

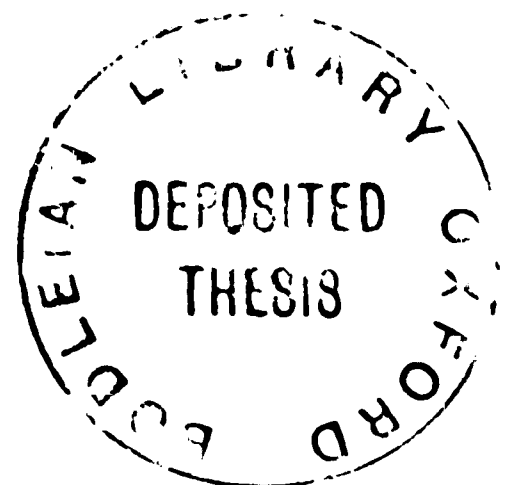
*Reading Egils saga Skallagrímssonar: Saga, Paratext, Translations*

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**Submitted for D.Phil., Hilary term 2000**



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**Abstract**

This thesis is concerned with how a set of different texts, all titled with various English or Icelandic versions of *Egils saga*, exists, can be interrelated, and may be read.

The first level of interpretation, before reading of the text even begins to occur, is a response to the book as a physical object whose ordering encourages and excludes certain interpretations. The first two chapters analyze the six English translations of *Egils saga*: W.C. Green (1893), E.R. Eddison (1930), Gwyn Jones (1960), Christine Fell and John Lucas (1975), Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards (1976), Bernard Scudder (1997): together with the Icelandic editions used as their source texts, in terms of *paratext*, as developed by Gérard Genette.

The third chapter consists of translation analyses. These use some of the methods of traditional translation criticism, together with more liberal methods of analysis associated with 'Translation Studies', as established by Susan Bassnett, among others. I conclude that the reader of translations who intends to move between 'target language' (language of translation) and 'source language' (language for translation), or who is in the process of getting the freedom to make transitions between these languages, is a special case, and that there is a literature which exists for them. By this I mean that, while it can be liberating to read literary translations as works 'in their own right', there are areas in some literary translations where it is best, or possible, to manipulate several languages and culture levels. There are also literary translations where the play between source language and target language, texts and paratexts, is necessary to their existence. Although I retain the 'source' and 'target' terminology of Translation Studies, I begin the chapter by questioning the direction of the vector: 'target' texts are in some senses the 'source' texts for the 'source' texts subsequently encountered by readers between languages.

The final chapter studies processes of transformation in *Egils saga*, following the Íslenzk fornrit text. It shows how the saga itself is concerned with the meaning and powers of language and processes of transmission: it translates itself, not in a modern self-reflexive sense, but with its own, historically particular aesthetic.

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Dr. Heather O’Donoghue deserves, and always will have, my greatest admiration and gratitude.

## ABBREVIATIONS

ANF	<i>Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi</i>
CS	According to context, refers to <i>The Complete Sagas of Icelanders</i> or Bernard Scudder's 1997 translation in vol. I.
FJ	Refers to Finnur Jónsson's 1924 edition in the discussion of Eddison's translation.
	Refers to Finnur Jónsson's 1886-1888 edition in the discussion of Green's translation.
ÍF	Íslenzk fornrit series (Reykjavík).
ÍS	Íslendinga sögur (new series) (Reykjavík).
K	Ketilsbók (AM 453, 4to): manuscript source for <i>Egils saga</i> .
M	Möðruvallabók (AM 132, fol.).
SBVS	<i>Saga-Book of the Viking Society</i> .
SL	Source Language (language from which to translate).
SS	<i>Scandinavian Studies</i> .
ST	Source Text (base text for a translation).
TL	Target Language (language into which to translate).
TT	Target Text, Translated Text (translation from a ST).

### Names of characters in *Egils saga*

The six translations into English of *Egils saga* do not all use the same system for anglicizing Old Icelandic names, nor do they always have a consistent policy.

Throughout the thesis, I refer to characters in *Egils saga* in three ways. (i) The anglicized name as it appears in a particular translation is used when that translation, or the character as interpreted in that translation, is being discussed. (ii) The Icelandic name as it appears in the base text for a particular translation is used when the relation of ST to TT is being discussed. (iii) For my own interpretations of *Egils saga*, or when referring generally to 'the' character in its various guises (English and Icelandic), the name appears in Old Icelandic following Íslenzk fornrit, as IF is the, or a, source text for four of the six translations, and the text which I take for my own analyses.

This variable system is necessary because the characters are variously inflected by the different translations; they are, and are not, essentially the 'same'. It is also desirable, because such relationships of difference and continuity are a main concern of this thesis, which looks at how SL and TL versions of the 'same' text work on their own terms, and how they can be interrelated.

**I.****PARATEXT AND READING**Translation: Text and Book

To translate may be ‘to turn from one language into another’. There is another meaning – translate, ‘remove from one place to another’. This second meaning is that which will be primary in this chapter.<sup>1</sup>

As a text in translation, an Icelandic family saga is not completely discussed if discussed in terms of pure text. This is because its existence as a text necessarily is particularly ‘impure’. The majority of its readers (student or non-academic) may not know the variety of editions and versions – source language (SL) or target-language (TL) variants and versions. Knowledge of this variety would have allowed them to construct something like an indeterminate, varyingly stable text as an imaginary standard for knowledge and interpretation (reading), by means of a sort of comparative friction between all actualizations that wears down the definitive (though never wears down the authoritative) appearance of any one actualization. However, the Icelandic language is

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<sup>1</sup> *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (1966).

complex, and little taught in British universities. There is no rapid, competitive production of translations.<sup>2</sup>

What the reader may have, then, with the saga-in-translation, is a book that is virtually almost *the* book – or at least one which, through its presentation, may seem to impose or offer itself as such. On the one hand, it is likeliest to be the sole translation read or consulted by the ordinary reader or student. On the other, it enjoys the authority largely by chance of availability, which may have little or no correlation with genuine authority.

The randomness of availability is not matched by an interchangeability between various translations of the ‘same’ work. I do not refer only to the non-interchangeability of various translations of the text, but also to the editorial shaping of that text, its layout, and the information (verbal and non-verbal) which is inserted in or surrounds it.

Translators of family sagas, either because they are aware of this situation or because of their personal interests, seldom produce very plain books. The text is interpolated with headings, maps, charts; interrupted by notes; illustrated, introduced, supplemented in all sorts of ways. The translator’s understanding – the translator’s intention – manifest themselves around the text as well as in it, perhaps just as powerfully when not by means of words. The reader’s knowledge and interpretation of what s/he will remember as the saga-in-translation begin with the physical object, the book: an object that continues to act upon the reading simultaneously with the reading once begun.

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<sup>2</sup> Taking one generation as twenty-five years, more than one generation separates the first three translations of *Egils Saga* from one another. The fourth and fifth appear as twins (or halves), while almost another generation passes before the sixth.

In this chapter, I shall try to suggest what kind of reading would be needed in order to respect what has been put together as a volume. By ‘respect’, I mean take seriously those aspects of the book – both within and outside the text proper – which, in total, make an interpretation of the text continuous with the book. When I speak of a reader, that will indicate neither an ‘average’, nor a ‘naïve’ reader, but a conventional figure that facilitates discussion of the total interpretation that is the book, and how its various elements do (not) harmonize. I shall be looking at how the book offers/controls associations and hence meaning, rather than at probable ways the book is used in reading, too unpredictable to be useful for discussion.

### Text and Paratext

One example, from the ordinary experience of reading, of the importance of the book-as-object, is provided by the special consideration obtained for a section of text if it is paragraphed as poetry, the margins of silence won for it by acknowledgement of the physical space of the page. In this case, both literally and figuratively, the appearance of the text in/and the book indicates the distance, concentration and complexity with which the reader is to ‘hear’, and in what mode.

Such aspects of the saga-in-translation do a great deal of work. For convenience when speaking of them I shall use the terms *paratext* and *paratextual*, drawing on the work of Gérard Genette in *Seuils*.<sup>3</sup> However, the schematic analysis suggested by Genette’s

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<sup>3</sup> Genette 1987.

work is, to a greater extent than mine, documentary and diachronic. Genette himself insisted that more closely focused studies – work by work, rather than generic – would be needed before the power of any such analysis could be realized.

The next few paragraphs are not intended as a summary of the approach and content of *Seuils*. They are a preamble to examining six sample copies of the six complete published translations of *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* into English<sup>4</sup>, explaining what I have understood, selected, and altered, as necessary for my purposes. An overview of the use I intend to make of Genette's work will be allowed to develop through the course of the text, for two reasons. (i) The development of what I have taken from his theory is best seen as it is discussed, and/or altered, in practice. To put his theory first, followed by applications of it to the subject in hand, would gloss over the development of understanding paratext in translations, and, in certain ways, be less easily remembered. (ii) This working-out may better familiarize readers who are students of Icelandic literature or translation theory with the ways of thinking that questions of paratext can evolve. Further, I do not claim to work *on* paratexts as such, but *with* them, when analysing what it means to read texts that call themselves *Egils saga* or some English version of this title.

For similar reasons, analyses of the translations' paratexts, in this chapter, will not be set out in linear or chronological order. An exhaustive list of the paratextual features of every translation (let alone every edition, far less every copy) would risk losing illumination in detail. The translations will be considered equally in various combinations.

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<sup>4</sup> W.C. Green (1893), E.R. Eddison (1930), Gwyn Jones (1960), Christine Fell with John Lucas (Everyman, 1975), Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards (Penguin, 1976), Bernard Scudder (*The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, vol. 1, pp. 33-177, 1997).

Examples will be drawn from them in order to demonstrate the importance of reading with and for the paratext, given the possible effects of what has been, and what can be, done.

Such demonstrations, if successful, and if more commonly done, could – even more than theoretical recommendations for improved practice – make future texts in translation better, more self-consciously, used as well as produced.

### Text and paratext

The paratext is composed of *peritext*: whatever appears around or in the interstices of a text, within the same volume(s); and *epitext*: all the information outside the book. The epitext may be public or private, official, informal, unauthorized . . . There are two reasons for examining both peritext and epitext. First, an element of paratext may be brought to bear on the text, affecting its reception. Second, because there is no absolute divide between the epitext and peritext, as an element of epitext may eventually find its way into the peritext.<sup>5</sup> For example, an extract from a well-known review, or indeed from an older document, may appear in the Introduction or on the back cover. There may be paratextual accretions to the individual copy as well, such as personal dedications by the translator, or marginalia.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Nor is there any final division between text and paratext: a text may be excerpted or wholly reproduced for inclusion in the paratext of the same or another work. Eddison, for example, uses an epigraph in his translation. Portions of their own translation are used by Pálsson and Edwards in their Introduction to it.

<sup>6</sup> Just such paratextual accretion occurs in the copy of Green's translation I worked with: a contemporary review (*The Athenæum*, No. 3633, June 12, 1897) was folded within a flap pasted inside the back cover.

The elements of paratext may have an intermittent life, between editions or copies and across time; they are functional, existing ‘à éclipses’.<sup>7</sup> Neither overpersonalized as biographical criticism, nor excessively abstract – not idealizing the ‘text’, a reading of reading which considers paratext must be imaginatively descriptive of what the process of reading a book actually is like, rather than prescriptive of how the processing of its text ought to be figured. It must work towards a phenomenology of reading.

So, typically, what matters when one comes to consider the *destinateur* and *destinataire* of paratextual messages is, first of all, not who ‘really’ is responsible but who appears to be so. Next, the fact that the message exists is sufficient for it to be registered for discussion as if a reader had noticed it. There is no implication that any real reader does or must notice every such message, merely that one reads differently if one does.<sup>8</sup> The translator, like many (or most) authors, may have little or no power over the choice of cover illustration, the number of blank pages, and other aspects of the book’s design. It may be impossible to pinpoint the person or persons (perhaps not connected with the publishing house) who, sometimes practically by chance, unofficially contribute to decisions of this sort. Still, given the layout of names, either the translator or the series generally has every appearance of responsibility for the book as a whole, and *effectively* bears that responsibility for the reader.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Genette 1987, pp. 11-12.

<sup>8</sup> Genette 1987, p. 13.

<sup>9</sup> I am grateful to Mr. R.F.S. Hamer and Dr. Heather O’Donoghue, who separately drew my attention to this point.

### The Translator's Peritext

Genette notes that the study of translations is an area merely touched on in *Seuils*. The problem of the paratext of translations becomes clear from the way that his categories need to be rearranged or further broken down when being applied to such texts.

Consider 'le péritexte éditorial', i.e. the publisher's peritext. It immediately is evident that much of the peritext in any translation of *Egils saga* has to be determined by the translator(s) in conjunction with the publisher. There is nothing that can with any certainty be adduced as authorial. Yet the model in *Seuils* generally is that of the text that has an author who has at least some say in its publication. Moreover, the translator(s) stand in a quasi-editorial as well as a quasi-authorial relation to the text in translation. The translator has to negotiate with the publisher about much of what surrounds and supplements the text, and possibly to some extent its layout (paragraphing; appearance of verse in prose).

Modern material for the sort of epitext that could eventually be included in the peritext as part of the volume is likely to be scant, specialized, lost in private communication between scholars, more or less unfurnished by news media, when the subject is so rare. Older material in the epitext surrounding *Egils saga* is more likely to be processed as part of the editorial/creative translator's messages, i.e. to influence or appear in the peritext or the translated text, than to find itself reproduced independently within the book.

However, the translator is seldom likely to have the relationship, agenda and intellectual/emotional investment of an editor who has produced a working text from its difficult, disparate parts. S/he is likelier to have a relationship to the TL text more like that of an author, whether or not with a curatorial attitude to the source text (ST).<sup>10</sup> S/he is the one who appears to claim responsibility for a transposition of the ST and its communication in the TL, i.e. the responsibility of interpreting the ST wholly, and making it afresh.

Still, the appearance of this second, creative responsibility can be elided, as when the translator chooses to write in the space of the peritext with the authority – detachment – of a scholarly tone. This means there may be a kind of schizophrenia in the presentation of the text, resulting in, for example, the anonymous-looking devising of highly inventive chapter headings but also the cluttering of the page with footnotes – cf. the Penguin translation.

One way that I have to work selectively from the analysis of paratext in *Seuils* in order to apply it to the practice of translation from Icelandic family sagas is to recommence with a different approach. Genette's working model presupposes some sort of literary text with an identifiable author-figure. He then works schematically inwards from the outside of the paratext and of the material manifestation of the book, which is why he begins with what he calls the publisher's paratext. I would begin with that problematic figure who is the translator, whose decisions inform the format of the book, who may be

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Brossard 1987, 1990.

haunted especially – not by the characters of the Saga Age or by the idea of the saga writers, but by those involved in a closer (more modern) stage of mediation which is, from one point of view, an initial stage for the translation: the producers (editors and publishers) of the form(s) of the source text used as base.

I should cite here the notion of *onymat* – ‘onymity’.<sup>11</sup> Genette’s neologism is needed, because, as he observes, signing a work with one’s real name is as much a choice as any other, and cannot be regarded as insignificant.<sup>12</sup> Onymity sometimes is motivated by a stronger or less neutral reason than, say the lack of desire to adopt a pseudonym. In the case of translation, it is vital to observe where and how translators sign their names in the book (an assertion of presence as well as a gesture of exit). Their double nature, as editor and reworker, can merge, or be mutually revealing.

#### Translators and other authors

Both Christine Fell (1975) and Hermann Pálsson with Paul Edwards (1976), like Gwyn Jones before them (1960), use the Íslenzk fornrit (ÍF) edition of *Egils saga* as their base text. Fell mentions this in her ‘Note on the Translation’, with thanks to those who do editorial work, but also with thanks to ‘earlier translators in the field’ and to her own collaborators. Nearly a page ((xxvi)-(xxvii)) of acknowledgements concludes her ‘Note’. This is very like an author’s ‘without whom it would not have been possible’: a clever, graceful move. isolating the author (translator) as the active centre of these connections.

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<sup>11</sup> v. *Seuils*, ‘Le nom d’auteur’.

<sup>12</sup> Genette 1987, p. 40.

This creative isolation is highlighted as Fell signs off with name, date and place, her public/personal existence finished yet asserted before the saga text which then, rather than detaching itself, emerges as even more her work. Nor does she scruple, even in her thanks, to remark ‘I share with other readers a debt to Professor Gwyn Jones who produced the first readable English version of Egils saga in 1960’ (and who was the first to use the ÍF edition as base text, though this is not mentioned here). Some of the earlier translators are, if not dismissed from the field, at least consigned to a less visible corner. Still, in terms of courtesy and concision this is an improvement on E.R. Eddison’s treatment of his sole forerunner, W.C. Green. Thus Eddison, in his Preface (1930):

Egils Saga has not hitherto been available to English readers. A previous attempt to translate it was made, some thirty-five years ago, by the Rev. W.C. Green. It is to be feared that the translator little understood the qualities of his original or the difficulties of his task. His version (now out of print) in its flaccid paraphrasing, its lack of all sense of style, its latinized constructions, and (a comparatively venial offence) its foolish and unavowed expurgations, conveys no single note or touch of the masterpiece with which he was dealing.  
(Eddison, p. (xiii))

Metaphors for a poor performer, or a performative introduction to *níð*<sup>13</sup>. The newest translation, however, the *Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, in the confidence of its five volumes and mustering of experts, has no space for these anxieties, apart from a vague charge that some previous translations were made ‘inaccessible’ by ‘archaism’.

In the Everyman translation, John Lucas, Fell’s co-translator, who steps out of his rôle as academic to feature as poet and co-translator, has, in his dealings with the verse

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<sup>13</sup> Defamation, often ritualized, and often taking the form of an allegation of unmanliness or homosexuality.

in *Egils saga*, another set of ghosts than those from academe. In ‘The Translation of Egil’s Poems’ (pp. (xxix) – (xxxii)), he cites W.H. Auden, but not overtly for Auden’s interest in things Icelandic, far less for Auden’s rôle – too eerily mapping on to his, perhaps – as the poet in the translation team which worked on the *Poetic Edda*.<sup>14</sup> Instead, Auden apparently is summoned up to grant his benison in disguise. He is cited as the commentator on Robert Bridges’s Homeric translations in hexameters, in order that Alexander Pope’s non-‘eccentric’ Homer be approved. Common sense blithely defeats forced formal virtuosity; the naturalness of SL and TL are both preserved.

This is, in the first paragraph, an overload of alien poets, if that is all they are there to do. I suggest that they have two other functions.

First, there are particular associations that may be evoked by naming these poets. These associations may be symptomatic of the undercurrents in Lucas’s work as poet-translator here, though not a measure of either. Robert Bridges, although cited for his own achievement and endeavours, also is famous for his rôle in Gerald Manley Hopkins’s life and work. One possible meaning of ‘Hopkins’ here is as a symbol for all those who deal in an English consciously made difficult by both a twisting and fusion of it with other languages (Anglo-Saxon, Welsh, Greek . . .) and in accordance with a restricted, since personal and non-traditional, way of producing it in literary forms. It is this uniqueness: non-traditionality combined with a sort of traditionalism<sup>15</sup>: which makes ‘Hopkins’

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<sup>14</sup> Auden, Salus and Taylor 1969.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Stephen G. Nichols’s definition (after Brian Stock), in *The New Medievalism*, p. 11: ‘Modernity enters the scene as the last stage of the traditionalistic process, when the gap between the traditional and the traditionalistic becomes too great. Traditional activity continues past practices as unselfconscious habitual activity. It is practical, as opposed to the theoretical orientation of traditionalistic initiative that “predicates

comparable, at a deep level of Lucas's rhetoric, to an idiosyncratic translator (thus also suppressing the consideration that idiosyncrasy in translation may be less personal taste than political choice)<sup>16</sup> rather than comparable to the producers of the even more complicated skaldic verse that Lucas chooses to render into acceptable English. Auden himself has a third meaning here, apart from his presence as literary critic who speaks with the authority of a literary creator, and his reputation as Icelandophile/translator. 'Auden' is the voice whose modernity succeeds that of modernist raids on strange languages and productions of high art: a voice that can revert to the demotic.

As summaries, these would be crude sentences. They are not intended as summaries. They sketch the way that invoked names can evoke clusters of associations – associations most effective when highly coloured beneath the obscurity in which they are brought forth.

The second additional function achieved by allowing space in the first paragraph to this crowd of poets is triple. Most obviously, it situates both Lucas and Egill in – not so much a line, as a brotherhood; by extension co-opting Egill for English literature. This prepares the way for Lucas's treatment of the figure of Egill Skallagrímsson. Though Lucas takes care to use such phrases as 'three long poems attributed to Egil' (p. (xxx)), far stronger and more frequent are his references to Egill as if he were a real, reachable author, none of whose work could be falsified or misattributed: '[...] Egil's speaking of

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self-conscious innovation based on the recovery of an allegedly authentic tradition" (39). "Ratiocination applied to tradition," characterizes traditionalistic initiative.' Brownlee, Brownlee, and Nichols, 1991.

<sup>16</sup> For the politics of idiosyncratic translation, see, among others, Lawrence Venuti, who discovers narcissism and domestication, an elision of the 'other', in the practice of fluent translation. He advocates 'resistant translation'

verse',<sup>17</sup> 'Egill's shaping powers', '[...] the language of an Egil poem', 'He means exactly what he says.' (pp. (xxx) – (xxxi)). His concluding paragraph confers on Egill a canonized actuality:

I am well aware of how far short I have fallen from my original aim in undertaking these translations, which was to give a palpable sense to modern readers of Egil's many-sided genius. But I hope at least that my versions of his poems will make readers impatient to read Egil for themselves.  
(Everyman, p. (xxxi))

This presentation of Egill alters much about both the book and the text. The saga begins to appear as a fictionalized? biographical? anyhow, artful work about a real poet whose real, autobiographical poems are embedded in it. Leaving aside the questions of authenticity of verses and their attribution, how they have been placed in the prose text, and which (in certain cases) – verse or some form of prose text – came first: i.e. leaving aside questions of origins and genesis, so crucial for the ST, what the TT now presents itself as is a work that has another competing authority within it. A moment's reflection is enough to topple the reader into the abyssal problem of how to be suspicious and how to trust when giving one's mind over to a work that purports to be about a character who unverifiably steps forth as part-author.

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<sup>17</sup> Egill's verse as a spoken thing appears within quotation marks in Jones and Green: an editorial marker both immediate and unavoidable, unlike Lucas's comments in the always optional peritext.

There are two main aspects to the effect that Lucas's 'Egil' has on the text in the book. The first aspect is that the margins of silence that the white space confers upon poetry cease to be such. The white space, if it really does surround an 'Egil poem', is no margin but an unquiet blank, a depth of blankness, astir with suppressed voices: not silence, but history. The verse, however powerfully translated, will have another verse, another voice, moving somewhere beneath it, because Lucas's treatment of 'Egil' reinvests the verse with the power of another author. In this case, the verse translation is without the possibility of failure, because it is to be experienced as double, unlike, for example, the dialogue in the saga, for which no such claims of preservation and reproduction can be made, and which cannot produce from its appearance alone any such interruption and resetting of the voice(s) mentally registered by the reader, but must depend on the unbroken readability of the narrative translated as a whole from another narrative. The second aspect which Lucas's changing the reader's idea of the status of 'Egil' as speaker within the text may have is to add a dimension to the seventeenth-century artist's impression of Egill Skallagrímsson which appears on the dust jacket.<sup>18</sup> It is, and is not, illustrative of a character subordinate to the prose text and its shaper(s). It is, and is not, demonstrative of the subject of a quasi-biographical work. It now stands in for the portrait of an author, whose verses detach themselves as fragments of autobiography. Compounded, these two elements of paratext – Lucas's verbal, the manuscript's visual – problematize genre.

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<sup>18</sup> It appears on the front cover of the Everyman paperback.

Pálsson and Edwards, in their much shorter ‘Note on the Translation’ (p. 18), say that they have used the ÍF edition, but also say which manuscript that was based on, and mention the existence of others. To mention these manuscripts without saying whether use was made of them in preparing the translation is to destabilize any anachronistic confidence (suspension of disbelief) that a reader of the translation may have in its text as singular. Both the Everyman and the Penguin translators acknowledge Sigurður Nordal as editor of the Icelandic text: another figure in what is both unfathomable recess and simultaneous existence of author-like (authoritative, interpretative, unreachable) workers made collaborators by time. The second paragraph of the Note contains a neutral list of other translations into English. Whereas Fell stressed the comparative modernity of her type of (prose) translation given most of what had gone before, Pálsson and Edwards are Lucas-like in recounting a line of names of people engaged on what then begins to appear as a common (not a repeatable) enterprise. The third and final paragraph is also minimal:

As in previous sagas translated for Penguin Classics, the spelling of proper names has been anglicized, The chapter divisions are original, but we have added our own chapter headings. Our thanks must go to Mrs Betty Radice and to Mr C. Chippindale for their careful and helpful reading of the typescript, and to Mrs Sheila Coppock for reading the proofs.  
(Penguin, p. 18)

They then sign off with names and place (Edinburgh), though not date. Roughly one-seventh the length of Fell’s acknowledgements, this paragraph is short but full of information. A snapshot of the translators at work (they thank series editor as well as proofreader), it makes implicit claims for their combination of integrity and invention.

with that second sentence about chapter headings and divisions. The opening phrase – ‘As in previous sagas translated for Penguin Classics’ – shows their translation to be part of a mainstream and ongoing enterprise. This almost overly simple note of thanks also stands practically as earnest of the translators’ craftsmanship. Authority is in it.

The question of Egill’s status as author and as historical figure, for the Pálsson and Edwards translation, will be discussed at greater length in the following chapter, where the verbal and non-verbal information supplied by the various translators is dealt with as far as possible in chronological order by translation. It can be said here that the Penguin front cover reproduces the same artist’s impression as the Everyman dust jacket. All mention of Egill in Pálsson and Edwards’s Introduction, however, is framed by their strong reassertions of the fictionalization involved in saga writing. Therefore, the effect of the picture is less destabilizing than in the Fell and Lucas translation, remaining primarily illustrative of Egill the ‘hero’ of ‘the Saga’ (to use Pálsson and Edwards’s terms), not a standard image of the ordinary poet.

The (very different) agendas of E.R. Eddison and the producers of the *Complete Sagas* are strong enough to suppress traces of anxiety in the translator/reworker. The translators of the *Complete Sagas* seem to have been fairly free to select or edit their base texts, and to mention this as they wished in the very brief preamble to each translation. Bernard Scudder begins with the information that ‘Egil’s Saga, translated here from Íslendinga sögur, is preserved in a number of vellum manuscripts and fragments, of which Möðruvallabók is the most important.’ He speaks of the saga’s attribution to Snorri, and of

Egill as a character in action. The necessary brevity of his preamble produces a casual yet lapidary style, suggestive of complete control. ‘The portrait of Egil Skallagrimsson is among the most vivid and memorable in the entire saga literature.’ Eddison needs much more space, and will be discussed in the close paratextual readings that comprise the next chapter.

Reverend W.C. Green (1893), in his ‘Introduction’, says:

Of the Egilssaga there are several editions. For this translation the following have been used: The large edition, with a Latin translation (Havniæ, MDCCCIX); Einar Thordarson’s (Reykjavík, 1856); Finnur Jónsson’s (Copenhagen, 1888). Also Petersen’s Swedish translation (1862). The text of Thordarson’s little book has been followed in the main; Jónsson’s differs from it in many places, being generally shorter. Into the critical merits of these texts I am not competent to enter; the variations are of no importance to the story or to an English reader.

