fjáandanum' [I would rather give two men to God than one to the devils], he declares (*Hkr* II, 210). A skaldic verse also exists in which Sigvatr prays for King Óláfr and notes that the king had sponsored the baptism of Sigvatr's daughter:

Dróttinn, hjalp þeims dóttur
 (dýrr 's þinn vili) mína
 heim ór heiðnum dómi
 hóf ok nafn gaf Tófu;
 helt und vatn enn vitri
 (varðk þeim feginn harða
 morni) mínu barni
 móðrakkr Haralds bróðir.³⁹

³⁸ Poole, 'Claiming Kin Skaldic-Style', 273. The verse referred to may be found in *Skj* BI, 248, st. 9.

³⁹ 'Lord, help the one who lifted my daughter home out of heathendom and gave her the name Tófa – your will is great! Haraldr's wise, courageous brother held my child under the water (in baptism). I was very glad that morning' (*Skj* BI, 248-9, st. 19). The prose narrative seems to be based upon the verse and gives no additional information about this relationship: 'Suo er enn sagt at Olafur konungur hellt undir skirnn dottur Sighuatz skalldz er Tofa het' (*Flat* II, 112). The episode is repeated in *Flat* III, 240. Magnus Olsen suggests that this stanza was composed after the king's

It is difficult to determine whether such stories are a reflection of the historical reality of Sigvatr's relationship with Óláfr, but if this verse is by Sigvatr, it is a strong indication of some truth behind the tales. Indeed, so well known was the relationship between Óláfr and his poet that more fanciful, folkloric tales crept into the later sagas, further emphasizing the bond between the two men. In one such tale, the miraculous quality of the saint seems to rub off onto his poet: Sigvatr's astonishing poetic ability is explained by one writer to have come from his having eaten the head of a magic fish as a youth.⁴⁰ The veracity of this report may be doubtful, but Sigvatr does seem to have enjoyed a close familial relationship with the king, consolidated through the ceremonies of vassalage and baptism. With the creation of such ties within the Christian framework of the eleventh century, commemorative verse took on a more melancholy and mournful tone than before, as poets like Sigvatr announced not only the death of the king, but also that of a lord and kinsman.

death as Sigvatr stood in the Alps and recited the elegaic *lausavísur* that will be discussed below. If so, it would make an interesting analogue to Sigvatr's preoccupation with his relationship with his god-son Magnús in the poems composed after Óláfr's death. See Olsen's article 'Tova Sigvatsdatter', *Maal og Minne* (1954), 189-96.

⁴⁰ *Flat* III, 243 and *Skj* BI, 246, st. 1. The folkloric motif of knowledge gained by eating a magic animal can also be seen in the eddic story of Sigurðr eating Fáfnir's heart, as well as in the Irish salmon of knowledge eaten by Fionn mac Cumhaill. The fish as an early Christian symbol may also be implied, as Margaret Clunies Ross notes. She locates Sigvatr's acquisition of poetry, like Cædmon's, within the Christian tradition of divine inspiration, in marked contrast to the pre-Christian tradition in which poets were required to demonstrate their skill in poetry before gaining Óðinn's favour (*Poetry and Poetics*, 125-6). Clunies Ross has also discussed the role of this episode in Sigvatr's transition between his native Iceland and the king's culturally superior court in Norway in 'From Iceland to Norway: Essential Rites of Passage for an Early Icelandic Skald', *Alvissmál* 9 (1999), 55-72.

Erfidrápa Óláfs helga

Skaldic verse dominates Snorri's *Óláfs saga helga* in *Heimskringla*. While recounting the kingship, exile, and sainthood of his protagonist, Snorri cites fifteen named skalds and weaves a total of 178 skaldic stanzas into the text. This is one of the reasons Carl Phelpstead has called the saga a 'mixed' text in which 'verse and prose, history and hagiography are brought into dialogue so as to present a realistically paradoxical portrayal of Óláfr as holy Viking, *beatissimus tirannus*'.⁴¹

Snorri emphasizes and even enhances the conflicting aspects of Óláfr's life through a heteroglossia of different voices throughout the narrative.⁴² Such conflicting voices can be heard even within the small corpus of Sigvatr's poetry: apparently impromptu *lausavísur* jockey with stanzas from stately, named *drápur*, while complex political eulogies collide with mournful personal elegies. The prose text binding the stanzas in place creates only the illusion of chronological order in Sigvatr's work. Reinvented as missionary king, saintly exile, and royal martyr during the course of the saga, Óláfr has an unstable identity. His poet is likewise forced constantly to adapt the role his poetry plays in the celebration and commemoration of this chameleon-like patron.

The preservation of Sigvatr's verses within later prose narratives has in large part been responsible for the ways in which they have traditionally been read, with far more critical attention paid to the so-called 'authenticating' verses – long, formal poems such as the *Erfidrápa Óláfs helga*

⁴¹ Carl Phelpstead, *Holy Vikings: Saints' Lives in the Old Icelandic Kings' Sagas*, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 340 (Tempe, Arizona: Arizona Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2007), 118.

⁴² Phelpstead, *Holy Vikings*, 127.

and the *Knútsdrápa* – than to ‘situational’ verses, namely the *lausavísur*.⁴³ However, as noted in Chapter Three, the division of verses into ‘authenticating’ and ‘situational’ categories is based only on their function within the prose context.⁴⁴ As Margaret Clunies Ross observes, dividing verses in this way relies on a ‘second-order distinction’, one which reflects the use of the stanzas in later literary texts rather than any valid distinction between the stanzas produced in an oral context.⁴⁵ Linguistic and metrical analyses, however, would often point to a date of composition well before the incorporation of such verses into the sagas.⁴⁶ Dating skaldic verse is, of course, notoriously difficult, but to the best of our knowledge there is often a gap between the composition of a skaldic stanza and its preservation in a written saga, and these gaps are ignored or glossed over by such terminology as ‘situational’ and ‘authenticating’. This section will open up the gaps between prose and poetry by examining the relationship between Sigvatr’s verses and Snorri’s *Heimskringla*,

⁴³ The *Erfidrápa* is Sigvatr’s most popular poem in terms of critical attention: see for example Judith Jesch, ‘The Once and Future King: History and Memory in Sigvatr’s Poetry on Óláfr Haraldsson’, *Along the Oral-Written Continuum*, eds. S. Rankovic, E. Mundal and L. Melve (Turnhout: Brepols, forthcoming), Phelpstead, *Holy Vikings*, 117-58, Rainford, ‘Óláfr Haraldsson, King and Saint of Norway’, and Hans-Peter Naumann, ‘Nordische Kreuzzugsdichtung’, *Festschrift für Oskar Bandle zum 60. Geburtstag am 11. Januar 1986*, ed. H. Naumann et al, *Beiträge zur nordischen Philologie* 15 (Basel: Helbing und Lichtenhahn, 1986), 175-89. His *Knútsdrápa* has also prompted a significant amount of investigation, as in Matthew Townend, ‘Contextualizing the *Knútsdrápur*: Skaldic Praise-Poetry at the Court of Cnut’, *ASE* 30 (2001), and Jesch, ‘Skaldic Verse in Scandinavian England’, 313-26. An article by Jesch is particularly revealing of the scholarly bias in favour of Sigvatr’s political *drápur*: examining three *lausavísur* by Sigvatr which praise Óláfr’s queen Ástriðr, Jesch attempts to raise the profile of the verses by objecting to their status as *lausavísur*. Noting their similarities with more conventional praise-poems, she suggests that they may have been drawn from a longer, formal poem and are thus, she implies, more worthy of attention. See her article, ‘In Praise of Ástriðr Óláfsdóttir’, *SBVS* 24.1 (1994), 1-18.

⁴⁴ As discussed by Whaley in ‘Skalds and Situational Verses’, 245-66.

⁴⁵ Clunies Ross, *Poetry and Poetics*, 78-80.

⁴⁶ On this, see for example Gade, *The Structure of Old Norse Dróttkvætt Poetry*, 226-38.

particularly as Sigvatr's expressions of grief are used to chronicle the exile and death of Óláfr and the subsequent return of his son Magnús to reclaim the Norwegian throne.

In Chapters 181-229 of *Óláfs saga helga*, Snorri tells the story of Óláfr's first defeat in the year 1028, his exile in Russia, and his final battle at Stiklarstaðir in 1030 (*Hkr* II, 328-87). The remaining twenty-one chapters record Óláfr's posthumous miracles and the Danish occupation of Norway (*Hkr* II, 387-415). As he begins to tell the story of Óláfr's downfall, Snorri cites three stanzas from Sigvatr's *Erfidrápa*, a poem which Sigvatr likely composed well after the battle around the year 1040 (*Hkr* II, 329).⁴⁷ In these stanzas Sigvatr praises Óláfr's adherence to traditional forms of kingship and criticises those who have forced him into exile. The first of these verses is typical:

Goll buðu opt þeirs ollu
 úthlaupum gram kaupask
 rautt, en ræsir nítti,
 ríklunduðum undan;
 skǫr bað hann með hjǫrvi
 (her land skal svá verja)
 ráns biðu rekkar sýna
 refsing, firum efsa.⁴⁸

The gnomic approval of 'her land skal svá verja' [so should one guard the land-army] (4.6) casts the king's actions in the pre-Christian tradition of the 'land-guardian', as depicted most famously by

⁴⁷ The poem is edited in *Skj* BI, 239-45 and the date given is Finnur's. The three stanzas cited at this point in the saga are stanzas 4-6 in Finnur's reconstructed sequence. The sequence is also edited in *Norsk* I, 124-7.

⁴⁸ "Those who had harried often offered red gold to buy themselves off, but the king would not agree. He ordered the men's hair to be chopped off with a sword: men received a clear punishment for robbery. So should one defend the land-army' (4.1-8). Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson joins *her* and *land* in the compound word *herland*, which is the meaning followed here (*Hkr* II, 329).

Einarr skálaglamm in *Vellekla*:

Engi varð á jörðu
 ættum góðr, nema Fróði,
 gæti-Njörðr, sás gerði,
 geirbríkar, frið slíkan.⁴⁹

Sigvatr echoes the sentiments of the earlier poem closely in the following stanza when he notes approvingly, ‘friðr bættisk svá /...fylkis lands’ [the peace of the king’s land was thus restored] (5.7-8). Folke Ström has demonstrated that the skalds eulogizing Earl Hákon stressed his adherence to the pagan religion and its beneficial effect on the land in just this way.⁵⁰ However, by the eleventh century the motif of the ‘land-guardian’ had become incorporated into praise-poems for early Christian kings, as in Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld’s *Erfidrápa Óláfs Tryggvasonar*.⁵¹ Sigvatr’s *lausavísa* in *Ágrip*, cited at the beginning of this section, expands on this idea, explicitly equating Danish rule with famine in contrast to the prosperity of Óláfr’s reign. By recycling such an image in his praise of Óláfr, Sigvatr locates his patron within a model of traditional Scandinavian lordship and invites his audience to consider the loss the country as a whole has sustained by such a king’s departure.

Such skaldic parallels between the saintly Óláfr and the pagan Earl Hákon are not obviously conducive to the promotion of Óláfr’s Christian cult. In the surrounding prose narrative Snorri betrays a great anxiety about these three stanzas and the image of kingship Sigvatr promotes.

Identifying the king’s actions three times as ‘rétt’ [just], Snorri frames the king’s ‘land-guardian’

⁴⁹ ‘Except Fróði, there was never in the world a guarding-Njörðr of the spear-board (king) of a good family who protected such peace’ (*Skj* BI, 120, st. 18).

⁵⁰ Ström, ‘Poetry as Propaganda’, 440-58.

⁵¹ See stanzas 11, 19, and 21, and my discussion of the poem in Chapter Two.

role within a Christian interpretation of just kingship that prevents the reader from interpreting Óláfr's rather violent actions as unkingly (*Hkr* II, 328-30). The verses in this section are neither 'authenticating' (they do not support the description of an important historical event) nor 'situational' (they are not integral to the plot). Rather, they provide Snorri with an opportunity to excuse his hero's sudden reversal of fortune: he asserts that the king 'vildi heldr láta af tíginni en af réttðöminu' [wished rather to give up his high position than (his) just rule] (*Hkr* II, 330). Employing the same rhetorical strategy as Þórarinn in *Glælognskviða*, Snorri reinterprets Óláfr's exile not as a military defeat, but as a choice on the part of the king, a voluntary laying down of his power in deference to Christian justice and the patterns of martyrdom. Separated from the prose text, Sigvatr's verses evoke a connection between Óláfr and traditional Scandinavian kingship models; framed by the text, they are reinterpreted to explain his exile and defeat through a hagiographic lens that foreshadows the king's eventual sanctification.

As Óláfr becomes a royal saint through death and battle, Óláfr's followers are transformed from warriors into worshippers. Considering the importance of Sigvatr's sword as a symbol of his relationship with the king, it is not surprising that swords and other such weapons figure prominently in the kennings of the *Erfdrápa* and are key indicators of the transformation Óláfr's followers undergo after his martyrdom. Having traced Óláfr's exile in the east and his return to Norway, Snorri moves on to describe the king's final battle at Stiklarstaðir, relying heavily on Sigvatr's *Erfdrápa* as he does so. In the first of Sigvatr's stanzas to be cited in this episode, the poet depicts Óláfr's standard-bearer Þórðr Fólason leading the charge into battle (7.4-8). Like

Sigvatr's sword, Þórðr's standard is 'fagrla gylta' [beautifully gilded] (7.7); also like the sword, which cements the king's relationship with the poet, this standard draws the *drótt* together as 'saman hjortu' [hearts together] they enter into the conflict (7.4). The king heroically advances first behind this standard:

Mest frá k merkjum næstan
 mín dróttin framm sínum,
 stöng óð fyr gram, gingu,
 (gnógr styrr vas þar) fyrri.⁵²

In this stanza, the possessive phrase *mínn dróttinn* emphasizes the collective nature of the warrior band and in particular the poet's close relationship with the king.⁵³

In contrast to the king's golden swords and standards, Sigvatr uses metaphors of unadorned poles to describe the enemy's forces:

Áðr vitu eigi meiðar
 ógnar skers né hersa
 (þjóð réð þengils dauða)

⁵² 'I heard that my lord went forth first, the very nearest to his standard. The standard-pole rushed before the king. There was enough tumult there!' (12.1-4)

⁵³ Compare this to the Old English elegies in which such possessives are often indicative of the speaker's state of grief and of the emotion connection between two people: for example, 'Wulf, min Wulf, wena me þine / seoce gedydon' [Wulf, my Wulf, my waiting for you has made me sad] (*Wulf and Eadwacer*, ll. 13-14) and '[æ]rest min hlaforð gewat heonan of leodum / ofer yþa gelac; hæfde ic uhtceare' [ever since my lord went away from the people over the sea, I have had sorrow at the dawn] (*The Wife's Lament*, ll. 6-7) in *Exeter*, 179-80 and 210-11, respectively. Peter Dronke compares these two poems to letters written in Latin by religious women in the eighth century. His translation of one such letter reads: 'Oh brother, oh my brother, / how can you afflict the mind of me, who am naught, / with constant grief, weeping and sorrow / day and night, through the absence of your love?' in *Women Writers of the Middle Ages: A Critical Study of Texts from Perpetua to Marguerite Porete* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984), 30-1.

þann styrk búandmanna.⁵⁴

The use of the word *meiðr* in Eyvindr skáldaspillir's *Háleygiatal* and its associations with Yggdrasil, the world tree, was discussed in Chapter One. In this poem, Sigvatr's use of the same word to describe Óláfr's enemies echoes again the pre-Christian kennings of *Vellekla*: in that poem, the skald praises Earl Hákon as a 'gunnar /...þrøngvimeiðr / lunda' [oppressing-pole of battle's trees].⁵⁵ In this way Sigvatr's use of the word *meiðr* in his *Erfidrápa* characterises Óláfr's enemies as pagan and deadly. Similarly, in the second *belmingr* of the same stanza he calls the enemy swords 'sárelds viðir' [trees of wound-fire] (20.6).⁵⁶ The enemy's poles of terror and wounds are very different from the golden swords and standards of King Óláfr's army: their swords are not expensive works of art, but deadly instruments of destruction.

There is, however, a reversal in the pole and sword imagery in verses from the *Erfidrápa* cited in *Magnúss saga ins góða*. King Óláfr has become the venerated royal saint in this saga and the word *meiðr*, previously used to describe the rebellious warriors, appears in a subsequent stanza to describe the pilgrims coming to Óláfr's tomb:

Gørt 's, þeims gótt bar hjarta,
gollit skrin of mínum

⁵⁴ 'Beams of the skerry of terror (warriors) did not know before then the strength of the farmers or of warriors. The people planned the king's death' (20.1-4).

⁵⁵ *Skj* BI, 121, st. 25.

⁵⁶ Þormoðr Kolbrúnarskáld echoes Sigvatr's rhetoric after the battle when he says, 'élþolla sák alla / Jølfuðs' [I saw all the trees of Óðinn's snow-showers (trees of battle, warriors)] (*Skj* BI, 266, st. 23, cited in *Hkr* II, 390). O'Donoghue observes that the reference to Óðinn in this stanza 'provides an ominous note. Traditionally a ruthless and treacherous controller of the battlefield, [Óðinn] is fittingly associated with the dark forces behind the enemies of a Christian king' (*Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative*, 63).

(hrósak helgi ræsis;
 hann sótti goð) drótni;
 ár gengr margr frá mæru
 meiðr þess konungs leiði
 hreins með heilar sjónir
 hrings, es blindr kom þingat.⁵⁷

Apart from stanza 12, cited above, this stanza contains the only other instance of the phrase *mínn dróttinn* in Sigvatr's *Erfidrápa*. In the previous instance, the king was seen advancing at the head of his troops under a golden standard; here, the king lies in a golden shrine. Whereas *meiðr* formerly described the hostile forces driving Óláfr out of his kingdom, here the same word is part of a kenning, 'meiðr /...hrings' [pole of the ring] (24.6-8), for the pilgrims coming to visit the saint's relics. *Meiðr* now suggests the pilgrim's staff rather than the soldier's sword. Such a comparison implies that the same men who fought against the king now pay their respects at his tomb, in keeping with Sigvatr's assertion in his *Erfidrápa* that, 'iðrask nú /...þess verks búendr' [now the farmers now repent of this deed] (11.2-4). This transformation is likely a nod towards reconciliation under the reign of Magnús and serves to celebrate the king further: his ignominious flight into exile is forgotten, replaced by the pilgrims' holy journey towards his shrine.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ 'A golden shrine is raised for my lord, who carried a good heart. I praise the sanctity of the king; he sought God. Many a pole of the ring (warrior) who came there blind walks early from the bright king's illustrious way with healed eyes' (24.1-8).

⁵⁸ Jesch writes about the use of the loan-word *skrin* in this stanza, the earliest recorded usage in Old Norse. In this context *skrin* is used to mean reliquary, but Jesch also notes that its associations with the Latin word *scrinium*, denoting a box in which documents and other valuables are kept, suggests that Óláfr's shrine may be a repository for written forms of record. She suggests that Sigvatr may betray here an awareness of writing as a mode of transmitting information ('The Once and Future King').