The prose of the Saga presents few difficulties to the translator.  
(Green, pp. (viii)-(ix))

This is readable as a statement of academic fact. Something more than that is conveyed by the reading of it. There is an implicit claim for the fairness of Green’s proceedings in that he has made careful comparison between so many versions. The other side to this, of course, is that he has translated something for which no ST exists, i.e. a composite, personal text that (without more annotation) is finally uncheckable.

The sequence of Green’s list, from the ‘large edition, with a Latin translation’ to the then relatively modern ‘Swedish translation’, situates the saga between the gravity of the dead language of high learning and the contemporaneity of a modern Scandinavian language that at Green’s time of writing would have been presumed somehow to hark back

to the saga, likewise exerting the gravity of Nordic heritage. There is another sequence to the list: from the 'large edition' to the 'Thordarson's little book'. The 'little book' is a sly phrase, half Chaucer and half Dickens in the good-humoured mastery it allows to its user. It also does double work: the so-called 'little book' (not, in fact, especially small in size) is the most relied upon – and Green's own translation is by no means a large production.

Both sequences suggest the compendiousness of the enterprise, from which Green acquires massive authority. The informality of the list ('Also' sentence-initial in line 3), like the courteous, conventional self-depreciation of the penultimate sentence cited, reinforces this impression of authority. 'Green' is someone who can afford to be casual in tone because he deploys so much knowledge; who dispatches formalities quickly, because he is at ease with the conventions of his *métier*. The effect, finally, of Green's paragraph – at first sight so much more humanly expansive than the modern translators' statements – is to absorb all authority into his. We are to be *his* readers.

Gwyn Jones's 1960 translation establishes authority by persuading the reader of a certain authenticity, evading the nervousness of authorship and the translator's relation to his working condition. This authenticity is scholarly and geographical. It goes back to source. In the Acknowledgements, Jones declares that most of his work on the saga was done in Iceland. Furthermore, he was there in the capacity of lecturer, not on a personal quest into the North.

The friends to whom he is most indebted are two very influential scholars and editors, Sigurður Nordal and E.Ó. Sveinsson. His simple expressions of friendship and

gratitude inevitably present the modern translator both as the equal and the contemporary of those who prepare the medieval base text for his reading and rendering, and as someone whose connection with these people and their work is reciprocal, less publicly accountable and deeper than the reader would otherwise imagine to be the case.

The stuff of the saga which most commonly bears the inscription of legends of settlement becomes reanimated as the stuff of the translator's creative excursion: 'Indeed, there is hardly an Icelandic placename in Egil's Saga which does not carry for me the memory of an Icelandic kindness.' (p. (viii)).

Jones's authority is stylish in its ease and good humour; he claims to work – however imperfectly – by the same gods as the old Icelanders, lightly underscoring his participation in the continuity of the saga's tradition in a way that suppresses any notion of the translation as secondary or parasitic:

The translation of poetry, like poetry itself, lies in Óðinn's gift, and for the verses of Egil's Saga I have deliberately sought no other help. Their faults are therefore all mine. So too are such errors of sense or style as may be found in the prose.  
(Jones, p. (viii))

What Fell deems the first readable translation is also the first to use paratextual space not as if embattled or enchanted but in order to balance its production rhetorically, between the independent and the collaborative.

Innovative Paratext?

Returning to our model for paratextual analysis, Genette's *Seuils*, there is another small point of interest for future translators: the possibility of using different colours of ink. Perhaps this may call to mind a 'beautiful' edition, i.e. a production for collectors or cranks. Coloured ink, however, is common enough. As Genette notes, it is expensive to use it lavishly in a book, but so effective that it is surprising to find it so rarely used other than for textbooks.<sup>19</sup>

Coloured ink could be used to highlight initial capitals at the start of chapters, where chapters are printed so that they run on with no separation but the numeral, i.e. without allowing a new chapter a new page. Run-on chapters may pace the reading more tightly – closer to the experience of a modern reader with a manuscript and further from the narrative expectations of a modern reader with a novel that observes, or can afford, the conventional printless blanks that break the narrative into assimilable, deliberate sections. However, the visually relentless compression of run-on printing makes the text harder to assimilate and remember.<sup>20</sup> Using coloured ink to demarcate sections of otherwise dense print may remove the supposed need for the often tendentious, inevitably reductive chapter headings which translators tend to impose (whether as a running title or intertitle with the numeral in the interstices of the saga, or near the front of the book), as it will be easier for the reader to keep a grip on the perhaps unfamiliar narrative form. What is the use of invented saga chapter headings, beyond the mnemonic or as an index to the translator's agenda?

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<sup>19</sup> Genette 1987, note 1, p. 23.

<sup>20</sup> Genette (*Seuils*, p. 30) remarks that excess is a sign of prestige. Excess need not imply waste; minimal resources may not increase efficiency.

The appearance of coloured initial capitals may also help to foreignize, indeed ‘medievalize’ the reading experience. To some extent, this could free the translator from excessive preoccupation with achieving a balance of accessibility and otherness by language alone. By analogy with the use of coloured ink for rubrics, or the use of italics, asterisks, etc. to indicate a shift of mode, special typefaces or differently coloured ink could highlight shifts in mode which present translation difficulties, such as proverbs, rhythmic alliterative prose, legal formulæ, or poems translated into prose. This, however, risks being distractingly interpretative – more like the ‘beautiful’ edition – rather than helpful.

The Preface in the first volume of the *Complete Sagas* (CS) observes that:

The saga corpus contains a number of basic concepts which are not immediately clear to the modern reader. Terms and notions which were central to the sagas as a genre need to be translated consistently. To minimise the textual apparatus and maintain the flow of the story, it was decided to *italicise* certain recurrent key terms and concepts instead of repeating footnotes. Detailed explanations of italicised words, along with illustrations, can be found in the **Glossary** towards the end of Volume V. (CS, p. (xviii))

In practice this has not quite worked, for a number of reasons, of which I shall sketch a few. The italicization does not apply to every occurrence of a word, but can be restricted to the first appearance. For example, ‘Kveldulf gave him a *longship*’ (Volume I, *Egil’s Saga*, p. 34), followed by ‘longship’ (pp. 34, 36, ff.). Reading has to be linear, sharp and conscientious if the reader is to pick up on the fact that the apparently normal words are glossed and italicized elsewhere. A preliminary stage of conscientiousness is required of

the reader. The italics will only make sense to a reader who consults the Preface, but it cannot be taken for granted that every paratextual element will be read. The non-recurrent use of italics in the five-volume *Complete Sagas* risks having the italicized words appear like ordinary, if eccentric, italicizations for emphasis, or being heard in the inner ear as also that – intensification of the narrative voice, even if the reader has done his or her duty by the paratext: ‘Kari was a *berserk*.’ (*Egil’s Saga*, Chapter I. Vol. I, p. 33); ‘It is said that Gunnhild had a *magic rite* performed to curse Egill Skallagrimsson from ever finding peace in Iceland until she had seen him.’ (*ibid.*, Chapter 60, p. 116).

Peritext has to be created and considered as something which *may or may not* be read, no matter how it presents itself for reading or what its sense of its own indispensability. Many readers, after all, will have taken up the sagas in translation with one or both purposes – put crudely – of reading for the story, or reading for a crib.

Yet more conscientious effort is required of the reader: to turn to the Glossary in Volume V and interrupt the story. This brings up the question of practical availability. Forty sagas and forty-nine tales are shared between only five volumes. The information which has been presented as essential for the recommended interpretation of the translations and use of the volumes is divided between volumes I and V. Therefore, only one reader at any time can make effective use of the entire set. Individuals are forced to make an improbable financial outlay. Libraries (themselves not with unlimited finances, especially for Norse literature in translation) have the inconvenience of purchasing multiple copies, which even so may not be enough.

It is true that the translations coordinated for the *Complete Sagas* have started appearing individually. This in itself undoes their project, both practically and in terms of effect alone. The *Complete Sagas* hopes to supersede all extant translations. However, once the very monumentality of the unwieldy five-volume format has been shattered, the slim individual translations have no hope of appearing definitive. In bookshops, they compete with translations produced for series such as Penguin and Everyman, which are attractively recognizable brand-name productions in the eyes of the same general or popular readership which the *Complete Sagas* wants as its own. Even if the selection from the *Complete Sagas* which now appears as a Penguin paperback is meant to replace the old series, there will still be second-hand bookshops, or sections in new bookshops, where the old series is obtainable. A different level of commitment is required from the student, perhaps even more from the casual reader, to purchase a compendious single volume, let alone use it on its own terms. In libraries which already have some of the older paperback translations (three out of five done by well-reputed scholars), and which may have invested in the five volumes already, the individual translations may simply stand no chance of appearing, and the compendium would also be usable only by one reader at once.

Practical difficulties notwithstanding, when the five volumes are together, or even if the reader is handling one, multi-saga volume, it is possible to get a stronger sense of the coordination of the enterprise. Italics and the need to use the glossary set many voices humming from text to text. The words emphasized in one saga overlap with those of others, the texts' appeals to the glossary are known to be happening again and again.

simply waiting for their realization in each instance as the engaged reader presumably moves on from saga to saga. This sense of coordination of translation policy and of the substantiality of the saga genre is lost with the publication of the thinner, individual volumes. Details devised for the sake of the whole become little more than quirks when the parts separate off.

Until so much money and interest are available to Norse literature in English (preferably with the concomitant development of language programs which recover editions of the ST for some readers of translations) that there is no need for a would-be definitive set of translations, because, as with classical translations, the sagas can find their complexity realized in as many retranslations as possible, each as experimental or as traditional as the talents of writer after writer and the resources of publication permit, innovative paratext should proceed with caution. The contractuality of the translator/reader relationship, with paratext part of the promise, is discussed in Chapter III, 'Translation and Translation Analyses'.

### The Writer's Name

One of the two points which I select from the third section of *Seuils* (Le nom d'auteur'), i.e. *onymat*, 'onymity', is dealt with above. The second point needs longer treatment. It is to do with the placing of the author's name in the peritext (within the book) and epitext. The former is, as Genette notes, conventionally confined to a few places such as the title page and cover. The latter is more 'erratic', taking any form from catalogue

entries to gossip. Some of the occurrences of the translator's name in the peritext (its creative/scholarly/editorial appearances and effective claims) were discussed as a function of onymity. Author figures mentioned in the peritext, for example Egill Skallagrímsson for the verses in *Egils saga* or Snorri Sturluson for the saga as a whole, are generally credited with their work only in the words of the translator. The translators of *Egils saga*, never mind how self-depreciating, always are second author in terms of time and first author in terms of reader experience. However, in the epitext, the translator's authority can be shared, if not displaced, as when Snorri Sturluson is identified in catalogues or other epitextual material as the author of the saga.<sup>21</sup>

The saga translator's name, in the case of *Egils saga* up to now at least, is not so likely to be known to the average (student or non-student) reader as must be the case where, say, William Morris – or, for quite different reasons – Magnus Magnusson, is the translator. It is less obviously embedded in complex epitext. It would be tedious to survey every instance where it has been used. It is, however, worth considering what else these translators (may be known to) have worked on or written: where else, in what sort of enterprise, their names are authorial or quasi-authorial. This will be discussed in the close readings of paratext which form Chapter II. It suffices to say here that their other writings range from erudite articles in scholarly journals, through to works of fantasy with such

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<sup>21</sup> Ambiguity of authorship, uncertain ascription of responsibility, can be written across an index. In the version of OLIS, the Bodleian Library's online catalogue, in use in 1999/2000, an 'Author' search under 'Snorri Sturluson' does not list *Egils Saga* as one of his works. A 'Title' search for *Egils Saga* or *Egil's Saga* variously gives no name or the editor's or translator's, at the second level of search detail. At the third level of search detail, Snorri appears as author, as one among 'added names', or not at all, inconsistently even between different printings of the same edition or translation.

titles as *The Worm of Ouroboros*. The latter sort of work sets up a fascinating contrast between the translator's sincere persona in the peritext of the saga and his or her individualism in other works. Still, these other works are part of the saga's epitext. Sometimes they are more overtly, or more generally, part of the reception of 'the Norse' in English.

### Titles

Genette distinguishes between 'thematic' and 'rhematic' titles. *Theme* is defined most concisely as what is spoken about; *rheme*, what is said about it.<sup>22</sup> This distinction fails easily with a title like 'Egil's Saga', which simultaneously denotes the saga about Egill – to use his name is to focus the content and suggest the genre of biography – and the saga in some way governed by Egill, whose verses form part of the narrative text which may have formed around them. None of the five later translations chooses to avoid this compelling difficulty.

W.C. Green's 1893 translation is very specifically titled. The cover offers the reader 'The Story of Egil Skallagrimsson: An Icelandic Family History of the Ninth and Tenth Centuries'. The title page reads, 'The Story of Egil Skallagrimsson: Being An Icelandic Family history of the Ninth and Tenth Centuries, Translated from the Icelandic, by Rev. W.C. Green, late Fellow of King's College, Cambridge; editor of 'Aristophanes'; author of 'Homeric Similes', etc.'

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<sup>22</sup> Genette 1987, p. 75.

Volume I of the *Complete Sagas* mentions 'Egil's Saga' in several places. First, in the table of contents (p. (v)) it appears under the thematic rubric 'Warriors and Poets'. This placement is also meant to refer to the saga's chronological position according to the system expounded subsequently in the introductory materials, where these sagas are the second earliest composed, after the 'Vinland and Greenland' sagas. At the end of the introductory materials (p. (lvi)), facing the first page of 'Eirik the Red's Saga', is the chronological chart. This consists of a pale grey rectangle, the perimeter a black line, inset in an unequal border of plain paper. At top and bottom the black line is interrupted by overspill of the design within the rectangle: a narrow antique-map-style scroll at the top, headed 'VINLAND AND GREENLAND', then listing 'Eirik the Red's Saga' and 'The Saga of the Greenlanders'. This shows primacy in terms of age. It also shows a literal pride of place and scope of achievement, in two senses. These are the sagas which testify that Icelanders may have been the first to cross to the 'New World'. This top scroll is overlaid on another larger scroll which is divided into 'INDIVIDUALS' and 'SOCIETY'. Under the latter are three soft-edged oblongs in different shades of grey, 'REGIONAL FEUDS', 'WEALTH AND POWER', 'EPICS', each with its list of sagas; under the former, 'WARRIORS AND POETS', 'A LOVE STORY', 'OUTLAWS', 'NATURE SPIRITS' and 'CHAMPIONS', with their lists.

Sailing near the middle of the main, pale grey rectangle is a stylized black-and-grey manned ship, overlapping the top scroll with its square, lozenge-patterned sail and overlapping a similar scroll ('TALES ABROAD', 'TALES IN ICELAND AND

GREENLAND') with its keel and oar(s). 'Egil's saga' is the first under 'WARRIORS AND POETS', so, near the top left of the top scroll. The greys, cream, and black, like the bluntness of the images, suggests the past: fading and night: as well as modernity: minimalism and computer chic. The lack of colour is also appropriate to a notion of translation as shadowing an original. The ship is sailing towards the left of the page, i.e. westwards.

This is in keeping with the rhetoric of the stated intention of the producers of the *Complete Sagas* to make 'the world of the sagas' a 'rewarding and enriching experience for readers the world over' (p. (viii)). The source literature allows its own translation in order to effect a literary colonization. The CS rhetoric is taken from the two journeys west in the myth of Icelandic uniqueness: the strongminded exodus from a Norway oppressed by King Haraldr hárfagri; and the discovery of Vinland. Hence the President of Iceland's foreword, of which I shall quote the first paragraph and the opening sentences of paragraphs three and four, as well as the third-to-last (sixth) paragraph in entirety; to demonstrate the array of culturally aggressive rhetoric:

The Sagas of Icelanders describe the events surrounding the discovery and settlement of Iceland more than eleven hundred years ago. In them we read about the establishment of the parliament at Thingvellir and the Icelandic commonwealth, the way chieftains mustered support and struggled to win power and renown. [...] The sagas are a unique literary phenomenon and invite comparison with the masterpieces of classical Greece and Rome. [...] While the rest of Europe was under the sway of the Church and the Latin language during the Middle Ages, Icelanders were sitting in their turf farmhouses, writing down immortal works of literature in their native tongue. [...] The publishers of the Complete Sagas of Icelanders have very aptly chosen to name their venture after Leifur Eiriksson, the Icelander who set off in the year 1000 to become the first European to set foot in the continent which *he named* Vinland, but *would later be known as*

America. [My italics] Accounts of this magnificent voyage of discovery are found in the opening sagas in this series.  
(CS, pp. (vi)-(vii))

The thrust of this venture, as well as the presence of the ship and the map-style scrolls, reconfigures the titles of sagas on the scrolls into rollcalls of literary destinations, each of which has been visited by the same Northern vessel. These landscapes are to be carved out again in permanency in every reader's marvelling, vanquished mind. This reconfiguration, this rhetoric, are unnecessary. Indeed, they suggest insecurity, the fear of smallness. They do little to interest (far less convince) a new reader who in any case is unlikely to pick up *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders* entirely at random in a shop, or even library, without a prior interest in the subject.

Where *Egil's Saga* itself appears in the volume, there are layers of titles before its beginning. The approximate timespan of its events, 850 to 1000, appears in ornamental numerals at left and right at the head of the page, joined by strips of a pattern of Viking beasts with a central decorative ship enclosed in a circle. In large bold capitals some way beneath is the main title, 'EGIL'S SAGA'. After a smaller interval, in small capitals on the left is the date of composition, 'EARLY THIRTEENTH CENTURY': on the right, the title in Icelandic, 'EGILS SAGA SKALLAGRÍMSSONAR'. The translator's preface follows in italics, but begins with 'Egil's Saga', in normal type. This layering of titles may be meant to suggest the complexity advisable in any attempt to understand the type of narrative to be read. It may be meant to usher in the saga with due ceremony. Whatever the intention, the execution does not live up to the potentially innovative technique. The

prettiness of the dates and pattern are too reminiscent of collections of folktales and serious fairy tales for semi-adult semi-child audiences, such as the 1968 Dover edition of Joseph Jacobs's *More Celtic Fairy Tales* (1894).<sup>23</sup> (In fact, the accusation or hint that such and such a saga translation resembles children's literature is recurrent in reviews).

Complexity appears like extravagance.

Over time, and with the exception of the most recent project, the translations of *Egils saga* have moved from matching elaborate titles with more-than-Victorian archaizing styles of translation to matching minimal titles with modern, 'transparent' styles. Elaborate translation styles – Green's, Eddison's, even Jones's – can inhibit the reader's freedom to invent an imagined original. The reader, like a late entrant to a well-established fantasy rôle-playing game, is too busy initiating himself or herself into the high artifice of the translator's point-by-point faithfulness to, or lush reworking of, the source language and recreated saga world. 'Accessible' styles and unfussy titles leave as it were more space between the lines, at risk of this not being imaginatively used by a reader who may have the illusion of being at home in the translated medieval work.

Genette's assertion that the time of the title's appearance is comparatively unproblematic derives from his author-text model. His concern is with revisions made by the author, and adaptations made by others. Interpreting the paratext of a translation, I would shift the emphasis from the real time of appearance of the title(s) in publication to the reconstruction of the moment (pre-publication) when the translator decides on the

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<sup>23</sup> Jacobs 1968.

target-language (TL) interpretation appropriate to the source-language (SL) title, if any, of the work.

Temptation and connotation, identified by Genette as two other aspects of the title, seem to be divided between the earlier and later translations (up to 1976) of *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*. Earlier translations try to excite antiquarian or other interest. Later translations allow the modern connotations of ‘saga’ to blend into another Genettian title-aspect, generic indication.

The title of a saga translation, even if it is as plain or exact as possible – *Egil’s saga* – is always later than its text, in the important sense that the words used in it have a history beyond their academic associations with Norse and Icelandic translation. Even if that is where certain words may be thought to have a type of beginning, their life immediately is doubled, able to run a parallel course. ‘Saga’, for example, may be defined as ‘a long story of heroic achievement, especially a medieval prose narrative in Old Norse or Old Icelandic: a figure straight out of a Viking saga’ or as ‘a long, involved story, account, or series of incidents: launching into the saga of her engagement.’<sup>24</sup> It already has a number of general, not always prestigious uses.

#### Dedications and epigraphs

Genette devotes some time to ‘Les dédicaces’. For the translator(s) to make a personal dedication public in the work is to make an important creative claim for the

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<sup>24</sup> *The New Oxford Dictionary of English*, 1998.

translator as reworker as well as the translator as scholar. Significantly, among the translations of *Egils saga*, four out of six have dedications (as distinct from Acknowledgements) but only two are private as well as personal: Gwyn Jones, 'To My Wife', and Christine Fell, 'To my mother and the memory of my father'. There is no use of dedicatory space to create a literary/scholarly genealogy for the Icelandic work in translation or for the work of translating (Icelandic) into English by expressing gratitude to another scholar or team, until the memorial dedication, in the *Complete Sagas*, under 'Publisher's Acknowledgements', to the co-founder of the project, Sigurður Viðar Sigmundsson. This dedication is oddly framed, dwarfed by the heading under which it comes, and faced on the next page by the logo of the sponsors, Icelandair. It is less a personal/public memorial than part of a tally of those involved in the *Complete Sagas* project. The omission of previous translators and scholars from dedicatory space reinforces the implicit claim to singularity in the presentation of saga translations.

Genette's concern with epigraphs is only negatively useful for looking at the translations of *Egils saga*, where the absence of epigraphs in all but Eddison's translation corresponds to the limit of the creative rôle which the translators felt they exercised. Eddison's epigraph is classical. His dedication is personal, naming both his daughter and 'a noble Icelandic lady'. The desired effect presumably is of authority, through a kind of cultural and geographical authentication, not dissimilar to Gwyn Jones's Acknowledgements, but depending on Eddison's aligning himself with personal and literary ancient lineages. The concept of a 'noble Icelandic lady' is strange, as Iceland has

some claim to be the oldest Republic. It is doubtful that the reference could be to some ancestral or marital connexion with mainland Scandinavian nobility, even very tenuously on the grounds that noble Scandinavian blood fortified the Icelandic Republic. Perhaps the dedication refers to a native and/or individual nobility of character, which, as a compliment to the Icelandic lady in question, is at best inapposite, and, as an indication to the uninformed reader, at worst misleadingly impressive.<sup>25</sup> The translator's tangled personal claims on Icelandic tradition in this dedication may register an anxiety about his claims to quasi-authorship of a work from a tradition not ancestrally, but *merely* intellectually, his, especially as his peritext and translation policy will try to prove that Iceland and England share a heritage.

In the next chapter's close readings, I shall consider the translators' various prefatorial materials in several ways. The translators tend to adduce multiple levels of prefatorial material. These reflect their authorial/editorial tensions as well as registering collaboration and/or attempting to classify the information which is provided for the reader before the text. A consideration of intertitles, drawing on Genette's 'Les intertitres', now follows from the discussion of intitulation above, since both are secondary ordering processes of the translation, and it is these rather than the front-to-back order of the book which give shape to this chapter.

### Intertitles

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<sup>25</sup> Again I am grateful to Mr. R.F.S. Hamer for his suggestions on this point.

Genette remarks that intertitles may have a value that is more ‘anaphoric’ than ‘cataphoric’. Their most obvious value is as an announcement. However, intertitles sometimes remind the reader of what s/he is already familiar with, at least in so far as the reader is able to relate the elements of the intertitle to what s/he has read up to this point. They can be present to varying degrees, and way that they appear has different connotations according to, among other things, period and genre.

Running titles appear in two main ways: with or without a chapter heading as well as saga title. For example, in Fell’s translation, both left and right running titles simply are ‘*Egils saga*’, with the Icelandic genitive –s rather than the English possessive. In Pálsson and Edwards’s, the left running title is ‘EGIL’S SAGA’ while the right gives the chapter number and the translators’ title, such as ‘44. EGIL KILLS BARD’. In W.C. Green’s translation, the left running title is ‘STORY OF EGIL SKALLAGRIMSSON’, while the right gives the invented chapter heading but no number: ‘SLAYING OF THORVARD PROUD’. In the *Complete Sagas* the saga title appears on the recto, the series title on the verso, with the saga itself appearing as a subsection in the way chapters do in the other translations. This layout promotes the idea that the sagas can be read as a whole because they cohere. What is common to these intertitles proves to be their cataphoric quite as much as their anaphoric value, indeed their dramatic function. They keep Egill, or his anticipated appearance, central to the reader’s mind during the first third of the saga, where he does not figure.

Where chapter titles are added by the translator(s), they are both interpretative and instructive. They tell how to read a saga, from which can be extrapolated what the idea of 'saga' is in that particular book. The changes in fashion of understanding can be seen from some comparisons between the chapter headings of the oldest translation (W.C.Green's, 1893) and the 1976 Penguin translation which, for reasons of library and second-hand availability, recognizability and price, is likely to remain the paradigmatic modern, accessible translation for some while.

The table below sets out the first twenty-eight chapter headings, covering the introductory part of the saga dominated by Egill's grandfather, Kveld-Úlfr [Evening Wolf]. Over this length, the reading pattern endorsed by the translator/translation emerges. In the discussion following, I shall refer to Green's chapter headings by Roman, Pálsson and Edwards's by Arabic, numeral.

W.C. GREEN (1893)	HERMANN PÁLSSON AND PAUL EDWARDS (1976)
CHAPTER I. Of Kveldulf and his sons.	1. Kveldulf
CHAPTER II. Of Aulvir Hnuf.	2. Olvir Hnufa
CHAPTER III. The beginning of the rule of Harold	3. Harald the Shaggy

Fairhair.	
CHAPTER IV. Battle of king Harold and Audbjorn.	4. Victory for Harald
CHAPTER V. The king's message to Kveldulf.	5. Kveldulf defies the King
CHAPTER VI. Thorolf resolves to serve the king.	6. Thorolf decides to join King Harald
CHAPTER VII. Of Bjorgolf, Brynjolf, Bard, and Hildirida.	7. The Hildiridarsons
CHAPTER VIII. Of Bard and Thorolf.	8. Thorolf comes to King Harald
CHAPTER IX. Battle in Hafr's Firth.	9. Bard dies and Thorolf marries his widow
CHAPTER X. Thorolf in Finnmark.	10. Thorolf in Finnmark
CHAPTER XI. The king feasts with Thorolf.	11. King Harald visits Thorolf
CHAPTER XII. Hildirida's sons talk with Harold.	12. Slander

CHAPTER XIII. Thorgils goes to the king.	13. Thorgils Gjallandi
CHAPTER XIV. Thorolf again in Finnmark.	14. Thorolf's second trip to Finnmark
CHAPTER XV. King Harold and Harek.	15. Slander sustained
CHAPTER XVI. Thorolf and the king.	16. Thorolf meets the King
CHAPTER XVII. Hildirida's sons in Denmark and at Harold's court.	17. Tribute for the King
CHAPTER XVIII. Thorolf's ship is taken.	18. Thorgils returns from England
CHAPTER XIX. Thorolf retaliates.	19. Thorolf goes raiding
CHAPTER XX. Skallagrim's marriage.	20. Skallagrim marries
CHAPTER XXI. Hallvard and his brother go after Thorolf.	21. Plots against Thorolf
CHAPTER XXII.	

Death of Thorolf Kveldulfsson.	22. The King kills Thorolf
CHAPTER XXIII. The slaying of Hildirida's sons.	23. Ketil Trout
CHAPTER XXIV. Kveldulf's grief.	24. Kveldulf mourns the death of Thorolf
CHAPTER XXV. Skallagrim's journey to the king.	25. Skallagrim sees the King
CHAPTER XXVI. Of Guttorm.	26. Harald and the sons of Guttorm
CHAPTER XXVII. Slaying of Hallvard and Sigtrygg.	27. Kveldulf and Skallagrim take revenge
CHAPTER XXVIII. Of Skallagrim's land-taking.	28. Skallagrim's land-claim

Despite the difference in time and approach between the two translations, six out of these twenty-eight headings, i.e. nearly one in four, are very similar in wording as well as emphasis (2, 10, 14, 20, 25, 28). Indeed, X and 10 are identical. This can be partly explained, in some instances, by the nature of the chapter. The Finnmark chapters (10 and 14) are both quite short, stylistically flatter, yet packed with detail of manoeuvres and about

the land. Chapter 2 is a two-paragraph miniature saga in itself, about the thwarted love of the poet Ólvir Hnufa. It foregrounds Ólvir Hnufa because of his later involvement with the main family's story, but the elaboration makes the chapter episodic, important to the reader both as 'fact' and in an assurance of the consistency of the internal history of the story (never mind what a saga author's attitude to material and invention was at this point). It welds together the scrupulous and the superfluous. Skalla-Grímr's marriage, in Chapter 20, is a sealed narrative unit, beginning with the formulaic 'Maðr hét Yngvarr, ríkr ok auðigr' [There was a man called Yngvarr, powerful and wealthy] to introduce the bride's family, and ending with an equally traditional-ancestral close-up of Skallagrímr as he is foregrounded in the narrative, 'Skalla-Grímr var líkr feðr sínum á vǫxt ok at afli, svá ok at yfirlitum ok skaplyndi.' [Skalla-Grímr was like his father in stature and strength, and also in appearance and disposition].<sup>26</sup>

Of the twenty-two remaining headings, nine are similar in subject but different in emphasis (1, 6, 11, 13, 16, 19, 22, 24, 26), so in just over half these chapters (fifteen out of the twenty-eight) the 1893 and 1976 translations agree on what is descriptively important. I mentions only Kveld-Úlfr; I mentions but does not name his sons too, hierarchizing as well as highlighting the genealogical. 6 weights neutrally Þórólfr's joining Haraldr hárfagri's men, naming both Þórólfr and Haraldr and using the single, plain verb 'decides'; VI simply calls Haraldr by his rank, 'the king', presenting him as the authority figure rather than the striving man. When read with the saga (Kveld-Úlfr's misgivings and

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<sup>26</sup> ÍÍ pp. 49, 50.

stubborn independence; Þórólfr's perilously gifted and charming personality), VI's 'resolves to serve' has the whiff of a judgement passed on Þórólfr's fatefully optimistic determination and less individualistic pride. XI 'feasts with' is more archaic and convivial than 11 'visits'. It also prepares an irony, as this is where Haraldr has his first fit of envious/fearful/outraged anger at Þórólfr's power and magnificence: central and more substantial than either the feast or the reconciliation with which the chapter begins and ends. XIII and XIX are similar in relating characters' actions and motives to King Haraldr, XIII overtly and XIX by implication, further enhancing the impression of his power in the story. 13 is no more than a mnemonic tag for yet another character and his introduction. 19, 'Thorolf goes raiding', makes his actions sound more stereotypically 'viking' and self-assertive than Haraldr-directed. It may be in line with this balance that in XVI 'Thorolf and the king' are conjunct as equals (apart from the name of authority), whereas in 16 'Thorolf meets the King' the verb, by introducing tense, also generates a kind of tension (quite apart from some of its connotations), and, though the King is capitalized, Thorolf governs the verb. Given what has gone before, XXII, 'Death of Thorolf Kveldulfsson' – death, not slaying or killing, and a ceremonial patronymic – suggests this translation's judgement passed on the inevitability – stupidity? – of a failure in the line. After Skalla-Grímr, the younger representative of Kveld-Úlfr, confronts King Haraldr (XXV/25), Haraldr disappears from Green's chapter headings, whereas he reappears in Penguin 26 as part of an ordinary plot-summary heading. Again by contrast with Green, Pálsson and Edwards's 22, 'The King kills Thorolf', spoils no surprises (the event being all too

apparently inevitable well before this). By a nice grammatical reversal, Thorolf is now on the other side of the transitive verb, and the King's action is commemorated to Þórólfr's honour – it is an outstanding way to die.<sup>27</sup> 24, 'Kveldulf mourns the death of Thorolf', only allows this death to be presented as a completed action when Kveld-Úlfr possesses it in contemplation, which itself happens only after a certain pattern has been set in motion – after Ketill (23) takes what revenge he can for his friend and relative, as if clearing the way towards the immediate family's even more energetic revenge (27). XXIV merely presents Kveld-Úlfr as a Man of Feeling. It is worth noting here that when the loss of sons is suffered by Egill (two generations after Kveld-Úlfr and Þórólfr), both translations treat his great elegy as the main event, not the characters' death: so, LXXXI, 'Death of Bodvar: Egil's poem thereon.', and 78, 'Egil's poetry'. The emphasis has shifted from the breaking or continuation of the family line per se to its production and preservation as verbal artifact by Egill's genius.<sup>28</sup>

The development of emphasis that emerges in the titles is clear in the difference between the 3-4-5 / III-IV-V and 7-8-9 / VII-VIII-IX sequences.

The three-four-five sequence in both translations establishes Haraldr as king, moving from proper name to title. However, the Penguin sequence is more dramatic, taking up an earlier stage of Haraldr's career as its beginning – 'Shaggy', rather than

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. Andersson 1967.

<sup>28</sup> de Looze 1989, in a self-reflexive reading of the 'translating' of the 'story of the life or *corpus* of the poet' into 'the poet's literary corpus', develops a related notion of Egill's genealogy as poetic, with *trolldómur* and the skaldic gift bearing equivalent relations to human stature and the language of dailiness; Egill then appears as the 'culmination of the bloodline', and, when his sons die, acknowledges a new 'poet-son' in Þinarr skálaglamm.

‘fairhair’, which is the stage Green’s sequence chooses to find him at. The Penguin sequence loses nothing of the grim comedy of Haraldr’s vow not to trim his hair or beard until he had subjugated Norway. Penguin 4 then gives Haraldr’s ‘Victory’ pride of place, a higher highlight than in the oddly selective title of Green’s IV, ‘Battle of king Harold and Audbjorn’ – by no means the only battle in the chapter. Neither translation’s chosen title for the chapter so much as hints at its last section, with its rhythmic, legalistic prose and comprehensive yet biased view of all the kinds of people affected by Haraldr’s ‘tyranny’ (the word used both by Green and by Pálsson and Edwards to render ‘áþján’ [oppression, oppressive rule]), far less at the last sentence, which could, in a translation of different emphasis, be all-important – ‘Ok í þann tíma fannsk Ísland.’ [And at that time Iceland was discovered]. Green’s subdued expression ‘message’ in V may be ironic understatement (retrospectively, to the new reader), giving nothing away. Still, the communication – the direction of power – is from the king to Kveld-Úlfr. The Penguin translation’s Chapter 5, ‘Kveldulf defies the King’ – terse and alliterative – belongs to another view of the situation. It seems that Pálsson and Edwards here have played up to the drama of the chapters. Green, more coolly, documents it.

The seven-eight-nine sequence cannot be compared as neatly as the three-four-five. While both translations had chapter headings that, roughly, were ‘about the story’ in three-four-five, in this case the chapter headings split apart, revealing differences in the conception of what a saga is.

Green's VII, 'Of Bjorgolf, Brynjolf, Bard, and Hildirida.' is no more than a list. It lines up three generations (inclusive) of Brynjólf's family, and names Björgólfr's new partner, from whom another line is to come. However, this is another of Green's understated titles that, retrospectively, authorize a particular view. Within the chapter, he calls Hildiríðr's children 'Hildirida's sons', shying away from a compound like the Penguin 'Hildiridarsons', although his translation practice admits compounds both ordinary and neologistic (some examples: 'sea-roving', p. 11; 'law-speakership', p. 52; 'shape-strength', p. 20; 'law-breaker', p. 112; 'witch-possesst', p. 130) as well as frequently (though by no means regularly) producing transparent, hyphenated versions of place names and geographically based peoples' names, and even hyphenating standard English compounds ('live-stock', p. 52), straining between foreignization and naturalization of the text. There is no remark on the use of the matronymic in the Introduction or the endnotes. In such a context, to translate 'þeir váru kallaðir Hildiríðarsynir'<sup>29</sup> as 'They were commonly called Hildirida's sons' (Green, p. 10), and to add the endnote 'The cause of the after trouble to Kveldulf's house, when their claim is rejected: so that this account of Bjorgolf's second marriage is not superfluous.' (Green, p. 199) is not neutral. The placement of 'Hildirida' in the chapter heading becomes not that of the last character in a quasi-historical catalogue, but that of a tacked-on outsider, female and incongruous to the male bloodline which shares name-elements (initial B-; compound with '-olf', *-ólfr* [wolf]) and formally is self-sufficient without her, implying its repeatability. Despite that word

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<sup>29</sup> ÍF p. 17.

‘marriage’, the translation’s suppression of the matronymic colludes with the descendants of Bjǫrgólfr’s first union in doing something more than leaving open the charge of bastardy against the offspring of the second, ‘commonly called Hildirida’s sons’.

Moreover the adverb not only casts general doubt on the right of the Hildiríðarsynir to acknowledge their paternity (let alone try to claim patrimony) but also transfers to them an overtone of that other meaning of ‘common’, hinting at their essential vulgarity. The Penguin translation simply entitles the chapter ‘The Hildiridarsons’. More economical than Green’s translation, this focuses attention on the (anticipated) importance of the Hildiríðarsynir (who merely do their growing up, in just over a scant paragraph, in this chapter), which makes it possible to read the three-generation story condensed here as preparatory material. The chapter heading does the same work as Green’s endnote, therefore more effectively. At the same time it preserves the matronymic in a form that slightly ‘foreignizes’ the text: Hildiridar- as the genitive in a compound (like Fell’s use of the Norse genitive ‘Egils’ rather than ‘Egil’s’, in her translation). The matronymic itself is carefully not used in a way that would participate in the partialities of characters within the text: ‘People called them the Hildiridarsons’ (p. 30). The section of Pálsson and Edwards’s Introduction that deals with their rôle in the saga begins:

Bjorgolf’s first marriage is legal, and his son Brynjolf and grandson Bard are descended from this marriage. But after his first wife’s death, Bjorgolf takes a second wife, Hildirid, in a highly suspect way (chapter 7). Hildirid has two sons, called the Hildiridarsons since their father dies while they are still young.  
(Penguin, pp. 13-14)

If objectivity is one of the features of family saga style, here it is the Penguin translation that preserves it as a virtue. The reader is left with the presentation of the conflict unmediated by commentary.

Green's Chapter VIII, 'Of Bard and Thorolf.', is a bland title. This may be suitable since Bárðr dies in battle in the next chapter. His main function in the saga is to pass on the problems of inheritance and the Hildiríðarsynir to Þórólfr when Þórólfr marries Bárðr's widow, so that the Hildiríðarsynir carry on the narrative, by intriguing with King Haraldr, towards the splendid fall or tragic waste which is Þórólfr's death. The title then prepares for this involvement of two characters and families, as well as more immediately pointing up the parallels between the two new King's men, who are explicitly likened to one another:

Þat var mál manna um Þórólf ok Bárð, at þeir vǫru jafnir at friðleik ok á vǫxt ok afl ok alla atgørvi. Nú er Þórólfr þar í allmiklum kærleikum af konungi ok báðir þeir Bárðr.  
(ÍF, p. 20)

And all men said of Thorolf and Bard that they were a well-matched pair for comeliness, stature, strength, and all doughty deeds. And both were in high favour with the king.  
(Green, p. 12)

[...] and everyone agreed that Thorolf and Bard were much alike in their stature, strength and skills, and in their good looks. Thorolf was well liked by the King, and so was Bard.  
(Pálsson and Edwards, p. 32)

If the title is pointing up the parallel, in Green, then it is a paratextual element working as compensatory translation. Green's version of the text ('well-matched pair'; 'both', rather than reiteration of the two names) stresses the friendship between Þórólfr and Bárðr above

their similarity as King's men. This similarity emerges more strongly in the Penguin rendering of the text, while the chapter title, 'Thorolf comes to King Harald', serves to keep the focus on Þórólfr and the narrowing-in of his fate as he seeks this encounter, despite the prominence of Björgólfr's family in this section of the narrative. The similarity may feed into the Icelandic partisanship of the saga, as a theme of the sort that 'good men who would thrive in Iceland must die because of Norway'. There are excellent stylistic grounds for the Penguin title as well. This chapter begins 'Haraldr konungr hafði þat sumar sent orð ríkismönnum þeim, er váru á Hálogalandi, ok stefndi til sín þeim, er áðr hǫfðu eigi verit á fund hans' [King Harald had that summer sent word to [the] powerful men, who were in Halogaland, and summoned to him those, who previously had not been to meet him].<sup>30</sup> Throughout the chapter it is the King's opinions, answers, permissions, observations, which are the controlling energy of the narrative. Every narrative unit traces a movement from the King's being sought out, towards his correspondingly fixed position as the one who commands or responds according to his own will. This is also marked clearly by the paragraphing of the Penguin Chapter 8, where the initial sentences are concerned with Haraldr in all cases but the last, where he and Þórólfr share the final sentence.

Green's chapter IX, 'Battle in Hafr's Firth.', cannot be more different from the Penguin 'Bard dies and Thorolf marries his widow'. Again the stress in Pálsson and

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<sup>30</sup> ÍF p. 18.

Edwards's version is more on plot and character, most particularly on Kveld-Úlfr's family, whereas Green takes the documentary, quasi-historical overview.

Green's chapters XII, XV, XVII and XXII chart the machinations of the Hildiríðarsynir against Þórólfr, naming them, so the chapters form a sequence culminating in 'The slaying of Hildirida's sons' (XXIII). The Penguin translation opts for titles in chapters 12 and 15 that thematize the slander by which the Hildiríðarsynir work against Þórólfr. Chapter 17, 'Tribute for the King', is summary and ironically double. It applies both to the success of Þórólfr's tribute collection in Finnmark and the failure of the Hildiríðarsynir when they manœuvre him out of this task in order to attempt it themselves. An 'anaphoric' title, it contains this difference when read with retrospective knowledge. Chapter 23 names 'Ketil Trout', who avenges Þórólfr on the Hildiríðarsynir. In brief, whereas Green's naming of the Hildiríðarsynir and of Haraldr is again a documentary naming of characters who are instrumentally important to the plot, Pálsson and Edwards keep the focus on what is emotionally important as the saga is gradually built up: the fate of Kveld-Úlfr's line.

This difference of focus appears too in XVIII/18. Green tells what is done to whom ('Thorolf's ship is taken'), naming who ultimately is damaged, rather than who is immediately affected (Þorgils, who is in charge of the ship, and who dies with Þórólfr in the fight against Haraldr, four chapters on). Pálsson and Edwards choose another bland, ironic title ('Thorgils returns from England') which does not detract from Þórólfr but honours his leadership by naming this chapter for one of his followers.

Green's chapters XXI and XXVII, as against the Penguin 21 and 27, deal similarly with the story of Hallvarðr and Sigtryggr who, enjoined by Haraldr to kill Þórólfr, only enter a chain of conflict which leads to their spectacular death (after Haraldr himself kills Þórólfr), at the hands of Kveld-Úlfr and Skalla-Grímr. Green names them in both cases, highlighting their 'Slaying' in the second. Pálsson and Edwards, not granting them the status concomitant with an appearance in a chapter heading, use a summary title in the first case, naming Kveld-Úlfr and Skalla-Grímr in the second, which is properly termed 'revenge'. As with chapter IV/4, neither title mentions that this chapter ends with Iceland, in fact ends with Kveld-Úlfr's coffin washed up at the place where Skalla-Grímr is to transfer and consolidate his power and household.

Both translations have avoided mentioning in their chapter headings the *trolldómur* [roughly, 'uncanniness'], the preternaturalness, of Kveld-Úlfr's family and some of their allies. This need not be read as embarrassment, merely as a negative sign that the interest of the saga should lie elsewhere.

The quasi-historical chapter titles preferred by Green are congruent with the influence of the kind of work that Finnur Jónsson was doing. In *The Problem of Icelandic Saga Origins* (1964), Theodore M. Andersson describes Jónsson's work:

In general the most emphatic and persistent advocate of saga reliability was Finnur Jónsson. "I will maintain and defend the sagas' historical trustworthiness – no matter how 'grand' that may sound – until I am forced to lay down my pen." He stressed the many references to trustworthy sourcemen, believing that these reflected both the sincerity – ". . . the respect for his listeners and readers, we would say for the public, the desire to narrate in such a way as to be believed . . ." – and the considerable critical sense of the saga writers. The tangible means of corroboration are

divided into three categories: 1. comparison with foreign sources; 2. comparison with other Icelandic sources; 3. topographic and antiquarian verification.  
(Andersson, p. 45)

Andersson then shows how '[t]he reaction to Jónsson's faith in the sagas came from the professional historians', (p. 46), later remarking that '[t]he shades of opinion on historicity are many and have little more than the value of opinion.' (p. 49)

Much of the fifth page of Green's sixteen-page introduction (p. (vii), pp. (iii)-(xviii)) reproduces Jónsson's justifications of the reasonable truthfulness (if not entire accuracy) of the saga. A paragraph from the preface to Thordarson's edition is cited next as being in agreement with this. As early as his second page, however, Green himself had asserted: 'No reader of this Saga can for a moment doubt the truthfulness of the picture given of life and manners at that time' (p. (iv)). The preface ends with a 'Chronological table of the chief events in the Saga or connected with it.'

Similarly, the Penguin translation, with its plot-based intertitles, is marked by the kind of contemporary thinking best exemplified by the structural analysis Theodore Andersson propounded.<sup>31</sup> In Andersson's *The Icelandic Family Saga: An Analytic Reading* (1967), the model for the family saga comprises introduction, conflict, climax, revenge, reconciliation and aftermath. Omissions, shadowings, replications, are some of the variations admitted to this model which seeks to define a genre. The divergences between Green's and Pálsson and Edwards's titles seen above, as in those chapters leading up to Þórólfr's death or dealing with the stages of vengeance for it, may be seen to be motivated

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<sup>31</sup> Andersson 1967.

by the Penguin translators' reading of the saga for its narrative structure. Even Andersson's occasional harshness, laconicism, and close focus in his judgements<sup>32</sup> on the superfluity or pertinence of saga elements may be seen in the brevity and ironies of the Penguin titles ('Slander'; 'Slander sustained').

All six saga translations are literary translations, i.e. are concerned with 'style' and translated in ways that primarily present the saga as literature, rather than presenting it in ways conducive to, for example, anthropological or historical study. This focus holds even in Eddison's translation, which is so concerned to offer information, and in the *Complete Sagas*, which is so marked by cultural politics.

Three out of the four translations which appeared after Sigurður Nordal's 1933 edition of *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar* as volume II of the Íslenzk fornrit series have used this as their base text. Bernard Scudder (1997) draws his base text from the new *Íslendinga sögur* series, like most of the *Complete Sagas* translators.<sup>33</sup> As seen above, the great importance of the paratextual material contained in or concerning a saga translation's ST is how, whether literary or not, it impinges on the 'literariness' of the translation. The editorial principles apparent in the translation and its peritext unavoidably are related to the ST. This is not the place to analyze the canonical status of the Íslenzk fornrit series.

The modern translators have not been naïve readers. Still, given that canonical status, and

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<sup>32</sup> Andersson does give the disclaimer that his study is a thorough working through of one possible approach, not exhaustive, certainly not indulgent of the individual saga.

<sup>33</sup> The *Complete Sagas* leaves open the question of Scudder's (and others') invisible use of ÍF. Vol. I, p. (xx) names the ÍF series as 'the most authoritative, although some of the older volumes are now outdated', but the new *Íslendinga sögur* as 'the most recent complete edition and based on the best and most up-to-date scholarly editions.' It is difficult to believe that ÍF would not also have been consulted or remembered even where 'Most of the tales are translated from *Íslendinga sögur*.'

given the monumental nature of the latest translation – *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders including 49 tales* has a tripartite foreword, by the President of Iceland, the Icelandic Minister of Education, Science and Culture, and the Former Director of the Manuscript Institute of Iceland – perhaps one should recall some of the criticisms which have been made.

Theodore Andersson, in *The Problem of Icelandic Saga Origins*, often returns to the theories and policies of the Íslenszk fornrit editors. He notes that the ‘bookprose theory is associated with Iceland’, especially with ‘S. Nordal, E.Ó. Sveinsson, and their collaborators.’ (p. 70). This theory counters the ‘freeprose’ theory of saga composition. ‘Bookprose’ downplays the oral element in saga origins, though without discarding it, concentrating instead on conscious artistry and (extant or conjectured) written precedent. It posits an increase in refinement during the thirteenth century, rather than deterioration away from an unrecorded original. According to Andersson, this produces a preoccupation with the idea of the author, which is ‘reflected in the disposition of the Fornrit introductions. One section is often entitled “Höfundur Sögunnar” [‘Author of the Saga’], a section in which, as some critics have felt, a game of identification is played. The most famous instance is the attempted identification of Snorri as the author of Egils saga.’ (p. 74). He detects an ‘unhealthy bias’ (p. 94), well beyond a righting of the balance, in the turning away from the idea of oral tradition as saga source. ‘There is a conscious effort in the Fornrit Introductions to explain away as much as humanly possible on the basis of written sources, even when oral tradition is regarded as the major constituent.’ (p. 94). The

‘remainder’ is allowed to the oral tradition, by now often seeming redundant. He finds a refusal to define the oral and an ‘adherence’ to Nordal’s system in the Fornrit Introductions (p. 118).

Such a push, in the ST, towards considering the family saga as the literary production of an artist consciously situated in but able to free himself from his tradition, may have a positive effect on literary translation. This is not because the ‘literariness’ of a medieval saga risks being overlooked – Tolkien’s battle between monsters and critics being over. From the point of view of translation, it need not be cause for criticism that this model of saga composition corresponds suspiciously closely to modern practice. Such correspondences may be inaccurate, but they may liberate the translator. The ‘author’ could appear to provide, behind the original, a reflection of the translator, legitimating the translator’s individual creativity during work from a selection of written sources and personal advice. The ‘author’ is of a fortunate species for the translator. Not present enough to induce piety, he is sufficiently present to exemplify the energy that can be generated, in the process of reworking texts and traditions, i.e. in the transactions between target language not-yet-text and SL text.

Other criticisms that have been made of the Íslenzk fornrit series are based on text editing, such as the normalization, or normalized fluctuation, of past and present narrative tenses from abbreviations which do not clearly denote word form, let alone tense. These, however, belong in SL and SL-source study. A literary study of translations and paratext, such as this thesis, finally only works backwards to a reading of the SL text.

So far I have sought to demonstrate paratext's rôle in the process of literary reading, and how Genette's pioneering work may have to be modified for paratextual analysis of literature in translation. Most of all, I have tried to redirect the reader's awareness towards paratext in translations of *Egils saga* as exemplary for Norse literature in translation, hence the reception of Norse literature in English.

I cannot emphasize often enough that it does not matter who the readers of the paratext are, or how many of them there may be. Peritextual elements are literally bound up with the book, and remembered epitextual elements impinge on readings of the text. The peritext, and in many cases the epitext, can be read in ways beyond their ostensible informative function. They are historical, and individual. They reveal something about the attitude of the translator, something about the way the translation is inflected. This is why Genette's three categories – notes, preface, epitext – are more fully treated in the next chapter, in closer paratextual readings, chronologically ordered, of the six translations of *Egils saga* into English.

## II.

### TRANSLATORS, TRANSLATIONS AND PARATEXT

#### W.C. Green and the 1893 translation

As the name of the translator appears in the book, it is an element of the peritext. The translator's name appearing elsewhere is still paratextual. It is an element of the epitext. This name is the link between W.C. Green's translation and those other texts where 'W. C. Green' appears. The translation potentially can be read with any or all of these texts in mind. This is altogether different from reading for biographical 'background', or for clues to an interpretation that would agree with the writer's intentions. Paratextual material featuring Green need neither be excluded or overemphasized. It does need to be considered since, practically, it can be interlinked with the translation.

Ironically, only the saga's first two translators, Green and Eddison, i.e. the only two dismissed or apparently ignored by the others, appear in the *British Biographical Index* (1998). Green's *Who Was Who* entry notes that he was Rector of Hepworth, Suffolk. His father, also a Reverend, was a Fellow of Eton College, where Green himself was educated. Green distinguished himself in Classics at King's College, Cambridge. He taught at Liverpool College for six years; went back to Cambridge as a lecturer; became Assistant Master at Rugby School; and published translations and editions of several Greek and Latin texts as well as a 'translation of the Egilssaga from the Icelandic' and 'Memoirs [(sic); *Memories*] of Eton and King's'<sup>1</sup>. He seems to have been athletic and, apart from the outdoor life, interested in nature.

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<sup>1</sup> The 'Memories' of Green's title are incorrectly named in *Who Was Who*.

His 'club' is listed as 'The Viking'. This was the forerunner of the Viking Society for Northern Research which now has its headquarters at University College, London. Green's enthusiasm for things Norse seems longstanding. His background as a translator is quite academic.

A slightly different Green appears in *Cox's County Who's Who series. Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire*. (1912). Green was to die in 1914. Notably, this volume was compiled in part by personal interview with those included or those able to supply firsthand information. It specifies 'Born at Eton College, 1832'. but he appears less sheltered and soaked in academic life. In 1858 he married E. M. Fison of Suffolk; they had daughter. He '[t]ravelled in France, Germany, Switzerland': a gentleman's cultural education, journeys important enough for the record, yet relatively near to home, as if his Italy, Greece, Scandinavia were to remain ideal places of the working study, ancient and pure. In the profile of his publications (whether at Green's direction or not), the Homer, Aristophanes and Horace translations are named (cf. *Who Was Who*), but the *Memories* (though they were published in 1905) are not there. Instead of 'several classical translations; translation of the Egilssaga from the Icelandic', the entry lists 'Egilssaga (from Icelandic), other translations from Icelandic.' Unlike Green's conventional scholar/sportsman identity for *Who Was Who*, here patience and high culture also characterize his '[r]ecreations': 'Angling, Chess, and Music.'

Green's Norse work postdates J. F. Kirk's *Supplement to Allibone's Critical Dictionary of English Literature and British and American Authors* (1891). The entry for him lists six classical translations and three editions (one popular enough to have a second print run) between 1865 and 1887, as well as an ambitious combination work, *The Iliad of Homer: the Greek Text, with a Verse Translation: vol. i., Books I. - XII.* (1884). No reviews are cited. It is a neutral entry. Norse literature was well within the scope of such a dictionary at this date. Sir George Dasent and William Morris are given extensive space and praise. Many of their

commentators are cited. Eiríkr Magnússon, though not strictly within the rubric of the title, receives a paragraph of thanks for bringing the Icelandic into English.

Green's *Memories of Eton and King's* twice mention Icelandic, though not in connection with translation or medieval literature. He first mentions Icelandic in a romantic, defensive passage about the Fellows of King's, which transfers something of this tone to the subject:

Some, whom we youngsters had in our conceit dubbed as useless old fogies, had done useful work in their time. For instance the elder of the two Heaths had earlier in life been a traveller in the North, he was learned in the languages of Norway and Iceland. It was mainly through his liberality that Jón Thorlaksson's translation of Milton's *Paradise Lost* into Icelandic was printed and published in 1828; and it is one of the best poetical translations I have ever seen.  
(Green, p. 81)

This dynamic of exchange is unexpected. The pioneering English scholar gives an epic to the Northmen, who (it would have been understood) themselves had not only language but 'epic' material to give.