Stanza 27 of the *Erfidrápa*, cited by Snorri in his *Separate Saga* of Óláfr but not in *Heimskringla*, contains an even more explicit substitution of the pilgrim's staff for the golden sword:

Róms létok ok helt heima
 hermóðr á fǫr góðri
 Gjallar vǫnd, þanns, golli
 gaf mér konungr, vaðan;
 sult, þás silfri hjaltat
 sverð dýrt, þats viðr þverðan
 loððum vápn, en vígðum,
 vers ylgjar, staf fylgðum.⁵⁹

This *lausavísa* stresses again the importance the king's gift played in his relationship with the poet. By setting the staff and the sword in opposition, Sigvatr emphasizes a change in allegiance from the king to God when he goes to Rome. Rainford observes that this stanza is the only time Sigvatr uses a mythological kenning in his poetry for his sword; as all other mythological kennings seem to be a derogatory way of referring to the enemy, it is fitting that Sigvatr should use this construction to describe his sword only when it is in competition with the pilgrim's staff.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ 'Weary of war, I left Gjöll's gold-wrapped wand (sword), which the king gave to me, at home to go on a good journey to Rome. We laid down the precious sword, silver-hilted, that labours to diminish the famine of the she-wolf's mate, and followed with a consecrated staff to Rome' (27.1-8). It is cited in Chapter 255 of that saga, along with three of the elegiac *lausavísur* discussed in the next section (*Hkr* II, 441-2).

⁶⁰ 'Óláfr Haraldsson, King and Saint of Norway', 126. This is a repetition of the motif Sigvatr first used in the sequence *Knútsdrápa* when he described Knútr's desire to go on pilgrimage to Rome (*Skj* BI, 234, st. 10). Although Finnur considered *Knútsdrápa* to be an *erfidrápa* dating from c. 1038 (*Skj* BI, 232), Matthew Townend has convincingly argued that the poem was composed as early as 1027 in 'Contextualizing the *Knútsdrápur*', 153-56. It thus predates Óláfr's *Erfidrápa* by at least ten years.

Snorri, however, primarily quotes stanzas from the *Erfdrápa* not in the saga of King Magnús, during whose reign it was composed, but in the saga of King Óláfr to support his own account of the king's final battle. At the beginning of his account of this conflict, Snorri emphasizes the authority of skaldic stanzas in general and justifies his use of them in a historical text. He describes how King Óláfr deploys his skalds in the field, commanding:

Skuluð þér...hér vera ok sjá þau tíðendi, er hér gerask. Er yðr þá eigi segjandi saga til, því at þér skuluð frá segja ok yrkja um síðan.⁶¹

Each skald immediately recites a verse and Óláfr's warriors learn by them by heart (*Hkr* II, 358-60).

Sigvatr, however, is clearly a special exception to the rule. As noted above, he has gone on a pilgrimage to Rome. When the skalds mock his absence from the battle, the king rebukes them, saying:

Ekki þarf Sigvati at sneiða, þótt hann sé eigi hér. Opt hefir hann mér vel fylgt. Hann mun nú biðja fyrir oss, ok mun þess enn allmjök þurfa.⁶²

This episode in the saga indicates a reimagining of the role of the court poet and of how Sigvatr is most useful to a king who will soon become a saint. The three skalds who fulfil the traditional role of remaining on the battlefield with the king also die with him; their poems are not now remembered. Sigvatr's new identity as a Christian pilgrim and his voluntary exile from the battle ensure not only that his prayers may help the king but also that he will survive. Rather ironically, in light of the king's words to his three skalds, Snorri primarily uses Sigvatr's *Erfdrápa* to

⁶¹ 'You must be here and see the events of what happens. Then the news will not need to be told to you, because you must tell and recite it afterwards' (*Hkr* II, 358).

⁶² 'It is not necessary to scorn Sigvatr, although he is not here. He has often followed me well. Now he will pray for us, and it will be a very great need (for us)' (*Hkr* II, 358).

corroborate his account of the battle, even though the skald was absent from it.⁶³

Sigvatr in the *Erfidrápa* goes on to describe the first miracles that take place after Óláfr's death (23.1-8), and it is clear that the poet has become not only a eulogist and historian, but also a hagiographer. As he says near the end of the *Erfidrápa*, 'hrósak helgi ræsis' [I praise the sanctity of the king] (24.4). Óláfr is not commemorated as a king who has died in battle and departed from the world, but as a saint whose feast-day must be honoured each year:

Oss dugir Áleifs messu
 (jǫfur magnar goð) fagna
 meinalaust í mínu,
 Magnúss föður, húsi;
 skyldr emk skilfings halda
 skolllaust, þess 's bjó golli,
 helgi, handar tjǫlgur,
 harmdauða, mér, rauðu.⁶⁴

This verse is cited near the beginning of Snorri's *Magnúss saga ins góða* (*Hkr* III, 21). Just as in *Glælognskviða*, in this stanza Sigvatr shows how Óláfr continues to have agency in the world of the living, strengthened by God. This verse presents a complete reimagining in the way skalds thank the king for his gifts. The skalds discussed in the previous chapters offer their rulers poetry in the

⁶³ O'Donoghue observes that Snorri's description of this battle appears to be the most factual among the three prose narratives – *Óláfs saga helga*, the *Legendary Saga* of St. Óláfr, and *Fóstbræðra saga* – that describe it, and that Sigvatr's verses play a particularly important corroborating role in his account (*Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative*, 72-73).

⁶⁴ 'We do well to rejoice in Óláfr's feast-day, the father of Magnús, without pain in my house. God strengthens the king. I must uphold without deceit the sanctity of the sorrow-dead prince who enriched my hands' branches (arms) with red gold' (25.1-8).

hopes of financial reward or honour, and even Sigvatr as a young man pledged his loyalty to the king after receiving the gift of a golden sword. In this verse, however, Sigvatr announces the new role played by the king's skald: he must repay the king for his generosity by proclaiming Óláfr's sanctity after death and by exhorting others to honour him as well.

Lausavísur

The *Erfidrápa* is not the only sequence of verses to commemorate the king. Sigvatr's absence from battle also prompted him to compose a series of *lausavísur* mourning Óláfr's death, which Snorri incorporates near the beginning of his *Magnúss saga ins góða* as the poet travels back to Norway from Rome (*Hkr* III, 14-17).⁶⁵ Five of the six verses are identical in their elegaic structure, contrasting past happiness with present sorrow, while one verse is a reiteration of Sigvatr's loyalty to the king.⁶⁶ Stanley Greenfield's analysis of the Old English elegies describes well Sigvatr's *lausavísur* in this saga. They too, in Greenfield words, 'emphasize...the speaker's state of mind arising from his reflection on the contrast between past and present conditions'.⁶⁷ This is

⁶⁵ These are *lausavísur* 21-26 in *Skj* BI, 251-2 and in *Norsk* I, 129-30. They are framed by more political stanzas in which Sigvatr addresses Queen Ástriðr and comments on Magnús' return from Sweden.

⁶⁶ Indeed, this verse has much in common with the protestations of loyalty found in his *Vestrfararvísur*, discussed in Chapter Three. In this stanza Sigvatr uses the language of legal defence that he had employed in the earlier poem: 'vatnœrin hefk vitni, /... annarra þau manna' [I have the testimonies of other men as plentiful as water] (25.5-8). His association of treachery with hell-fire in this stanza is also reminiscent of the earlier sequence.

⁶⁷ S. B. Greenfield, 'The Old English Elegies', *Continuations and Beginnings: Studies in Old English Literature*, ed. Eric Gerald Stanley (London: Nelson, 1966), 143. Joseph Harris has written about the similarities between Old English elegy and Old Norse poems in 'Elegy in Old English and Old Norse: A Problem in Literary History', *The Old English Elegies: New Essays in Criticism and Research*, ed. M. Green (Mississauga: Associated UP, 1983), 46-56.

not to argue for a direct connection between the texts Greenfield discusses and Sigvatr's work, but the influence Anglo-Saxon traders and missionaries enjoyed in Norway as the country entered Christian Europe does seem to be evident in these poems. That is, in the first *belmingr* of each *lausavísa*, Sigvatr describes a circumstance that reminds him of his grief: he hears a man mourning the death of his wife (22.1-4); ravens fly over the harbour, reminding the poet of battle (23.1-4); and a king's retainers play war games (24.1-4). Verbs are primarily in the present tense in these *belmingar*: 'maðr missir' [a man loses], 'sék' [I see], 'geng ek frá' [I turn from] (22.1; 23.1; 24.1). Just as the Anglo-Saxon narrator of *The Ruin* is prompted to consider the transience of life when faced with a visual reminder of decay, so Sigvatr's experiences in the present lead him to compare his own situation to the people and places he encounters.⁶⁸ The second *belmingr* of each stanza shifts into the past tense as Sigvatr meditates on the loss that has caused his grief. Words such as 'forðum' and 'endr' [formerly] emphasize the past (23.4; 23.7), while the repetition of the verb *minna* [to remember] highlights the poet's separation from earlier and happier days. He mourns:

minnumk ek, hvar manna
 minn dróttinn lék sinna
 opt á óðalstoptum
 orðsæll ok vér forðum.⁶⁹

As Sigvatr dwells on his memories, his verses are analogous to elegaic expressions in Old English and to the Anglo-Saxon poets' use of the cognate verb *monian*. *The Wanderer* similarly features a

⁶⁸ For the text of *The Ruin*, see *Exeter*, 227-9.

⁶⁹ 'I remember where my famous lord played formerly, and often we (played) in the farmsteads of his men (24.5-8). The verb *minna* is also repeated in stanzas 21 and 23.

lord divided from the company of his hall:

Gemon he selesecgas ond sincþege,
 hu hine on geoguðe his goldwine
 wenede to wiste.⁷⁰

Such constructions suggest that Sigvatr and his Anglo-Saxon counterparts conceived of grief not only as an emotion felt in the present but as the awareness of a difference between past and present emotional states.

Sigvatr's stanzas also contain moving descriptions of the poet's physical reaction to his grief.

Discussing the paucity of descriptions of emotion in the sagas, William Ian Miller notes that physical indicators rather than emotion words are often used to signal feeling in a sort of 'somatic semiotics'.⁷¹ However, Sigvatr's poetic descriptions are more complex than Miller's saga examples: Sigvatr not only describes his physical reaction to grief, but also metaphorically compares grieving to being wounded in battle. In one *lausavísa* the poet says he encounters a man weeping over his wife's death; Sigvatr then compares the husband's grief to a warrior who has lost his lord and who cries 'vígtár' [battle-tears] (22.8). The word could be a periphrastic expression for the blood a warrior would shed as he fought a losing battle, but it also describes the tears wept for the lord's death caused by that battle. In the account in *Flateyjarbók* a weeping Sigvatr is criticised as being 'þreklitill' [small in courage] and he explains that *vígtár* are wept by those who hear sad tidings

⁷⁰ 'He remembers the hall-men and the receiving of treasure, how in his youth his gold-friend entertained him with feasting' (*Exeter*, 134-7, ll. 34-36).

⁷¹ William Ian Miller, 'Emotion and the Sagas', *From Sagas to Society: Comparative Approaches to Early Iceland*, ed. Gísli Pálsson (Enfield Lock: Hisarlik, 1992), 100.

(*Flat* II, 371-2). This encounter suggests that the compound was so complex as to need an explanation even by those writing only a few centuries after his time. Similarly, the poet mourns in another stanza, '(þróask ekki mér) /...emk sem bast (í brjósti) / bleikr' [convulsive sobbing grows in my chest; I am as pale as bast] (24.2-4).⁷² Paleness could be the result either of grief or of the loss of blood, and the poet's sobbing is imagined as an ever-growing, almost violent force within him. In this way, Sigvatr's figurative language blurs the distinction between emotional injury and physical injury. Countering the accusations of desertion the poet faced for his absence from the battle, such metaphors reimagine him as one of the warriors who fought with the king. Poetic grief thus becomes a substitute for heroic death.

Snorri structures the prose text around these *lausavísur* in a way similar to the battle sequence surrounding Sigvatr's *Erfidrápa*. In this instance however, the prose narrative describes not a battle but a journey as Snorri locates the recitation of each *lausavísa* progressively closer to the poet's farm in Norway as Sigvatr returns from his pilgrimage. Sigvatr speaks the first verse in Rome itself before he moves on to an unnamed village; he then travels to Hillarsund, Kaupang and Trondheim before arriving at his own farm, reciting a verse in each location. It is surely no coincidence that when the prose text finally locates Sigvatr in Norway, the stanza he recites is one which extends his grief to the entire land:

⁷² Bast is the fibrous, inner bark of the lime tree and is used to make rope (*CV*, 53). The word is elsewhere unattested in the skaldic corpus, as a search of *SkP* demonstrates. The phrase *bleikr sem bast* is, however, recorded five times in prose in sagas dating from the end of the thirteenth century and later, according to *A Dictionary of Old Norse Prose*, ed. Helle Degenbol et al., 2005-10, University of Copenhagen. Accessed 18 August 2010 through <<http://dataonp.hum.ku.dk/>>.

Hø þótti mér hlæja,
 holl, of Nóreg allan,
 fyrr vask kenndr á knørrum,
 klif, meðan Qleifr lifði.
 Nú þykki mér miklu,
 (mitt stríð es svá) hlíðir,
 jøfurs hylli varðk alla,
 óbliðari síðan.⁷³

In this verse, the grieving poet is shown to be a microcosm of the whole country. Sigvatr's movement away from Rome to Norway is curiously incongruous with the movement one finds in the Old English elegaic tradition, at least as interpreted by Greenfield. Noting that, if the Seafarer's journey is taken 'literally as a peregrination to a land of foreigners, symbolizing a renunciation of the life of this world...there is nothing to preclude a further extension of the meaning to embrace the ultimate journey to the heavenly home'.⁷⁴ Sigvatr's voyage is, conversely, a journey home from pilgrimage, a movement away from the centre of Western Christendom to the

⁷³ 'When Óláfr lived, the high, sloping cliffs seemed to me to laugh through all of Norway. Earlier, I was known on the ships. Now the mountainsides seem greatly unhappy to me, such is my adversity since I lost all the lord's favour' (26.1-8). Roberta Frank has observed that line 7 could be translated either as 'I have lost all the favour of the prince' or 'I had won all the grace of the king'; *verða* used transitively usually means 'to lose' but may sometimes have implied the opposite. As this reading seems much less sure, I translate the verb as 'to lose', in keeping with the elegiac tone of the other stanzas. Frank also notes that this verse is unusual in the corpus of skaldic verse, although there does seem to be an analogue in Hallsteinn's quatrain, '[d]rúpir Høfði / dauðr es Þengill, / hlæja hlíðir, / við Hallsteini' [Høfði's drooping, Þengill's dead, the hillsides smile at Hallsteinn] in *Landnámabók (Ísl-Land II, 272)*. See Frank's *Old Norse Court Poetry*, 132. Hillsides seeming to express the speaker's loneliness can also be found in *Brennu-Njáls saga* when the outlawed Gunnar looks back to his home and says, '[f]øgr er hlíðan, svá at mér hefir hon aldri jafnføgr sýnzkr' [the hillside is fair; it has never seemed so lovely to me as now] (Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed., *Brennu-Njáls saga*, Íslenzk fornrit 12 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1954), 182).

⁷⁴ Greenfield, 'The Old English Elegies', 157.

fringes of Europe. His movement is an inversion of the path followed by the Wanderer and the Seafarer as the poet returns to court and to the political and worldly affairs he left behind. Thus, Sigvatr's stanzas do not form a religious narrative but a political one, functioning in the saga as a bridge between the death of King Óláfr and the coronation of his son Magnús five years later. By including skaldic verse that mourns the death of Óláfr rather than celebrating the Danish occupiers who briefly follow his rule, Snorri keeps the focus of his saga firmly on the succession of the Norwegian royal house. Sorrowful commemoration functions as a refusal to eulogize: the narrative emphasis shifts to the poet and then via the poet's grief to the gap created by the king's absence, but never to the king who killed him.⁷⁵ When Sigvatr has returned from Rome, however, he resumes his political role as the king's poet just as the Norwegian ruling family regains control over the kingdom in the person of Óláfr's son.

Bersöglisvísur

Despite the similarity of his *lausavísur* to the Old English elegies, Sigvatr differs from the Anglo-Saxon poets in one very important respect: he does not present the king's death as the passing of an age that can never come again. Sigvatr's *Bersöglisvísur* stands in marked contrast to

⁷⁵ Only two stanzas in this saga praise Sveinn's martial abilities and one of these is taken from a verse composed about his rival, King Tryggvi (*Hkr* II, 413-4). The majority of the verses cited by Snorri after Óláfr's death come from the poem *Glælognskviða*, which, as discussed above, has a decidedly divided focus. Snorri also uses poetic lament in *Óláfs saga helga* when describing Óláfr's victory over Earl Sveinn. Corroborating his account of the battle with Sigvatr's *Nesjavísur*, the only stanzas Snorri cites to represent the enemy's experience come from Bersi Skáldtorfuson's *flokkr* about Óláfr helgi in which the skald laments the fall of his patron (*Hkr* II, 65-67). In this episode, the focus of the narrative is similarly on the poet's grief rather than on the enemy king's prowess.

the Seafarer's celebrated complaint that:

nearon nu cyningas ne caseras
 ne goldgiefan swylce iu wæron,
 þonne hi mæst mid him mærbæ gefremedon
 ond on dryhtlicestum dome lifdon.
 Gedroren is þeos duguð eal, dreamas sind gewitene,
 wuniað þa wacran ond þas woruld healdaþ.⁷⁶

It is a sentiment echoed, as I have already discussed in Chapter Two, in the early commemorative poems. In *Hákonarmál* Eyvindr skáldaspillir fears that, '[m]un óbundinn / á ýta sjöt / fenrisulfr fara' [unrestrained, the Fenris-wolf will attack the home of men] (20.1-3), while in Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld's *Erfidrápa* for Óláfr Tryggvason the poet predicts, '[f]yrr mun heimr ok himnar /...í tvau bresta' [earth and heaven will break in two, far apart] (29.1-4) before kings equal to their patrons will rule again. Neither Eyvindr nor Hallfreðr find consolation, although Hallfreðr does pray that his patron's soul be kept safe by God (29.7-8). The Seafarer, however, finds consolation in the Christian God, exhorting the reader to think of heaven rather than earth (ll. 117-24). As Greenfield, writes:

We may perhaps formulate a definition of the Old English elegy as a relatively short reflective or dramatic poem embodying a contrasting pattern of loss and consolation, ostensibly based upon a specific personal experience or observation, and expressing an attitude towards that experience.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ "There are not now kings nor emperors nor gold-givers as there once were, those who performed among themselves the greatest of glorious deeds and lived in the most noble renown. All that company has perished; joys are departed; weaker people remain and inhabit the world' (*Exeter*, 143-7, ll. 82-87).

⁷⁷ Greenfield, 'The Old English Elegies', 143.