Green's *Memories* mention Icelandic for the second time in relating his friendship with the University Librarian (and distinguished bibliographer), H. Bradshaw, who was, in Green's description, 'rather eclectic and independent in his ways of reading'. Again, the far-out, the maverick, is associated with Icelandic:

[...] we now had some literary tastes in common, though we did not run exactly on the same lines. He gave me, just when I was first studying Icelandic, a copy of Thorlaksson's *Paradise Lost*, given to him by our Senior Fellow, Heath.  
(p. 96)

More illuminating than either of these is Green's account of his views on translation, defined combatively against those of a friend:

But once I had the misfortune to differ from [B. H. Kennedy] about the translation of the Greek aorist; and we had a friendly correspondence on the matter. I worshipped (as I thought) idiomatic English in a way which he called heresy, refusing to eschew “have” and “has” altogether. Neither of us convinced the other: I hold to my heresy still. And in the R.V. of the New Testament I cannot help thinking that here and there the translation has suffered by a too Kennedian following of a rule about Greek aorists (excluding “has” and “have”) which was devised to keep schoolboys straight. Something of this kind, I fancy, Dean Merivale must have felt, when, as I see in his Memoirs lately published, he retired from the Revisers’ Committee because he thought them over zealous to construe rather than to translate.  
(pp. 101 - 102)

This disagreement is largely significant, not for its content, but because of the opponent.

B. H. Kennedy (1804-1889) was Canon of Ely and a Student of St. John’s, Cambridge, as well as Regius Professor of Greek from 1866. Extremely prolific, he favoured ‘verse’ or ‘poetic’ forms for his translations from Greek, and was a member (1870-1881) of the New Testament Company of Bible Revisers which, according to Green, Dean Merivale quit on principle. In 1882 he published his *Ely Lectures on the Revised Translation of the New Testament*. He had a good reputation as a poet and translator.

The split Green tries to create, or claims to perceive, between his own championing of the ordinary and Kennedy’s practice, is false. Kennedy was well known for his support for technical and popular translations and his preparation of textbooks and school editions. The real split is between Green’s ‘Kennedy’ and Green’s ‘Merivale’, where Merivale (1808-1893), a Fellow of St. John’s, Cambridge, and Dean of Ely from 1869 till his death, stands for the younger, the inspired, even the embattled. Merivale’s publications were diverse, ranging from a *History of the Romans under the Empire* through a rhymed verse translation of the *Iliad*. They received mixed reviews, sometimes faulted for haste and subjectivity or some disproportion between reflection and imagination. He published on church history, and was fascinated by pagan/christian contrasts and what his contemporaries called a ‘revolutionary’ church. Merivale was also an hereditary poet-translator: his father translated some Schiller. What appears to be a

paragraph on translation policy turns out to be yet another token of Green's predilection for the romantic.

The content of the disagreement is less illuminating in itself than of Green's intellectual attitude. It is incongruous for Green to champion accessible translation or translation practice which renders the fluctuations between 'ordinary' and 'non-ordinary' language<sup>2</sup>. There is no evidence in his *Memories* that his idea of the ordinary is anything but skewed.

Green, born at Eton, takes pains to emphasize that, for him, royalty, Windsor Castle, Thames floods, incursions into buildings by the stag hunt, were ordinary. Contradictorily, he also insists that all this was marvellous, to be viewed through the lens of Walter Scott's *The Lady of the Lake*. This is the ordinariness of a birthright to romance, not of everyman. His self-characterization is consistent with this non-ordinary ordinariness. Of his schooldays, he remembers pleasure in severe learning, his good memory (a medieval-style attribute), his love for antique geography ('Trogdolytes [*sic*] and the like') despite his uncharacteristic failure to come to terms with the modern version of the discipline, and his thankfulness for being 'early initiated into the knowledge of how slow and unintelligent some minds can be.' His family, even his sister, was highly educated and multilingual (Latin before the age of five).

The comparative absence of family and personal life from Green's *Memories* is no real absence: his real family was to be found in the continuity between Eton and King's. He presents himself in two ways: as the prizewinning student who became the classical scholar, and as the active, nature-loving poet who composed verses for his friends. His pride in his verses is obvious from his self-citations. The two come together at the end of his *Memories*, where classical quotation ends the prose narrative, and his own last words are given in the

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<sup>2</sup> For translation policy regarding 'ordinary' and 'non-ordinary' language, see de Beaugrande 1978.

Appendix, in the form of a poem which he sent to friends on the occasion of a college reunion: *King's College, Cambridge. June 18, 1902*. In this poem, he describes himself as an 'old fogey' remembering youth but now feasting in maturity among eloquent heroes, drinking and making speeches: a rather 'Norse' self-portrait. He concludes with God, truth, right, and 'the royal law of mutual love'.

The prose style which seems natural to Green is mannered: 'Go we back to'; 'Frequent visitors we were to Fishers'; 'Doubtless in food there had been greater variety: but I can honestly say that regret for the flesh-pots I never felt' (a description of lodgings with board). Lexical anxiety appears occasionally: 'grooviness', for him, is a noun that lives between quotation marks<sup>3</sup>, while 'donnishness' is whimsically redefined, as connoting desirable moderation.

Chronicle-wise, Green brackets his chapters with dates under each chapter heading, but they are not consecutive or exclusive. I runs from 1836 to 1843 and II from 1843 to 1860, followed by a step back, 1851-1858, then a gap, 1863-1871. This interlace chronology is like a representation of the form of self-understanding through reminiscence, with its easy frankness about interweavings and omissions. It also resembles the layering of time in Icelandic family sagas, which translators and commentators sometimes, nervously, present as difficult, as if their readers otherwise were used only to the simplest books, or as if such a narrative technique were not to be found elsewhere.

Of course, Green's background need not have helped cause any blurring between registers of language. In his case it did, because of his translation of his life - a life of the mind, overwritten with romance and archaism. Inevitably, his idea of ordinary-language translation produced a work in a self-consciously purified yet mixed language, blending Saxonisms and the

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<sup>3</sup> It is not used with the present-day meaning, but to describe people who are set in their ways, stuck in a groove.

Latinated with the King James Bible into an idiolect that reveals Green's norm to be an implausible, highly individual ideal, synthesized from his reading, and remote from common usage.

Green reproduces some sections from *Egils saga* in another book, *Translations from the Icelandic* (1908). This book is divided into 'Prose' and 'Verse', with extracts from the 'Prose Edda', five sagas, the *Elder Edda* and Hallgrímur Pétursson. In the King's Classics series edited by Israel Gollancz, it is a small, beautifully produced volume. The frontispiece (with protective insert) is a photograph of 'The Thor Cross. Kirk Bride, Isle of Man'. This illustration sets the book's beginning at a point of intersection of pagan identification and Christian shape, British and Norse territory.

In the Introduction, Green dates his interest in Icelandic to what would be c. 1864, i.e. when he was thirty-two. After tracing some of the ways that a more general interest in Icelandic literature began in England in the nineteenth century (Gray; Scott; the Viking Club and its 'Saga-books'; the Cleasby-Vigfússon dictionary; above all Sir George Dasent's 'the *Njalssaga*'), Green asserts that the sagas' value is their historicity and their connection with England. He credits Iceland's conditions of settlement, the preservation of the language, independence, freedom, and distance from Scandinavian strife, with producing 'the best literature we possess about the north [...] superior to anything contemporaneous on the mainland', and lists some works for further reading. As will be seen, much in this assessment will not have changed over a century later in the peritextual material of the *Complete Sagas of Icelanders*.

The fairminded, documentary approach up to this point gains the reader's confidence, so Green's image of 'the Norse' appears trustworthy: 'But the Icelandic prose is (me judice) more interesting and more valuable than the Icelandic verse' because the verse is, he says,

based on religious legends, faith in which 'sat loose upon [the Norsemen]'. Green apparently presumes that what was irrelevant to them becomes uninteresting to us. An identification with the Icelandic is urged, and Icelandic prose is said to turn easily into English. Green makes a claim that persists into this century, that 'the Njalssaga' is best, but 'Egilssaga a good second'. He names Snorri's *Heimskringla* as a notable exception to the anonymity of sagas, and adheres to the Freeprose theory of saga composition: the sagas were 'learnt by heart and told long before they were written'. He presents his qualifications as a saga translator as more than scholarly. He informs the reader of his efforts, devotion, and suffering over time; most of the translations in this volume were done within the twenty-four preceding years, 'though my earliest Icelandic studies began twenty years earlier, when helps were few.' In Green's opinion, his verse translations are 'really translations, not loose imitations' because they follow the alliteration and rhyme of the original form.

Although Green values form over content or metaphorical system (can the two be dissociated?), and prose over verse, he decides that certain sections of the sagas 'seemed to lend themselves to ballad treatment'. Accordingly he includes ballad versions of four episodes from *Njáls saga* and two from *Gunnlaugs saga Ormstungu*. However eccentric this proceeding, two of the *Njála* ballads were published in *Blackwood's Magazine* (1890). His endnotes are scant, sometimes mentioning other scholars, clarifying meaning or context, finding classical parallels or analogues in Dante, and including practical speculations, for example whether Icelanders would have known about bees or whether references to bees in poetic images must derive from knowledge of England.

A certain wilfulness, amateurism in the strongest sense, can be diagnosed from this book. It is for his amateurism that Green is cited in the peritext of the next translation (Eddison

1930). Extracts from Green's peritext and text are drawn together and become epitextual to Green's own work, as they are reproduced in the peritext of Eddison's book.

### E.R. Eddison and the 1930 translation

E. R. Eddison's life comprises two kinds of work. They must have been complementary, but they sound like a glorious mismatch.

The successful Eric Rücker Eddison (1882-1945) of the *British Biographical Index* and Foreign Office List (1936) is not named as a writer. He went (like Green) to Eton. At Trinity College, Oxford, he graduated with a Second Class in Humanities, and went on to join the Civil Service in 1906, appointed a Clerk (Upper Division) in the Board of Trade. He worked his way up steadily. He was made a C.M.G. in 1924, appointed Comptroller of the Companies Department of the Board of Trade in the same year, transferred to greater responsibility as Director of the Empire, Trade and Economic Division in the Department of Overseas Trade in 1928; made a C.B. in 1929, promoted to Deputy Comptroller-General the following year, recipient of the Silver Jubilee Medal, 1935.

There exists an Eric Rücker Eddison who is another yet the same: author of the world of Zimamvia. His series of fantasy novels, their narrative working backwards from *The Worm of Ouroboros* (1922), came to C. S. Lewis's attention in 1942. Lewis was much taken with this 'heroic', 'sinister' world. His tribute to Eddison is reprinted in *On Stories*.<sup>4</sup> He praised Eddison for two kinds of newness: the newness of the inspired, and the newness familiar to people in their 'teens and early twenties' but, it is implied, worn away later on. This enthusiasm helped raise awareness of Eddison's work, leading to the reprinting of the *Zimamvia* novels from 1968 (and again in the 1990s). The newest editions insist that Eddison's is not a quirky or minor

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<sup>4</sup> 'A Tribute To E.R. Eddison', in Lewis 1982 [1966], p. 29.

achievement, citing the admiration of contemporaries such as Hilaire Belloc, H. Rider Haggard and Arthur Ransome, as well as moderns such as Piers Anthony, eminent among the ever-proliferating authors of secondary worlds.<sup>5</sup>

Paul Edmund Thomas's Introduction to the 1991 edition of *The Worm Ouroboros* emphasizes the genetic importance of Icelandic sagas to Eddison's art. This is worth examining in some detail. Given the paratextual connections (such as the name of the author), both the fantasy oeuvre and the translation may find themselves read with the other in mind. The Introduction also registers Eddison's contribution to the reception of Old Norse literature, in so far as it demonstrates the presuppositions and information of its writer. Thomas's authoritative appearance in the peritext of the fantasy novel makes him an exemplary real potential reader of any of the six translations of *Egils saga*, the title of which links the saga epitextually to Eddison's other authorial interests and work.

According to Thomas, 'the strongest influences' on *Zimamvia* are 'the Icelandic sagas and the Iliad of Homer, and Elizabethan drama.' (p. (xviii)). This matches Eddison's ancestral-hierarchical politics of culture, as will be seen in the paratext of his translation. Thomas annotates this declaration. Endnote 6 on page 406 says that 'Most readers outside the field of Scandinavian literature have never heard of the Icelandic sagas'. There follows an extensive explanatory quotation from Gwyn Jones's 1973 *A History of the Vikings*, p. 288. Thomas has not consulted Jones's second, updated edition, though this would have been available for several years (since 1984). More modern, and more sharply differentiated literary-historical, works, could be cited as well as or instead of Jones's. Thomas had done research in Oxford, Marlborough and Leeds in preparing this edition. This interesting paratextual intersection of

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, the publicity material at the front of *The Worm Ouroboros* (1991), and Paul Edmund Thomas's Introduction, pp. (xviii)-(xix).

one translator/scholar with another translator/author also demonstrates the randomness with which 'lay' readers pick up, or are directed towards, this or that Norse book.

Thomas's confidence in the esotericism of the Icelandic results from the vagueness of his idea of 'readers'. It is obviously true that readers most generally defined may not even be primarily book readers. If he is thinking of the large subsets of book readers and those who read for pleasure, his confidence is still not unjustified. Narrow any further the set of 'readers' and it really becomes impossible to pronounce on the accuracy of Thomas's plausibility, not least because market research would be misleading, unable to account properly for the second-hand book trade; gifts; use of libraries; book borrowing.

Pages (xxii) to the end (xlii) of Thomas's Introduction concentrate on the sagas, even more than on the Greek influences. According to this account, Eddison started reading Morris and Magnússon's *The Saga Library* at about the age of eleven, just after starting the plays and stories (with schoolfellow Arthur Ransome) which developed into *The Worm Ouroboros*.<sup>6</sup> He taught himself Old Icelandic at Eton and Oxford. As recorded in correspondence currently held in Leeds, Eddison conceived of his translation of *Egils saga* in a flash of inspiration. With this translation, he hoped to 'pay back some of my debt to the sagas, to which I owe more than can ever be counted'.

Thomas himself seems to have done some saga-reading. He analyzes Eddison's style as being more influenced by the Arabian Nights than by the plainer Icelandic, further claiming that Eddison mixes the style of saga speech (especially the aphoristic laconicism of the dying) with the 'Elizabethan'. He sees Eddison's use of characterization through action as both Greek and Icelandic. He identifies the 'althing system' as the model for Eddison's (heroic)

'Demonland' on Mercury. However, Thomas's idea of the 'althing' corresponds most closely to

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<sup>6</sup> All references in this paragraph are to pp. (xxi)-(xlii) of Paul Edmund Thomas's Introduction to *The Worm Ouroboros* (1991).

late medieval Iceland's idea of the early Republic - it is an idea from the age of saga writing, not from whatever historical world corresponded to the events of family sagas - and his reading seems insufficient to inflect this. Thomas takes on wholesale from Eddison's paratextual material in the *Egils saga* translation the idea that Iceland was founded by 'the pick and flower of the Norse race', who were single-mindedly distancing themselves from the demeaning authority of Haraldr hárfagri, king of all Norway. Like Eddison, he makes selective use of impressive-looking scholarship to perpetuate this legend.

There is an indirect indication that the knowledge of Norse literature that allows Thomas to make his stylistic and other judgements largely is acquired through the use of translations. Siding with Tolkien in his distaste for Eddison's 'slipshod', 'inept' names, he shows his partisanship to be less well informed: 'Ironically, some of the nonsensical but lyrical names, like "Gaslark" or "Tivarandardale"', sound lovely and gain easy acceptance from most readers.' (p. (xviii)). 'Tivarandardale' transparently is Norse. If it derives from *tívar-andar-dalr*, the second two elements meaning 'valley of the breath', it is odd that *tívar* [gods, nom. pl., poetical] is not in the genitive - Valley of the Breath of the Gods - but this may be Eddison's adaptation for euphony. It may derive from *tíva-randar-dalr*, Valley of the Shield of the God(s). In this case there may well be some explanation of 'Gaslark'. Even if not, nonsense names and sound chimes are not valueless.

*The Worm Ouroboros* introduces the character Lessingham, who is the traveller between worlds throughout the sequence. Lessingham's own journey, which begins through the 'Lotus Room' in the story, in fact is framed as beginning through Dasent's translation of *Njáls saga*, which his wife reads aloud (description rather than citation) as if laying the groundwork for Eddison's fantasy world. There is a frame before this, which recalls the shape of saga narrative. The book begins in family saga style, 'There was a man named Lessingham dwelt in

an old low house in Wasdale, set in a grey old garden whose yew-trees flourished that had seen Vikings'.<sup>7</sup> Was-dale incorporates the past tense into the place name, restoring the archaic to the everyday.

Idiosyncratic as Eddison's writings are, he has at least a more complex idea of what a text can be, and what work a reader can willingly do, than many commentators on translation choose to envisage. In *The Worm Ouroboros*, which (however derivative or eclectic) still is classified and read as primary/original whereas translations (however reworked) count as secondary, Eddison includes a note on the pronunciation of names (strangely placed just under the dedication, in the 1922 edition), uses elaborate chapter headings (plot- and character-based) with summary subheadings ('Of -'; 'How -'), and produces a hybrid prose/verse text, interpolating many poems (often presented as songs) taken from late medieval and early modern English verse. The degree of difficulty which is to be normal for his reader is as great as that for the reader of a saga translation. The format is not so different. Underestimation of the reader's capacity probably accounts for the conservatism with which translations tend to be judged and produced.

The continuity between Eddison's 'original' work and his translation is indexed in its paratext. *Egil's Saga: Done into English out of the Icelandic with an Introduction, Notes, and an Essay on Some Principles of Translation* mentions *The Worm Ouroboros* and *Styrbiorn the Strong* (a 'Viking' adventure tale) as other works by the same author. It, too, orders its material with chapter headings based on plot: conflict, arrival, 'leavetaking', birth, death, marriage; 'Of' and 'How'. Eddison takes control of the saga, not eschewing evaluation: for example, chapter LXXX speaks of 'high-handed dealings'. Archaizing adjectival 'evil' and Saxonisms such as 'rede' contribute to the ersatz antiquity familiar to readers of Eddison's other works.

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<sup>7</sup> *The Worm Ouroboros* (1991 edn), 'The Induction', p. 1.

The Preface starts by informing the reader that ‘Egil Skallagrimson of Burg is the main actor in this history, not its author’. It then emphasizes that the author remains unknown. Eddison makes his place for *Egils saga* in English literary history more than clear. The Preface effectively detaches the saga from *Icelandic* heritage by claiming that it was preserved in Iceland because of its *universal* appeal. Sagas are still read in Iceland because they are literature with life in them, not because of Icelanders’ ‘obsession with the bones of a dead past’. In retrospect, this sounds like sly preterition at the modern Icelanders’ expense.

The Preface reattaches the saga to England. Affinity well beyond geographical overlap is announced. Difficulties of linguistic, temporal and cultural transfer are minimized. According to the Preface, apart from ‘such accidents of staging’ in *Egils saga* as the inclusion of scenes in England (i. e. discounting such knowledge of the wider world as the medieval Icelandic tradition had), it must be clear to every ‘Englishman’ (sic) that ‘this is not a foreign book but curiously his own, curiously English’, down to the ‘whole quality of life’. This likeness is attributed to ‘many qualities that have come down to us through the Norse strain in our ancestry’.

Eddison’s eclecticism is a thing of the surface. Deeper than that is a politics of assimilation which justifies itself by genetics, in the biological as well as the literary-historical sense. What comes to us by right also returns to us. (This idea of the *return* of the saga to the wider world through translation into English will find its expression in the *Complete Sagas* version, though with an inverse relation of cultural power: Icelandic above English.) When Eddison says that his translation ‘is meant first for the man in the street’, he is not only introducing something new and fine to this man, but making him know what ought to be his.

For the sake of the man in the street (Eddison says), he produces a clear text with endnotes, and designs his critical apparatus to ‘smooth away’ the ‘only serious obstacle’ to the

uninitiated reader - the problem of keeping track of the characters. His apparatus, as will be seen, does rather more than this. Eddison's is the first translation with a scholarly appearance, scrupulous as to detail and layout. Towards the end of Eddison's Preface are acknowledgements to several scholars, including Sigurður Nordal, who read the Introduction, Terminal Essay, and notes, but whose edition of the saga came at least three years too late for Eddison to use. Eddison's translation is based on 'Dr. Finnur Jónsson's text in his latest edition published at Copenhagen, 1924.'<sup>8</sup> The Conclusion is a reflection on the verisimilitude of Egill's character, human in its containing contradictory extremes.

Eddison's Introduction is divided into four sections, to which I shall refer by numeral:

(1) The Heroic Age and the Sagas (2) The Republic (3) The Gods (4) The Saga.

(1) establishes the Norse canon and its purity of source. The 'five major [...] Íslendinga Sögur' are 'Njála, Egla, Laxdæla, Eyrbyggja and Grettla'. Using the Icelandic short titles, Eddison is uncompromising about the linguistic flexibility of his 'man in the street'. Otherwise, there are no surprises in this selection. The latter three sagas probably represented to Eddison chivalry, magnificence and romance (*Laxdæla*); the dealings of Icelanders in the pagan past (*Eyrbyggja saga*); and the chequered career of the ill-fated hero (*Grettis saga*). According to Eddison, 'Iceland means three things' - 'aristocratic individualism of an uncompromising kind', 'paganism', and 'a peculiar and in itself highly perfected form of narrative'. It will become clearer in (3) that these first two characteristics go together for Eddison, and seem to have his practical sympathy. From what follows in (1), it becomes clear that Eddison is using 'the Icelandic' traditionalistically, to create the matter from which a modern English character could *be* modelled.

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<sup>8</sup> Finnur Jónsson's Introduction is signed 'Kopenhagen, 1923', but his book is published at Halle (Saale), 1924.

The geographical isolation of Iceland (with its ‘curiously English’ literature) is spoken of as its salvation (translating now, in Eddison's times, as redemption?) from ‘Empire’, ‘Papacy’, and ‘the dead weight of Latin culture’. He is keen to assert that there is no real classical influence. Not paradoxically, this reinforces the power of the laudatory classical analogies Eddison will draw in (2). The Icelandic is freed to look independently valuable, when northern original and classical original are compared. His rhetoric of vernacular perfection implicitly invokes and displaces those other medieval figures of honourable tradition as conceived in English literature at Eddison’s time: notably Dante, whose work, of course, if one applies Eddison's apparent criteria, is marred by non-paganism. Again, it is remarkable how an explicit anxiety about the classical tradition and the classic status of the sagas links together the paratext of Eddison's nationalistic English translation in 1930 and the perhaps slightly less partisan Icelandic-motivated translations in the *Complete Sagas*, more than two and a half generations (and three translations) later.

(2) continues the work of grafting the Icelandic on to Eddison’s England. He re-states the theory that ‘King Harald Hairfair’<sup>9</sup> drove from Norway the people who would found Iceland. Subsequently, in one great outpouring, he manages weirdly to inscribe the Icelandic in England’s golden Elizabethan age, though without mentioning Shakespeare. It is as if Shakespeare were held silently in reserve for the English-English tradition. On the way, Eddison’s rhetoric draws on classical analogy and contemporary science (eugenics was respectable enough then). Finally he disparages the quality of the Anglo-Saxon origin of

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<sup>9</sup> The calque translation of *Hárfagri* [with beautiful hair] is, like Eddison’s use without gloss of Icelandic short titles for sagas, another forcible demonstration of how well Icelandic goes into English. However, it creates ambiguity where none need be: ‘Hairfair’ could mean ‘light or beautiful hair’, but also could be confused with related expressions: *hairsplitting*, *turning a hair*, *a hair's weight of difference*, which would suggest a meaning to do with exactitude and/or (in)justice.

modern America. Effectively, this pulls Iceland away from its mid-Atlantic position, closer to England.

A small population: but so was Athens small, and the Greek cities of Iona. Eugenically, it may be doubted whether any country in history has possessed a population of a higher quality. For the men who settled Iceland were precisely the pick and flower of the Norse race [...] To match the circumstances one must picture the sailing of a Mayflower not in Stuart but in Elizabethan times, and give her for passengers not William Penn and his Pilgrim Fathers, but, driven from England by some strange tyranny till then unheard of, men of the mind and temper of Raleigh and Drake, Sidney and Marlowe.  
(p. (xix))

This historical origami is yet more intricate. When Eddison was writing, Iceland had not yet gained its independence from more than five hundred years of rule by Denmark. To a mind of romantically northern cast, Iceland could have been regarded as a possible annexe to a crumbling British empire. Eddison's preemptive policy of domestication is followed at the level of semantics. Far from being in opposition to his uncompromising Icelandicization/archaism (which he claimed was more natural to English than current English) of word formation and syntax, this domestication bears out his self-fulfilling belief in Icelandic and English cultural oneness. *Goði* has 'no sacerdotal connotation: the 'priest' was squire and parson in one.'

Eddison's peritext has some marks - intentional or not - of an English cultural annexation of 'the North'. Eddison manages to suggest that his admired Norsemen had a structurally flawed society, so their best men destroyed themselves. It follows that his (structurally superior) English society, not modern Icelanders, would be the true heirs of 'the North'. If the aristocratic anarchy which prevailed in Iceland was doomed to failure, after discontent arose and internal boundaries were violated, the descendants of the Vikings are not worthy (i. e. not the real) inheritors. In the battles of the Sturlung Age, 'it was the great men

who fought to the death while their followers were given peace. The life-blood of the land was thus let out in the bitterness of civil war.’

Near the start of the Preface, Eddison authoritatively emptied out and collapsed the space for (our knowledge of) an original saga author. This section of his Introduction closes with a similar move. He dramatically recounts the murder of Snorri Sturluson, ostensibly to fix that date, ‘the night of the 22nd September, 1241’, as the symbolic date of the demise of the Icelandic republic. Given Eddison’s own account of his consultations with Sigurður Nordal, Eddison most likely was aware of strong case for ascribing the authorship of *Egils saga* to Snorri. Sigurður Nordal was to argue for this in his 1933 edition of the saga. Recording the passing away of the Republic, Eddison does away with Snorri all over again, remaining in sole control.

(3) uses its discussion of the gods to clear them away. Eddison is more interested in the figure of the heroic, overweeningly self-reliant human individual. Again he reads the Northern past in a way which constructs an eccentric political model for his contemporaries and future readers. After all, a state built up by a few grim, talented, arrogant individuals flourishes on the servitude of an admiring, less assertive community, and the elimination of anyone who spoils the unity of the picture: an elimination already practised by Eddison in his (non-)analysis of the aristocratic composition of early Icelandic society, whose households were not, so far as can be known, in fact unremittingly noble.

Eddison refers his reader both to primary texts (notably *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*) and scholarly works. Working mostly from personal and place names, but without any critical discussion of this method<sup>10</sup>, he concludes that Þórr and Freyr were the most commonly

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<sup>10</sup> Even if he had wished to avoid onomastic debate in the Introduction to his translation, the period would have been right for him to have considered the possibility of unnameability of certain gods or certain aspects of a deity, i. e. taboo.

worshipped gods in Iceland. He says that there is not much religion in the sagas. This is an example of selective interpretation, given the content of the five sagas he himself elected as foremost in the canon. Eddison suggests that Egill's relation to Óðinn may have been developed in some other land.

Eddison makes multiple rhetorical shifts in order to neutralize religion in his discussion, so that the individual man comes out most strongly. First, he makes much of the 'heathen' lawspeaker's conversion of Iceland to Christianity by decree for the sake of national unity (the account given in Ari's *Íslendingabók*), emphasizing the disinterestedness and longsightedness of the heathen lawspeaker in arriving at 'this statesmanlike compromise'. Having modernized the heathen lawspeaker, he takes care to note that 'though the letter of the law was christian, the pagan spirit lived on', citing the 'pagan' behaviour (wives and violence) of early Icelandic bishops as positive evidence of a positive thing. With the power of simplicity of contrast, he keeps 'christian', 'christianity', with a lower-case initial letter, before approving the old faith in 'fatalism' and 'fellowship between men and *the Gods*' [my italics]. An access of high language and white space is produced at the mention of the old faith: Eddison cites some stanzas from his own version of *Völuspá*: 'Sate on the house there and strake harp-string [...] The Hell-dead walk the way of Hell, and the Heavens are riven'. Later scholarship ironically betrays Eddison's rhetorical citation here. The date of composition of *Völuspá* may be nowhere near as early as sometimes thought. The description of Ragnarök may be a less than pure record of pagan vision, influenced both by natural volcanic disaster in Iceland and by Christian visions of Apocalypse. Finally, in his validation of the rigorous, independent pagans Eddison uses an orientalist comparison that also has changed its significance, lost its effectiveness, over time in the West. He compares these 'proud souls' walking always with the 'thick black shadow' of

predestination to the 'Moslem'. poised proud and free, the individual before eternity, his God, and death.

In section (4), Eddison defines the saga 'roughly' as based on history and built through characters. He sets the saga in the context of disparate tales and traditions that might be available to the modern reader, yet coloured by the distance of culture and time. However, he cites the Old Testament, 'French Romance', 'Keltic tradition', the *Arabian Nights*, and Boccaccio's *Decameron* in order to dismiss them. In his view, although they are equal in art to the saga, they are the products of civilizations inferior to that of the 'Northman' with 'his terse objective way'. The relationship to classical tradition remains self-conscious and difficult. It is the earliest term of comparison. Although he presents sagas as like Homer but better, because 'more purely individual', not so clogged by the supernatural, the marvellous and the gods, and without any pauses in the story except for the genealogies, the classical still sets the terms of value. He agrees with E. V. Gordon in finding the beauty of human conduct foremost in the sagas: 'We may well rub our eyes, and wonder whether we have not dreamed ourselves back to Hellas' (p. (xxxii)).

Eddison wishes to place the saga in a new context, with the 'modern novel' and Elizabethan drama. As his list of modern novelists includes Fielding, Thackeray and Meredith, it is clear that, for his 1930 peritext, Eddison opposes 'modern' to 'ancient', not 'modernist' to 'Georgian' or 'Victorian'. This means that the generic term 'novel', as Eddison uses it, must be understood in a wide sense. Eddison himself is once again almost but not quite modern in his perceptions. Just as his paratext to the translation is innovative and sensible in its layout, but idiosyncratic in its content, here he anticipates the drama-influenced analysis of the action of some family sagas,<sup>11</sup> but homes in on the 'Elizabethan', apparently for the sake of its prestige

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. the consistent use of stage metaphor in Andersson 1967.

and vernacular vigour, not for any striking likeness to the Icelandic - unless one conflates the Elizabethan and the seafaring, the seafaring and the piratical, the piratical and the Viking, as Eddison seems to do elsewhere, in his *Mayflower* conceit.

It is worthwhile to turn the 'modern novel' consideration inside out, and apply it to the modern reader. Excessive conservatism, and the carefulness of dullness, are typical effects of the half-fearful half-patronizing relationship which translators sometimes seem to have with their potential readers. I would so far support any argument for SL editions which challenge their readers as to extend it into an argument for translations which at least do not underestimate them.

Two more aspects of this section require discussion. One, a suggestion which Eddison ascribes to Sigurður Nordal, that the sagas came about because the Norse were conquerors brought up short by geography on reaching Iceland, so they turned their gifts and energies to the writing of histories. Two, the conclusion, which simultaneously invokes and turns aside nostalgia for the Norse, 'We may think of that old saying: *Tout passe, tout casse, tout lasse*', but 'tout lasse' cannot be imagined of the indomitably 'strong Northern spirit' (p. (xxxiv)), and finally asserts, in true 'pagan' spirit, an appreciation of transiency: poignant, but unreliably so, in the close to the Introduction of a translator's enterprise to renew two literatures.

The peritextual material at the back of the volume comprises three tables of genealogies, a Chronological Table with the warning that 'The exact chronology is in dispute. I have in the main followed Finnur Jónsson', a list of abbreviations, a 'Terminal Essay: Some Principles of Translation' (pp. 229-242), Notes (in five sections), Miscellaneous Notes (by chapter), and an Index (for the most part to places, persons and things; it includes references to peritext, such as an entry for the 'Tout passe' saying), and two maps, one of 'NORWAY in the Saga-Time', the other of 'the countryside of BURGFIRTH', across two pages, with scrolls and

borders. This multiple indexing of the saga sets the precedent for the next three translations. I shall discuss Eddison's Notes, then the Essay. This order answers my concerns in the general discussion. The interaction of the miscellaneous notes by chapter with the main text will be touched on in the translation analysis in chapter III.

The Notes are numbered I through V. Note I recommends books for English readers. These are divided into 'Translations of Sagas' and 'Books on, or bearing on, the Sagas'. II deals with 'BERSERK (berserkr)', giving examples from other Norse material as well as references within the saga. It explains 'that this peculiar form of furor athleticus was no mere legend is proved by the fact that laws were made against it'. There is a cross-reference to the next note, III, 'SHAPE-STRONG (hamrammr)'. This, like note II, refers the reader to chapter I, page 1. In keeping with the lower-case 'christianity' but capitalized 'Gods' of the Introduction, the main note starts, 'Odin was Himself a shape-changer'. Here, however, this may be an attempt to dignify material already, by implication, presented as embarrassing, not only by its presence in these notes, but following Eddison's identification, in his Introduction, of the incursions of the supernatural or preternatural as the flaw in Homer, the relative lack of which gives the sagas their advantage. Validation of this difficult supernaturalism, achieved in note II by reclassifying it as merely realistic, here is achieved by citing sources and analogues to make a generality of the uncommon, and by the use of a calm, scientific tone which discusses the phenomenon on its own terms. 'The classic instance' is said to be from *Vǫlsunga saga*. Other examples demonstrate that the 'power seems to have come sometimes direct from the beast itself', and the 'shape-strong' are told of in India, Japan, Africa and Greece. The neutrality of tone continues deliberately. 'In Europe the shape is generally of wolf or bear'. A parallel with modern writing (advanced in general terms in the Introduction) brings the saga respectably up to date, even in these matters, as the reader finally is referred to a 'fine modern story built on

the theme of lycanthropy', Mérimée's *Lokis*. Note IV, 'GENERAL NOTES ON THE VERSES', shows Eddison to be slightly more positive in his opinion of skaldic verse than was Green. He considers the early skaldic verse grand and powerful, but the later verse 'lifeless' and artificial. How far this is a critical judgement, and how far a predilection influenced by Eddison's own galvanizing 'obsession with the bones of a dead past', is uncertain. Still, his method is, once more, laudably practical. He takes one Icelandic stanza, explaining typical form and content through the particular. V, 'THE SCORN-POLE (níðstǫng)', resumes the neutrality of exposition, with such normalizing phrases as 'Níð is, technically [...]', and a division of the topic into 'tongue-scorns' and 'tree-scorns', with examples. A digression on land-spirits follows, again with the mention of normalizing parallels to *níð*, from Greek myth. The practice is discussed in terms of its reality, like berserk behaviour in note II, so the saga is happily returned to the realistic. 'Professor Magnus Olsen has shown that a correct runic transcription of Egil's 'formular' carved on the níðstǫng will give exact numbers of runes, repeated in such a way that they must necessarily have a magic meaning.' (p. 249). There is a double stress in Eddison's œuvre. He grapples 'fantasy' into 'reality' by creating the extravagant Zimamvia as a world for other adults to read about. He wrests his saga, the one chosen for the translation that would repay his debt to the Norse world, as close as he can (closer than he realized?) to himself, his nation, his times, and acceptable factuality.

Eddison's essay on translation begins by reasserting his belief in the kinship of Icelandic and English ('likeness of spirit and likeness of language'). Its quasi-scientific style resembles the peritext at the back of the volume more than the Preface or Introduction. One asterisked footnote consists of an extremely long alphabetical list of common lexical stock between the two languages. The stock may add up as common, but is a linguistic equivalent to romantic archaeology, an ahistorical hotchpotch almost indifferently picked from a variety of

Old English contexts, given in modern English forms. Its etymologically dubious examples of Northern kinship include such words as 'guard' and 'sign', which are even stranger, given Eddison's aversion to the 'dead weight of Latin culture'.

Eddison's declaration of this linguistic kinship precludes a criticism of the inefficiency of translators, too typical of commentators on translation. It should be recalled here that Eddison himself falls victim to such criticism when Fell dismisses him anonymously, lumped together with his execrated Green, as writers of the unreadable. For Eddison, there are 'perhaps only two good translators [from Norse], and all the rest mostly bad'. The two main reasons for this are the false confidence which saga style easily allows its translators, and 'the difficulty of translating the living word' - Eddison's phrase gives the Norse scriptural power, well beyond rescuing it from dead-language status.

As proof, Eddison cites Green's Preface on the 'few difficulties to a translator' presented by Icelandic prose. Juxtaposing this citation with a passage of Green's translation, Eddison compares the whole to the ass in the lion's skin. Eddison continues his argument for a good translation which would utilize the common stock of Germanic words. His preferred metaphors for this process of translating are drawn from soil, gardening, and transplanting. These metaphors imply that a proper tending of the Northern nature could (re)constitute culture. Taken to another level, the garden references could be seen as dividing translations into the deathridden reproductions made by language in a fallen state, not 'the living word', and translations of paradisaical virtue, through which the work of maintenance and right naming is carried on.

Eddison approves of two translators: Sir George Dasent and William Morris. He blames Dasent, however, for lacking beauty, dignity and splendour, and having a colloquial style. He blames Morris, by contrast, for being too literary and sophisticated, and for using

archaisms. Eddison then introduces Samuel Laing, praising Laing's pioneering efforts in having translated *Heimskringla*. The main reason that Laing is brought in, though, is to set up a further contrast with Morris. Eddison claims that Laing translates 'rather as an historian and a student of institutions than an artist'. Passages from Morris's and Laing's translations of *Heimskringla* are juxtaposed and criticized. Laing loses, on Eddison's pet charge: lifelessness. According to Eddison, the lesson is that 'The mischief is plain enough, and can be summed up in one word: Latinism.'

The energy and consistency with which Eddison advances this position effects a rhetorical sincerity. This sincerity is not a matter of criticism, but of faith. Dasent cannot really be blamed for Latinism, and this is why Eddison soon abandons references to him. Laing can be blamed for inaccuracy. Instead Eddison brings Laing to book for Latinism and non-literariness.

Eddison is leading up to a personal version of the belles-infidèles model of translation, according to which the translator must master and be faithful to the mistress text (the TT), while the mistress text cannot be kept faithful if she is allowed to become too beautiful. This paradigm does not bear close scrutiny. The translator's double duty, to ST and TT, is more like a bigamist's. Eddison decides that translating fails, not because the translation becomes seductive, distracting from the ST, but because translators already 'are ashamed of their mistresses', i.e. of the ST. Eddison's commandment is a courtly law for translators: 'Thou shalt love thy Mistress'. In this view, it should even be easier, with concentration, to keep to one's source text than to embellish it, in translating. Eddison condemns translators who believe they are free to judge where to approximate to and where to depart from the ST. He names several wrong-doers, including Pope. Despite Eddison's zeal to fix a tradition for saga translation policy, subsequent saga translators naturally have held different views, as

demonstrated by John Lucas, in whose opinion ‘Pope’s Homer is probably still the best of all English Homeric translations’ (Fell and Lucas 1975, p. (xxix)).

With atypical epigrammaticism, Eddison claims that everything difficult in the saga is ‘style’, and ‘in all art, style is life’. The emphasis is not Wildean. The impulse is sub-Nietzschean. As ever for Eddison, life force, though undefined, is the ruling principle of style. Eddison’s scholarly energy is partly fuelled by vague and mystical notions. His Introduction hints that the (real world) present and future can be changed according to the past as celebrated in its literature. His remarks on translation are concerned with a restricted method for bringing the past into the present. This method supposedly is perfectible by practice. Admitting of perfectibility, the method need never be changed.

Eddison’s desire to fix and set the tradition becomes finally apparent in his remarks on archaisms and on proper names. Eddison’s remarks do not clearly distinguish between the language policy that he would endorse in principle as ideal, and the language policy that he would adopt in practice for convenience. Eddison displaces whatever may be problematic about archaism. According to him, the essential, true English language is ‘literary’. It is unlike modern speaker’s actual or desired speech. Though literary, this true English does not fall into his bad category of ‘lifeless’. On the contrary, modern vernacular English lacks true life. Eddison harks back to the ‘greatest tradition of pre-Spenserian English’. He sets up a contrast between the modern English of ‘official documents’ and newspapers, and the English which ‘bubbles over with life and sprightliness’, an eternally relevant wellspring of inspiration.

Eddison then shifts his argument. True English may be archaic to us, but so are the sagas to the Icelanders. This is a strange shift, for Eddison previously has said that modern Icelanders (though of attenuated bloodline) tap into their living past. Eddison has it both ways. Archaism is true. It embodies an ancient vitality from which most people have sundered

themselves. Archaism is also accurate. The relation of modern Icelandic readers to the ST should, therefore does, parallel the relation of modern English readers to the TT.

Eddison's contentions could be read as personally motivated, supplying answers to the questions of an interior dialogue between his Civil Service work and his alternative work as an author. This reading provides more than a biographical understanding. It allows the use of Eddison's books, and books that mention them or him, as part of each other's epitext, so fluctuations of direction can be registered.

Another reading would re-apply Eddison's own technique for evaluating other translators. This discussion of Eddison's values for translation, as found in his peritext, could be juxtaposed with an extract from the text of his translation. If Eddison's translation method is successful, his language should prove less colloquial than Dasent, not supersubtle like Morris, more literary than Laing, without being Latinate or lifeless. Here is an example, chosen as nearly at random as is possible:

There was there great man-fall. They robbed the cheaping-stead, and burnt it before they had done with it: fared thereafter down to their ships.  
(Chapter XLVII, p. 91.)

It would be difficult to deduce the stated aims of Eddison's method from these results.

Eddison would like to see proper names systematized between books. He considers that all saga translators into English are engaged on a single project, which should be single in method. With tyrannical simplicity, he would like them to identify themselves as collaborators. Eddison believes that their simple recognition of the situation is all that is needed. This belief in simple recognition as the solution to problems was also behind his suggestion that faith in the ST invariably would be a sufficient translation policy.

Translation as version or reworking; translations as part of a continuum, each at once a footnote and a supplement to the others; these views of the translator's practice, inimical to Eddison, also are absent from the work of his successors in the translation of *Egils saga*. Systematization (though not in Eddison's version) is the aim of the *Complete Sagas* (1997). The ideal of systematization, as Eddison conceives of it, would be difficult to achieve. Eddison thinks it would be done best case by case, not by rule, but, even if all subsequent translators had thought of themselves as collaborators, there would have been much that was arbitrary in the project. It would have to be limited by time and membership of a group, as with the *Complete Sagas*, or an Academy would have to be established. Eddison claims that his own policy is to follow where work that seems permanent already has begun a tradition. He follows Morris and Dasent, in that order of preference. His claims for systematization, tradition and collaboration effectively are an injunction to future translators who consult his text, and to all readers as potential future translators.

#### Gwyn Jones and the 1960 translation

Gwyn Jones, unlike either of the previous translators, has professional expertise in Old Norse, as well as Old English and Celtic. This makes his work in some ways more objective in focus than the serious but amateur work of Eddison and Green. In the work of a practising academic like Jones, the explanation and instruction which his translation's peritext supplies to the reader is likely to be more realistically pitched to its audience.

Jones's dedication and his two pages of acknowledgements have been discussed earlier. After his table of contents, there are two maps, each occupying one page (pp. (x) and (xi)). Eddison's maps need not have influenced Jones's. Jones's base text, the ÍF edition,

features several detailed maps at the back of the volume. Jones is alone among the translators in placing detailed maps before the saga.<sup>12</sup>

The prominence of Jones's map thematizes geography as an element in the text contained in Jones's book. This plain relocation of the reader from the beginning cleverly both reassures and foreignizes. There is nothing resembling Eddison's verbal encouragement to the reader figuratively to map the saga on to Britain (his English-language reader's presumed base). Grounding the reader like this is good preparation for reading the saga. It makes it easier to grasp the vertical layering of time and allusion over place by which the narrative 'progresses'. This layering is otherwise potentially a source of confusion to the new reader.

The saga may be read as being *about* certain places, just as much as certain places *appear in* this saga. It is, therefore, appropriate that Jones's maps appear at the beginning. If the reader refers to them, (s)he will have to leaf backwards, move a set of pages back, re-open the book, so the geography of the saga becomes a point of beginning which is again and again a place of return. The first map is of 'Egil's World', which extends west to Ireland, east to 'Bjarmaland', south to 'Frisland' and London, north to Iceland. The second map is of 'Borgafjodr', the final particle not anglicized.

Jones's translation has an extensive Introduction in four parts (not numbered; I shall refer to them by Roman numerals). They are of diminishing length. I, 'The Saga and Tradition', occupies pages 1 to 16, which is roughly twice as long as II, 'Date and Authorship' (pp. 16-23) and slightly more than twice the length of III, 'Aspects of the Saga' (pp. 23-28); IV, 'The Manuscripts', does not quite cover pages 28 to 29. This does not indicate an absolute

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<sup>12</sup> Although the *Complete Sagas* offers a map of the saga world, from Vinland to Constantinople, between the Publisher's Acknowledgement and the Introduction, it is not detailed (there is only room for the country's name on Iceland), and its position in the book is awkwardly remote from the literary texts.

judgement of the importance (or validity) of these categories. Rather, it structures the information to make it accessible for the less expert reader.

Like his forerunners, Jones begins with a competitive, canonical placement of *Egils saga* among the best. However, he makes no ponderous arguments and draws no far-reaching analogies from this. Instead, his opinion presents the reader with a saga transformed into an object whose value is real once it becomes understandable. His 'best' is chosen not out of an impulse to catalogue and fix the canon, but in order to hint at a useful readerly attitude. His rating of the saga assures the reader that his or her persistence will be repaid.

Jones makes the thronging world of the saga easier to remember by setting out history in the saga world's terms. He makes it a social history, not a history of great men: 'The period covered by the saga is from early in the second half of the ninth century to the end of the tenth, from the birth of Kveldulf's sons to the death of his grandson Egil.' Unfortunately, the practical aid of an index is not supplied - a flaw in keeping with the easy, conversational, civilized (i.e. leisurely) presentation favoured by Jones. The lack of an index prevents the reader from falling into a compulsive, interruptive use of peritext with text. It also inhibits certain kinds of cribbing. However, it does worse than nothing for the pleasure of reading which comes with comprehension and re-reading: of consulting the Index and returning to the text with a sharpened vision. This paratextual policy is analogous to the Penguin series's policy of accessible translation which allows some passages to gain in immediacy while others fall flat and the reader's experience is overall narrowed.

The rhetoric of both Eddison and Green was best suited to a cult readership for Icelandic material, for whom the saga had to be special property. By contrast, Jones is consistently pragmatic, uncontentious. He collapses academic debate on saga genesis by crediting the vanished author with the best of intentions. His saga author, or (as he prefers)

‘sagaman’ is ‘not concerned to invent but to make the best use he could of the material at his disposal’, accommodating both written sources and oral tradition ‘open to change’ over a time gap between two hundred and twenty and three hundred and sixty-three years (Jones’s estimation). This accommodating saga author resembles Jones’s persona as translator, in an elision by now familiar.

Characteristically, for Jones this near-identity is not a move to gain authority. It is the oblique apologia of a translator whose work steers clear equally of the individualization of ‘reworking’, and of the arid self-consciousness of translation conceived as transfer. Jones is clear-eyed about the romantic appeal of the saga for readers who share its territory though not its culture, language or time. He knows that they may want to domesticate its events in the hope that colour will bleed into their modern landscape. He may even be suspicious of the cult readers, in whose existence Eddison and Green would have been happy to believe. The better to connect with such readers, Jones concedes the point. He admits the local interest that would, for example, be pleased to identify the battle of Vínheiðr, in which Þórólfr Skallagrímsson is killed (ÍF chapters LIII and LIV), with the battle of Brunanburh, commemorated by the entry of a poem for year 937 of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. Having conceded this, Jones simplifies nothing, but in both the main text of his Introduction and in footnotes to it (paratext of the paratext?) he suggests further reading. His generous-sounding conclusion, that it is *easiest* to map Vínheiðr on to Brunanburh, gives nothing away.

Jones’s TT proper names are formally close to the SL, retaining (or, from a TL perspective, introducing) some particles and accentuation. This is not foreignization as Lawrence Venuti would understand the practice. The agenda which emerges from Jones’s paratext is less concerned with preserving the ‘otherness’ of the Norse material than with general good manners towards the reader. The names’ slightly exotic appearance is not a

marker of Norseness (anglicized versions, after all, still are not English). It merely acknowledges that the reader, elsewhere in literature or otherwise, probably copes with non-English names, possibly with diacritics. Jones does not present Norse-looking names as a difficulty.

There is an echo of Tolkien, a writer whose tone accords with Jones's liberal civility to his reader. Tolkien, in 'On Fairy-Stories', identifies one of the crucial questions which children ask about fantastic stories: 'Is it true?'.<sup>13</sup> It is a concern with truth as factuality which Jones seems to anticipate in readers of the skaldic verses in the saga. Carefully, he gives his opinion: most of the verses are 'genuine', but this means that they are 'faithful to tradition', not that they necessarily are the 'truth'. (Jones himself does enlarge on the reliability of certain fact-type truths, of geographical accuracy, for example.) However - and more importantly - he lets the reader know that, on this issue, the saga may be trusted up to a point, may be granted that 'suspension of disbelief' so important to Tolkien's essay.<sup>14</sup>

The genuine verses are separated into two types, on stylistic grounds. Some verses are presented as unquestionable. Others may not fit their context, but may represent Egill's retrospective embellishments of his story. This is not a simple separation. The first type, taken in the context of Jones's discussion of genuineness, diagnoses an area of trouble that is never outlined as such. The characters' habit of impromptu verse speaking, not to mention the intercalation of an otherwise reasonably naturalistic narrative with elaborate verse spoken impromptu, may look stranger to Jones's modern (general) reader than any number of odd

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<sup>13</sup> Tolkien 1975 [1964], p. 38.

<sup>14</sup> Jerome J. McGann, examining Coleridge's phrase in its immediate context, finds it has two senses, a limited suspension of disbelief which the reader 'none the less remains conscious of and attached to', and a 'more comprehensive understanding' whereby the reader gains a 'poetic faith' in a psychologized reality. (McGann 1988, pp. 169 - 170). This passage suits any reading of the sagas which bases itself on their intrinsic interest being that of enduring human nature. Torringa 1969 seems to endorse such a view. Gwyn Jones, in the *TLS* 1980 (p. 135), remarks that 'Everything which shows *that complicated but entirely human creature* the Viking in other than the bleaker-than-bleak or over-romantic light he has long been forced to inhabit is pure gain.' [My italics]

consonant groupings and diacritics in names. In the TT, such verse-speaking introduces a possible structural difficulty for reception: the reader's understanding of prose conventions, bound up with his/her emotional as well as intellectual response.

Jones's classification of the first type of genuine verse also can be read as an authoritative allegation that what is unquestionable is not just the verse in its circumstances. Unquestionable is the very fact that the speaking of verse, and the verse spoken, in such circumstances is perfectly in character, acceptable to the reader, believable: not an aberration or a trick of style. Instead of making this into a debate, Jones smooths things over.

Jones's second classification chimes with Lee M. Hollander's suggestion, that 'considering the extraordinary concreteness of certain portions [of *Egils saga*], one may [...] hold that the body of the saga consists of reminiscences by the skald himself', although Hollander does not explicitly extend Egill's hypothetical process of reminiscing to poetic revision or retrospective embellishment.<sup>15</sup>

Jones leaves unclear at what level of composition of the *saga* material Egill may, not impossibly, have edited or augmented his own poetry. Jones does not raise the question of authorship here, though. Until the next section of his Introduction, 'Date and Authorship', Jones refers (almost) neutrally to 'the sagaman' in his main text. Hollander makes his claims more aggressively. Hollander concerns his Egill with revisions in order to challenge the attribution of authorship to Snorri Sturluson, alleging that 'the skald himself', anecdote, and family could have provided a dense and definite stretch of material, to be 'welded into a whole by a gifted author - whoever he was.'<sup>16</sup>

Analysis of Hollander's argument left aside, Jones notably has already disabled such a possibility by naming Snorri as the author in footnote 17 on page 12, four pages before the

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<sup>15</sup> Hollander 1945, p. 55

<sup>16</sup> Hollander 1945, p. 55.

discussion of authorship begins. This footnote occurs as Sigurður Nordal's Foreword to his 1933 edition of the saga for Íslenzk fornrit is presented as an authoritative text. The scholarship of the translation is in line with that of the editor who has established its base text. Gwyn Jones also refers the reader to Nordal's article on Snorri in *Skírnir* (1941), which, given its date, may well have been the provocation to Lee M. Hollander's remarks.<sup>17</sup> Snorri's authorship is as near as possible proven, according to Jones. A characteristic blend of stylistic and practical reasons is produced: exactitude of geographical detail; pragmatism; a wide, impartial view of events; sophisticated treatment of domestic and foreign locations; dexterity with matters relating to kings.

The discussion of authorship brings out a range of rhetorical effects in Jones's own scholarly language, becoming a practical display of the powers of Jones the translator's style. His concise style can also be conservative: 'an historian's saga', 'Snorri saw and explained this *clearer* than any of his countrymen' [my emphases]. Jones displays his talent for ritual elaborateness at this section's close: 'And who shall say that it is a saga unworthy of the genius which gave us the prose Edda and *Heimskringla*, a genius nurtured in Oddi and Borgarfjörður more than in courts abroad, and not least where the fast white waters of Hvitá mix with the sea near Borg?' Here it appears normal for the peritext to have end phrase and initial phrase introduced by 'and'. Does the main text become so much the freer to render the saga prose, paced as it is by *ok* [and, also] and *en* [and, but]?

In Part III of the Introduction, 'Aspects of the Saga', there is much character analysis. Whether or not Jones's conclusions are followed, this analysis (if read) partly makes up for the lack of an index, in so far as it helps to make these characters memorable. The effect is not like items in a list. When these characters (re)occur in the main text, they will already have been

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<sup>17</sup> In the second sentence of the paragraph from which citations have been made, Hollander says that 'reasons have been adduced for attributing it to Snorri Sturluson, the greatest man of letters Iceland has produced'

picked out as significant. Whether or not Jones's presentation of them is consciously recalled or followed, they will shape the narrative held in the reader's mind.

Jones makes his peritext do other work for the saga's memorability. Highlighting certain areas of the narrative, he immediately undoes his own choice by suggesting a set of alternative, equally interesting areas. From this, the reader's memory and comprehension pull the narrative into shape over a series of points, like cloth stretched on a frame. It is odd to see the hierarchical language of listing doubling on itself, turning into something very unlike the lists in the earlier translations' paratexts. Jones's first list does make assertions in a style by now familiar. The second list, along with unfolding choice, brings in conversational civility, flash of image, unembarrassed use of proverb and occasional coinage of compounds:

The five outstanding sections of *Egils Saga* are the dealings of Thórólf Kveldúlfsson and King Harald, the account of Egil's boyhood in chapter 40, Egil's visit to York, the account of Egil's skaldship in Chapter 78, and the concluding description of his old age and death. (One may be tempted to extend the list with such things as Skallagrím's settlement, Egil at Athelstan's court, and Egil's last words with his father, diamond cut diamond, but sometime one must make an end.)  
(p. 24)

Jones's voice in the peritext is close to his translation's narrator.