Unlike the poems of Eyvindr and Hallfreðr, Sigvatr's elegaic verses sit firmly within this medieval Christian tradition of loss and consolation. In *Bersöglisvísur*, the poet transcends the apocalyptic visions of his predecessors as he expresses not only the grief caused by the death of the king, but also the possibility of consolation through his son.⁷⁸

In *Magnúss saga ins góða*, Snorri uses Sigvatr's *Bersöglisvísur* to demonstrate how the king's son gradually learns to step into his father's shoes, re-establishing not only the hereditary line of kingship, but also the surrogate familial relationship that was destroyed with Óláfr's death. The nine stanzas of *Bersöglisvísur* incorporated into *Heimskringla* are almost more interesting for what they leave out than for what they include, suggesting deliberate choice on the part of the saga-author. The full sequence contains a number of stanzas that, like the *lausavísur* discussed above, express the theme of past happiness and present sorrow; these will be discussed below. However, Snorri incorporates none of those stanzas into his saga. Instead, the stanzas he cites from *Bersöglisvísur* are those which echo the models of kingship promoted earlier in Sigvatr's *Erfríðráða*, cited in *Óláfs saga helga* before the king's defeat at Stiklarstaðir. Through the citation of such verses, Snorri moves the saga away from the personal grief expressed by Sigvatr in the *lausavísur* to focus again on the politics of kingship as Magnús begins to rule.

In *Bersöglisvísur* Sigvatr, like Þórarinn and the early genealogists before him, shows his patron to be a legitimate king by emphasizing Magnús' status as a descendant of the Norwegian royal family. However, unlike Þórarinn, who attempts to identify Sveinn as the spiritual inheritor of the

⁷⁸ The sequence is edited in *Skj* BI, 234-9 and dated by Finnur to c. 1038. It is also edited by Kari Ellen Gade in *SPSMA* II, 11-30 and in *Norsk* I, 121-4.

land, Sigvatr shows Magnús to be the latest in a long patrilineal line of law-makers, a *rex justus* whose inheritance is assured not only by his blood but by a regard for the law. The first stanza in this sequence reiterates the connection made in the *Erfdrápa* between the king and the well-being of the land when Sigvatr asks, ‘tyst / hvé lengi skal /...hans grund?’ [how long shall his land be mournful?] (9.6-8).⁷⁹ Grief in this verse is not only an emotion felt by the king’s followers but by the very land itself. This troublesome state of affairs stems from a conflict of inheritances: Magnús’ right to rule *hans grund* must not conflict with his subjects’ rights over their own lands.

Sigvatr warns:

Eitt es mál, þats mæla,
 mín dróttinn leggr sína
 eign á óðal þegna,
 ofgask búendr gofgir;
 rán mun seggr, hinns sína
 selr út, í því telja,
 flaums at fellidómi
 fǫðurleifð konungs greifum.⁸⁰

Both *óðal* and *fǫðurleifð* are terms that emphasize the length of time these lands have been in the families of Magnús’ subjects. The king’s right to inherit the kingship of Norway is thus valid only as long as he respects the equally valid inheritances of others.

⁷⁹ The final clause in Gade’s edition reads *konungr, hvé lengi skal fundra vel tvist til þess?* [king, how long must one ponder so very silent on this?] (*SPSMA* II, 12-13). The apostrophe to the king is in keeping with her placement of this poem as the first stanza in the sequence. She also notes that earlier editors emend *tvist* to *tyst* to retain the *aðalbending*, but that the translation offered by Finnur (*trvedragt*, or ‘discord’) is elsewhere unattested.

⁸⁰ ‘One tale is told: my lord takes possession of the ancestral lands of his subjects. Noble farmers become angry. The man who hands over his patrimony to the king’s men in a hasty judgement will call it robbery’ (14.1-8).

The king's right to rule is further consolidated by the inherited laws that govern Norway, and Sigvatr urges Magnús to emulate his illustrious law-making forefathers in order to resolve his dispute with the farmers. Hákon Aðalsteinsfóstri, says the poet, '[h]ét /...fjölgegn ok réð hegna / heiptar rón' [was called the very-good and he ruled punishing hateful robbery], and 'þjóð helt fast á /...lögum síðan' [afterwards the people held fast to the laws] (4.1-6). Óláfr Haraldsson and Óláfr Tryggvason similarly 'frið gófu' [gave security] to their subjects (5.4). In the *Erfiðráða* Óláfr maimed thieves and robbers, as discussed above (5.1-8); in *Bersöglisvísur* his son Magnús is similarly urged to be a 'veltir þjófs' [toppler of the thief] rather than to engage in 'rán' [robbery] against his own people (13.1-3; 11.7). Sigvatr declares that a regard for the law is inherited from father to son, and he underlines the importance of father-son relationships by calling Hákon inn góði 'fóstr Aðalsteins' [Æðelsteinn's foster-son] (4.5-8), while the two Óláfrs are 'Haralds arfi' and 'sonr Tryggva' [Haraldr's heir and Tryggvi's son] (5.5-8; 5.5-6).⁸¹ Sigvatr's arguments are evidently successful, and in the final stanza quoted in *Heimskringla*, Magnús has stepped fully into his father's shoes when Sigvatr calls him, as he once called his father, *mínn dróttinn* (14.2).⁸² In this phrase, the poet-patron relationship that formerly applied to Óláfr and Sigvatr has been re-applied to the

⁸¹ Jesch has discussed the dynastic considerations in Sigvatr's eulogy to Ástriðr Óláfsdóttir as well, noting the dowager queen's central role in the transmission of the kingship. In this fragmentary poem of three stanzas, Norway is called the 'áttleifð Haralds' [Haraldr's inheritance] (*Skj* BI, 232, st. 2). Jesch suggests that 'Haraldr' in this sequence refers not to Magnús' half-brother but to his paternal grandfather ('In Praise of Ástriðr Óláfsdóttir', 9).

⁸² Þórgeirr flekkur takes a similar approach when he too admonishes Magnús not to reward traitors (*Hkr* III, 23-4). He stresses his loyalty to the young king by declaring, 'vask í fylgju / með feðr þínum' [I was in the retinue with your father] (*Skj* BI, 305). Only this one *lausavísa* by Þórgeirr survives, however, so it is impossible to determine whether he, like Sigvatr, developed this theme over the course of many verses.

skald and Magnús. The king's subjects too have acquired a ruler who acts in accordance with custom and inherited legal procedure. This is Sigvatr's last verse in *Heimskringla* and it marks the beginning of a new reign as Snorri writes,

Eptir þessa áminning skipaðisk konungr vel...Magnús konungr gerðisk vinsæll ok ástsæll öllu landsfólki. Var hann fyrir þá sök kallaðr Magnús inn góði.⁸³

Having established Magnús as a legitimate, law-abiding king, Snorri no longer has need of Sigvatr's verses and the poet disappears from the pages of *Heimskringla*.

Sigvatr's verses have thus been used to trace the demise of one ruler and the re-establishment of another in Snorri's narrative. His *Erfidrápa* chronicles the exile and death of Óláfr; his expressions of grief in the *lausavísur* during his own temporary exile allow the saga-author to concentrate on the gap left by the downfall of Óláfr rather than on the rule of the Danish occupier. This gap can then be filled by Óláfr's son when Magnús has learned how to emulate his father's method of kingship. This allows Sigvatr, in *Bersöglisvísur*, to transfer both the poet-patron bond and his surrogate familial relationship successfully to a new king of Norway. Unlike his Anglo-Saxon counterparts, Sigvatr's consolation is not in the workings of God but the workings of the state as he ensures the continuity of the Norwegian royal house on the throne. In marked contrast to the mournful *lausavísur*, there are no expressions of the poet's grief in the sequence of verses from *Bersöglisvísur* recorded in *Heimskringla*. In Snorri's narrative, the grief expressed by Sigvatr merely acts as an interim state between the downfall of one good king and the

⁸³ 'After this admonition, the king changed for the good. King Magnús became popular and beloved by all the people of the land. Because of that reason he was then called Magnús the good' (*Hkr* III, 31).

installation of another; such expressions are apparently not required when a model king sits on the throne. Skaldic grief has thus become a narrative device through which to discuss a change in rulers in the saga and to manoeuvre between the old state of affairs and the new.

But what of the verses Snorri does not include? *Bersöglisvísur* is a long poem, and Snorri cites only half of the eighteen stanzas that are elsewhere recorded. *Magnúss saga konungs og Haralds konungs* in *Flateyjarbók* records all but one of the stanzas, giving a far fuller picture of the sequence as a whole.⁸⁴ Compared to Sigvatr's highly emotional *lausavísur* in which he mourns the death of Óláfr, Snorri's selection of *Bersöglisvísur*, which follows almost immediately after, presents a far more rational interpretation of kingship and portrays a mutually beneficial, but not emotionally close, bond between prince and poet. The full sequence, however, is less cohesive than Snorri's select citation; it contains not only Sigvatr's advice to Magnús, but also a reiteration of the poet's own attachment to Óláfr and a declaration of the importance of remembering the sainted king properly.

Despite this, the account in *Flateyjarbók* de-emphasizes the special relationship between the Norwegian kings and Sigvatr. Sigvatr is chosen by chance to deliver his advice after a number of Magnús' retainers become worried by the king's harsh treatment of the Þrændir:

⁸⁴ In *SPSMA II* Gade follows the order of the stanzas given in this version, while according to Finnur's edition, the order the stanzas cited in *Flateyjarbók* is 1-8, 13, 11, 12, 10, 14, 18, 16, 17. Stanza 18 is cited only in *Skáldskaparmál*. Stanzas 9, 10 and 12 can also be found in *Fagrskinna* in a condensed version of the events related in *Heimskringla* and *Flateyjarbók*, while *Ágrip* contains the shortest version of events and only one stanza. See *SPSMA II* for a full list of the manuscript contexts of each verse (12).

Hier voru vit staddir nockurir vinir Magnus konungs og ræddu nu þetta sin æ mille eda huersu þeir skyldu med fara. vrdu ásattir vm þat at osynt (væri) huort bændr þættizt bera mega ef sliku hieilde fram. og þotti nu vinum hans þaurf æ ath nockur segdi konungi – num huar komit var og þetta hial Þrænda og fysti huer annan til ath segia konunginum enn eingin villde sialfr.⁸⁵

The retainers act together as a group, their single-minded approach lessening Sigvatr's prominence as the king's only advisor. His previous relationship with King Óláfr is not mentioned and in this narrative Sigvatr is merely speaking the thoughts of the entire courtly community. This image of collective action continues after the sequence as well. In a much longer passage than that in *Heimskringla*, the saga-author notes that the king is swayed not only by Sigvatr's arguments, but that 'verda þa og margir gófgir menn og godgiarnir ath stydia þessi heilrædi med godum tillogum' [there were also many honourable and kind men who supported this sound counsel with good advice] (*Flat* III, 269-70). The saga-author creates the fiction that Sigvatr is reporting the speech of the people directly: 'og segir nu vmrædu lydsins huersu virdizt' ['and now (the verse) tells the talk of the people, how they considered (Magnús)] (*Flat* III, 268), he writes. The circumstances of composition having been established, however, the narrator intervenes only rarely in his citation of the stanzas themselves. There are only eight prose insertions between the seventeen stanzas and many stanzas are cited continuously. The prose lines that do appear have at most an explanatory function and serve only to indicate the order of the stanzas: 'og litr nu æ j kuodskapnum vm huad

⁸⁵ 'Here were standing some of King Magnús' friends and now they discussed this among themselves, what route they should take. They were agreed that it was unclear what the farmers could be thought to bear if things were to remain the same. And it seemed now to his friends that someone needed to say to the king what they had decided, and the talk of the Þrændir, and each wished another to speak to the king but no one wanted to himself' (*Flat* III, 267).

hann æ ath ræda' [and now he considers in his verse what he has to advise], '[n]u vikr hann hiedan j fra sinne frasogn til hofdingia þeirra' [now he turns away from this in his account to the chieftans]; '[o]g enn kuad han' [and then he said] (*Flat* III, 267, 268 and 269).

Lee M. Hollander, despite his dismissal that 'Sigvatr is not a great poet', saw a marked symmetry and elegance in Finnur's reconstruction of *Bersöglisvísur*, which follows relatively closely the text in *Magnúss saga konungs og Haralds konungs*. 'It is structurally coherent in a way that few Skaldic poems are,' Hollander writes, and 'it is concrete and specific without losing the afflatus of the high-flown court-measure'.⁸⁶ Hollander's translation follows Finnur's edition of the poem, and it is true that a strikingly logical order emerges in this sequence, particularly when the context of Sigvatr's *lausavísur* is taken into account. That is, in the full sequence of *Bersöglisvísur*, Sigvatr returns to the structure of the elegy, contrasting his happy relationship with Óláfr to his present distress. In contrast to the unresolved *lausavísur* the resolution of this distress is nearly completed by the end of the sequence, but the uncertainty of Sigvatr's final acceptance of the young King Magnús suggests that the close friendship and familial bonds that characterized Sigvatr's relationship with Óláfr are not quite so easily transferred to Magnús as Snorri's shorter citation of the sequence would make it appear.

Stanzas 1-3 of *Bersöglisvísur* are not included in *Heimskringla*, perhaps because Sigvatr's focus on Óláfr in these verses would have diverted the narrative away from Magnús. *Bersöglisvísur* is, after all, cited near the beginning of *Magnúss saga ins góða* and Snorri's protagonist is no longer

⁸⁶ Lee M. Hollander, *The Skalds: A Selection of Their Poems, with Introduction and Notes* (Ann Arbor, MI: U of Michigan P, 1968), 175, 68.

King Óláfr but his son.⁸⁷ In these stanzas the poet emphasizes again the close relationship between the king and himself, as well as the king's bond with his retainers more generally. Sigvatr emphasizes his status as a warrior rather than as a poet in these opening stanzas: 'fullkerska sák falla /...verðung' [I saw the valiant army fall] (1.5-8), he says, remembering first hand Óláfr's victories in the field. He brags about his own loyalty in a curiously gnomic utterance:

vasat á her, með hjörvi
hlið, þars stóðk í miðjum
hröesinn (skal með hrísi)
hans flokki (við þjokkva).⁸⁸

Echoing the sentiments of such early poets as Glúmr Geirason, discussed in Chapter Three, Sigvatr acknowledges and celebrates the generosity of his lord and the importance of treasure-giving as the hallmark of a good king: Óláfr was a 'fémildr gramr' [lord generous with treasure] (2.2), who performed the parallel actions of giving gold to the 'dróttinhollir' [men faithful to their master] (1.2) and carrion to ravens (1.3-4).⁸⁹ The generosity of the king to retainers and scavengers alike demonstrates Óláfr's successful fulfilment of the dual roles of the Viking-age king: he was both a good lord and a vicious warrior.

⁸⁷ This order is according to *Skj*. These are verses 2-4 in *SPSMA* II and occur in the same order in *Flateyjarbók*. It is not certain that they would have occurred at the beginning of the poem as it was originally performed, but as we can never know for certain, it seems reasonable (even necessary) to take the order(s) presented by modern editors as a starting point for any literary reading of the text.

⁸⁸ 'There was no gap in the army where I stood proud with my sword in the middle of the troop; one must thicken the wood with brush' (2.5-8).

⁸⁹ Stanza 16 repeats this idea: 'Áleifr lét mik, jöfra / órýrr, framask /...með hringum' [Óláfr, not poor among kings, let me be promoted with rings] (16.1-4).

Sigvatr depicts Óláfr's relationship with his subjects as one far more emotionally close than that implied by the stanzas in *Heimskringla*. These extra stanzas develop the theme of the land as the king's rightful patrimony as discussed above, but Óláfr's successful defence of the land ignites the hearts as well as the legalistic minds of his followers:

varði hart, en hjörtu
 hugfull við þat skullu,
 (Áleifr réð svá) jöfra
 erfðir (framm at hverfa).⁹⁰

Erfð occupies the same lexical group as *óðal* and *fjǫðurleifð*, discussed above. Those words were used in the stanzas in *Heimskringla* to justify the anger of the farmers at Magnús' robbery of their ancestral lands; however, *erfð* in this stanza is the whole of Norway, protected heroically by Óláfr. Snorri cites verses which describe the anger of the farmers during Magnús' reign, and this anger contrasts in the full sequence with their happiness during Óláfr's: 'nú eru þegnar frið fegnir' [then (*lit.* now, at the time described) retainers were pleased with the peace] (2.3). This contrast between past and present expands the elegiac mood of Sigvatr's *lausavísur* to all of the king's subjects and explores more fully the farmers' disappointment with Magnús than the sequence cited in *Heimskringla*.

The full sequence also establishes a contrast between the hope of Magnús' subjects when the young king first returned from exile and his subsequent disappointing actions. Sigvatr speaks from the perspective of the entire community when he describes Magnús' return from the east:

⁹⁰ 'He guarded fiercely the inheritance of princes, and hearts full of courage pounded at that. So Óláfr ordered (his subjects) to go forward' (3.5-8).

himin þóttisk þá heiðan
 hafa, es landa krafðir,
 lofðungs burr, ok lifðir,
 landfolk tekit hǫndum.⁹¹

The phrase ‘heiðr himinn’ [bright heaven] is to some extent a conveniently alliterative stock phrase: in *Hárbarðsljóð*, for example, Þórr brags that he threw Þjazi’s eyes as far as *heiðr himinn*, while in his *drápa* for Óláfr kyrri, Steinn Herdísarson praises the king as the best under *heiðr himinn*.⁹² The phrase is also indicative, however, of the effusive, almost exaggerated joy the farmers felt when Magnús returned. It may also be an oblique allusion to Óláfr himself, implying that the farmers thought they had found another Óláfr in the person of Magnús.⁹³ This description of the farmers’ welcome of the young king contrasts greatly with their characterisation in the *Heimskringla* verses as ‘reiðir’ [angry] (11.8). In the full sequence, the anger of the farmers gains a greater rhetorical force through this contrast: the farmers are not only angry at Magnús, but

⁹¹ ‘It seemed to the land-folk that they had taken bright heaven with their hands, son of a prince, when you claimed the lands, and lived’ (6.5-8).

⁹² *Hárbarðsljóð*, st. 19 and *Skj* BI, 383, st. 17, respectively. The related concept of bright stars also appears with some frequency in the poetic corpus bearing quasi-supernatural connotations: in *Völuspá*, *heiðar stiðrnor* vanish from the sky (st. 57), while in the anonymous *Lilja*, *heiðar stiðrnur* sing praises for Mary (*Skj* BII, 414-5, st. 93).

⁹³ The association between Óláfr and the sun appears most famously in the later poem *Geisli*, although Chase notes that the association of the sunbeam with saints had appeared earlier in texts by Bede and Ælfric, as well as in the Old Norse homily collections (*Einarr Skúlason’s Geisli*, 22).

bitterly disappointed after having loved him at first. The poet also contrasts Magnús' shining glory when he first returned to Norway with the 'ofrausn' [over-magnificence] he later displayed (11.3).⁹⁴

Having established himself as a warrior loyal to Óláfr in these stanzas, Sigvatr then turns to his role as the king's poet. Just as the relationship between Óláfr and his warriors is excised from the verses in *Heimskringla*, so too is Sigvatr's description of his role as an advisor and spy for the late king:

Føður Magnúss létk fregna
 folgin jöfurs dolga
 orð, þaus eyru heyrðu
 ór, á svik hvé fóru;
 mál bark hvert af heilum
 hug, þvít eigi brugðumk,
 (ek vissa þó) ossum
 (ótta) lánardrótni.⁹⁵

Sigvatr's use of the term *lánardröttin* in this stanza echoes his previous vow of loyalty to Óláfr in the verse in which Sigvatr thanked the king for the gift of a sword (*lausavísa* 3). As discussed above, Poole reads this term as one alluding to the feudal system and the vassal's pledge of loyalty.⁹⁶ Sigvatr's 'plain speaking' to Magnús, therefore, can also be read as a duty the poet

⁹⁴ Compare this to Arnórr's description of Haraldr Sigurðarson's *ofrausn* at the doomed battle of Stamford Bridge (*Skj* BI, 324, st. 13), as well as to Byrhtnoð's *ofermód* at Maldon (Scragg, ed., *The Battle of Maldon*, l. 89). See also *SPSMA* II, 273-4 for a detailed discussion of the word.

⁹⁵ 'I let Magnús' father hear the concealed words of the lord's enemies, which our ears heard, how they turned to treachery. I bore each tale with a sincere (*lit.* whole) heart because I did not scheme against our liege-lord – nevertheless, I knew fear (or danger)' (7.1-8).

⁹⁶ Poole, 'Claiming Kin Skaldic-Style', 283.

discharges to his lord; he performs this duty first for Óláfr and then, after the king is dead, for his son. It is even possible that Sigvatr's advice to Magnús in *Bersöglisvísur* is part of his original obligation to Óláfr, a continuation of service after the lord's death ensuring that the old king's land is properly governed. It is striking that the term *lánardrottinn* is juxtaposed in this sequence with a vow of loyalty reminiscent of the one Sigvatr once made to Magnús' father: the phrase 'meðal okkar alt 's háligt' [all is excellent between us] (18.3-4) in *Bersöglisvísur* closely echoes his earlier declaration to Óláfr that 'høfum ráðit vel báðir' [we have both benefited] (*lausavísa* 3.6).⁹⁷ However, there is more uncertainty in this utterance than in the *volo*, in Poole's words, that Sigvatr formerly pledged to Óláfr. This pledge is based, as discussed above, on Magnús' ability to govern the land in accordance with the laws of his ancestors and not to impinge on the ancestral rights of others.

Sigvatr too must choose between conflicting patrimonies, as the poet once served not only Magnús' father but also Óláfr's rival, Knútr. He uses his past relationship with the two kings as a mild threat to encourage Magnús to comply fully with his suggestions:

Sigvats hugr mun hittask
 Hørða-Knúts í garði,
 mildr nema mjök vel skaldi
 Magnús konungr fagni;
 fórk með feðrum þeira
 (fekk mér ungum tunga

⁹⁷ The phrase 'sinjór Nóregs' [seigneur of Norway] in *Bersöglisvísur*, from the Old French *seigneur*, may also indicate Continental models of vassalage (15.2-4).

golls), vask enn með ǫllu
 óskeggjaðr þá, beggja.⁹⁸

Sigvatr's threat is a far cry from his protestations of loyalty in *Vestrfararvísur*, discussed in Chapter Three. It is perhaps not surprising that this verse is not cited in *Heimskringla*: it would sit strangely with Sigvatr's earlier and unequivocal assertion to Óláfr that he never truly served King Knútr and it would moreover undermine the smooth transition made in the narrative from Óláfr to Magnús. However, the focus on patrilineal inheritance and on Sigvatr's familial bond with the kings is crystallised in this verse: Sigvatr can choose to serve the son of either lord, and he will choose the one who steps most successfully into his father's shoes. It is a powerful inversion of the episode discussed in Chapter Three, in which Eyvindr skáldaspillir was called *hans skáld*, the skald belonging to the king. In that episode, the poet himself was transferred from one king to another like a piece of prestige property. For Sigvatr, his patron is *minn dróttinn*; the possessive case is reversed and the lord is now chosen by the poet. Sigvatr's threat is soon resolved, however, as Magnús modifies his actions appropriately, and the poet affirms his loyalty to the young king in a second pledge of loyalty:

erum Magnús vér vægnir,
 vildak með þér mildum
 (Haralds varðar þú hjörvi
 haukey) lifa ok deyja.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ 'Sigvatr's heart will be there in Hǫrða-knútr's court unless generous Magnús please the skald very well! I travelled with the fathers of both – my tongue granted me gold young – when I was entirely without a beard' (17.1-8).

⁹⁹ 'Magnús, we are lenient (with you). I would wish to live and die with you. You guard Harald's hawk-island (Norway) with (your) sword' (18.5-8). I follow Kari Ellen Gade in this translation of *haukey* (*SPSMA* II, 27) rather

Sigvatr does not only affirm his loyalty to Magnús, but also affirms Magnús' royal genealogy in this stanza. Looking far back to the reign of Haraldr hárfagri, the near-legendary king who first united the petty kingdoms of Norway, Sigvatr proclaims Magnús' fulfilment of the duties established for him by his ancestors. The poet simultaneously demonstrates how closely his own poet-patron relationship has become entwined with the family tree of the Norwegian royal house.

Rainford has written extensively about the political manipulation of Óláfr's cult, both in the eleventh century and later. She observes that although Norwegian chieftains first used the cult to resist the Danish occupation, it soon became a powerful means of support for the monarchy, particularly during the reign of Magnús:

King Magnús then promoted the cult, it seems, to emphasize his own legitimate status as a member of a prestigious royal dynasty and as the immediate descendant of a saintly ruler, whose miraculous powers expressed divine approbation. He could reinforce his right to rule by exploiting feelings of national guilt regarding the betrayal of his father. The figure of the saint seems always to have represented national independence and respect for the ancient royal dynasty, but under King Magnús it was transformed from a subversive symbol of political defiance into an ally of the establishment.¹⁰⁰

It is no surprise that skaldic verse is used to support the establishment during this time. As has been shown in previous chapters, the success of a Viking-age poet relied in large part on the skald's

than Finnur's suggested translation of *fortræffelig* or *udmærkede*, meaning 'splendid', 'excellent' (*LP*, 231). In the prose context this kenning is taken to refer to the Danish king Haraldr Górmsson, but this is clearly a misreading on the part of the saga-author. Kock suggests that 'hawk-isle' refers to the mountains of Norway, the place where hawks perch, and this reading would form a nice analogue to Sigvatr's *lausavísa* about the mountains of Norway mourning the death of Óláfr (*NN*, § 655).

¹⁰⁰ Rainford, 'Óláfr Haraldsson, King and Saint of Norway', 78-9.

conformity to the dictates of his patron and on his successful propagation of the lord's story and ancestry. Sigvatr's case is no different, but this skald's verses show a marked evolution of the poet's voice and role as he adapts not only to new, Christian forms of medieval kingship, but also to a new understanding of the poet-patron relationship. This relationship is one consolidated not only by treasure-giving and mutual reliance but also by close bonds of family and friendship. The multifaceted nature of Sigvatr's poetic corpus, comprising eulogy, elegy, hagiography and 'plain-speaking' advice, fits in well with the many different accounts of the chameleon-like Óláfr by later saga-authors. Sigvatr's verses establish a new and powerful mode of commemoration that could be adapted to fit a variety of narrative techniques and to commemorate Óláfr as Viking, saint, or anything in between.

III. *Lausavísur* on the Funeral of Magnús inn góði Ólafsson: Grieving in Public

Only tantalising scraps of verse remain about the funeral of King Magnús inn góði, son of Óláfr inn helgi. Having died of an illness in 1047 while on campaign in Denmark, Magnús' body was ensconced in splendour aboard a ship and sailed to Trondheim to be buried with his father, whose reputation as a saint was by then widely propagated. Prose accounts in all of the major kings' sagas attest to this journey, although the account recorded in *Morkinskinna* is the most detailed.¹⁰¹ The sagas describe the public demonstrations of mourning that accompanied Magnús'

¹⁰¹ See *Mork*, 146-8 for the full account. There are shorter accounts of Magnús' death and funeral in *Ágrip*, *Fagrskinna* (*Ágr-Fsk*, 37 and 248-9), and Snorri's *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* (*Hkr* III, 106-7).

funeral voyage and burial, and the episode is unusual among the kings' sagas in the degree of public emotion that is recorded in the skaldic verse attached to these accounts.

Unlike his father, Magnús is not commemorated in the sagas by one main poet but by several, their manifold voices adding to the great outpouring of emotion that accompanied his death. The prose authors cite as evidence two stanzas composed by Oddr kíkinaskáld and an anonymous *lausavísa*, while a single *helmingr* preserved in the *Third Grammatical Treatise* attributed to Þjóðólfr Arnórson describes the scene in similar language and may have come from a longer poem, perhaps an *erfidrápa* that is now lost. The stanzas are all strikingly similar in their focus on the king's retainers' emotional reactions to his death: not only do the poets describe the grief felt by the retainers, but also the grief prominently displayed in public by those retainers. Although the fragments are not long enough to specify the exact nature of the relationship between the king and his skalds, no other such descriptions exist of funerals of early Scandinavian kings. The verses attached to this episode are therefore all the more important for their portrayal of a state funeral as the first step in the process of commemorating a much loved ruler.

The two stanzas attributed to Oddr kíkinaskáld form the basis of the prose accounts.¹⁰² In one stanza Oddr describes the interment of Magnús by his retainers:

¹⁰² Only three stanzas attributed to Oddr kíkinaskáld are extant. The editors of *SPSMA* II assume that all three stanzas belong to the same poem, which they call 'Poem about Magnús góði' (31-34). Stanzas 2 and 3 of this poem describe the king's funeral while stanza 1 is a conventional battle-verse describing an earlier conflict with the Wends. Finnur groups the first two stanzas together under the heading 'Et digt om Magnus d. gode', while he prints the third stanza separately as a *lausavísa* (*Skj* BI, 327-8). Kock does likewise (*Norsk*, 165).

Feldu menn, þás mildan,
 mǫrg tǫr, í grǫf bóru,
 þung byrðr vas sú, þengil,
 þeim es hann gaf seima;
 deildisk hugr, svát heldu
 húskarlar grams varla,
 siklings þjóð en síðan
 sat opt hnípin, vatni.¹⁰³

The first *helmingr* describes the moment at which the retainers carry their lord to his grave; this is the moment also described in the anonymous stanza and in Þjóðólfr's *helmingr*. No one person takes pride of place over the others in this verse. Plural verbs and the general descriptors 'menn' [men] (2.1) and 'þeim es hann gaf seima' [those to whom he gave riches] (2.4) emphasize the group, while the description of the king as 'mildr' [generous] (2.1) emphasizes the connection between the king and his men, those who received riches and he who gave them. The opposite but complementary acts of giving and receiving in this *helmingr* mirror the similarly complementary acts of carrying and dropping: men carry the king's corpse while they let their tears fall. The tension between carrying a heavy object and the men's unsuccessful attempts to restrain their tears intensifies the emotion of the moment as the single word 'þungr' [heavy] unites the physical act of carrying the coffin and the mental anguish the retainers feel as they do so. This adjective denotes at the same time the literal weight of the burden as well as the emotional weight of sadness.

¹⁰³ 'Men let fall many tears when they carried the generous prince to the grave. That was a heavy burden for those to whom he gave riches. The heart was in turmoil (*lit.* divided) so that the king's servants could hardly restrain (themselves) from weeping, and since then the king's people often sat downcast' (2.1-8).

Þorkell Hallkelsson expresses a similar grief caused by the death of his wife at the end of *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu* when he says it is ‘bíða /...þungara miklu’ [much heavier to remain (living)] than to die.¹⁰⁴

Oddr’s second *helmingr* reiterates this conflation between the mental and the physical response to loss. The emotional burden is shown to affect the men’s bodies as they sit ‘hnípin’ [drooping or downcast] (2.8). This adjective similarly describes the posture of the men’s bodies as well as their mental state.¹⁰⁵ Þjóðólfr Arnórsson’s exultant announcement that Magnús’ actions in battle make women *hnípar* is a fairly straightforward use of the word to denote sorrow.¹⁰⁶ In *Sólarljóð*, on the other hand, the narrator is *bræzlufullr ok hnípin*, a phrase that suggests not only fear, but also a physical shrinking away or bowing down. Carolyne Larrington and Peter Robinson translate this as ‘terrified and cowed’, a phrase that echoes nicely the narrator’s description of physical disorientation as he experiences the vision.¹⁰⁷ Oddr’s image of the downcast retainers is, in the second *helmingr*, located after the moment of the funeral through the word ‘síðan’ [since then] (2.7), extending the emotion of loss expressed at the funeral through to the moment of the stanza’s composition. The connection between king and company, introduced in the first *helmingr*, is reinforced in the second by the two phrases ‘húskarlar grams’ [king’s servants] (2.6) and ‘siklings þjóð’ [king’s people] (2.7), the possessive case establishing a connection between the people and the

¹⁰⁴ This is from a *lausavísa* edited in *Skj*, BI, 195 and cited in Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Borgfirðinga sögur*, Íslensk fornrit 3 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1938), 107.

¹⁰⁵ *CV*, 276 and *LP*, 270.

¹⁰⁶ *Skj* BI, 335, st. 15.

¹⁰⁷ See *SPSMA* VII, 325.

king that survives even after his death. It is notable that the retainers' public expressions of emotion are described as taking place only during the funeral. *Síðan* marks a sharp shift into the time after that public event and, while the men might sit downcast, such an expression of emotion is far more muted than the weeping that accompanied the interment. Such a shift suggests that the display of excessive emotion is only appropriate to indulge in – or perhaps, for the poet to describe – during the moment of the funeral itself. Afterwards, the poet implies, grief must be manifested in more subtle ways.

In his next stanza Oddr moves away from descriptions of general lamentation to express his personal connection with the king and his own reaction to the king's death. Following in the footsteps of Hallfréðr and Sigvatr, Oddr mourns:

Mák, síz Magnúss ævi
 móðfíkings þraut góða
 (Odd hafa stríð of staddan)
 stillis, harða illa;
 hvarfak hvers manns þurfi,
 harmr strangr fær mér angrat,
 þjóð es at dögling dauðan
 dǫpr, því fǫrum vér aprir.¹⁰⁸

As in the last two lines of the previous stanza, Oddr no longer describes the moment of the funeral but the time that follows it, contrasting the reign of the king, 'Magnúss ævi / móðfíkings þraut

¹⁰⁸ 'I find myself sorely grieved (*lit.* I am very poorly) since the lifetime of Magnús the good, the ambitious king, ended. Woes have afflicted Oddr. I wander around in need of every man (*lit.* the company of other men); strong sorrow distresses me. The people are dismal over the king's death; therefore we travel chilled' (3.1-8).

góða' [the lifetime of Magnús the good, the ambitious] (3.1-2), to the poet's present dolorous state. Positive adjectives such as 'góðr' [good] (3.2) and 'móðfikinn' [ambitious] (3.2) are only applied to the person of Magnús, with the implication that when his life ended, these qualities disappeared also. The phrases 'harða illa' [sore wretchedness] (3.4) and 'harmr strangr' [strong sorrow] (3.6), in which Oddr uses intensifying adjectives to emphasize the nouns of grief, describe his own emotional state after losing the king. This contrast narrows the focus of the sequence from the general lament in the first stanza cited to Oddr's personal reaction to the king's death in the second. In addition to this, Oddr no longer uses plural verbs and nouns that denote community and inclusion, as in the first stanza. Rather, the poet announces his isolation through the use of verbs in the singular; indeed, 'mák' [I find myself] is the first word of the first line, and the poet names himself in the third. The end of the king's lifetime has ended not only happiness, but the very existence of his company. Like the Seafarer, Deor and other Old English exiles, Oddr wanders through the world in search of companionship. While we know from the sagas that Haraldr, Magnús' uncle, quickly seized control over the kingdom, this poetic conceit implies that the court community died with Magnús. In the final line of the stanza the poet adopts a formal, plural first-person voice that extends his predicament to all of the king's followers. They are united only in their isolation: 'förum vér aprir' [we travel chilled], he mourns (3.8).¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Oddr's stanza contains the only recorded use of the word *apr* in *SkP*. In prose it is used to describe dangerous battles, while in Modern Icelandic the cognate *napr* is used in the sense of cold, chilly weather or a snappish temper (*CV*, 23).

The anonymous *lausavísa* cited in *Morkinskinna* and Þjóðólfr's fragment both lack the intense personal expressions found in Oddr's stanzas. However, these poets too describe public displays of grief on the part of Magnús' retinue and meditate on the longevity of this emotion. The anonymous *lausavísa* is cited just before Oddr's verses in *Morkinskinna*, describing the journey of the king's ship as it travels up the Norwegian coast:

Nú fara heim í húmi
 (her) kunn (fyr lög sunnan
 daprar) veðrs með dauðan
 dýr nenninn gram þenna;
 ǫld hefr illa haldit,
 esa stríðvana síðan,
 hultit hafa hirðmenn skylja
 höfuð þess 's fremstr vas jöfra.¹¹⁰

In this verse, cited by the saga-author to corroborate his account of the funeral voyage, the ships function metonymically for the retinue and the same language used by Oddr to describe men's emotions is in this stanza applied to the ships. Rather than Oddr's image of the people carrying the king to his grave, the ships perform the same action in this verse as they carry Magnús home over the sea (ll. 1-3). While Oddr noted, '[þ]jóð es at dögling dauðan / dǫpr' [the people are dismal over the king's death] (3.7-8), in this anonymous stanza the ships themselves travel 'daprar...með dauðan / dýr nenninn gram þenna' [dismal with this very active, dear lord dead] (ll.

¹¹⁰ 'Now the dismal ships travel home in the twilight, from the south by the famous law-districts with this very active, dear lord dead. The people have suffered wretchedness; there will be no lack of adversity afterwards. The king's retainers have covered their heads – he was foremost among princes' (*Skj* BI, 395, st. 5 and cited in *Mork*, 147).

3-4). The same word, *dapr*, is used in this stanza, but to describe the personified ships rather than the king's retinue. The anonymous poet, like Oddr, comments on the universality of grief as a reaction to Magnús' death, 'öld hefr illa haldit' [the people have suffered wretchedness] (l. 5), as well as the duration of that emotion well past the moment of the funeral: 'esa stríðvana síðan' [there will be no lack of adversity afterwards] (l. 6). As in Oddr's stanza, the poet moves his focus away from the time of the funeral voyage to make dire predictions about the sadness that is to follow. The emotional gloom felt by the retainers matches the literal twilight the ships sail through on their way home. This poet also shows the retainers sitting in grief long after the funeral itself (ll. 7-8). The act of covering the head in response to Magnús' death is the same as the action recorded by Sigvatr in *Bersöglisvísur*, discussed above, in which it is a sign of defiance and grief over the loss of Magnús' father Óláfr (12.5-8). It is curiously fitting that an act that once signified defiance to Magnús is later used to express grief over his death.