Before the section dealing with manuscripts, which closes the Introduction, Jones judges *Egils saga* to be 'the second greatest of sagas' (p. 28). 'Second' rather than 'first' reassures the reader that the assertion is truly comparative, not naïve. The account of the manuscripts is full enough to indicate the complicated textual base from which any judgement on the work should be made. It is ironic that this, and the following two translations likeliest to

remain popular, since accessible, until their stock peters out, standardize the ÍF text as the source for their diverse renderings, eliding saga and edition.<sup>18</sup>

Jones's Notes (pp. 241-257), like his Introduction, are extensive and discursive, blending information and opinion. Explanations of unfamiliar terms, such as 'berserk' and 'odal rights', index his willingness to leave in, or invent, workable approximations for things Icelandic. Historical conjecture and geographical specifications are set alongside stylistic evaluations, rationalizations of unclear passages, and suppositions as to the motivation of characters. These endnotes do not merely give information which the reader may lack. They demonstrate ways of thinking about the saga. The saga does not come into reach because of the notes. The notes present a reassurance of its approachability.

There is an endnote for each poem. Jones's treatment of the poems, in the peritext and in the layout of the translated text, is remarkable. The character analysis offered by Jones in Part III of the Introduction had culminated in the identification of Egill himself as 'the most impressive creation'. The word 'creation' reaffirmed the fictionality of 'Egil' relative to his author. However, the description of the character 'Egil', clearly meant to excite the reader's fascinated respect, slips into a description of *Egil* (earlier identified as the author of genuine verses). The power of fascination is transferred from created to historical character, and so to the historical character's poetic creations: 'It is in his poems and verses that Egil is most himself'. The poems are the areas of intensity in a narrative elsewhere restrained.

The clear text presentation of the saga narrative is broken only where Jones inserts an asterisked footnote. The footnotes are attached only to verse, on pages 208, 214, 217 and 222.

These marginal elements of peritext all read: 'The words here are missing.' The text

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<sup>18</sup> v. Tanselle 1998 for the status of the intangible *work* relative to the instructions for its recreation varyingly given in its disparate, documentary *texts*. However, I do not consistently use 'text' in Tanselle's sense, but usually in opposition to 'paratext'.

corresponding to this peritextual element is visually disrupted. In order to show the omission, the space of the missing words is made up with dots: four dots per line, i.e. two per half-line (allowing for the structure of the SL verse), and so many dots as necessary to complete the line, so many lines as necessary to make up the stanza. This disrupted verse calls attention to itself. It is obviously text that has been worked on by the translator. It recalls the existence of SL poetry that needed to be rearranged by an editor. The look of the verse does not promise that any recoverable SL value of Egill's creations survives into its TT form.

Jones's care in attaching paratextual elements to the verse in the saga matches the care with which he intervenes quasi-editorially in the main text. He is the only modern translator to mark the status of the verse in the narrative with punctuation.<sup>19</sup> In all but seven instances, Jones encloses the verse in quotation marks, presenting it as a character's performance, maintaining the integrity of verse in prose within the saga. The more usual saga translation policy would leave the verse alone and artifactual, a block of Norse antiquity and difference, unowned except by location in the white space - both sudden and static, like a revelation of 'otherness' - between the prose on the page.

In one of the seven instances where the verse does not appear to be enclosed in quotation marks, verse (2), this is because the verse is continuous with its speaker's prose speech, so, while the verse is numbered and paragraphed as normal in Jones's translation, the open quotation mark which introduced the prose speech finds the close mark at the end of the verse paragraph. This is verse (2), chapter 27 (Jones p. 78, ÍF p. 70), where Skalla-Grímr teaches his rhyme of successful vengeance to his prisoners, King Haraldr's men, so that they take it to the king.

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<sup>19</sup> The saga's first translator into English, W.C. Green, also did this, further marking off the verse by his usual policy of translating the way the verse was delivered with 'sang'.

The two next cases are (21) and (22) (Jones p. 134, ÍF pp. 146, 147). Here the status of the verse is not marked as speech because the verse is continuous with the self-presentation of the prose narrative as historical/biographical report. (21) is a complete stanza. However, the narrative cites it as evidence of the *drápa*<sup>20</sup> which Egill composed for King Æthelstan, and (22) is the refrain of the *drápa*. The relevant verb is *yrkja* [to compose, to make a verse], not (as elsewhere) *kveða* [to say, speak, utter, recite, repeat, chant]. ‘Þá orti Egill drápu um Aðalstein konung, ok er í því kvæði þetta’ [Then Egill composed a long-poem-with-a-refrain about King Æthelstan, and in it is this verse].

The fourth instance, verse (43) (Jones p. 179, ÍF p. 213) is similar. Again the composition of a verse is reported, this time Egill’s expression of gratitude to his friend Arinbjörn for his Yule gifts: ‘Þá orti Egill vísu’ [Then Egill composed a verse]. It is not clear whether the division that would class some verse as immediate communication by the character/poet, and other verse as ‘later’ citation of a poem neither performed nor given in full during the course of the narrative, is a division that holds in this instance. Possibly *orti* [‘wrought’, composed] here implies *kvað* [recited]. Still, Jones’s punctuation of the verse on the whole inflects the saga dramatically, refusing to flatten out the change of voice implied by the occurrence of verse from instance to instance.

In two of the final three instances under consideration, the omission of the quotation marks which normally would indicate speech (speech cited in prose narrative) presents the verse as a linguistic artifact catalogued by complete citation, not as (the memory or reenactment of) the process or fact of composition or recitation. *Sonatorrek* is introduced: ‘And this is the beginning of the poem:’ (Jones, pp. 204-210). The introduction to *Arinbjarnarkviða* hardly varies: ‘and this is the beginning of it:’ (Jones, pp. 211-218). The *drápa* with which Egill

<sup>20</sup> A long poem with a refrain, a highly prestigious form.

commemorates the gift of a shield from the young poet Einarr skálaglamm is not given in full, so the phrase ‘and here is the opening of it’ is literal, introducing only the first stanza, verse (54); this classifies as memory of the fact of composition. The variation between ‘beginning’ and ‘opening’ is entirely Jones’s. *Sonatorrek*’s SL introduction reads: ‘Ok er þetta upphaf kvæðis.’ [And this is the poem’s beginning]. *Arinbjarnarkviða*’s introductory phrase is: ‘ok er þetta upphaf at.’ [and this is [its] beginning]. Verse (54) reads the same: ‘ok er þetta upphaf at’. (ÍF pp. 245, 257, 272). Jones chooses not to give the two identical phrases (for verse (54) and *Arinbjarnarkviða*) equivalent translations. Instead, he makes the introductory phrases for the two full poems correspond to each other. The reader’s experience of the long poems’ level of placement in the narrative is thereby differentiated from that of the extract from the *drápa*. For some readings of the saga, this differentiation may well have the kind of literary motivation and effect sketched above. However, Jones’s translation also brings out a correspondence between the problems of textual history embodied by the frame of the two long poems. What nowadays is purely a literary formula once was also a reminder to insert the required material. It is, in fact, only one verse of *Sonatorrek* which appears in the Möðruvallabók (M) manuscript, though the other main source for the saga, Ketilsbók (K), gives it entire. The transmission of *Arinbjarnarkviða* is not smooth, either. The ÍF edition footnotes the introductory phrase for each of these poems. It is possible that these two paratextual elements in the source influenced Jones in the bringing together of the translated phrases in his translated text.

Turning back to Genette, I reiterate that paratext consists of peritext (internal to the volume) and epitext (external to the volume). These are working definitions. Any element of either may enjoy additional existences over time, moving between the two. One motive for saga translation may be to bridge the gap between specialist and non-specialist readers. It is worthwhile to examine Jones’s reception in a periodical both literary and mainstream, so in

some way representative of the intersection of the academic reviewing and general informed reading of books,<sup>21</sup> and which is overtly targeted at the book-buyer as well as at the reader.

The *Times Literary Supplement* [TLS] of 1944 (p. 455)<sup>22</sup> has a short, generally positive notice of Jones's translation *The Vatnsdalers Saga* for the American-Scandinavian Foundation. The TLS 1948 (p. 481) reviews Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones's translation of the *Mabinogion*. This review elaborately praises the production of the book, but scarcely discusses the translation except to wonder whether it will replace its predecessor. From its remarks on Jones's care for the text's appearance, and, given the layout of the *Egils saga* verses, we can deduce that this care is part of Jones's method. The 1948 reviewer happily discusses Jones together with 'the ancient storytellers', and uses garden images in discussing the practice of translation and the issue of taste. The connotations of the image of gardening, however, are not all of peaceful and nurturing activity. Gardening involves destruction and selection as well as cultivation and transfer; this was implicit in the peritext of an earlier translation, where E.R. Eddison used similar images.

Lee M. Hollander's review of Gwyn Jones's translation of *Egils saga*, for *Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies*<sup>23</sup>, spends pages 333 to 335 faulting Jones on five counts: accuracy, taste and style, accessibility, the range of the Introduction over every aspect of the saga but the literary, and verse translation (bad enough, on Hollander's accounting, to be treated separately from the first three faults). Many of Hollander's perceived faults of accuracy can in fact be reassigned to the taste and style category. Hollander's list of Jones's faults sometimes even takes the form of a selective catalogue, with an appearance of restraint which is a kind of visual preterition. This list amounts to a single objection to Jones the storyteller, who

<sup>21</sup> This discussion also is restricted to covering Jones's reception up till the appearance of the Pálsson and Edwards translation, i.e. the last of the latest generation of separate translations of the saga.

<sup>22</sup> TLS pagination as for one year's issues bound together.

<sup>23</sup> Hollander 1961.

expands into colloquial and figurative language where there is none in the ST, yet Icelandicizes his English elsewhere. In other terms, Hollander apparently objects to calling a reworking a translation. Hollander's degree of insistence makes his objection apparently extend to the translation technique of compensation<sup>24</sup>, and further, to the practice of reworking at all. It is true, however, that the examples which Hollander cites paint a picture of TT extravagance that looks like a reworking of the saga prose to co-opt it for another storytelling tradition. Epitextual coincidence can be bittersweet: the *TLS* review of Jones's translation of *Egils saga* (1960, p. 628) is confident that Jones 'has successfully managed to engage the attention of the scholarly world'.

Returning to the *TLS* 1948 review, we find a second epitextual coincidence. Starting with a sketch of Icelandic studies in Britain, moving on to set up *Njáls saga*, *Egils saga*, *Laxdæla saga* and *Grettis saga* as the four best Family Sagas, in descending order and by a consensus as to the order (if not the nature) of what is 'best' unchanged over the time spanned by my whole discussion, the review then brings together Jones with Hermann Pálsson and Magnus Magnusson for purposes of contrast. The Icelandic/British translation team had produced a version of the 'first' saga which appeared in the same month as Jones's version of the 'second' one. Jones 'has successfully managed to engage the attention of *the scholarly world and the general reading public*; they have published their translation in the Penguin Classics and appealed to *the widest possible audience*.' [My italics] The two phrases which I have emphasized in the review are so placed in the sentence as to give the impression of intended contrast, although the former phrase simply looks like a specific version of the latter.

The review's rhetoric is more complex. The review soon faults the Penguin *Njála* for

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<sup>24</sup> 'Compensation' means that the features of a ST are treated *on average* rather than point by point, for example by introducing a phrase with a proverbial ring where it seems appropriate, if another proverbial phrase elsewhere has been lost in translation.

‘flatness, the absence of tension in this translation at the various climaxes of the action’, and for the (useful) footnotes which mar the clarity of the page. Immediately it undercuts its own conclusion. Deploring selective quotation, the review asserts that, to be fair, the Penguin translation ‘carries the reader along without drawing attention to itself; it will open a new world of imaginative experience to thousands of readers who can rely on Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson as reliable guides into this literary *terra incognita*.’ However, ‘*Egil’s Saga*, which now appears handsomely from America in Professor Jones’s superb translation with an introduction and notes’ is then praised in a way that makes the Penguin translation sound pallid, its guided readers needy and weak. Intensity, strength, force, are the root words for describing Jones’s Introduction. The prose of his translation can be ‘tense’, ‘compressed’; it can ‘vibrate’.

Now perhaps the review’s attempt to distinguish two groups of readers becomes understandable. The first group - scholarly and general readers - comprises what I would call the imaginative or actual readers, for whom so few translations seem to be written. These are the readers who can cope with a high degree of narrative energy. They take pleasure in doing some work, not hoping for the security of derivative prose and recognizable convention. The second group, or ‘audience’ (this word, as used in the review, characterizes them by the less modern or more primitive sense of hearing and by a greater degree of passivity) approximates to what I would call the ‘average reader’. Concern for this ‘average reader’ often moves the translator in practice to limit her- or himself, whether from consideration or something like contempt.

Two models of translation can be inferred from the review. There is impersonal transfer, translation as shinethrough of text beneath text and world into world. This requires a kind of telepathy (eased rather than effortless), and is always slightly blurred. The Penguin translation, where the content of the source text is somehow absorbed by the reader,

exemplifies this model. Then, there are the demands of Jones's masterfully written version, where the 'flavour' of the original is sought. Reading becomes an experience (whether inspiring or exasperating) of seeking this intangible, through the creative (opportunistic?) fluctuations of the TT's literary modes.

The last rhetorical move by which this review privileges Jones above Magnusson and Pálsson without making explicit judgement is in the final paragraph. Penguin may seem flat - but selective quotation is unfair - still, Jones is superb (and doing something different) - anyhow, '[i]nnumerable passages which could be selected for quotation all lead to the same conclusion', i.e. that after Jones's quarter-century of success as writer and translator, '*Egil's Saga* is the best thing [Jones] has ever done and there it now stands, a powerful challenge and example to any future translator of the Family Sagas.'

The third epitextual coincidence comes in the discussion of the verse in the saga. A passage of verse translated by Jones's predecessor Eddison is cited to demonstrate Jones's superiority. It is praised sincerely, but for a dubious reason. Jones's 'translation of *Sonatorrek* will stand comparison with Ezra Pound's version of the Old English poem, *The Seafarer*.'<sup>25</sup> Earlier, the review criticized Magnusson and Pálsson for translating their saga's verse into free verse which kept the imagery. This criticism was odd enough in supposing 'imagery' to be separable from meaning in skaldic (or any good) verse, and odder still given the admiring invocation of Pound. Perhaps the reviewer is working with the notion that imagistic poetry may be one of the filters through which the average reader sees poetry in general and poetry per se. This notion becomes complicated by a fear of how the translator can make this average reader think (feel) that the verse in the saga, as translated, is any kind of poetry at all. The strength which with Jones is praised is weakened by the suppositions which motivate the praise. This

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<sup>25</sup> v. Stanley for a closer view of what dubious praise the comparison with Pound may be.

resembles Eddison's own *TLS* review (1930, p. 1012). Eddison's reviewer there remarks that Egill was 'certainly the greatest of Icelandic skalds. The text of his poems has suffered dreadfully in transmission; but he is relatively simple in diction and shows real feeling', so Eddison's translation 'has communicated the qualities of his original'. An exclamation point is the best comment on this summary and conclusion, which so obviously have worked backwards from Eddison's version to an imagined original, missing the ST, of which an idea is formed anyhow.<sup>26</sup> Just as Jones's reviewer does with Eddison, Eddison's reviewer dismisses Eddison's predecessor Green, wishing to assert that 'there was room for the present translation.'

When the *TLS* 1961 (p. 388) reviews Jones's *Erik the Red. And Other Icelandic Sagas*, the 'storyteller' characterization is also used, though less lavishly than in the 1948 review. Jones is praised for bringing so much Icelandic literature to an English-reading audience. He is also praised for adapting his style to the needs of 'all his selected sagas', not imposing 'one uniform style'. He changes his style in response to each saga's individual qualities, and is flexible within the style chosen for each saga. The reviewer notes with approval the 'economy' and unobtrusiveness of Jones's scholarship and peritext, which help the reader to 'enjoy' these stories for their own sake. In other words, a Gwyn Jones mini-canon of medieval Icelandic literature is becoming a subset of modern literature. Commenting that Jones's 'skill as a novelist and short-story writer is of great assistance and the archaic cloak of William Morris is thrown away', the 1961 reviewer brings in an opposite verdict on Jones to that passed on Eddison by a 1930 *TLS* reviewer (p. 1012), where Eddison's essay on translation appended to his version of *Egils saga* is dismissed: it 'is a stout defence of the Morris tradition, but the etymological theory of translation is not a sound one', nor should the translator ever 'get

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<sup>26</sup> Use of an *imagined original* is discussed in chapter III.

between his author and the reader.’ The 1961 reviewer’s verdict on Jones’s project is a positive restatement of Hollander’s negative view.

Jones’s power as a storyteller is evidenced by the way his authorial style infects the style of his critics. This is true even where *The History of the Vikings*, no ‘literary’ work, is being reviewed. Jones’s *TLS* 1968 reviewer enthuses with rhyme, rhythm and alliteration:

Today there is general agreement that the Vikings were morally neither black nor white. They were raiders but they were traders, they were violent but they were loyal, they were greedy but generous. They were a vital moulding together of loosely associated regional groups who could fuse together on new or old ground to form a kingdom or a republic, organize a farm or a trading station. The heroic enthusiasm of the saga writers and the loud laments of the Christian chroniclers have been discounted.  
(*TLS* 1968, p. 1310)

It is one of the ironies of paratext that the next translator of *Egils saga*, Christine Fell, would provide a precise account of the development of the word ‘viking’, in her article for *Leeds Studies in English*,<sup>27</sup> as well as the Anglo-Saxon ‘wicing’, in the Sir Israel Gollancz Memorial Lecture for the British Academy, 1968. The difference between the analysis offered by her charting and the response excited by Jones’s history is paradigmatic of the shift between the two translations. Despite general enthusiasm, Jones’s 1968 reviewer criticizes, in Jones’s more academic work, the same tendency to smooth things over which this discussion found in Jones’s *Egil’s Saga* Introduction. On the question of Russia and the Vikings, ‘Professor Jones, with consummate skill, avoids real entanglement with this tricky problem. But the problem remains.’ The review closes with praise of Jones’s ‘book of hope’ as being ‘true for the moment’ and opening the way for more truth to come, by the example of its interdisciplinary nature.

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<sup>27</sup> Fell 1987.

The TLS 1964 review (p. 219) of Jones's Norse-Atlantic Saga translations also notes Jones's characteristic virtues: the book's handsomeness, its thoughtful, well-illustrated layout, the language, the interdisciplinary interests which move Jones to participate in archaeological expeditions in Greenland. It names Jones's reward for these virtues: the Icelandic title, Chevalier of the Order of the Falcon.

Just eight years after this - three years before the appearance of Fell's *Egils saga* translation, there is a negative shift in the way that Jones's work is received by TLS reviewers. The 1972 *TLS* reviewer (p. 1190) of Jones's *Kings, Beasts and Heroes* is divided between admiration for a style of scholarship which brings the subject imaginatively alive for the reader, and a cautious dislike of this style for being oldfashioned and inexact.<sup>28</sup> This reviewer depicts Jones as exuberant yet elusive, in command of his material but never living up to his promises. 'Some topics Professor Jones seems to have disregarded because in his enthusiasm he has become too totally absorbed into the stories themselves' to convey any sense of (needed) exactitude in interrelating events, genesis of the narratives, and time of the recorded narrative. The folktale-archetype approach is found wanting. The language is 'over-heady' - but the adjective's hyphen shows the critic impaled: as often before, the critical voice finds itself possessed by Jones's style. Jones is evaluated more as author than scholar. His book is criticized as if it were literature. The reviewer is inspired to an extended conceit which compares Jones to the medieval antiquarian who put together the story of *Culhwch and Olwen*. The illustrations are said to both distract and delight. Jones's language overwhelms but also saturates:

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<sup>28</sup> Nowadays, though, a reader of Cixous might see Jones as 'writing with' rather than expect him to be writing about, or on, his selection of texts.

One finds oneself so rolled along in the tide of words that it often takes a second look to realize that one is also being instructed. But, to adapt slightly what he himself says of *Culhwch and Olwen*, “this is no majestic, smooth-flowing river . . . cabined and confined, but . . . an exciting, at times hair-raising succession of freshets, cataracts, and rapids, transporting us through a variegated, spectacular, part-real and part-magical landscape” - and one stays with him every inch of his story-telling way.  
(*TLS* 1972, p. 1190)

The ‘story-teller’ characterization has stuck.

Jones’s own writing for the *TLS* is as informative and measured as his reviewers’.

The year after this review of his work, where criticism is belied by critical style, Jones himself analyzes his translation (with Thomas Jones) of the *Mabinogion* (“Viewpoint”, *TLS* 1973, p. 418).<sup>29</sup> Jones views translation as a way to ‘honour the donating literature as well as enrich the one that receives it’, emphasizing that translating into the TL brings increased appreciation of the TL. He admits that his non-academic writing and his personal circumstances (which he contextualizes historically) influence his choice of texts for translation. He balances this by describing the collaborative, interdisciplinary nature of translation as an enterprise. Jones’s list of collaborators outrivals Hollander’s list of Jones’s errors: ‘Lexicographers, ploughmen, botanists, topographers, archaeologists and historians [...]’. His pragmatism is evident, as in his Introduction to his *Egils saga*. He can temporize for the sake of consistency, deciding to be ‘*not too unreasonably distant from an eleventh-century standpoint*’. He concludes:

The minimum to aim at - it is the maximum too - is accuracy, faithfulness; and if the original has claims to greatness, a use of language that conveys that greatness. In short, for once in your life give it all you’ve got. You will never face the job again.  
(*TLS* 1973, p. 418)

This is as sober as his reviewers, but, typically of writings epitextual to saga translations, it is also as unspecific.

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<sup>29</sup> The following citations from Jones are from this article.

The well-worn terms, 'accuracy' and 'faithfulness', imply that translation is transfer - a correspondence between model and reproduction, a contract between master and clerkly representative (not mistress), a decoding between systems. However, Jones's specification, 'use of language', points elsewhere: towards translation as version or reworking, and to the version as literary, the letter disposed according to the movement of the spirit. Jones's phrase restricts transfer to content, allowing stylistic latitude. This opposition is familiar, and dubious. It hardly matches Jones's initial, scientific minimum-and-maximum phrases. Moreover, if the duty of the literary version is to 'greatness', this raises more questions than it answers. Are 'meaner' parts in a great whole to be rendered meanly, or touched up for the sake of the general greatness?

Jones's last exhortation, that the translation is a once-in-a-lifetime effort, sounds like a motto for work, applicable to project after project, not like a genuine critical assessment of the task. How to single out one translation from amongst the phenomenal number of translations, versions and retellings produced by a writer like Jones? With Jones's record of achievements standing in epitextual relation to his exhortation, the exhortation cannot be taken literally. It is, rather, the expression of something inbuilt in Jones's practice. He has offered a watchword to be repeated and heeded, not before some unique work in production, but during every task of interpretation - reading and writing.

#### Christine Fell and the 1975 translation

When Christine Fell's translation of *Egils saga* for Everyman appeared, Gwyn Jones's translation was so much in demand, and so well liked, that an early reviewer (in *Scandinavica*, Vol. 15, No. 1) wondered, typically, whether there was room for another. He concluded that there was, as the two translations were very different kinds of book.<sup>30</sup> No TLS

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<sup>30</sup> Glendinning 1976.

notice appeared. Within the peritext of her book, there is scant discussion of Fell's self-image as a literary translator. Is there epitextual material which might present Fell on translation?

There is an article by Fell, unrelated to her translation of *Egils saga*, but showing some of the habits of thought of the mind which worked on that translation. Entitled 'Some Domestic Problems', and published in *Leeds Studies in English. New Series. Vol. XVI*<sup>31</sup>, it looks at the second list of tools in the 'Gerefa' (MS. CCCC 383), with imaginative relish for the reconstruction of a world, as well as patience and philological thoroughness. She makes plain points: 'Some of the problems are outlined simply by comparing various translations of the text': with sharp awareness of how (mis)understandings can accrue and be perpetuated - here, for example, that return to a source text is not good enough if interpretations (versions) of that text, and their influence on one's own thinking, are not scrutinized. Her skills work quietly for her imagination, as she exhausts the German and Italian translations, as well as the English, of the Anglo-Saxon list, finding where they catch and connect. She is capable of reading the list as being naturally continuous with readings of the literature of its language. She warns against the faults of translating Old English prose as if it were poetry, and mapping a variety of SL expressions on to one English expression as if the Old English words were pure synonyms.

Evidence of an exhaustive exactitude, together with a clear-eyed impersonality of tone, suggest that Fell would be an ideal translator of the sort who seeks for lucid transfer, who seems to achieve transparency as much through implacable arrangement as through apparent neutrality. One would trust her with the translation of recurring phrases or of peculiar cultural differentiations, with how a wound was made, for example, or what kind of ship was used. This intellectual style is entirely unlike the ebullience and fertile subjectivity of Jones's writing ('Between the saga of Egil and that of Llywarch (much of which has been lost) there is no

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connection whatsoever. But we can relate their subjects as we relate two portraits hanging on a gallery wall, independent of each other, not of the same school, country, or century, but expressing in their different ways what two great artists have seen and wished to record of irascible and resentful old age.’)<sup>32</sup> - Jones gets the reader to suspend disbelief in the fantastic world while contemplating human nature thrown into relief by its setting; Fell can encourage the reader to find the foreign world believable.

It would be unwise, of course, to read this article as a *key to* the way in which she would translate a long, mixed (formally, temporally) work such as *Egils saga*. There are, however, general principles articulated here which hint that her translation style would tend to favour what could be the flexible modern, as opposed to the flat modern (supposedly) found in the Penguin series translations or the invention of a special variety of literary English - another of Fell’s warnings is against translation to the ‘modern etymological derivative’ as this will ‘inevitably mislead’ any ‘readers untrained in philology’. She persistently prefers to assume that sense and order existed and were exercised in the world, writer and text to be translated, insisting that the interpreter should have some confidence in the author’s common sense. At the same time, she refuses to overinterpret what is there by the light of what a present-day reader may find striking or have been trained to look for: alliteration in prose does not have to signal the influence of other texts (other traditions), and may even result from a habit of thought, with no special significance necessarily attached to its every occurrence. This commonsensical endeavour to think back into the time of writing is something Gwyn Jones also claimed to do. Fell’s application of this to stylistic features, rather than to some more general world view, should also mean that her judgement of equivalencies would not lead to too much translation of ordinary SL by nonordinary TL.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Leach Festschrift pp. 54-62.

<sup>33</sup> de Beaugrande 1978.

Fell is comfortable with the idea that different methodologies lead to different conclusions: another plain point, but it may be this attitude which frees her peritextual material from most (though notably, not all) of the dismissive, opinionated or condemnatory tones which translators may assume when discussing predecessors. Last, she appears effortlessly to embody that interdisciplinary capacity which Jones's reviewers both praised and craved at the conjunction of literary and historical studies. Take, for example, her elucidation of the Anglo-Saxon wordlist: 'Old Norse texts certainly imply that tables in that culture were as movable as the dishes on them. One does not, according to the sagas, clear away the pots from the tables, one clears away the tables. Middle English poetry shows that this was also the case in medieval England.' It seems likely that Fell would be disposed to apply a realistic, detailed and knowledgeable imagination to the world of any text she undertook to translate.