A final, fragmentary stanza by Þjóðólfr Arnórson is similar in subject matter and language.¹¹¹ Although there is no prose context related to Magnús' funeral surrounding the verse, its similarity to the other stanzas is unmistakable:

Leiða langar dauða
 limar illa mik stillis,
 bórut menn enn mæra
 Magnús í gröf fúsir.¹¹²

¹¹¹ As noted by Gade, the verse is only preserved in the *Third Grammatical Treatise*, in which it is given as an example of *tíðaskipti*, a change in tense (*SPSMA* II, 815). It is edited in *Skj* BI, 349, st. 10 as a *lausavísa*.

¹¹² 'The far-reaching (*lit.* long) consequences of the king's death lead me to sadness. Men did not willingly carry the famous Magnús to the grave.'

There is only one *belmingr* of this verse extant and in it the poet locates the time of the utterance after the funeral itself, as in the second *belmingr* of the anonymous *lausavísa* and in Oddr's second stanza. Thus, the contrast between the moment of the funeral and its effects on the people afterwards is absent in this fragment. The poet's focus is solely on the 'langar /...limar' [far-reaching consequences] (l. 1-2) of the event itself. The consequences are uniquely felt by the poet – the *mik* of line 2 – rather than by the retinue as a whole; the king's followers are shown in a group only as they carry Magnús to his grave (l. 3-4). In typical skaldic understatement, they are said not to be 'fúsir' [willing] to do this. This is a construction that appears elsewhere in similar contexts: meditating on Óláfr inn helgi's death at the beginning of *Magnúss saga ins góða*, Sigvatr Þórðarson compares the loss of his patron to a man losing his sweetheart and who is therefore 'fúss' [eager] for death, while Arnórr jarlaskáld says he is 'ófúss' [unwilling] to take part in the conflict between his two patrons, the Orkney earls.¹¹³ The king's followers thus grieve at the funeral in a way that is almost convention.

In contrast to this, the poet shows that he sorrows much more than the king's retainers as he ominously describes how the consequences of the king's death will continue to affect him long after the interment. Þjóðólfr exploits the multiple meanings of the verb 'leiða' [to lead], which is used not only to denote emotion but also to suggest the act of leading or dragging, often to the grave. That is, one might 'leiða ástum' [love] and 'leiða konu í kirkju' [lead a woman to church

¹¹³ *Skj* BI, 251, st. 22 and *Skj* BI, 326-7, st. 5, respectively.

(marry)] in the sagas;¹¹⁴ however, in poetry one might also ‘leiða til bana’ [lead to death], as in *Nóregs konunga-tal*.¹¹⁵ The verb has a particularly chilling resonance in the eddic poem *Reginismál* in a stanza describing a river in Hel:

Ofrgiöld fá gumna synir,
þeir er Vaðgelmi vaða;
ósaðra orða, hverr er á annan lýgr,
of lengi leiða limar.¹¹⁶

Þjóðólfr’s use of the word *leiða* in this stanza shows the poet metaphorically being forever dragged on or pulled at by his memory of the king’s death. With its connotations of burial, the verb subtly echoes the physical act of carrying the king’s body that his followers perform in the same stanza. The ‘limar’, which literally mean the limbs or branches of a tree but here take on the metaphorical meaning of ‘consequences’, are indeed far-reaching. As in the other stanzas discussed above, the poet’s grief is represented as unending, continuing to affect him long after the king’s burial. In each case, it is clear that the funeral is merely the first step in commemoration, and the one which first provokes the composition of mournful skaldic verse. However, as with Sigvatr’s verses cited above, it is also clear that the commemoration of the king and the poet’s expressions of grief will continue for a long period afterward.

¹¹⁴ *CV*, 380.

¹¹⁵ *Skj* BI, 577, st. 16.

¹¹⁶ ‘The sons of men receive a fearful retribution – they wade in Vaðgelmir. One lies about another with untrue words: consequences affect him for a long time’ (4.1-4).

IV. Arnórr jarlaskáld's Commemoration of the Orkney Earls: Divided Loyalties

Arnórr jarlaskáld Þórðarson is, like Sigvatr Þórðarson, a poet primarily known from the sagas written about his patrons. He is not the protagonist of a skald's saga, although his father, Þórðr Kolbeinsson, is the antagonist of *Bjarnar saga Hítðlakappa*.¹¹⁷ Although born in Iceland, Arnórr himself is not a prominent figure in the *Íslendingasögur*, perhaps because he spent much of his adult life in the Orkney Islands. A younger contemporary of Sigvatr and Þórarinn, Arnórr married into the family of the earls of Orkney and composed poetry to chronicle the lives and deaths of Earl Rognvaldr Brúsason and his nephew, Earl Þorfinnr Sigurðarson.¹¹⁸ He later travelled to Norway during the joint reigns of Magnús Ólafsson and Haraldr harðráði Sigurðarson, composing encomia for both kings during their lifetimes as well as after their deaths.

The majority of Arnórr's poetry appears in *Orkneyinga saga*, one of the so-called 'political sagas'.¹¹⁹ Along with *Jómsvíkinga saga* and *Færeyinga saga*, the saga tells the story of an outlying settlement nominally under the influence of the Norwegian kings, chronicling the rulers' often

¹¹⁷ Arnórr is briefly mentioned as Þórðr's son in this saga (Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson, eds., *Borgfirðinga sögur*, 64, 174-5) and in *Grettis saga* (Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, Íslenzk fornrit 7 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1936), 197).

¹¹⁸ For a biography of Arnórr as well as a discussion of all the manuscripts in which his poetry appears, see Diana Whaley's edition, *The Poetry of Arnórr jarlaskáld*, Westfield Publications in Medieval Studies 8 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998), 41-47 and 3-23. A short biography is also given in *SPSMA II*, 177-8.

¹¹⁹ As discussed by Melissa A. Berman in 'The Political Sagas', *SS* 57.2 (1985), esp. 113-19. Peter Foote has noted similarities in the narrative structures of these sagas and in the saga-authors' treatment of Christianity ('Observations on *Orkneyinga saga*', *St. Magnus' Cathedral and Orkney's Twelfth-Century Renaissance*, ed. Barbara E. Crawford (Aberdeen: Aberdeen UP, 1988), 192-5), while Judith Jesch has suggested that the sagas are instead linked through their complicated textual history and preservation ('History in the "Political Sagas"', *Medium Ævum* 62.2 (1993), 210-20).

fraught relationships with the kings and also with their own subjects. Parallels are made in *Orkneyinga saga* between the Orkney earls and the Norwegian royal family: Rognvaldr, left at the Norwegian court as a young boy as a pledge of good faith by his father, fought with Óláfr at Stiklarstaðir in 1030 and fled with Magnús to Russia afterwards.¹²⁰ He returned to take control over the islands after his father's death but became embroiled in a territorial conflict with his nephew Þorfinnr. After his men killed Rognvaldr, Þorfinnr became a missionary king in the tradition of Óláfr himself:

Lét hann þá af herferðum, lagði þá hug á stjórn lýðs ok lands [ok] á lagasetning. Hann sat jafnan í Byrgisheraði ok lét þar gera Kristskirkju, dýrligt musteri; þar var fyrst settur byskupsstóll í Orkneyjum.¹²¹

Arnórr is thus a poet like Hallfreðr and Sigvatr, setting in verse the deeds of his Christian patrons as they attempt to consolidate control over their lands in the years shortly after conversion.¹²² In

¹²⁰ Bo Almqvist has discussed the parallels between Rognvaldr's foreboding of death in *Orkneyinga saga* and a similar episode in the life of Óláfr inn helgi. Such parallels further emphasize the similarities between the two rulers. See 'The Death Forebodings of Saint Óláfr, King of Norway, and Rognvaldr Brúason', *Béaloideas* 42-44 (1977), 1-40.

¹²¹ 'Then he left off raiding and set his mind to governing the people and land, and to legislation. He remained always in Byrgisherað and had Christ's Church built there, the most splendid cathedral; the first bishopric in the Orkneys was established there' (*Ork*, 80-1). Supported by the saga, the traditional view is that the Orkneys were forcibly converted to Christianity by Óláfr Tryggvason and that Þorfinnr consolidated the hold of that religion by establishing the first bishopric in the islands in 1048. However, the historical accuracy of the literature has been called into question by archaeological dating that demonstrates a much earlier time of conversion through the islanders' contact with Anglo-Saxon traders and missionaries. This is discussed by James A. Barrett in 'Christian and Pagan Practice During the Conversion of Viking Age Orkney and Shetland', *The Cross Goes North: Processes of Conversion in Northern Europe, AD 300-1300*, ed. Martin Carver (Woodbridge: York Medieval P, 2003), 207-26.

¹²² Whaley notes that Arnórr's father's poetry is thoroughly pagan in tone and vocabulary. She concludes therefore that Arnórr must have been influenced not by Þórðr but by the works of such Christian poets as Sigvatr and Hallfreðr in Diana C. Edwards, 'Christian and Pagan References in Eleventh-Century Norse Poetry: The Case of Arnórr jarlaskáld', *SBVS* 21.1-2 (1982-83), 37-8.

this section I will examine Arnórr's commemorative poems for the earls of Orkney, *Rognvaldsdrápa* and *Þórfinnsdrápa*, set in the context of his memorials for the kings of Norway, *Magnússdrápa* and *Haraldsdrápa*. Arnórr's poetry for the earls represents the commemoration of rulers who wielded power like kings, but in the much more compressed world of the Orkneys. The earls' kingdoms were smaller than those of the Norwegian kings, and the populations of the islands likewise; tensions between the two earls were probably inevitable. Arnórr forged close familial ties with both men and the bonds of family and of poet-patron relationships soon exploded when tested in this pressurized environment. His memorial poems are thus unique in the corpus of skaldic verse as the poet mourns his two warring patrons, one the death of the other.

It would not be accurate to suggest that all courtly memorials composed during the eleventh century were imbued with expressions of personal emotion. Arnórr's stanzas about the Orkney earls display a remarkable degree of grief and personal attachment to the lords commemorated, but such expressions are not to be found in his *erfidrápur* for Kings Magnús and Haraldr of Norway. *Magnússdrápa* and *Haraldsdrápa* are long commemorative sequences about famous kings. As such, they have received much scholarly attention, and due to a lack of space they will not be examined here in detail.¹²³ Their function in this section is as counterpoint, to show the originality of Arnórr's far more unusual poems for Earls Þórfinnr and Rognvaldr. In terms of scale, however, the poems appear to have been similar. *Magnússdrápa* as we have it

¹²³ The poems have recently been published in *SPSMA* II, 206-28 and 260-78, respectively. This edition by Whaley follows her earlier work in *The Poetry of Arnórr jarlaskáld*, 182-220 and 68-301. For reasons of consistency citations in this chapter are taken from Finnur's edition, *Skj* BI, 311-15 and 322-6, but differences between Finnur's and Whaley's editions will be noted.

comprises nineteen stanzas and *Haraldsdrápa* seventeen, compared to the twenty-five extant stanzas of *Þórfinnssdrápa*.¹²⁴ When the vagaries of manuscript preservation are taken into account, this does not suggest a significant difference in the original scope of the poems. The subject matter differs slightly between the two royal encomia. In *Magnússdrápa*, the poet focuses on the ruler's early career, tracing Magnús' journey back to Norway to claim his father's kingdom after Óláfr's death, while in *Haraldsdrápa* the skald dwells rather on the king's later career, showing his successes harrying in Denmark and then his final defeat in England. However, both eulogies conform to skaldic convention as the skald praises each ruler as the best of men and declares that no other more glorious ruler will ever live again.

Magnússdrápa and *Haraldsdrápa*

Much of the rhetorical force of *Magnússdrápa* comes from Arnórr's insistence that the son is the rightful heir to his father. This idea is also expressed in Sigvatr's poems for Magnús, as discussed in the previous section. In Sigvatr's *Bersöglisvísur* however, the poet urges the young king to emulate his father in order to rule more effectively; in *Magnússdrápa*, Arnórr uses references to his saintly father to place Magnús within a more dramatic context of conflict between good and evil. Arnórr describes the young prince as 'Áleifs sonr' [Óláfr's son] twice (3.3-4; 15.6) and notes that the prince returned to Norway to reclaim his 'föður-arfr' [father's inheritance] (4.8). Just as Óláfr returned from exile to reclaim his land, so 'fýstisk Áleifs austan / afkart sonar hjarta' [Óláfr's

¹²⁴ With only three fragmentary stanzas extant, *Rognvaldsdrápa* is clearly an exception to this.

son's remarkable heart urged itself from the east] (3.3-4). This is a continuation of the same theme in Arnórr's earlier poem *Hrynbenda*, in which he similarly referred to Magnús as 'hilmis kundr' [helmeted one's (Óláfr's) kinsman] (11.2) and the 'hefnir Áleifs' [avenger of Óláfr] (14.1-2).

Having established Magnús as the rightful king in his father's place, Arnórr shows him engaging in the same missionary efforts for which his father became so famous. Battling the heathen Wends, Magnús' use of his father's axe Hel is a direct link between the early missionary king and his son's battles against 'illvirkjar' [evil-doers] with 'óskírð enni' [unbaptised foreheads] (8.4; 8.7).¹²⁵ Stanza 12 of *Hrynbenda* contains similar rhetoric: in that poem, Arnórr called the enemy Wends 'óþjóð' [an evil people] and, more specifically, 'heiðinn' [heathen] (12.1; 12.6). However, in his commemorative sequence Arnórr emphasizes the two competing afterlives of the opposing religions, a theme absent from the poetry addressed to Magnús during his lifetime. As Whaley notes, there is a grim pun on the name of the axe and the goddess of the pagan afterlife, particularly as the name Hel appears close to a reference to heaven:¹²⁶

þás of skapt, en skipti
 skapvörðr himins jörðu,
 (Hel klauf hausa fólva)
 hendr tvær jöfurs spendu.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ The Wends invaded southern Jutland in 1043 but were defeated in battle by Magnús at Lyrskov Heath. For an account of the Wends' relationship with Christian Scandinavia, see Tinna Damgaard-Sørensen, 'Danes and Wends: A Study of the Danish Attitude Towards the Wends' in *People and Places in Northern Europe, 500-1600. Essays in Honour of Peter Hayes Sawyer*, ed. Ian Wood and Niels Lund (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1991), 171-186.

¹²⁶ Whaley, ed., *The Poetry of Arnórr jarlaskáld*, 74, 203.

¹²⁷ 'When the lord clasped the shaft with two hands, and heaven's appointing guardian distributed earth, Hel clove pale skulls' (10.5-8).

The juxtaposition of Hel next to this ‘skapvǫrðr himins’ [heaven’s appointing guardian] (10.6) creates a contrast not only between the pagan and Christian afterlives, but between the role pagan and Christian figures play in the lives of humans. Hel can only kill and the characterisation of the skulls as ‘fǫlvir’, or deadly pale, suggests that even this power is limited to those dying already. The *skapvǫrðr himins*, however, takes an active role in the world of the living as he dispenses lordship over the earth. As in *Bersǫglisvísur*, Magnús steps into his father’s law-keeping shoes when Arnórr announces, ‘[s]vik réð eigi eklu / allvaldr Dǫnum gjalda’ [the all-powerful man did not meagrely repay the Danes for their treason] (17.1-2). He notes, similarly, that ‘ráns galt herr frá hǫnum’ [the people atoned for their robbery of him] (18.3). Echoing Óláfr’s missionary efforts in Norway, Arnórr shows Magnús to be both an upholder of the law and an enemy of paganism in continental Europe. He is thus a suitable heir to his sainted father.

Arnórr’s commemoration of Haraldr is similar, although he cannot frame Óláfr’s half-brother so explicitly within the patrilineal framework established in *Magnússdrápa*. There may be some small attempt at this: when the poet notes that Haraldr burned settlements in Uppland, he observes that this ‘[g]engr í ætt’ [runs in the family] (7.1), a possible reference to Óláfr’s violent conversion of the area.¹²⁸ However, Haraldr’s raids in Uppland are not motivated by the religious zeal attributed to Magnús in his attack on the Wends. Describing the king’s punishment of his own rebellious subjects, Arnórr and his fellow skalds depict Haraldr’s actions as those of the angry

¹²⁸ Whaley points out that *ganga* could also be understood in a figurative sense of telling or reporting, and thus that the phrase could be translated as ‘it is told in the family’ or ‘it is reported through generations’ (*The Poetry of Arnórr jarlaskáld*, 277). There is certainly an analogy made between Haraldr and Óláfr in the prose context, as this stanza is actually cited in Snorri’s *Óláfs saga helga* rather than in any narrative about the earl (*Hkr* II, 208-9).

rex justus, a far more forceful Christian motif. Richard Barton, in his analysis of anger in eleventh- and twelfth-century France, observes that anger occupied a double, seemingly paradoxical, place in the medieval world. On one hand, it was one of the seven deadly sins condemned by the Church; on the other, anger could be legitimate and righteous, as in the Old Testament. It was entirely justified for rulers to grow ‘angry when evil threatened their position or areas under their protection’.¹²⁹ Public displays of anger could thus successfully call attention to the ruler’s legitimate authority when it was being challenged.

Arnórr describes just such an anger performed by King Haraldr, establishing an intellectual rather than an emotional understanding of the king’s role and his relationship with his followers. In *Haraldsdrápa* the king is ‘reiðr’ [wrathful] as he quells a rebellion in Uppland (8.2), but it is a justified anger:

vildut oþflgar aldir,
 áðr vas stýrt til váða,
 grams dolgum feksk galgi,
 gagnprýðanda hlýða.¹³⁰

Stúfr inn blindi’s short *erfiðdrápa* for Haraldr contains a similar declaration: ‘enn fyr afgørð sanna /...þjóð fekk vísan váða’ [and because of proven transgression the people suffered certain danger].¹³¹

¹²⁹ Richard E. Barton, “Zealous Anger” and the Renegotiation of Aristocratic Relationships in Eleventh- and Twelfth-Century France’, *Anger’s Past: The Social Uses of an Emotion in the Middle Ages*, ed. Barbara H. Rosenwein (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1998), 159.

¹³⁰ ‘Powerful men did not wish to listen to the adorer of victory before (they were) steered into danger – the gallows received the lord’s enemies’ (7.5-8).

¹³¹ *Skj* BI, 373-4, st. 3.

Indeed, it seems that this motif was already being explored during Haraldr's lifetime, as Þjóðólfr Arnórsson's *Sexstefja* also describes the effects of the king's anger during his invasion of Denmark:

eldr vas gǫrr at gjaldi;
gramr réð, en þá téði
hár í hóf at fœra
hrótgarmr búendr arma.¹³²

Gjald could mean 'payment', 'retribution' or 'reward', while *hóf* commonly carried connotations of a judgement in moderation or in proportion to the crime.¹³³ According to his poets, Haraldr is a righteous king who doles out deserved punishments to his rebellious subjects.