The collaborativeness of translation which delighted Gwyn Jones in his description of the process of translating the *Mabinogion* is explored by Fell in a way which no other English-language *Egils saga* translator tries to do. The first three of the six translations are the work of individuals. The fifth, Pálsson and Edwards's, is produced by a team which chose to work within the Penguin Classics series, and whose authoritative voice remains single in the peritext. The sixth, Bernard Scudder's for the *Complete Sagas*, is one item in a huge collaborative venture, and works according to collectively decided rules; but it remains very much the signed production of an individual. Only Fell takes on a different translator for the verse in the saga. This makes her version of the saga less assimilable to standard saga translation criticism, which (as seen so far) reserves some of its finest flourishes and critical judgements for the translator's treatment of the verse. Critics often use the saga verse as a test case where one translation is juxtaposed with another and both are judged for sense and sensitivity.

I have discussed in the previous chapter John Lucas's 'The Translation of Egil's Poems' (Fell, pp. (xxix) - (xxxii)). In Fell's 'Note on the Translation', there is one short paragraph where she deals with the translation of the prose, before the concluding acknowledgements. This note is perfectly in accord with the epitextual material on the wordlist; similar problems are touched on, such as the difficulties of non-equivalent lexical resources and of defusing unhelpful translation traditions:

The semantic difficulties are largely a matter of trying to avoid anachronism. For example Old Norse distinguishes several kinds of spear. One of them, the *atgeir*, is literally a thrusting-spear, and often translated as 'halberd'. The word halberd, however, describes a weapon which did not exist at the time, and I have not used it, preferring an unqualified 'spear' for the various terms in the original.<sup>34</sup>  
p. (xxvi)

Fell arrives at a solution for the book translation which she had rejected in the wordlist article: she forces a convergence, tailoring ST to TL. In principle, however, refusing to let the complexity disappear, she makes it a matter for the scholar's peritext rather than the literary translators' text. Almost all of the first three pages of the Note deals with the translation of the *Egils saga* poems. More specifically, this serves as an introduction to skaldic verse by means of explicating a single stanza at a time. This method is also used by the *Egils saga* translators she deems not 'readable', but again, a seeming continuity of method of discussing saga translation coexists with transformatively new knowledge and approach. The text of her translation is the place for simplicity (understood as immediacy), its peritext is the place for complexity.

Fell's division is no compromise if the contents of the *book* are to be read as continuous, rather than viewed as the text (which should speak for itself) and additions to it. Translation becomes less possible if the TT has to be readable independently of its peritext. An analogy to these two views of the contents of a book, and how their relation to each other is to

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<sup>34</sup> Fell goes on to discuss similar difficulties.

be read, could be drawn from bilingualism defined as functional translation competence in two languages, or bilingualism understood to admit of nonequivalent areas of equal expertise corresponding to one *or* the other of the languages available to the user. Fell's solution of simplification plus explication does not claim, however, to be founded on the theory of reading the book as a whole, nor even primarily on pragmatic considerations. Still, the theory applies to what she produces, and what she produces looks highly commonsensical. These results apparently are almost side-effects yielded by an intellectual dislike of fakery and obfuscation, identified as the besetting faults of translators' attempts to convey the 'spirit' or 'style' of their ST. Fell refrains from name-calling identification of faulty practitioners.

In her translation of the *Egils saga* verse, Fell eschews point-for-point equivalence as an ideal. This is not the result of a belief in the need to level the TL text. It is a kind of purism, because the points cannot really match up. One paragraph is worth quoting in full:

A number of translators of scaldic verse, recognizing the bleakness of a straight prose rendering and the unintelligibility of a literal one, have substituted something almost as complicated as the original in an effort to convey the feeling of highly-wrought, complex poems. This has always seemed to me a mistake. It forces the reader to unravel a crossword-puzzle tangle of ideas, which when unravelled are still not the specific complexities of the original and actual poem. The solution we have arrived at is to put poems in the text and translations in the notes, though even in the notes I have frequently simplified elaborate kennings, and have eliminated a whole range of casual allusion to figures of myth and legend. John Lucas, who claims that a poet must be translated by a poet, has for the entire corpus of poetry in *Egils saga* produced poems which are close to the originals in form, sense and tone, though not in the details of scaldic metaphors. In this way instead of the scaldic poems presenting a barrier to the reader's understanding and enjoyment of the saga, they are an integrated part of the story, adding considerably to its vigour and impact.  
p. (xxv)

Fell's concern for the poems in translation as part of the 'story' - events within the text, rather than outstanding features of it - dovetails with Gwyn Jones's approach to the layout of his text. Her phrase 'original and actual poem' is apt, because the poems are 'actual' in more than one

way in the Fell translation - actual (present) *in* the text in one form of translation, present *to* that text in another form of translation in the peritext. The fact that in the book each verse has two versions, which inevitably interrelate to some extent, reminds us of the real contemporary existence of the SL 'original [...] poem'. For these two versions, the SL original is a current, though invisible, referent, not susceptible of replacement by an equivalent. To have been translated need not mean to have a patina of pastness.

If Gwyn Jones's activity as an autonomous author fed into his creative translation practice, the epitext provided by John Lucas shows further stages of such a process. His other main projects for publication around the time of the saga translation are like a frame in two materials akin to the texture of the saga: an academic text on the English provincial novel, and a book of poems. The poems, which appeared eight years after the translation, are built on Norse material. They are a spinning-off from his personal imagination, most unlike the deliberately circumscribed translation, or the concision and formality of much of its peritext. Nonetheless, the links of authorial name (and, to some extent, subject matter) make it *not impossible* that Lucas's poems be read 'with' the translation, epitext enriching the otherwise controlling peritext and text in ways that they could not have accounted for.

*The Days of the Week*, beautifully produced with a moss-green rough paper cover and printed in an edition of a hundred copies by Roger Burford Mason at the Dodman Press, identifies Lucas as Professor of English and Drama at Loughborough University, author of 'numerous critical works', poet and reviewer of poetry, - and as the translator of the poems in *Egils saga*. The seven poems - Sunday to Saturday - in (usually iambic) pentameter, rhymed and stanzaic, deploy a bitter, satirical, transparent language, often in direct address, with more than one dramatic voice. They are tuned by the same system as the voice in which Lucas renders 'Egil'. Sunday and Monday are ruled by the sun and moon, respectively. Tuesday, 'The

Day of Violence', is annotated in italics: *'Tiw was God of War. In the stories about him he is shown to be crude, rough and violent.'* Wednesday, 'The Day of Revolution', draws up an (also Norse) opposition between the lawful, and the 'troublemakers' with 'crazy dreams' and visions. When 'Out of a sudden sun flies a strange bird', it is not only skaldic metaphors of battle which are invoked. The omens of *Vǫluspá* are tilting just outside view, and the note specifies that *'Odin/Wotan/Woden was associated with the forces of the air and frequently assumed the shape of a bird. He was God of Change and possessed a magic spear that could not be deflected from its aim.'* Thursday, 'The Day of Faith', is for the first time about the god for whom the day is named rather than about possibly contemporary humanity, reworking incidents from the *Poetic Edda* which are also alluded to in skaldic verse and visual art. Thor is depicted as a god who wrongheadedly tries to use his physical strength to improve things so that ordinariness gets a chance. The note reads, *'The Norse Eddas, from which the above incidents are taken, treat Thor as a noble, simple God, as remarkable for his credulity as for his courage.'* Friday, 'The Day of Love', notes that *'Frija means, literally, well-beloved. She was Goddess of Fertility and Protectress of Marriage.'* The images in the poem are continuous with the legend of Freyja weeping and searching the world for her estranged husband, though this legend is not mentioned. Saturday, 'The Day of Sadness', is made into 'sadderday'. An Indian god, Krishna, is invoked as the god for self-deluded optimists. Such a movement, tracing backwards Snorri Sturluson's theory that the *Æsir* went from Asia to Northern Europe, is suggestive of retrogression. It ends sceptically, with sameness, light, and fading - always more faded - hope, with 'a glass of bitter' and 'God - or time - '. Its tone is close to that of the stereotypical god-denier in a family saga, expressive of reliance neither on the Christian god nor the old gods but on one's own strength and power.

John Lucas seems to give new life to the gods by means not unlike E.R. Eddison's fantastic writing and his manipulation of initial capitals in his translation's peritext. Still, just as Lucas's creative translation seems to have fed into this book - another stage than Gwyn Jones's description of his own books feeding into his creative translations - so Lucas is one stage away from the idea that 'enduring human nature' is to be found in Norse literature. Instead he draws on Norse literature to write about a human nature which, in the other sense, must endure. Whatever the level of reading, the existence of this book of poems in the epitext to the translation of *Egils saga* does something more to prevent the formation of the patina of pastness on the source literature translated or reworked. It makes the source literature realistically present in another way, as part of an ongoing exchange of materials for writing and reading, more than as the base for renditions of its withheld self.

The carefulness and control which mark the verbal peritext of the Fell translation extend to the non-verbal peritext, but, like the epitext, the non-verbal peritext does more than might have been foreseeable. Consider a copy of the 1975 hardcover edition.

The dustjacket reproduces the picture of Egill from a seventeenth-century manuscript, then held at the Arnamagnean Institute in Copenhagen. There is no border but the edge of the reproduced leaf, against the white dustjacket. Both the title of the book and the illustration are right of centre, leaving only a narrow white space before the right edge of the book. This makes them appear as if to one side of a background of white space. This impression can function as a visual metaphor for both translation and transmission. Such an impression of white space and of shunting-off to one side is reinforced by the fact that in the illustration Egill is walking towards the right, but (quizzically? warily?) glancing back over his right shoulder, i.e. he is walking as though towards the edge of the book and out of immediate view, or as though into the text, but certainly he is positioned as if gazing into the white space to the reader's left, i.e.

'behind' Egill, yet he is obviously unable to quit the age-darkened background of the reproduced illustration. This reproduction, since comparatively dark, appears to be receding into the surrounding whiteness, if looked at continuously for even a short length of time. At a glance, the reproduction appears to be embedded in the whiteness. This can be read as analogous to the layering of strangeness and distance at work in (not merely 'colouring') any reading of the saga, or any attempt to reach the historical Egill's life. A still deeper level of such distance and strangeness may be suggested by the even darker script in which Egill's name is placed with given name and patronymic separated by his head. The name becomes legend, 'Egill Skallagrímsson' at once antecedent to, recognised through, and split apart by the - to us - exotic figure (to the artist, presumably nostalgic).

This portrait of Egill strikingly resembles the verbal portrait of him in both prose and verse in Chapter 55, where Egill's bizarre eyebrow movements demonstrate the intensity of his - grief/dissatisfaction/anger (never specified for the reader any more than for Egill's companions) - at his unrewarded valour and his brother's uncompensated death in the service of King Aðalsteinn. In this translation and edition, the episode may be found on page 84 (of 171), an episode roughly halfway through the saga in terms of narrative length rather than chronology. The dustjacket prepares the reader for what Egill is to (have) become, even before the character is introduced in the saga (Chapter 31, p. 45). It prepares the numerical midpoint of the saga to be felt with the weight of a significant midpoint, counteracting any feeling of foreshortening some modern readers might experience from Egill's 'late' introduction into the narrative.

The black hat and boots which Egill is shown wearing, together with the blue of his overcloak and trousers, may bring about an association by costume with the dark (*blár*) clothing worn by characters in other sagas at moments where their power is to be asserted in ritualized,

sometimes murderous behaviour. Again, my concern is for the knowledge which the reader *possibly may* bring to, and incorporate legitimately in, his or her reading of the saga in translation. I do not attempt to suggest what likely minimum knowledge is so brought, far less what any of these paratextual features ‘must mean’. The hat and cloak may further associate Egill with the god Óðinn whose difficult patronage he claims and acknowledges in his poems - most notably in *Sonatorrek*, in this translation Chapter 78, pp. 146-149. Not only Egill's skaldic ability, but also his skill with runes and unpredictable, disruptive behaviour could be viewed as model ‘Odinic’ characteristics.<sup>35</sup>

Black and blue do not predominate in the portrait, however, and any generalization about the intrinsic properties of dense and brooding colours would be inapplicable. The bright red and clear green of his other clothing are colours charged with significance when they are named in various family saga episodes, often where wealth (or showiness) and risk or death are in play.<sup>36</sup> If the reader is not acquainted with these associations, the picture itself lays a foundation for them. Similarly, no knowledge of Egill's career or disposition is needed for the gnarled, ugly, wary face with its distorted forehead, the bulk of body, and the drawn sword, to convey that Egill is a dangerous character, and if this picture is the reader’s first impression of Egill, it will make the troll-like features of his ancestors and their friends more easy to accept as a serious inheritance - a counterweight to any intrusive memories of oafish and unbelievable ‘trolls’ which the reader may bring from some children’s literature or retold folktale.

One general point which can be made about the use of colour is that the colours combined - black hat over very pale face, blue of overcloak against golden-yellow of sword, yellow of boot-tops and kirtle against blue of trousers, red of tunic against green of cloak - are

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<sup>35</sup> Turville-Petre, *Nine Norse Studies*.

<sup>36</sup> The significance of coloured clothing may be known from, or found in, *Laxdæla saga* or *Hrafnkels saga Freysgöða*, for example, both much translated and much taught.

combined in pairs that are perceived as maximum contrasts by the human eye. Egill's colours are read by the eye as a composite of extremes, and this perception corresponds well to the character awaiting reading in the narrative.<sup>37</sup>

Above the picture on the front of the jacket and underneath the title the words 'Translated and edited by Christine Fell' appear in smaller print than the title's, and italicized. The phrase begins very much to the left of both picture and title, therefore with 'Translated' heading the column of white space before Egill. It is also qualified by the back of the jacket, which states 'Poems by John Lucas'. This is more than simply elliptical for 'Poems translated by', for (as will be seen in more detail in Chapters III and IV) John Lucas necessarily has inserted poems of rather a different kind from those in the original. Egill in translation becomes a different kind of poet in his saga, more direct, sharp, incisive, yet less monstrously gifted. According to the blurb on the back jacket, John Lucas 'has produced versions' of the verse in the saga which are similar in all but complexity of diction to those of the originals.

The summary of the saga refuses to try to even out the balance of expectation in the reader - or to even out the balance of emphasis in the saga - between a 'central figure', a family history, and larger Icelandic/Norwegian tensions. This is fair, though the description of Egill (twice) as a 'hero' is unhelpful, in so far as his behaviour no less than the saga narrative's conduct would frustrate any such notion. If such misinformation were taken on board by the reader, the first third of the saga would suffer from the reader's attempts to sustain interest while the so-called hero makes no appearance. That structure is very far from unusual for family saga narrative. Other terms should be found if a résumé of the story has to be attempted.

The binding of the book is red with gold lettering and detail. The pastedowns, first leaf and last leaf (both blank) are pale greenish-grey. A blank white leaf precedes the title-page.

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Regarder Ecouter Lire*.

This is a very unlike the excess of decorative-interpretative accretions to be found in some earlier saga translations.<sup>38</sup> However, this colour combination - cold and hot - already participates in the imaginative scene-setting of the saga in the so-called 'Land of Ice and Fire'.

The table of contents shows remarkable restraint. There are no chapter headings. It becomes clear that pp. (vii)-(xxix) and pp. 172-217 (221) exist in conjunction with, yet adjacent to, the translated text (which is all of a piece, without chapter numbers given either) as supplementary material of a kind (maps; select bibliography) which deters the reader from experiencing or judging the literary text on pp. 1-171 as if it were purely self-standing and approachable. In other words, however 'transparently' or 'accessibly' the text may have been translated, the mere presence of the surrounding material makes transparency a window onto the half-approachable and renders accessibility an approximative effort. A better clue to focusing reading than the misleading back-jacket epithet 'hero' is provided by the occurrence of Egill's name three times in the table of contents, twice in an English and once in an uncompromisingly Icelandic possessive. 'The Translation of Egil's Poems' precedes 'Egils saga', and 'Genealogical Table: Egil's Family' follows the maps and notes after the saga. This is emblematic of the powerful interaction of his poetry with the prose narrative: his poems deserve attention, not as interludes, but as special components of a narrative whose form is mixed.

The genealogical table helps the reader to hold on to a kind of coherence in the saga. To refer to the genealogical table is to take Egill's family as a shifting centre towards and away from which the various lines of the story radiate. Egill is no more and no less than the member to be read most intensely. He appears to be the one whose life has caused the narration of the

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<sup>38</sup> The title page of Muriel Press's late Victorian translation of *Laxdæla saga*, for instance, gave the name of the saga with the supposed dates of the action of its narrative beneath, all wreathed with leaves and flowers, to heroically funereal effect.

other lives to be made in writing, and for whose sake the saga is composed, since Egill as a canonical Icelandic poet is the one who matters for Iceland's culture beyond settlement, and beyond foreign intervention or rule. It appears then that it is from the storied complexity of Egill's connexions and characterization, historical or not, that the literature which has earned its literary translation is produced. The importance of Egill is set out as something to be remembered and understood throughout every procedure of the narrative, even where Egill himself appears enigmatically, repulsively or not at all. The brave use of the Icelandic possessive (without the apostrophe) in 'Egils saga' returns both Egill and the saga - not to unknowability - but to an oblique knowability.

This piling-up of significance is a good way to attempt to influence the reader's situation. Fell even uses her Introduction to warn the reader to be alert, not moment by moment, but with an incremental awareness:

It is a truism that the saga writer expects an intelligent audience, leaving much to be grasped from suggestion and understatement. What perhaps is more difficult for the modern than the medieval audience is that he also assumes good memory.  
p. (xx)

This can be true for the book (text with peritext) as much as for the text alone.

The deliberate plainness in the presentation of the text of the narrative holds it distant at once from the risk of preciousness in reworking an old and alien language and literature, and from confusion with historical or other types of novel. There are no illustrations. The title 'Egils saga' appears above the text on page 1, not centred but aligned with the left margin of the text. In the absence of headings, there is no division between chapters except for a large Arabic numeral, similarly to the left. The text begins directly under this, without indentation except for subsequent paragraphs (if any) in each section. The title is repeated in italics at the top right on

the verso, at the top left on the recto, of each leaf, but the chapter number is not given, as if in an insistent, negative declaration of the cohesion of the narrative. An index of personal names and an index of place-names, both in double columns, occupy pages 209-216 and 217-221, the last printed leaves in the book. These give page references but no section numbers.

This presentation can make the reading experience alternate between the visually monotonous, as the text is so dense throughout its length, and the mnemonically unsettling. It is not so easy to find one's way around the saga on a first reading, and the layout makes it impossible for the reader to resort to dependency on the division into numbered sections. However, the presence of endnotes ('Notes', pp. 175-203) means that the pages are clearer in appearance, i.e. the narrative seems less interrupted, than in the footnoted Penguin series.

There are good reasons to use endnotes rather than footnotes. The reader has more choice in resorting to the additional information, and more information can be included. The information included is equally likely to be seen, as of course neither linear reading, complete reading nor re-reading can be assumed as the 'normal' readerly practice. The monotony of presentation circumvents narrative expectations that the numbered sections will be built up 'like' chapters: there is one name for the whole of the saga, which serves as title and running title. The presence of the personal name and place name indexes, and the absence of a list of chapter numbers with corresponding page numbers, draw up the narrative in ways which help to avert or suspend a reading that, by 'novelizing' the saga, would have created its own frustrations.

Before the text is read, the poetry is already overloaded with significance by the amount of introductory material explicitly devoted to it rather than to the qualities of the prose. If (as is not uncommon) the introductory material is read after the text, the poetry can also gain this weight of significance as the reader's memory of reading is reconfigured.

Within the text, the stanzas are between blank lines and centred on the page, but not italicized as artifacts or marked off as speech. Capitalization is sentence-initial, not line-initial. Each stanza appears to consist of normal saga text, which, from the smallness of the font size, is less strikingly framed by whiteness than gathered into an approximate, closely-wrought square.

The sense that each stanza is a specially memorable event within the narrative is reinforced by the endnote number that invariably hovers at the end of the final line. This annotation is a recognizable, economical and helpful marker which takes the reader from text to peritext and back again. Unavoidably, it does more than this. The numbers make a tally of what may look interesting and opaque in each section. Not being consecutively numbered across the sections of the narrative, this tally is not cumulative. It is possible for the reader to form the impression that stretches and points which are more colourful or obscure alternate with continuous prose that is plainer or more transparent - nothing at all in chapters 74 to 77, for example; as many as nine in chapter 78. This affects the felt pace of reading, of how much has been got through.

When the annotation is used as it is meant to be, in conjunction with the endnotes, the latter are found to offer literal versions of the verse with some explication. The elaborateness of the literally translated skaldic verse is formally shockingly unlike the stripped-down, forcefully personal poems which are Lucas's mood-faithful replacements. As the two are brought into coexistence, the reader may experience an academic excitement, but also an emotional chill, a change in temperature as well as pace before the return from peritext to text.

The knowledge so gained, coupled with (the memory of) this experience, can bring about a doubling of vision as each endnote number comes into view within the TL text. On every occasion (after the first) where the endnotes are consulted for the explication of a verse, the verse on the page of text, equally with the verse on the page of peritext, will be seen as both

a real thing and yet not *the* real thing. As a result, the awkwardnesses of the literal version in the endnotes can be taken as incomplete, or complete but intermediate, thus reinforcing the sense that there exists an original.

This dispenses the reader without access to the SL from having to judge the TL translation entirely according to personal taste. Her or his estimation of Egill as a poet (which, if not high, would make it difficult to read the saga without constant mental reservations, if not positive bewilderment or dislike) no longer has to depend on his or her response to John Lucas's style of poetry, because that is not all that is given, nor is it given as if it were sufficient. Skaldic verse per se remains unjudged and intact. The reader's estimation of Egill as (imagined) skald can be as high as necessary for the reading of the saga to progress without excessive friction.

If John Lucas's versions *had* invariably been outstandingly lacking as poetry, or unsuited to the TL prose, or if they had been the only token of Egill as Icelandic poet, the imagined value of the ST poetry and of the mixed genre of the saga narrative would have been diminished. The reading of a translation which is known to be a translation, or which calls attention to itself as such, tends to be pegged to the imagined value of a source text projected through the text in translation - not at all the same thing as the shinethrough of actual ST character. Fell and Lucas are successful translators of the verse-with-prose not because their translations are transparent, but because they are candidly divergent.

The three maps provided in Fell's translation are placed after the narrative, before the endnotes and other information. Their presence emphasizes that a sure knowledge of location is crucial to following, ordering and remembering the saga. In narratives such as *Egils saga*, place can be a touchstone as people and time are not. This means that the maps are not here as pure 'background' information. They are visible shapes of a literary geography that is equally

structure, setting and theme in a saga which follows a Norwegian family through Icelandic settlement, paradigmatic Iceland/Norway conflict, 'viking' internationalism, and, in all senses, the pushing at borders.

On page 171 (not numbered) is a map of Norway. Facing this on page 172 (not numbered) are maps of '[a]reas of viking activity mentioned in *Egils saga*' (note the Icelandic possessive again) and of (linguistically simplified) 'Borgarfjord', where Skalla-Grímr, Egill's father, establishes their family in Iceland, following his dead father's indication. These maps are as deliberately plain as the text. There is nothing but black outlines and place-names. The possibilities for decorative or archaizing touches are ignored - no hint of a compass or scroll. Extra information (rivers, woodland, contours) is eschewed. Nothing attaches to these place-names except the story of these places as given in the narrative. The phrase 'viking activity' is excellent, erasing as it does the popular image of the stereotypical capitalized 'Viking', who is what he is - neither seasonal nor mercenary - and whose fierce yet blockish figure would not have admitted of such everyday adjectival use.

The inclusion of maps of medieval Scandinavia, through which the modern Scandinavia still can easily be mapped, assists in the relocation and doubling of vision which characterizes the process of translation and would characterize a non-naïve attitude in the reader of a text in translation. The inclusion of the Scandinavian maps in Fell's translation compounds with an omission, however. There is no map of Anglo-Saxon England. This part of 'Egil's world' (to use the caption of Gwyn Jones's map) is the setting for much that is important in Egill's career, including perhaps the most notorious display of his poetic genius - the composition over a single night of his long praise-poem *Höfuðlausn*, successfully offered as ransom for his head from King Eiríkr at Jórvík [York] (Fell, Chapter 60, pp. 108-112).

*Höfuðlausn* is innovative among Norse poetry in using end-rhyme rather than internal rhyme and alliteration.

It cannot be assumed that England (whether modern or Anglo-Saxon) is the one region relevant to *Egils saga* where geographical knowledge may be taken for granted in English-language readers, even if a British university readership is assumed. This is not to suggest that, as reference material, the maps at the back have to represent the scenes of action of the entire saga. Still, the omission of Anglo-Saxon England from the maps in the peritext resembles Fell's translation policy in the saga text, in which personal names like that of the Anglo-Saxon king Aðalsteinn, who figures as Æthelstan, are Anglo-Saxonized, and such place-names as Jórvík are both anglicized and updated, to 'York' (not Anglo-Saxonized to 'Eoforwic'). The reader who uses the maps together with the saga is then curiously centred in a doubly vanishing England. No map of Egill's England (whether a Norse interpretation or an Anglo-Saxon one) is to be found, as if none were needed. Geographical vision of England depends on the modern reader.

Perhaps this works as 'compensatory' (peritext with) translation. The Scandinavian settings are mapped for the reader in a version of their medieval form. The English setting is left implicit, not presented with, for example, both Norse or Old English and modern place-names on a map which related the English coast to Scandinavia. Invisibly present, Egill's England mapped on to the reader's England is the steady background knowledge *from which* the reader's acquaintance with and recognition of the rest of 'Egil's world' may be developed.

However, it could also be read as a form of cultural appropriation. It is taken for granted that all maps but England's are to be given. Marked with the nomenclature that means pastness, the mapped world is appended to this withheld country. The given maps 'belong' with an England that elides Anglo-Saxon geography with the reader's, as if claiming the saga's

relevance to it, rather than its part in the relation of the saga. This would amount to a working out in Fell's non-verbal peritext of the assumption which Gwyn Jones pragmatically made in his verbal peritext, that to English readers (English-language readers), some of the interest of the saga lies in the overlap of its action with places already and otherwise familiar to them, i.e. it promises to enrich known areas newly, first by the reader's surprise at recognition when these places turn out to have a storied existence in another culture's saga, subsequently by the reader's association of these places with what becomes another set of memories.

The peritext can be used to make unobtrusive adjustments to the situation of the saga in translation. Not much more space would have been required in Fell's translation for another map, which could have shown England with Anglo-Saxon or Old Norse forms of relevant place-names (even as alternatives to other, more anglicized forms in the TL text) juxtaposed with the modern place-names, and the non-saga areas left blank. There could also have been a map which showed the proximity of Iceland, Ireland, Britain, and Norway. Either of these would have had a 'foreignizing' effect on the perceived situation of the saga in translation, *at the same time as* providing reference material which practically familiarized the reader with 'Egil's world'. The displacement and re-mapping already begun, in Fell's translation, with the labelling of a map with medieval names as a map of 'Norway' would have been extended and achieved as a fully constructive action. Cost is unlikely to have been the reason in this case for England's looming non-appearance, as white space is not spared elsewhere in the book. The map excluded by peritextual choices which run parallel to translation preferences for clear language and accessible versions of place-names would have been crucial to the task of re-imagining the reader's known modern space and situation. Such re-imagining is an essential part equally of the task of reading and of the task of making a saga translation. The difficulty of

the effort required of the reader will increase or decrease according to the interaction of peritext with translation.

### Hermann Pálsson, Paul Edwards, and the 1976 translation

Author, plot, and character: these are the concerns of the peritextual material in Pálsson and Edwards's *Egil's saga*. Even the 'Chronological Note' (p. 248) begins: 'The author of *Egil's Saga* was not a historian in the modern sense and evidently had little interest in absolute chronology'. The exposition in the Introduction (pp. 7-17) is remarkable for its impersonal clarity. The translators have performed a vanishing trick. They refuse to claim the rôle of translator in the creative sense. They insist on displacing their own presence in the translation by flagging the putative 'author's' craft and contribution. Modesty, unaccountability or cultural responsibility? It appears to be the last of these.