In keeping with the intellectual and spiritual nature of his commemoration of Magnús and Haraldr, Arnórr himself maintains a formal distance from his task as he composes these poems. He begins *Magnússdrápa* with a formal call for hearing and an admonition to his listeners to be quiet:

Nú hykk rjóðanda reiðu
rógǫrs, þvít veitk gǫrva,
(þegi seimbrotar) segja
seggjum hneitis eggja.¹³⁴

¹³² 'Fire was ready as retribution; the king prevailed. And then the high roof-hound (fire) could bring the wicked farmers to judgement' (*Skj* BI, 343-4, st. 20).

¹³³ *CV*, 201 and 280. In the legal sense, *hóf* is a punishment in equal degree to the crime committed, and a *hófmaðr* in the sagas is a just or temperate man. For a full list of the uses of this word and its use in related compounds, see the *Dictionary of Old Norse Prose*, ed. Helle Degnbol et al.

¹³⁴ 'Now I plan to tell men of the deeds of the strife-ready reddener of the sword's edges (warrior), because I know (them) exactly. May treasure-breakers (warriors) be silent!' (1.1-4)

The poetic voice is not absent from this sequence, but it is one of detachment. Arnórr echoes the conventions of many a skaldic poet when he remarks, '[s]egja munk' [I will tell] (6.1) and 'hrósak hugfulls visa /...ævi' [I praise the lifetime of the courageous lord] (11.3-4). These are statements of fact, rather than of emotional attachment. He places the events of the king's life at a remove from his own experience with the phrase, 'hefk heyr't' [I have heard] (12.1). This phrase also reminds the audience that Arnórr is only one of many poets to speak about the king's life, rejecting any suggestion that Arnórr is more privileged than other poets in his access to the king. In fact, Arnórr places the onus of commemoration firmly on the shoulders of others: 'minnsk ǫld' [let men remember] the king, he commands (18.5).¹³⁵

Haraldráða presents a similar case when the poet declares confidently that, 'mannkyn hefr at minnum / morgun þann' [mankind holds that morning in memory] (11.7-8). Arnórr even attributes the process of oral transmission to the king himself in this poem, noting that, '[h]jalmǫru lét heyra /...tyggi' [the leader let helmet-bearers hear] (2.1-3). At times, Arnórr rather comically shows himself to be aware of his creation of an impartial stance: following a mildly subjective statement in which he notes that Sveinn did not abandon his ship 'saklaust' [without reason] (4.2), he clarifies this as his own interpretation of events: 'hugi minn es þat' [that is my thought] (4.4). He even makes a bald statement of the fallibility of poets in general: '[m]yrkt 's, hvern meira orkar, / mér, alls greppr né sérat' [it is obscure to me who will achieve more, since a

¹³⁵ Whaley suggests that this subjunctive could be taken in a more challenging way, 'let me see *if* they can recall', implying that they will not be able to do so (*The Poetry of Arnórr jarlaskáld*, 217).

poet does not understand it] (17.1-2).¹³⁶ Near the end of the sequence, Arnórr denies agency to all men regarding the transmission of the king's success story: declaring that '[v]ítt fór vǫlsungs heiti' [the prince's (*lit.* Vǫlsungr's) name travelled widely] (16.1), the poet suggests that the king's reputation has taken on a life of its own, travelling at will. Only in the final stanza of the sequence does Arnórr claim any responsibility for the production of the poem, and he does so in language that harks back to Glúmr and to other pragmatically-minded skalds who regard poetry as a commodity: he concludes, 'gjǫf launak svá jǫfri' [thus I repay the king for (his) gift] (19.4). This creation of an apparently detached poetic persona gives what might be read as criticism of the lord the veneer of impartiality: when Arnórr remarks, '[o]lli ofrausn stillis /...því' [the over-magnificence of the king caused this] (13.1-2), his judgement is phrased as a statement of fact rather than as the poet's opinion.¹³⁷ The poet's opinion it may be, but Arnórr himself is careful to suggest that this is not the case. Arnórr's critique of the king is not, like Sigvatr's in *Bersǫglisvísur* or Þórarinn's in *Glælognskviða*, an example of friendly advice: Haraldr is already dead and cannot profit from the poet's verses. It is however possible that such criticism originates from within this tradition of 'advice to princes' more generally, and Arnórr's comments may function instead as advice to the kings who follow Haraldr as he warns them not to make similar mistakes.

¹³⁶ Although in prose *greppr* refers to metre or verse, in poetry the word can also denote the poet himself (*LP*, 203).

¹³⁷ Whaley discusses the word *ofrausn* in more detail and its similarities with the Old English word *ofermod* in *The Poetry of Arnórr jarlaskáld*, 290 and in *SPSMA* II, 273-4. Arnórr's criticism of the king is echoed by Þjóðólfr Arnórsson in a *lausavísa* in which he says that Haraldr led his troops 'þarflaust' [needlessly] westwards (*Skj* BI, 353, st. 27).

Magnússdrápa and *Haraldsdrápa* are thus highly competent memorial poems celebrating the power of two kings who ruled Norway more or less successfully as they followed in the path of their illustrious kinsman, Óláfr inn helgi. Arnórr's commemoration of the two kings is respectful and suitably celebratory. However, the relationship between Arnórr and his royal patrons is, at least according to these verses, one of lord and retainer rather than of friend and kinsman. In his commemorative poems for the two kings Arnórr is more a political thinker than a mourner. He betrays an interest in the characteristics of a good king and the king's role as a leader of the community, but does not mourn the end of his relationship with one king in particular.

Rognvaldsdrápa and *Þórfinnsdrápa*

Arnórr's memorials for the Orkney earls are very different from *Magnússdrápa* and *Haraldsdrápa*, commemorating as they do the poet's kinsmen and friends. *Rognvaldsdrápa* is barely a *drápa* at all, but a fragment.¹³⁸ None of its three stanzas is more than four lines long, and all are preserved separately, the first in Snorri's separate *Óláfs saga helga* and in *Orkneyinga saga*, the second and third in *Skáldskaparmál*. Snorri cites the first stanza as evidence for Rognvaldr's journey to Russia with Haraldr Sigurðarson after the Battle of Stiklarstaðir. Both the poet and the subject of the poem are named in his narrative, although Snorri gives few details about Rognvaldr's involvement in the battle: '[þ]ess getr Arnórr jarlaskáld, at Rognvaldr Brúsason var lengi

¹³⁸ Citations of this poem are taken from *Skj* BI, 305-6, where Finnur dates it to c. 1046. It is also edited by Kock in *Norsk* I, 155 and by Whaley in *SPSMA* II, 178-81, where full information about the various manuscript contexts of each stanza may be found.

landvarnarmaður í Garðaríki ok átti þar orrostur margar' [Arnórr jarlaskáld says this, that Rognvaldr Brúason was for a long time charged with the defence of the land in Russia and engaged in many battles there] (*Hkr* II, 440). The author of *Orkneyinga saga* also describes Rognvaldr's travels with Haraldr but gives slightly more detail about Rognvaldr's character: 'Rognvaldr var, sem áðr er ritat, hverjum manni meiri ok sterkari' [Rognvaldr was, as is written before, the best and strongest of men] (*Ork*, 54). The anonymous saga-author integrates the verse closely into the prose text, likely taking his cue from it: '[s]vá segir Arnórr jarlaskáld, at Rognvaldr átti í Hólmgarði tíu fólkorrostur' ['so says Arnórr jarlaskáld, that Rognvaldr had ten great battles in Hólmgarðr] (*Ork*, 54), he writes, summarizing the verse that follows. This stanza, therefore, functions in an 'authenticating' way and the commemorative nature of the overall sequence is not apparent to the reader of the saga. In this case, it is not absolutely certain that the stanza does indeed come from an *erfidrápa*, although the past tense and the specification that the subject of the poem fought ten battles would suggest a protagonist who is no longer young. However, stanza 3, recorded in *Skáldskaparmál*, is a prayer for the earl's soul:

Saðr stillir hjalp snjollum
sóltjalda Rognvaldi.¹³⁹

If this fragment is from the same sequence, it would certainly attest to the memorial nature of the poem. It is cited by Snorri as an example of a kenning for the sky, and of the twelve examples he gives for such kennings, five are commemorative stanzas in which poets declare the supremacy of their patrons and the impossibility of finding their equals ever again (*Skm*, 33-5). Three of these

¹³⁹ "True ruler of the sun's tents (ruler of the sky, God), help excellent Rognvaldr' (3.1-3). Cited in *Skm*, 35.

are in fact from poems by Arnórr himself.¹⁴⁰ Stanza 24 of *Þórfínnsdrápa*, while it does not specifically name a king but offers rather an apocalyptic vision that follows his death, is also included in this section. It is clear, therefore, that this fragmentary poem is typical of Arnórr's *erfidrápur* as a whole, and that it was recognized as such by later writers.

The two stanzas discussed above, then, present a limited but credible case for the existence of an *erfidrápa* for Earl Rognvaldr along generic lines that are followed by a relatively large number of skalds during the tenth and eleventh centuries. Stanza 2, however, represents something new in the world of skaldic commemoration. In this stanza, Arnórr twice describes the importance of his kinship-by-marriage with the earl:

Réð Heita konr hleyti
herþarfr við mik gǫrva;
styrk lét oss of orkat
jarls mægð af því frægðar.¹⁴¹

Although marriage has consolidated the relationship between the two men, no woman is ever mentioned. The king does not marry as such, but creates a marriage-alliance: the relationship is shown in terms of its male participants only. Indeed, both words used to describe this bond suggest the legalistic world of kinship between men: *mægð* is discussed in the context of court challenges on behalfs of one's kin-by-marriage in *Grágás*, while *Eyrbyggja saga* offers an example of both *mægð* and *hleyti* used in in this way when a case is disallowed because of the close kinship

¹⁴⁰ They are from *Rognvaldsdrápa* (*Skj* BI, 306, st. 3), *Magnússdrápa* (*Skj* BI, 315, st. 19) and a fragment praising Hermundr Illugason (*Skj* BI, 316).

¹⁴¹ 'The son of the sea-king (earl), useful to armies, decided to make a marriage-alliance with me. The strong kinship by marriage of the earl gave fame to me because of that' (2.1-4).

between the plaintiffs and their supporters.¹⁴² It is significant, however, that it is the king, as the subject of the verb, who forges this alliance and not the poet, who is the recipient of the king's actions. The poet gains 'frægð' [fame] from this alliance (2.3), a flattering inversion of the usual pattern that sees a poet bestowing fame on a king through the composition and performance of his verse. Indeed, the image created in this stanza is one of a king who enjoys a strong relationship with his followers – he is 'herþarfr' [useful to men] (2.2) – and with this one man in particular.

The events surrounding Rognvaldr's death are not mentioned in the few extant stanzas of his memorial *drápa*, but we are told in *Orkneyinga saga* that the earls argued for many years over the division of the Orkney Islands (*Ork*, 35-62). The dispute culminated in a sea-battle at Rauðabjörg (*Ork*, 63-70) from which Rognvaldr escaped, only to be killed later by Þorfinnr's men after attempting to burn his nephew alive in his own hall (*Ork*, 73-79). Rognvaldr's death completed Þorfinnr's consolidation of power in the islands and granted him full control over his inheritance; after this, notes the saga-author, 'Þorfinnr jarl gerðisk hofðingi mikill' [Earl Þorfinnr became a great chieftain] (*Ork*, 43). It is not surprising, therefore, that Arnórr's *drápa* for Þorfinnr betrays not only admiration for an incorrigible fighter, but also a great anxiety about the process of commemorating a man who was both his patron and kinsman, but who had killed a member of both his and Arnórr's family in a vicious feud.

¹⁴² See the section entitled 'Að ryðja kvið' in Gunnar Karlsson, Kristján Sveinsson and Mörður Árnason, eds., *Grágás: Lagasafn Íslenska Þjóðveldisins*, 389-90, and Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, eds., *Eyrbyggja saga*, 30, respectively.

The first three stanzas of *Þorfinnsdrápa* establish, as Sigvatr does in his *lausavísur*, an elegiac contrast between the happiness of the past and the skald's sorrow in the present.¹⁴³ It should be noted that there is some disagreement as to the order of these stanzas, probably because they are not preserved together in any one text.¹⁴⁴ Stanza 1 is recorded in the *konungasögur* as an example of the seating arrangements in a royal court, specifically that of Óláfr kyrri (*Ágr-Fsk*, 300 and *Mork*, 289-90), while stanza 2 is cited only in *Orkneyinga saga*, where it provides corroborating evidence of Þorfinnr's generosity to his followers (*Ork*, 52). Following seven stanzas from the same poem in which the poet relates Þorfinnr's early battles in Scotland, the depiction of the earl seated in the hall dispensing treasure celebrates a ruler who has successfully established his military pre-eminence in the region. In this vein the chapter concludes, '[i] þenna tíma andaðisk Brúsi jarl, ok tók þá Þorfinnr jarl undir sik allar Orkneyjar' [at that time Earl Brúsi died and then Earl Þorfinnr took all the Orkneys under him] (*Ork*, 52). Such a phrase is very common in the historical sagas

¹⁴³ As in the rest of this thesis I follow Finnur's order of the stanzas in *Skj* BI, 316-21, but it should be noted that Kari Ellen Gade has made an excellent case for rearranging the order of stanzas 16-18 (Þorfinnr's English campaign). She places them instead after stanzas 19-20 (the earls' conflict and the Battle of Rauðabjörg) in 'Norse Attacks on England and Arnórr jarlaskald's "Þorfinnsdrápa"', 1-14. Similarly, Judith Jesch has observed that, despite Arnórr's apparently eye-witness account of many of the battles, '*Þorfinnsdrápa* is dismembered and plundered for historical information' by the author of *Orkneyinga saga* ('History in the "Political Sagas"', 213). The poem is also edited by Whaley in *SPSMA* II, 229-60 and by Kock in *Norsk* I, 160-3. *Skj* does not give a date for this poem, but as Whaley notes, it must have been composed after Þorfinnr's death, c. 1064-5 (*SPSMA* II, 229).

¹⁴⁴ Stanzas 3 and 4 are recorded in *Skm* as examples of kennings for noblemen and Óðinn respectively, while stanza 1 is in *Fagrskinna* and *Morkinskinna*, and stanza 2 is in *Orkneyinga saga*. The full manuscript context of each verse is given by Whaley, who, in both her 1998 edition and in *SPSMA* II follows the order: 4 (*Nú hykk slíðrbugaðs segja*), 2 (*Orms fellu drakk allan*), 1 (*Hétu, þás (hvern vetr) sötum*), and 3 (*Bera sýn of mik mínir*). Despite their differences, all three editors of this sequence do agree that the first four stanzas are in some way separate from the battle sequence of the poem.

and is elsewhere applied to Haraldr hárfagri (*Hkr* I, 99 and 112) and to Earl Hákon (*Hkr* I, 241) at the height of their powers. The stanza and the prose thus combine in *Orkneyinga saga* to form a declaration of Þorfinnr's might as a king-like ruler in the tradition of powerful Norwegian lords. In this context the stanza lacks all connotations of the memorial poem and is, rather, a celebration of the earl's early success and a promise of more to come.

Both Finnur and Kock follow the same stanza order, establishing a 'then and now' structure in Arnórr's opening meditation. In the first two stanzas, Arnórr speaks in the past tense, describing himself performing before the earl and his retainers:

Hétk, þás (hvern vetr) sötum,
 hrafns verðgjafa, (jafnan
 líð drakk gramr á góðar)
 gagnvart (skipa sagnir).¹⁴⁵

Orms felli drakk allan
 (alkostigr) fen hrosta
 (rausn drýgði þá ræsir)
 Rognvalds niðr í gognum.¹⁴⁶

Arnórr's description of the seating arrangements – 'sötum /...gagnvart' [we sat facing] (1.1-4) – playfully compares Þorfinnr's hall to a ship manned by rows of men, or 'skipa sagnir' [men of ships]

¹⁴⁵ 'I exhorted always the good ships' hosts when, each winter, we sat facing the raven's meal-giver (earl). The lord drank ale' (1.1-4). For this translation I do not follow Finnur's rather convoluted syntax, suggested by the added parentheses. The prose word order in this translation would read: 'Hét jafnan á góðum skipa sagnir, þás hvern vetr sötum gagnvart verðgjafa hrafns. Gramr drakk líð'.

¹⁴⁶ 'Rognvaldr's descendant (Þorfinnr) drank the marsh of malt (ale) right through all of the serpent's death (winter). The very precious king practised generosity then!' (2.1-4)

(1.4) as he calls the retainers. The metaphor is continued in the third stanza with the phrase ‘þengils sessi’ [prince’s bench-mate] (3.3), with *sessi* derived from the word *sess*, denoting a rowing bench on a longship.¹⁴⁷ Comparing the earl’s hall to a ship places the enforced inactivity of winter pastimes – drinking and listening to poetry – within the context of sea-voyages and battles as the feasting earl is described as a heroic ‘hrafns verðgjafa’ [giver of food to ravens] (1.2). This giving of food to ravens in the first stanza parallels the act of giving treasure in the second: according to the poet, ‘raun drýgði þá ræsir’ [the king practised generosity then] (2.3). Arnórr even implies that the king rewarded him in particular, as the kenning for the ale that the king drinks, ‘fen hrosta’ [marsh of malt] (2.2), could also be a kenning for the mead of poetry; in stanza 4 the kenning ‘alfǫður /...brim hrosta’ [surf of the all-father’s malt] (4.3-4) uses the same construction (albeit modified by a reference to Óðinn) explicitly to refer to poetry. The image that Arnórr creates in these two stanzas is that of an idealized hall in which the heroism of summer battles blends with the feasting and story-telling of winter. The earl is a generous ruler who rewards his poet handsomely as he consumes ale and poetry with equal voracity.

As Widsið says,

Forþon ic mæg singan ond secgan spell
 mænan fore mengo in meoduhalle
 hu me cynegode cystum dohten.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ Judith Jesch, *Ships and Men in the Late Viking Age* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2001), 186.

¹⁴⁸ “Therefore I can sing and tell a tale, and relate before many in the meadhall how noblemen treated me generously” (*Exeter*, 149-53, ll. 54-56).

In *Þorfinnsdrápa* Arnórr too proclaims his skill as a poet and the status at court he was granted as a result of it. In the next two verses of the poem, however, the skald contrasts his success in the past with the grief he feels in the present:

Bera sýn of mik mínir
 morðkends taka enda
 þess of þengils sessa
 þung mein synir ungir.¹⁴⁹

Nú hykk slíðrhugaðs segja,
 síð léttir mér stríða,
 (þýtr alföður) ýtum
 jarls kostu (brim hrosta).¹⁵⁰

As in Sigvatr's work discussed above, the poet invokes the elegiac mood as he shifts into the present tense, signalled by an introductory *nú*. Finnur's ordering of the poem thus aligns Arnórr's commemoration of Þorfinnr with that of such powerful figures as Óláfr inn helgi as the poet contrasts the joys of the earl's court with the desolation that follows his death. It should be noted that Whaley's ordering of the sequence attributes a different function to this stanza, as she places it in the opening, *upphaf*, position.¹⁵¹ This is a viable option, as the poet's announcement of his intent to recite verse, '[n]ú hykk segja ýtum' [now I plan to tell to men] (4.1-4), has much in common with the other stanzas that 'call for attention', grouped together in *Skáldskaparmal* (*Skm*,

¹⁴⁹ 'Heavy, visible sorrows loom over me; my young sons hear the conclusion of the bench-mate (poet) of the slaughter-knowing prince (Þorfinnr)' (3.1-4). This translation will be explained in detail below.

¹⁵⁰ 'Now I plan to tell men of the accomplishments (or virtues) of the fearsome-minded earl – grief will lift from me later. The surf of the all-father's malt (mead of poetry) howls' (4.1-4).

¹⁵¹ Whaley, *The Poetry of Arnórr jarlaskáld*, 220-21.

6-8). If this stanza fulfils an introductory function, the contrast between then and now is reversed in this poem in comparison to other *erfiðrápur*, but it is perhaps most important to note that the contrast is still present, and a potent source of pathos for the poet. Thus, this opening sequence of stanzas describing the hall functions as an introduction to the battle sequence that follows.¹⁵²

The order of the stanzas notwithstanding, it is certain that as Arnórr declares his intention of relating the deeds of the earl he also comments on the relationship between the act of composition and his grief over the earl's death: 'síð léttir mér stríða' [grief will lift from me later] (4.2) he says, alluding either to the completion of the poem or to a time in the distant future when the earl's death will feel less immediate. The word *síð* adds a third time frame, the future, to his contrasting times of past and present, while the verb 'léttu' [to lift, lighten] (4.2) foresees an alleviation of the pain that has been described as 'þungr' [heavy] (3.4), further emphasizing that contrast.¹⁵³ Arnórr's depiction of grief is thus confined to the present moment of composition and recitation; we have been told that he was happy while the king lived and we are assured that his grief will dissipate at some point in the future, but in the space of time occupied by the recitation of the poem, grief is dominant. His kenning for poetry is intimately linked to the expression of

¹⁵² It is true that no exact parallel to this 'prologue' exists in the few poems that have been recorded as continuous sequences, but it is notable that such poems as *Hákonarmál*, *Haraldskvæði* and *Eiríksmál* have at least one stanza of narration that precedes the main dialogue, as discussed in the second chapter of this thesis. A later example, *Geisli*, begins with a complex prologue of eighteen verses, the first six stanzas of which are a religious *invocatio*, while the second group of six contains a more traditional 'call for hearing': '[n]ú skulum gofgan geisla /...vel dyrka' [now we must worship the glorious sun-beam] (*Skj* BI, 428, st. 7). On this see Chase, ed., *Einarr Skúlason's Geisli*, 21.

¹⁵³ Note the similarities here between Arnórr's description of grief as heavy and Oddr kíkínaskáld's description of Magnús' funeral, discussed above: 'þung byrðr vas sú /... þeim es hann gaf seima' [that was a heavy burden for those to whom he gave riches] (2.3-4).

this grief: the phrase ‘þýtr alfǫður /...brim hrosta’ [the surf of the all-father’s malt roars] (4.3-4), as suggested above, continues the ocean imagery that characterises Arnórr’s description of Þorfinnr’s hall. The verb *þjóta*, however, is a startling and semantically complex word to describe the action performed by the mead of poetry. There are only eight uses of *þjóta* in skaldic verse, all dating from the eleventh century or later.¹⁵⁴ Describing the howl of a wolf or the blast of a trumpet, the verb suggests a loud, perhaps high-pitched, sound;¹⁵⁵ *þjóta* also describes the crackling noise of a farmstead burning during a raid.¹⁵⁶ Arnórr’s use of the word in this stanza is clearly related to his call for attention, but the verb he chooses to describe his voice is one that in other verses suggests a loud and almost inhuman noise. It can be no coincidence that the verb *þjóta* is also used twice to refer to the sea: Þjóðólfr Arnórsson describes the sea in this way as it washes over drowning men, while in a later *lausavísa* by Rognvaldr kali Kolsson, earl of Orkney, the verb describes the play of the waves on his ship.¹⁵⁷ This association with the sea is also suggested in Arnórr’s stanza, as the ‘alfǫður /...brim hrosta’ [surf of the all-father’s mead] (4.3-4) churns from the poet’s mouth, perhaps also a play on the notion of poetry as Óðinn’s vomit (*Skm*, 4-5). Strangely, *þjóta* is rarely the main verb in a skaldic verse: in five of the eight examples of its usage in poetry, it appears in intercalary clauses of only three or four words, as in this stanza. It is thus a verb used to evoke atmosphere rather than to describe an important event. The howling of the wolf, the roaring of

¹⁵⁴ This is according to a search of *SkP*.

¹⁵⁵ As in Þolverkr Arnórsson’s *Drápa about Haraldr barðráði* (*Skj* BI, 484, st. 1) and in Máni’s *lausavísur* (*Skj* BI, 519-20, st. 3).

¹⁵⁶ This is found in an anonymous *lausavísa* from *Magnúss saga berfætts* (*Skj* BI, 397-8, st. 15).

¹⁵⁷ *Skj* BI, 335-6, st. 2 and *Skj* BI, 484, st. 23, respectively.

the fire, and the roiling of the sea are incidental to the main events related in their respective stanzas, but the sounds of these dangerous phenomena lend an ominous tone to the verses. In *Þórfinnsdrápa*, Arnórr's description of the mead of poetry in this way is not a celebration of his skills, but an indication of his grief and a declaration of his powerlessness as poetry demands release, unstoppable as fire or waves.

Stanza 3 is more problematic than stanza 4. Whaley and Finnur construe it in roughly the same way: Whaley suggests the translation, 'My young sons begin to bear for me at the death of the battle-skilled bench-mate of the monarch, manifest, heavy sorrows'.¹⁵⁸ Whaley notes, however, that this reading is imperfect and suggests that the text may be corrupt.¹⁵⁹ This is likely true, but the translation settled upon here implies too tortuous a word order to be a convincing reading of the stanza. Kari Ellen Gade has done an extensive survey of *dróttkvætt* patterns and she observes that the finite verb of an independent clause must always occur as the first or second element in the sentence;¹⁶⁰ Arnórr would, contrary to all his other stanzas, be breaking this rule if the verb *taka* were taken to be the primary verb, as in Whaley's suggested reading. *Bera* must be the primary verb, and *taka* introduces a second, interwoven, clause.¹⁶¹ Following the pattern of

¹⁵⁸ Whaley, *The Poetry of Arnórr jarlaskáld*, 123-4, 225. She also offers two alternate readings. Finnur's Danish translation, 'Mine unge sønner begynder at nære øjensynlig tung sorg for mig i anledning af den kampvante fyrstevens død', follows a similar pattern (*Skj* BI, 316, st. 3).

¹⁵⁹ Whaley, *The Poetry of Arnórr jarlaskáld*, 225-28.

¹⁶⁰ Gade, *The Structure of Old Norse Dróttkvætt Poetry*, 173.

¹⁶¹ Gade notes that constructions in which the second finite verb falls in the even line following the first verb occur with relative frequency (roughly 37% of the time) in the skaldic corpus (*The Structure of Old Norse Dróttkvætt Poetry*, 178).

‘vertical placement’ that Gade identifies – a form designed to help the audience decode such interlacing clauses¹⁶² – I construe *Bera sýn of mik* with *þung mein* to give the first clause, while *mínir* modifies *synir ungir* and is also joined to *taka enda*:

BERA SÝN OF MIK **mínir**
morðkends taka enda
þess of þengils sessa
 ÞUNG MEIN **synir ungir.**

The syntax of lines 2 and 3 is less contested than that of the framing lines 1 and 4, and editors generally agree that the phrase *morðkends þengils sessa* is a kenning for warrior; the genitive case of that kenning refers to the *endi* of line 2.¹⁶³ The prose order, therefore, should approximate that suggested by Whaley as an alternative option: *[þ]ung, sýn mein bera of mik; mínir ungir synir taka enda þessum morðkends þengils sessa.*¹⁶⁴ This reading provides a simplified word order, and one in

¹⁶² According to Gade, such patterns are created by placing the constituent parts of the interwoven clauses vertically above or below each other in the stanza. Of course, such a theory relies heavily on Gade’s analysis of the written stanzas, which are divided into eight lines each. We have no definite proof that the eight-line format provides a valid structure for verses that were delivered orally, or written in the manuscripts as continuous prose. However, the evidence Gade provides for the frequency of this pattern is convincing, and while the name ‘vertical placement’ privileges the way we read modern, printed editions of the poems, it does seem that there is some sort of patterning within the lines that renders these placements memorable (*The Structure of Old Norse Dróttkvætt Poetry*, 17, 204–08). It should be noted that there is evidence in the sagas that supports our modern eight-line stanza, particularly in the context of the skaldic challenge: consider King Óláfr Tryggvason’s demand that Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld compose a verse in which the word *sverð* occurs in every line (*Hkr* I, 331) or Einarr Skúlason’s bet that King Sigurðr munnr Haraldsson and his men cannot remember every line in a stanza he recites (*Mork*, 447–8).

¹⁶³ This reading also aids audience comprehension by placing the direct object of the verb next to it, and thus in a prominent location that emphasizes the function of *endi* as the base-word in a complex kenning.

¹⁶⁴ Whaley, *The Poetry of Arnórr jarlaskáld*, 227. Whaley notes that for this reading, the manuscript variant *þessum* for *þess of* must be followed, producing a dative of possession that links the kenning *morðkends þengils sessi* with the referent *endi*.

which the relationship between the two clauses is signalled to the reader by conventional skaldic patterning.

The editors of the sequence are united in assuming that the kenning *morðkends þengils sessi* refers to Þorfinnr. This seems an incongruous reading in an encomiastic poem. The earl is not portrayed as second to any other ruler in the rest of the sequence, and indeed, such a representation would be entirely unusual in the corpus of praise-poetry.¹⁶⁵ Elsewhere in the sequence the earl himself is referred to as *þengill* (7.8; 9.3; 11.7), and Arnórr uses a wide range of *heiti* that commonly refer to kings in this sequence: Þorfinnr is a *ræsir* (2.3), *gramr* (1.3; 8.5; 13.4; 18.3), *hilmir* (5.1), *jöfurr* (6.2; 17.4), *dróttinn* (8.4; 10.1; 10.5; 12.4), *siklingr* (9.7), *hjarri* (18.1) and *vísir* (16.3). He is also described by typical king-kennings that refer to the giving of treasure, such as *bringdrífr* (15.4) and *bringstríðr* (23.1), and the adjective *morðkendr* is repeated later in the sequence to refer unambiguously to Þorfinnr.¹⁶⁶ Most tellingly of all, perhaps, Þorfinnr is called the ‘konungr jarla’ [king of earls] (13.2), a phrase which elevates him to a status equal to that of the lords of Norway. It is highly unlikely, therefore, that the poet would undercut so many careful representations of Þorfinnr as a ruler in his own right only to show him as the bench-mate of one more powerful. Who, therefore, is the *sessi* in this kenning? Hallfreðr uses a similar kenning in his *Erfidrápa Óláfs Tryggvasonar*, but in that poem the phrase ‘þjóðar sessi’ [bench-mate of the people] (3.7) refers to the king by placing his high rank in juxtaposition with that of the common people.

¹⁶⁵ Consider Haraldr’s annoyance when Arnórr praises Magnús as the best of kings: ‘[I]ofa konvng þenna sem þv vill s. hann. en lasta eigi aðra konvnga’ [praise this king as you wish, he said, but don’t speak ill of other kings’ (*Mork*, 117).

¹⁶⁶ Arnórr speaks of the earl raiding in Scotland: ‘[m]orðkennir galt monnum / mein’ [the slaughter-knowing man repaid adversity to men] (11.5-6).

The kenning in *Þórfinnsdrápa* may well be an inversion of Hallfreðr's, and I contend that it refers not to the earl, but to the earl's bench-mate, who is the poet himself.

It is likely the conjunction of *morðkends þengils sessi* with *endi* in the context of a memorial poem that has encouraged past editors to identify Þorfinnr as the bench-mate described. *Endi* may after all be used like its modern English cognate to refer both to the literal end of something and to the figurative end, or death, of a person.¹⁶⁷ If, however, Arnórr himself is accepted to be the *sessi* in this stanza, *endi* probably does not refer to his death. It would be an intriguing possibility to consider this stanza as part of the conclusion, rather than the opening of the poem; *endi* in this case would refer to the poem rather than to the poet. In the anonymous poem *Leiðarvísan*, for example, *endi* functions in exactly this way.¹⁶⁸ In *Háttatal* the word is used to refer to the end of a line of poetry.¹⁶⁹ My translation of this stanza thus reads, 'heavy, visible sorrows loom over me; my young sons hear the conclusion of the bench-mate (poet) of the slaughter-knowing prince (Þorfinnr)'. Editors have traditionally assigned this stanza to the beginning of the poem as part of the *upphaf* sequence, but as it is preserved only in *Skáldskaparmál*, there is no prose context to guide (or to mislead) a modern audience. According to my reading, therefore, this stanza should be placed at the end of the sequence: Arnórr thus frames his encomium with an *upphaf* that describes his past happiness at the earl's court and a conclusion in which he passes on the process

¹⁶⁷ See *CV*, 129 and *LP*, 109 for examples.

¹⁶⁸ The poet announces, 'brands hefr órr til enda /...kveðit drópu' [the blade's messenger (warrior) has recited the poem to the end] (*Skj*, BI, 633, st. 44).

¹⁶⁹ Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Háttatal*, ed. Anthony Faulkes (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1999), 17, 19.

of commemoration to a new generation, the young sons who descend from both the poet and the family of the earls who have died.

Within this framework of the family's mourning and commemoration, Arnórr celebrates the life of the battle-skilled earl. As noted above, it is not immediately obvious from the prose context that the stanzas form part of an *erfidrápa* about Þorfinnr rather than a eulogy addressed to a living ruler. Rather, Chapter 20 in *Orkneyinga saga* follows the early successes of Þorfinnr as he goes abroad to defend his claim to Caithness from a newly installed king of Scotland, Karl Hundison.¹⁷⁰ Stanzas 5-11 are all cited in this chapter in the order followed by Finnur, Kock and Whaley, and the chapter concludes with a citation of Arnórr's stanza 2 which, as discussed above, praises Þorfinnr's hospitality. The verses are cited as corroborating evidence of the saga-author's account, introduced by such formulaic phrases as '[s]vá segir Arnórr jarlaskáld' [so says Arnórr jarlaskáld] (*Ork*, 43, 51, 52), '[s]vá segir Arnórr' [so says Arnórr] (*Ork*, 47) and the somewhat more detailed, '[o]rrostu þessar getr Arnórr í Þorfinnsdrápu' [Arnórr tells of these battles in *Þorfinnsdrápa*] (*Ork*, 46). The poet himself has not yet been introduced as a character in the saga; his name and the title of the poem function merely as 'authenticating' details in the narrative.

These stanzas in particular have much in common with the pattern of the king's rise to power through a series of battle-verses that we have seen so far in *Gráfeldardrápa* and the *erfidrápur* for Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr Haraldsson. In stanza 5 Arnórr declares,

¹⁷⁰ This character is mentioned in no other source and may have been derived from the word 'karl', which can mean both 'old man' and the proper noun Karl, mentioned in stanza 6 of *Þorfinnsdrápa*. For a complete list of the many identities proposed for this character, see Whaley, ed., *The Poetry of Arnórr jarlaskáld*, 231.

Hilmir rauð í hjalma
 hreggi skelkvings eggjar,
 fór áðr fimtán væri
 fetrjóðr hugins vetra.¹⁷¹

The image of an adolescent king successfully defending his land is one found in Arnórr's two encomia for Magnús, *Hrynbenda* and *Magnússdrápa*, as well as in Þjóðólfr Arnórsson's *Sexstefja* for Magnús' uncle Haraldr.¹⁷² It is possible that the poet echoes this trope when he notes that the earl fights against a 'karl' [old man] (6.1), ironically teaching the older (but apparently not wiser) man how to fight: 'kendu / kyndóm jøfur brynju' [the prince taught (him) the strange verdict of the mail-coat (battle)] (6.1-2).¹⁷³ A ruler's early success is shown to be even more praiseworthy when the ruler is an unusually young man.¹⁷⁴ However, in this sequence the poet carefully balances the youth of Þorfinnr with a mature responsibility for the land. The earl is not an enthusiastic raider, as some young kings are, but a defender of what is his. In stanza 5 the poet even comments on the rarity of such a young defender:

gørr lézk grund at verja
 geðfrœkn ok til sœkja,

¹⁷¹ 'The ruler reddened the swords' edges in the storm of the helmet (battle). The reddener of the raven's foot (warrior) went forth before he was fifteen winters old' (5.1-4).

¹⁷² See *Hrynbenda* (*Skj* BI, 307-8, st. 8), *Magnússdrápa* (*Skj* BI, 311, st. 1) and *Sexstefja* (*Skj* BI, 399, st. 1).

¹⁷³ Although the verb is in the plural, *jøfurr* is the only possible subject. Both Finnur and Whaley follow this reading.

¹⁷⁴ Jesch has discussed skaldic verse in which Kings Óláfr Haraldsson, Magnús Ólafsson and Knútr Sveinnsson are similarly praised for their youthfulness; she suggests that such poetry reflects the changing nature of kingship in the eleventh century in which kings were not only praised as successful Vikings but as the legitimate descendants of powerful fathers. See "'Youth on the Prow": Three Young Kings in the Late Viking Age', *Youth in the Middle Ages*, eds. Jeremy P. Goldberg and Felicity Riddy (York: York Medieval P, 2004), 123-39.

œri Einars hlýra,
 engr mannr und skýranni.¹⁷⁵

He reiterates this idea in stanza 6, noting that, ‘land vasa lofðungs kundar / laust’ [the land of the prince’s son was not available] (6.3-4). The story in these stanzas is that of an underdog. Not only is Þorfinnr younger than his opponents, but he also possesses fewer ships (6.5-8) and a smaller army (8.1-4). He emerges victorious, however, and stanzas 7-11 describe his bloody march through the Scottish troops.

The battle-stanzas follow the pattern found in other *erfidrápur* as Arnórr depicts the military pre-eminence of the earl over all rivals, albeit in more gruesome and gory detail than in many of the other sequences so far discussed. The verb *rauða* is repeated five times to stress the earl’s murderous success as he cuts down his enemies (5.1; 8.8; 9.1; 10.3 16.2). The battle is portrayed in short, action-packed sentences:

stall drapa, strengir gullu,
 stál beit, en rann sveiti,
 broddr fló, bifðusk oddar
 bjartir, þengils hjarta.¹⁷⁶

Each half-line is an independent clause in which weapons are personified, a pattern broken only by the first and last two words of the *helmingr* in which the prince’s courageous heart frames and

¹⁷⁵ ‘No man under the cloud-hall (sky) has let himself be willing to defend and lay claim to the land younger than Einarr’s brother’ (5.5-8).

¹⁷⁶ ‘The prince’s heart – strings shrieked, steel bit, sweat (blood) flowed, spikes flew, bright spear-points shook – did not falter’ (7.5-8).

drives the action of the battle.¹⁷⁷ The beasts of battle join in also, particularly the wolf: ‘[u]lfs tuggu rauð eggjar’ [swords reddened with the wolf’s mouthful (corpses)] (9.1); ‘gíndi / grár ulfr of ná sǫrum’ [the grey wolf yawned over the wounded corpse] (12.7-8); and ‘ulfar /...morginn, hræ tuggu’ [wolves munched on corpses in the morning] (17.7-8). There is a great emphasis on place-names, presumably to aid in the memorisation of the details of each battle: Dýrness (6.4), Torfness (9.2), Oykell (9.6), Man (15.6), Rauðabjörg (20.8), Pentland Firth (21.2). The poet concludes his list of places with a sweeping statement about the geographical expanse covered by Þorfinnr’s raids:

Hringstríði varð hlýða
herr frá Þursakerjum,
rétt segik þjóð hverr þótti
Þorfinnr, til Dyflinnar.¹⁷⁸

As in this *belmingr*, the poet repeatedly intersperses his account of the battle with an insistence on the veracity of his report and the necessity of remembering the earl’s life: ‘[n]emi drótt, hvé sæ sótti / snarlyndr konungr jarla’ [may the retinue hear how the king of earls, quick of mind, passed over the sea], he says (13.1-2). ‘Engla minnir’ [the English remember] he gloats, reminding the

¹⁷⁷ This *belmingr* nearly exemplifies the pattern Snorri identifies as *sexátánmæltr*, which literally means ‘sixteen-clause pattern’. The pattern of two-word clauses is broken in this instance only because the first and last two words form a complete clause. See Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Háttatal*, 9.

¹⁷⁸ ‘The army was to listen to the ring-harmer from Þursaker (*lit.* giants’ skerry) to Dublin. I tell people rightly how Þorfinnr was regarded’ (23.1-4). Whaley suggests that if Dublin marks the south-western-most point of Þorfinnr’s rule, then Þursaker presumably marks the north-eastern edge. A location in the eastern Shetland islands is therefore likely (*SPSMA* II, 257).

enemy of the hurt they once had inflicted upon them (15.1).¹⁷⁹ Throughout the poem he emphasizes his own relationship with the earl, calling him *minn dróttinn* three times (8.4; 10.5; 12.3-4), and for those battles he is said to have witnessed himself, the first person is used.¹⁸⁰

If Finnur's reconstruction of the sequence does indeed follow the order (or an approximation of the order) in which the stanzas were originally recited, then a pattern of naming the earl by ascending family members emerges, one which acts as a reverse genealogy throughout the course of the poem. That is, as the poet proves the earl's right to the islands through a catalogue of his military successes, he also demonstrates that Þorfinnr is a legitimate, hereditary ruler of the Orkneys. In stanza 5 Þorfinnr is 'Einars hlýri' [Einarr's brother] (5.7), a potentially problematic kenning if *Orkneyinga saga* is to be believed: after a period of distrust and a dispute over land, Þorfinnr's foster-father Þorkell killed Einarr in his own hall (*Ork*, 33-4). No mention of this is made in the stanza itself, however, and in stanza 10 the poet has moved his attention to the earl's grandfather: Þorfinnr is now praised as 'Hlǫðvis frændi' [Hlǫðvir's kinsman] (10.7-8).¹⁸¹ Invoking the semi-mythical realm of the progenitors of the Orkney earls, in stanza 15 Arnórr praises Þorfinnr as 'Rǫgnvalds kind ens gamla' [Rǫgnvaldr the Old's family] (15.7-8), a reference to the Earl of Mœrir who founded the line. The final stanza associates Þorfinnr with the first Orkney earl himself, Torf-Einarr: he is the 'ættbætir /...allríks /...Torf-Einars' [kin-betterer of the all-

¹⁷⁹ This gleeful comment that the enemy (rather than the king's own forces) will remember the battle is repeated by Arnórr in *Magnússdrápa* when he says that the Wends will remember Magnús' battles among them (*Skj* BI, 313, st. 8).

¹⁸⁰ This occurs from stanza 12 onwards, perhaps because Arnórr was not present during Þorfinnr's early Scottish campaigns, related in stanzas 5-11.

¹⁸¹ Whaley lists Þorfinnr's ancestors in her doctoral thesis, Diana C. Edwards, 'The Poetry of Arnórr jarlaskáld: An Edition and Study', D. Phil. thesis (University of Oxford, 1979), 78.

powerful Torf-Einarr] (25.1-4).¹⁸² Just as kinship with the almost legendary progenitor of the Orkney earls lends status and legitimacy to his descendant, so the accomplishments of Þorfinnr have added fame to the family line. *Bæta*, the verb on which the noun *ættbætir* is based, can mean ‘to better’ or ‘improve’, but it also has connotations of restoring or redressing, of setting right.¹⁸³ In this final stanza therefore, the poet proclaims not only Þorfinnr’s military and hereditary right to the earldom, but implies that his rule represents a successful re-establishment of past greatness. The squabbles over landownership that plagued his early career and the generations immediately preceding him have, we are told, been successfully resolved by a man as powerful as Torf-Einarr was himself.

Stanzas 19-22 stand in marked contrast to the rest of the celebratory verses in *Þorfinnsdrápa*.

In these verses Arnórr describes the conflict between Earls Rognvaldr and Þorfinnr during the battle of Rauðabjörg. These stanzas are noticeably different from those in which Arnórr followed Þorfinnr through his early campaigns: there are no beasts of battle mentioned and the earl no longer reddens his enemies in blood. No patronymics are used, and phrases referring to the earls are ambiguous: *heiti* such as ‘allvaldr’ [all-powerful] (19.6) and ‘gramr’ [lord] (22.1) could refer to either of the earls, while the seemingly more specific kennings ‘Endils / ættstafr’ [Endil’s kin-staff]

¹⁸² Else Mundal discusses the mythical associations made with both men as they are established as the progenitors of the family of earls in *Orkneyinga saga* and *Haralds saga hárfagra* in *Heimskringla*. See her article, ‘The Orkney Earl and Scald Torf-Einarr and his Poetry’, *The Viking Age in Caithness, Orkney and the North Atlantic: Select Papers from the Proceedings of the Eleventh Viking Congress, Thurso and Kirkwall, 22 August - 1 September 1989*, eds. Colleen E. Batey, Judith Jesch and Christopher D. Morris (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1993), 248-59.

¹⁸³ CV, 92. It is used in this sense as a legal term referring to *wergild*, and also in the more general sense of making redress for wrongs inflicted upon someone.

(22.5-6) and ‘Hjalta dróttinn’ [lord of the Shetlanders] (22.7-8) do not specify which lord of the islands is meant. These are the only examples of singular subjects in the stanzas; subjects are more often in the plural and refer to both earls simultaneously. Reflexive constructions emphasize this plurality: ‘jofn fengusk hræ hrøfnum’ [slaughter was found for ravens on both sides] (19.3); ‘þars jarlar bǫrðusk’ [where earls attacked each other] (20.4); and ‘réðusk ástmenn órir’ [dearly beloved friends attacked each other] (20.5). Arnórr widens this mutually destructive action to include the earls’ followers when he notes, ‘mǫrgum kendi / háligt róg at hníga’ [mighty strife taught many to fall down dead] (20.2-3) and ‘öld fekk mein en milda / mǫrg’ [generous men received many wounds] (20.7-8). The pain of these actions is most clearly expressed in stanza 21:

Hvárn tveggja sák hoggva
 hirð á Pétlandsfirði
 (ór þrifusk mein at meiri)
 mín auðgjafa sína.¹⁸⁴

The role of the *auðgjafi* is to consolidate his relationship with his retainers by giving treasure. The act of hewing down the retainers is thus framed within the context of the lord himself brutally hacking down the men with whom he has made this bond. The plural and reflexive verbs in this stanza blur the lines that divide members of each retinue with the other, implying that the fighting retainers, like the poet, served both earls and that their loyalty is not so easily divided between the two men.

¹⁸⁴ ‘I saw both my wealth-givers hew down their own retinue at Pentland firth – our pain grew more’ (21.1-4).

It is unsurprising therefore that such a conflict forces Arnórr to interrogate his role as a poet and to ask whether it is even possible to commemorate these events in the prestigious *drápa*-form. ‘Ek em /...hegju trauðr at segja’ [I am reluctant to speak of these events] (19.1-4), he says. *Trauðr* is used elsewhere in the skaldic corpus to denote a poet’s reluctance to betray his lord: Bersi skáldtorfuson is *trauðr* to stop composing for the Danish King Sveinn even when captured by Óláfr Haraldsson, and in Þjóðólfr Arnórsson’s *Sexstefja* Haraldr Sigurðarson is *trauðr* to desert his brother King Óláfr at the battle of Stiklarstaðir.¹⁸⁵ When encouraged by Óláfr Tryggvason to convert to Christianity, Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld says he is *trauðr* to do so.¹⁸⁶ It is notable in this stanza, however, that Arnórr is reluctant not to desert his lord but to *speak* of the conflict; he is reluctant to perform his duties as a poet, perhaps because to record these events in a formal *dróttkvætt* poem would be to legitimate them. It is a marked difference to his brimming confidence at the beginning of *Magnússdrápa* in *bryhenda* in which he commands, ‘Magnús, hlýð til máttigs óðar’ [Magnús, hear a mighty poem].¹⁸⁷ There is also a practical concern for a poet in this position: he has a relationship with each earl and is thus unable to praise one patron without disparaging the other. He must rather watch and fear, and the phrase ‘es vættik’ [as I expected, foresaw] (19.2) betrays his own powerlessness to stop events from occurring.

Another verse from *Orkneyinga saga* has been identified both by Finnur and by Whaley as a *lausavísa*, but it is one in which Arnórr discusses further the earls’ conflict described in

¹⁸⁵ *En flok om kong Olof* (*Skj* BI, 255, st. 1) and *Sexstefja* (*Skj* BI, 339, st. 1), respectively.

¹⁸⁶ Hallfreðr’s ‘Conversion Verses’ (*Skj* BI, 158, st. 7).

¹⁸⁷ *Skj* BI, 306, st. 1.

Þorfinnsdrápa and therefore deserves some consideration here.¹⁸⁸ The stanza has much in common with the stanzas in *Þorfinnsdrápa*, including the plural subjects ‘jarlar þessir ógnbráðir’ [these terror-hasty earls] and the reflexive verb ‘ráðask’ [attack each other] (l. 5-6). The poet is, as before, ‘ófúss’ [reluctant] to fight against Rognvaldr (l. 4). This stanza is more distanced than those in *Þorfinnsdrápa*: Arnórr initially refers to himself in the third person and he discusses the merits of remaining loyal to one’s lord through the gnomic phrase, ‘gótt ’s fylgja vel drótni’ [it is good to follow the lord well] (l. 2). Such a gnomic utterance establishes the ideal of the lord-retainer relationship. The pain of Arnórr’s position is that he is unable to follow such wisdom whatever choice he makes. He alludes as well to his position as court poet and his duty to uphold such ideals: ‘öld leynik því aldri’ [I never conceal that from men] (l. 3), he says, *því* in this phrase likely referring to the gnomic sentence that immediately precedes it. He is thus unable to fulfil either his role as a warrior or as a poet, and the *lausavísa* ends on a grim note of despair: ‘høð mun vinraun verða’ [the trial of friendship will be hard] (l.7).

Arnórr is thus a poet who enjoys a close familial relationship with his patrons, but is unable to influence the tragic outcome of their feud. Unlike Sigvatr, Arnórr is powerless to advise the lords and his description of the conflict is placed within a commemorative sequence; speaking only

¹⁸⁸ In her 1998 edition of the poems, Diana Whaley placed three stanzas, including this one, together under the heading ‘Strophes occasioned by the strife between the jarls of Orkney’ (*The Poetry of Arnórr jarlaskáld*, 133). Although two of these stanzas have been integrated back into the text of *Þorfinnsdrápa* as stanzas 19 and 22 in *Scandinavian Poetry of the Middle Ages*, Whaley notes in the introduction to the sequence that the stanzas are still of ‘uncertain status’ (*SPSMA* II, 230). It is edited in *Skj* BI, 326-7, st. 5 and Finnur does not suggest a date of composition. In *SPSMA* II Whaley suggests that its ‘air of anticipation and immediacy’ points to a date of composition during battle of Rauðabjörg, and thus during the 1040s (280).

after their deaths, he is unable to address those who most need his advice. At best, the poem functions, like his *Haraldsdrápa*, as a warning for the lords who follow Þorfinnr and Rognvaldr. In *Magnússdrápa* and *Haraldsdrápa*, Arnórr is far more detached as a poet, discussing the process of crafting poetry and the kingly process of waging war in a distanced, third-person voice that is very different from his first-person lamentations about the earls' strife. It is clear that the sort of grief Arnórr expresses about the deaths of the earls of Orkney was not required by the conventions of commemorative poetry at this time, although such expressions were growing in frequency. Rather, there may be a certain amount of honesty implicit in such verses: if personal grief was not a required element of all commemorative verse, it may be that when such grief is expressed, it does reflect to some degree the poet's feelings. Such a hypothesis is impossible to prove. It may also be the case that when lord and poet were related by kinship, it was more conventional for a poet to indulge in mourning and lamentation. That is, the end of a poet-patron relationship may not automatically have required that grief be expressed, but when that relationship was combined with a familial bond, such expressions did form part of the expected commemoration of the king. The existence of a range of commemorative poems even within the work of one poet suggests not that the generic conventions of the *erfidrápa* were evolving towards a highly emotional end, but that the elements that could be included in an *erfidrápa* were expanding in the eleventh century to accommodate a range of personal relationships between poets and patrons.

Eleventh-century commemoration, therefore, can appear under many guises as poets remember their patrons as friends, family members and even saints. Ceremonies such as marriage,

baptism and vassalage adopted from continental Europe bound poets and patrons more closely together than ever before. The death of the patron did not always provoke an emotional outburst of feeling on the part of the skald, but such expressions were becoming more common as the conventions of skaldic euology expanded to accommodate the many roles played by the modern Christian king.

Conclusion

A number of themes emerge from this study. First and foremost, this thesis has demonstrated that a wide range of commemorative verse may be found in the corpus of Viking-age poetry. Although skaldic verse is often assumed to be a form devoted to the praise of living kings, it is clear that the praise of dead kings represents a significant portion of the corpus. The function of praise-poetry is often characterised as a simple exchange of reputation for honour: the king pays the poet for his work, and the poet's eulogy ensures a good reputation for the king. In commemorative verse, however, praising the reputation of the dead king is never the only role of the poet. In many of the sequences discussed, the legitimisation of the political *status quo* is one of the main functions of commemorative verse, as the memory of dead kings is employed to justify the power of their successors. This is seen most clearly in the ninth- and tenth-century genealogical poems *Ynglingatal* and *Háleygjatal*, in which long lists of dead ancestors are enumerated in order to provide memorable and sometimes even divine pedigrees for their living descendants. This can be seen again in poetry from the eleventh century in which poets proclaim the legitimacy of kings by asserting their adherence to the model of kingship established by the sainted King Óláfr. Þórarinn loftunga shows the Danish usurper Sveinn Knútsson to be a legitimate spiritual successor to Óláfr while Sigvatr Þórðarson and Arnórr jarlaskáld assert the legitimacy of Óláfr's Norwegian relations; both Óláfr's son Magnús and Óláfr's brother Haraldr are shown during their own reigns to emulate successfully Óláfr's law-making and missionary activities. Even the earls of Orkney use genealogy to proclaim their status, as Arnórr subtly weaves kennings

tracing the family tree into Earl Þorfinnr's commemorative *drápa*. In each case, kings from the past are used to justify the power their descendants wield in the present.

Commemorative verse is thus a potent mixture of poetry and politics. The skalds who craft such stanzas are keenly aware of the public role they play in the consolidation of kingly power, and many of the skalds discussed in this thesis exhibit a high degree of self-awareness and even self-interrogation as they compose their stanzas. In the early genealogical poems there is a tension between different forms of commemoration as both Þjóðólfr and Eyvindr compare the efficacy of their poetry to burial mounds and other commemorative monuments. In the ninth-century memorials *Eiríksmál* and *Hákonarmál* poets engage with the mythology of the pagan afterlife, depicting their departed kings' entrances to Valhöll and tracing their transformation from human warriors into characters of heroic myth and legend. In his *Erfidrápa Óláfs Tryggvasonar*, Hallfreðr reconstructs the conflicting rumours that accompany the king's defeat and declares the obligation of the poet to reassert control over language through the construction of commemorative verse. However, the role poetry plays following the death of a king is never fixed. On one hand, the *orðaskipti* of Glúmr and Eyvindr demonstrates the potentially subversive nature of poetry as the commemoration of one's dead lord is shown to inhibit his successor's acceptance of the skald. On the other, Glúmr's unashamedly pragmatic appeal for a new patron after the death of his king reveals poetry to be a marketable commodity available only to the most powerful rulers.

The role of the poet becomes even more changeable at the courts of eleventh-century kings and earls as new ideologies of rulership are adopted. The most dramatic shift occurs with the

sanctification of Óláfr inn helgi as the poet Sigvatr Þórðarson adopts the role of hagiographer as well as that of court poet. Þórarinn loftunga also commemorates Óláfr in an innovative way: his is the first skaldic sequence to assert the continuing presence and agency in the human world of the king commemorated. The commemoration of the saint is more complicated than that of his forefathers because of his role as mediator between heaven and earth. The early, pre-Christian poets mediated between the living and the dead; their poetry bridged the gap between the human audience and their semi-mythical ancestors or the supernatural inhabitants of the afterlife. However, as Óláfr inn helgi himself takes on that role, the function of the poet must also change: Þórarinn adopts the role of an advisor to princes rather than mediator, urging Sveinn himself to appeal directly to the dead king for his blessing. Sigvatr too becomes an advisor to Óláfr's son, urging Magnús to become as close to his father as possible as he emulates Óláfr's style of kingship. This stepping aside of the poet to the role of advisor is compensated for by the increasingly close relationship the poet enjoys with his patron. Through the ceremonies of vassalage and baptism, poets such as Hallfreðr and Sigvatr are welcomed into the king's family, while Arnórr becomes a kinsman by marriage of the two earls he serves. Such close relationships have a great impact on the nature of commemorative verse at the end of the Viking age as poets not only praise a departed lord, but also mourn the loss of a friend and kinsman. In these later verses, the poet's private grief is articulated even as he proclaims the loss of the wider community.

Commemoration is, therefore, a more complex and multifaceted task than might at first appear, providing an umbrella under which many different aims and genres may gather. The

remembrance of one who has died is not a simple endeavour, as these poems all reveal. The memory of a dead king may be manipulated by poets and their patrons in a multitude of ways, but the poets' engagement with the contemporary political environment is a constant.

Commemoration is never solely about the past.

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