In the epitext of the translated saga, Hermann Pálsson makes what is closer to a declaration than anything he admits into its peritext. In the concluding paragraph of his article for *Leeds Studies in English*, 'The Borg Connexion: Notes on *Bjarnar saga, Egla, Gunnlaugs saga*, and *Laxdæla*', Pálsson speaks 'as a native Icelander' about the need to remember what he identifies as the very special circumstances and motives for the original production of 'the *Íslendingasögur*'.<sup>39</sup> In harsh and isolated conditions,

In order to make sense of their own society and at the same time to justify themselves in the eyes of Europe, the learned men of twelfth-century Iceland set out to create an acceptable image of their background [...] the ultimate aim of learned men in medieval Iceland was not only to present their forebears as brave and noble men, but, at the same time, to fit them into suitable rôles for medieval romance.  
(p. 64)

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<sup>39</sup> Pálsson 1989.

This aim, ascribed to the medieval Icelanders, may well be (re-)attributed in a modified form to Hermann Pálsson's work as a translator. If so, there is an epitextual overlap with the stated aims of the producers of the *Complete Sagas*. In their advertising blurb, the *Complete Sagas* team supports their claims for the world importance of the sagas by assertion and by testimony from modern literary authors and critics hailing from Czechoslovakia, Ireland, Norway, the U.K. and the U.S.A. - their identity listed by country or journal under their names.

Like the peritextual foregrounding of the saga's original single author, the double collaborativeness of the Pálsson and Edwards translation - coauthored by two people with different specializations, and entered as part of the Penguin Classics series - manages not to engage the reader's awareness of the complicated way in which the medieval texts of the saga, the manuscript tradition and modern editions, and the Penguin translation are constituted in themselves as well as in their progression and interrelation.

Most unlike the way in which coauthored translation provoked a foregrounding of personality and varied information in the Fell and Lucas version, the Penguin translators make these complications disappear in the service of seeming simplicity. The Introduction, written by both Pálsson and Edwards, is signed by neither, and presented as a seamless text. The Note on the Translation is signed by both, with initial and surname, and is written in the impersonal, until 'we' (still editorial) creeps in towards the end of the third and last paragraph, with the declarations of their invention of the chapter headings, and of thanks owed.

The saga as such effectively is placed under the government of the Penguin Classics series. The distinctiveness of the (now old-style) Penguin Classics paperback cover is a guarantee of the qualities of its contents.<sup>40</sup> These qualities include the suitability of the saga for

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<sup>40</sup> My discussion of the qualities promised by the translation's inclusion in the Penguin Classics series is partly based on *The Translator's Art: Essays in Honour of Betty Radice* (Penguin, 1987). This collection, which makes a number of general claims about the series, was meant 'not only to honour the achievements of Betty Radice, editor of the Penguin Classics from 1964 until her death in 1985, but to stimulate debate and reflection on the

a prestigious place in the canon of world literature. This implies its assimilability into a recuperable (not invented) world culture as consolidated by Penguin's policy on behalf of the anglophone world. The Penguin enterprise consolidates the anglophone world's freedom to enjoy world culture. This is also meant to serve the world literatures themselves and the preservation of their intrinsic lasting value, given the dominance of the anglophone and the shortfall of language teaching. There is great optimism in such an enterprise, which the reader who picks up any book from the series is encouraged to share. Each Penguin translation contributes to the appearance of inclusiveness (if not comprehensiveness) of the series.

Translatability, generously understood, must have counted for something in the selection of texts for translation and the production of the translated text. The TT must be seen as genuine and approachable. It should be a good read, not too linguistically challenging. Not the prerogative of 'the educated', it can help the general reader's self-education. The kind of reading which this facilitates is precisely not historical. It is akin to the kind of reading made possible by the slight modernizations (silent or otherwise) found in Penguin publications of English-language literature from earlier periods: a round-table availability of conversational encounter. Any of these diverse texts can be taken up and read, none in too dissimilar a way from the others, by anyone at any time.

Pálsson and Edwards's style of translation is perfectly in keeping with this implicit promise. Their suitability for this enterprise emerges clearly even in works translated for other publishers than Penguin. For example, the *TLS* 1968 review (p. 831) of their *Gautreks Saga and other Medieval Tales* (New York University Press and University of London Press) treats the success of their translation as one of transfer of content. Only the last sentence of the short review remarks (without giving any criteria for the judgement) that 'The versions are very well

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translator's difficult art' (Preface, p. 7). However, none of the '[s]eventeen distinguished translators' here featured has worked on Norse literature for the series.

done`. This is transparency at its most successful. The *TLS* 1969 review of Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Pálsson`s translation of *Laxdæla saga* for Penguin Classics, entitled `Up-to-date saga`, describes it as `follow[ing] their established practice` as regards critical apparatus (peritext) as well as style. This involves both a clarification of the saga`s fine but allegedly difficult design, and a language which

[...] is clear, fluent, and accurate, in a neutral modern idiom which allows the saga to do its own talking. The final impression is of a richly varied and powerfully sustained narrative, as much a part of medieval Iceland as the farms and valleys, fjords and rivers which are its setting, but by reason of its examination of the impulses to action of proud, generous, violent and emotional people as up-to-date as this morning`s newspaper.  
(*TLS* 1969, p.)

The idea of `up-to-date`-ness which is being praised actually is composed of a set of less obvious notions which can characterize the policy of fluent translation.

First, how can the `saga do its own talking`? This must be based on the belief that the *essential saga* is something other than the language in which the TL saga has its only existence. The transparent translator, like a wizard, uses her or his art to reveal an independent reality. My argument would be otherwise. The transparent translator`s art conceals art. If the reader is made to feel close to the essential saga, with a consciousness eased of any considerations of the practical ways in which the TL translation has been generated from the translator`s work on the ST, the translator is free to intervene as and how seems necessary to make a medieval Icelandic text read fluently in a modern English version. One might think of the rendering of dialogue (colloquial or stylized?), conventions of paragraphing (which kind of novel should it look like, if any?), treatment of the supernatural and other discomfiting elements (embarrassment or enrichment?), to name just a few.

A second notion contained in this idea of ‘up-to-date’-ness is an obvious one, by now familiar from other contexts: the essential continuity of human nature between the saga world as portrayed by medieval Icelanders and the anglophone world of the translation’s readers. Hence the policy of clarity fulfils a moral as well as literary duty, revealing the human relevance of the essential saga.

The third notion is also familiar. The perhaps equivocal praise - ‘up-to-date as this morning’s newspaper’ - with which the cited passage concludes probably refers to the ‘human interest’ sections of the newspaper. Given the reputed terseness of saga style, it actually evokes the *faits divers*. This is in line with the character, action, and sequence of events view of saga narrative structure expressed in the Introduction to the Pálsson and Edwards *Egil’s saga* and the section headings invented for it. It parallels Theodore Andersson’s roughly contemporary analysis of the Family Saga, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Inferring another notion from the ‘up-to-date’ involves an unpicking of the reviewer’s geographical metaphor. The metaphors used by writers on translation (not excluding translators) are often revealing. The saga narrative, apparently, is compact with the landscape of Iceland, ‘as much a part of medieval Iceland as the farms and valleys, fjords and rivers which are its setting’. The notion here is not so much of an embedded strand, saga-in-landscape, as of an *identity in nature*. Saga and landscape produce themselves in each other. This natural claim bears the stamp of the same thinking, more fluent than careful, which would assert that the *essential saga* emerges *through* the translator’s lucid language.

With typical lack of specificity, the *TLS* 1973 review, ‘A Snorri Tale’, of Pálsson and Edwards’s *Eyrbyggja Saga* (Edinburgh: Southside), praises this ‘translation for modern times, without archaism or that need to be literal which often makes saga translations sound stiffly remote’. Regretting the lack of maps, the review does attend to both text and peritext. However,

its concern is transfer of content. Content as defined how, though? In the end, the issues of literary translation are familiar ones. Is a translation which smooths over difficulties actually ‘accurate’? In what sense can a translation which is more poetic or less poetic, funnier or duller or bolder, more rebarbative or more facile than its original probably was to its audience or still is to a specialist and/or native SL reader be ‘accurate’? How can this ever be measurable? If narrative and landscape do become one another, when does style become content?

The *TLS* 1973 review of Pálsson and Edwards’s translation of *Eyrbyggja Saga* praises the content of the saga and their decision to translate a hitherto undervalued story of the people in a district rather than ‘acknowledged masterpieces’. As examples of masterpieces, the review names ‘the sagas of *Burnt-Njal*, the outlaws Grettir and Gisli, and most would add the great “viking” saga that tells of the warrior-poet Egil Skallagrimsson’. This is a remarkable comment, not only for its implicit proof that the illusion of transparency attained by Pálsson yet again focuses his reviewer on the content. It relies on Dasent’s nineteenth-century version of a title for *(Brennu-)Njáls saga*. Over the twentieth century, the hierarchy of masterpieces has persisted. Moreover, the use of Dasent’s title as the standard title in a 1973 review reflects the currency of old translations, which continue to be republished side by side with new - Dasent’s is even now the Everyman version.

The last, brief paragraph of the 1973 review praises the translation for eschewing an archaizing, ‘stiffly remote’ style, linking that fault with over-literality in other translations, though without examples. The praise is made equivocal, though, by the phrase ‘a translation for modern times’. When, as is inevitable, the translation ceases to sound modern, there is no guarantee that (like Dasent’s) it will not be republished side by side with newer versions. Then it will itself set the measure of the remote, not because of its translation policy, true, but because of the evolution of literary language over time.

Indeed, by 1976. Simon Keynes, in his *TLS* review of Pálsson's translation of *Bandamanna saga* and *Hænsa-Þóris saga, The Confederates and Hen Thorir: Two Icelandic Sagas* (Canongate/Southside), remarked on the over-simplifying effect of lucid translation. Keynes concludes that '[a] compromise [between the simplified and the literal] is desirable and even possible, but inevitably the distinctive Icelandic prose style is, like poetry, what gets lost in translation.' (p. 464). This comment is rare in granting that saga prose may be difficult to translate, as, in 'mixed' saga texts, the difficulty of the verse tends to preoccupy commentators.

'Onymity' (from *onymat*, Genette's term for the author's name and the claims implicit in its appearance) is another kind of distinctiveness which tends to disappear in the Penguin Classics translation. The typical old-style Penguin Classics spine: small strip of yellow at the top, then black, with EGIL'S SAGA in white, very close to the top; ISBN number and penguin logo in white, very close to the base; then the long stretch of black: features no translators' names. This does not mean it makes no claims. This design reinforces the impression of the saga's placedness within the series and what the series stands for, as well as the commercial, approachable nature of that series's texts.

Although the same artist's impression of Egill which Fell used, also unframed, is on the front cover of the Penguin translation, the image looks curiously disindividualized. It is centrally placed, but the colour of the manuscript leaf looks faded and aged against the predominant yellowish-cream of the paperback cover. Above Egill's head, with a strip of yellow space intervening, is a solid black rectangle with the appearance of a border formed by a fine white rectangular line within it. Centred over Egill's head in large white capitals within this border is the title: EGIL'S SAGA. Above this, also within the border, in smaller white capitals, are the words PENGUIN CLASSICS with the penguin logo between the two words. Both Egill and the saga appear under the banner of the Penguin series, which is visually the

heaviest thing on the cover, far outweighing Egill's troll-like features. The colours of his clothes lose lustre against the yellowish-cream ground.

The Penguin Classics legend emerges, white from black, as if it were the most salient feature of the understood background to Egill and the saga. What is most notable about this white-on-black presentation, however, is that it reverses the conventional black-on-white of print, as if the Penguin name and saga title were the reverse side to the fabric of the literary text: the source and circumstance behind the display of figure and promise of translation.

However the book may be marked on the interior with signs of the translators' activity, the cover design, combined with the translators' tendency to impersonality and self-effacement, subordinates the translator/author figures to the series, as regards the appearance of (i.e. the effective) claims to responsibility for the literary text.

*Egil's saga*, in this version, initially gives the impression of being subordinated to a series. In the Introduction to the saga, though, Pálsson and Edwards use a variety of words to describe the genre of the saga. This prevents the reader from settling into an idea of the saga's assimilability to any other genre in the Penguin Classics series, far less to the modern novel, despite the size, feel, and internal presentation of the paperback.

The genre descriptions are diverse not only in themselves but in the contexts where they come into use. Some case could be made for contrasting 'tale', 'saga' and 'narrative' with capitalized references to the 'Saga'. The former terms feature more in structural or unspecific discussion, the latter in closer analysis of the content of the 'Saga'. There is rhetorical patterning, for example in the Introduction's opening and closing sentences both tying up the discussion of the saga as a 'tale'. On the whole, these patterns are slight.

Most important is the extraordinary amount of fluctuation in terminology, which has the effect of holding the saga free of anachronistic generic determination. It does not matter

whether this fluctuation arises from the combination of Pálsson's and Edwards's styles in one seamless Introduction (cf. variable capitalization of 'saga' on page 17). The variable capitalization of 'saga' is in fact an exemplary feature. The serious, slightly archaic 'Saga', alternating with the literally common usage 'saga', makes the saga-in-translation exceptional by keeping it flickering between the categories of the general and the particular, the received idea of 'saga' (whatever that may be) and some more special connotation.

Pálsson and Edwards's Introduction to their translation reads more like a general introduction to the saga itself. In a further elision of their activity as translators of the text with their quasi-editorial interventions in the form of peritext, the word 'translation', or any related word, only appears in the main section of their Introduction on page 12, line 2, in connection with the difficulty of translating the poetry in the saga. Otherwise, there is very little in the manner or subject of the Introduction to differentiate the discussion of the saga in translation from a discussion of an SL text. The short Note on the Translation (p. 18, unnumbered), which merely names the base text, mentions the manuscript tradition, lists the other translations, and includes thanks, all in twenty-one lines, only admits responsibility for the chapter headings<sup>41</sup>, consigning the responsibility for the anglicization of names to the general policy followed in saga translations for the Penguin Classics series. However, the word 'translation' does appear in the footnote to page 17 - the only footnote in the Introduction - on the '*Book of Settlements*, or *Landnámabók*', which ends 'See the translation published by the University of Manitoba Press in 1972.' These are the last words in the space allotted to the Introduction. This amounts to a recognition (or decision) that, for the purposes of the non-specialist reader at whom the Introduction and text are aimed, the traffic between texts is between texts in translation, and all that went before in the Introduction is to be understood within this economy.

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. the discussion in Chapter I.

Pálsson and Edwards note (p. 18) that Fell and Lucas's Everyman translation appeared when the Penguin translation was already complete. However, the two versions could scarcely be more different in the degree of lasting attention which they are prepared to exact from their intended audience. Fell's already detailed 1975 reading list was updated and much augmented in her 1993 edition. Fell and Lucas's 'I' or 'we' is always personal as well as scholarly, admitting differences. Pálsson and Edwards's 'we' has the impersonal authority of the historicizing and structuring formulæ used in the saga itself, such as 'sem fyrr var sagt' [as was said before]. The complementarity of rôle which these two translations display in the reception of Norse literature in English belies any redundancy which might seem to be implied by their near simultaneity. It gives the lie to the wish sometimes expressed (among the *Egils saga* translations, by Eddison and by the *Complete Sagas* project) for the perfect, all-sufficient translation.

#### The Complete Sagas of Icelanders, 1997

*The Complete Sagas of Icelanders, Including 49 Tales*, is a five-volume compilation of translations with supporting peritextual material. Naturally, it is a collaborative venture. Pages (xxiv) to (xxv) of the Preface to Volume I list the editorial team - Viðar Hreinsson (General Editor), Robert Cook, Terry Gunnell, Keneva Kunz, Bernard Scudder (the translator of *Egils saga*); thirty translators, including all but Viðar Hreinsson of the editorial team, listed as working from Australia (2), England (10), Canada (2), Denmark (1), Germany (2), Iceland (5), and the U.S.A. (8); 'Icelandic Readers', 'English Readers' (11 out of the 14 are also translators, and Bernard Scudder is, with Diana Whaley, one of two special poetry readers), 'Proofreader', 'Consultants', 'Special Research', 'Cross-Reference Index of Characters', 'Maps', 'Illustrations', and 'Editorial Assistance'.

Despite the fact that more translators work from locations where non-British varieties of English are spoken (12, as against 10, excluding any considerations of the type of standard English most generally taught or spoken or most prestigious in Iceland, Denmark or Germany), ‘British spelling and idiom are the standard for translation [...] although the reading and editorial process has almost always included a transatlantic element’ (p. (xvi)). I would suggest that there is another motive for this decision beside the declared one of ‘[seeking] to achieve a style that will seem natural to both British and American readers’. This motive is involved with the idea of ‘sagas’ which the *Complete Sagas* promulgates.

The translation of Icelandic sagas must not be seen as renewing or supplementing the cultural world of anglophone readers. Anglophone literature is not to be seen as ‘discovering’ the sagas by translating them. They must be presented as a vast and ancient body. The TL reader must learn to feel that an overwhelming tradition stands openly before her or him. The reader is not free to make what s/he will of this tradition’s texts. S/he has to remember that s/he is being permitted to approach and gain knowledge of it. Irreverent appropriation is disallowed.

English English, not mid-Atlantic or North American English, is considered the appropriate TL for the sagas, because it is the variety of greatest literary prestige, if prestige is defined in terms of the ancestral. It really is not otherwise the most obvious choice, if fluency and contemporariness are at a premium, as claimed over and over again in the peritext. It would have been easy to build up a ‘translation stock’ (Rabin’s term) between North American or ‘mid-Atlantic’ English and Icelandic culture, given Iceland’s geographical position (genuinely a key to its cultural position), the existence and work of the American-Scandinavian Foundation, and the recent patterns of settlement in the U.S.A. (and Canada) which played some part in the Foundation’s coming into being.

If ancestral prestige is one of the motives behind the choice to translate into English, this would explain why Ted Hughes, the late Poet Laureate, is given such a prominent position in the publisher's blurb for the *Complete Sagas*. The presence of Ted Hughes endows the *Complete Sagas* enterprise with the prestige of contemporary English literature. There is also the popular idea of his poetry's character to be considered. As with John Lucas's rollcall of poets, discussed in Chapter I, 'Ted Hughes', endorsing the *Complete Sagas*, is made to preside as the modern skaldic spirit, standing for the renewal of a nation through gritty individualism and myth taken at source.

Even beyond the status of English English as the 'original' literary language, if the ancestral is to be valued, is the alleged kinship of Anglo-Saxon and Icelandic culture - never mind the contradictory superficial stress on Europeanness elsewhere in the peritext, which itself cancels that contradiction by a dismissal of Europe as emasculated by a dominant Church. The insistence on reckoning the sagas with whatever appears to be among the fountainheads of western civilization is clear.

What is the evidence for this? There is, first, the use of the adjective 'classical'. The distinction between 'classic' and 'classical' still holds. Antiquity, as importantly as definitiveness or quality, must be declared proper to the sagas.<sup>42</sup> The two instances in the Foreword by the President of Iceland, Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson, appear to have different functions. His third paragraph begins, 'The sagas are a unique literary phenomenon and invite literary comparison with the masterpieces of classical Greece and Rome'. It ends, 'In the sagas

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<sup>42</sup> According to the *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, 'classic' can mean 'of the first rank; of the standard authors of Greece and Rome; hence more widely, of others', but this explanation of 'classical' is put forward: 'The application to the ancient 'classics' may have been due in part to the notion that the ancient Greek and Roman literatures were superior to the modern, and in part to their predominant use in the *classes* of schools.' The ancient/superior axis is where I would locate the *Complete Sagas* meaning. Modern Icelandic *klassískur* can mean either 'classic' or 'classical', but the choice of the longer English adjective, when standard adjectives with suffix -al increasingly are clipped and overlapped with the shorter form (poetical > poetic, etc.), probably indicates a conscious discrimination.

we find classical human wisdom and breadth of mind which are relevant to all people at all times.’ The first use is an example of the quality-through-antiquity declaration. Literary masterpieces of Egypt, Persia, India, China, Japan . . . would be pointless to mention. The concern is not with quality or antiquity per se. The concern is with how ‘the classical’ has formed the ‘western’ world and its idea of civilization. A place in that formation is what is being claimed, after the fact, for the sagas. From this point of view, other ancient literatures, it might be argued, still have their work to do, and cannot hope for much beyond improved reception, i.e. a reach into the future. The *Complete Sagas* is reaching simultaneously into the future and the past.

There is, paradoxically, no compliment to literature in English as such behind this translation agenda and TL decision. There is scant evidence, in the *CS* peritext, of any real feeling that the sagas are being received into a literary tradition as well as opening the way into their own. There is only a tacit, pragmatic recognition of the hegemony of the English language in the modern world, which makes it the best medium of introduction for the sagas to as wide a readership as possible.

President Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson’s second use of ‘classical’ is apparently an example of the enduring-human-value argument which has been found elsewhere, notably in Gwyn Jones. This naturally makes the sagas proof against modern (re)interpretations. There is no need to subject them to modern(izing) scrutiny. They are already modern, because timeless.

This ties in with the third significant use of ‘classical’ in the prefatory material. The third paragraph of the second Foreword, by Björn Bjarnason, Icelandic Minister of Education, Science and Culture, finds that, because of the evolution of the individual and the polarizing tug of heathendom and Christianity, ‘The subject of the sagas is therefore also classical ethical questions’. The paragraph which follows this sentence immediately closes down the dangerous

possibilities of a reapplication of the notion of questions and questioning to any aspect of the sagas, and the *Complete Sagas*, themselves. ‘Whatever approach we may take towards them, the Sagas of Icelanders are monumental works [...]’. Monumental: imposing, larger than life though commemorative of humanity, perhaps ruined in places, but certainly sealed off, no further work to be done other than conservation/restoration (editing/translation?), or the step back to contemplate.

The assertiveness of the claims made for the sagas’ lasting value seems to betray unease. The texts amassed in *The Complete Sagas* are not allowed to speak for themselves, in the confidence that they stand by themselves.

Tension is registered in the doubleness of the rhetoric throughout the three Forewords. The drift of their language brings the sagas only now, and finally, into their due place in the modern ‘western’ world. Simultaneously, it brings that world to an awareness that the sagas are not newly arrived but rightfully recovering their place, antique, and belonging to the common human tradition. This implies that the receiving world must be understood in two ways at once. It is the rich civilization which grants recognition to the sagas. It is the civilization which ought to recognize its own enrichment by this literary gift and by the history of which the literature is a token. Self-contradictorily, it is an ignorant and grateful world, whose sophistication and greatness alone can rank the sagas as they deserve, with the ‘classical’. Chapter I of this thesis touched on the cultural aggressiveness (not the unease) evident in the *CS* peritext, where, in the first Foreword, Leifr Eiríksson is credited with *naming* Vinland, which is now *known as* America.

The claims implicit in the idea that the sagas’ value is ‘endless’ can best be seen through close analysis of a telling sentence from this Foreword.

Written down by literary craftsmen, few of whom bequeathed their names to posterity, the sagas became an endless source of knowledge and wisdom, entertainment and brilliant language.  
(p. (vii))

This sentence launches the second paragraph. However, the rhetoric is enough to make a suspicious reader stop. Is it that the endlessness of the sagas might be conceived *either* as the inexhaustibility of the resource which was available to medieval Icelanders - a kind of oceanic stretch of endlessness open to their view - *or* as a kind of rising endlessness, tidal, ebbing and flowing over time but going on into our present and into the future?

There are three elements in the sentence's assertion which hint that something ambiguous is at work.

First, the tense used in saying that the sagas 'became', not that they 'have become', such a source, may imply that they once used to be that source, up to a certain time, but that the use or nature of their qualities may require some qualification nowadays. This reading is borne out by the consolidation of 'source' into 'rich heritage' in the next sentence, and that heritage's etherealization as the fosterer of a national 'vision' in the third and last sentence of the paragraph. Alternatively, 'became' may be the storyteller's style of tense; there would still be a sense of pastness in the description.

Second, there is the deceptively simple reference to the sagas as a 'source of knowledge'. It is redundant to call the sagas a 'source' of *literary* knowledge. They are literature. If the knowledge inhering in or conveyed by the sagas is uncontroversial, this reinforces the possible sense of pastness discussed above.

What audience for this knowledge can be inferred? The implied audience, unsceptical of the sagas as a source of knowledge (if 'knowledge' and 'wisdom', as used here, are synonymous with 'information' and 'understanding') might not be a modern audience. Alternatively, the audience could be imagined as reading the sagas in full awareness of the

transformations which oral and written tradition, and irrecoverable but factual history, have undergone, i.e. with an awareness of the way the genres of sagas work. If the implied or imagined audience is close in time to the composition of the sagas, this awareness will be sharply felt. A scholarly modern audience, though not personally familiar with the daily realities of the saga world or the saga-writing world, would also have a sharp understanding of the tradition's complexities. Paradoxically, in both cases, awareness of the complex relation of saga narrative to 'knowledge' may liberate these audiences to confront the need to disentangle complexities rather than build monuments. None of these possibilities accounts for how 'knowledge' from the sagas relates to the more general modern audience for whom the *Complete Sagas* is marketed.

The third element of which the implications work against the sentence's rhetorical flow is found in the clause 'few of whom bequeathed their names to posterity'. The other two elements (verbal tense; knowledge and audience) pull strongly towards the past. The wording of this clause sets up a tension. It pulls strongly towards the future, but in a way that realizes the future yet again through a sense of pastness. To consider the modern world as 'posterity' is not only for us to adopt the temporal vision of the long-ago literary craftsmen, i.e. to experience *with* them. It also requires that we re-experience ourselves as someone else's already fulfilled future. We become past to ourselves in imagining our present as their future. Further, we become past to ourselves in a second way, envisaging ourselves as past to the posterity still to come, which is ours as well as the saga's. We are placed halfway down the existing line, and forced to watch that fraction diminish.

The conception of modernity in the *CS* peritext models itself by a belief in progress. If, as in President Ólafur Grímsson's Foreword, '[t]he sagas endowed European culture with new perspectives which, to the modern mind, are far more immediate and relevant than much

other literature from times of old', this praise is equivocal. What is relevant now may not be relevant to a later age. Yet the *CS* sagas must have enduring, 'classical' status. The presupposition must be that all subsequent phases of European and world culture will build on what is relevant to today's mind, because we have reached far enough along some scale of discernment to know what should and will endure.

Several linguistic decisions about the policy of the *CS* translations agree with these attitudes. The unsigned, apparently editorial Preface, under the sub-heading 'Preparation of the translations', states that:

Translators were asked to try to retain certain stylistic features of the classical saga style, such as economical phrasing, paratactic style, understatement and the limited use of adjectives. Other formal features, however, have been avoided, such as the use of the historical present; in the Icelandic this involves switching between past and present in a way which is unnatural in modern English. Translators were also asked to avoid the use of archaisms, which have rendered some earlier translations inaccessible to modern readers.  
(pp. (xv) - (xvi))

This is disingenuous in a number of ways.

The motive for retaining the stylistic features named in the first sentence cannot be solely that these are most important to preserve in conveying the saga to a non-Icelandic-reading audience. It must be that these features, unlike the switching between tenses, have been judged to be more natural in 'modern English', and, unlike archaisms, belong to a variety of modern English which is *accessible* 'to modern readers'.

It is simply not true that tense switching is 'unnatural' in modern literary English, especially with the current popularity of genres such as memoir, biography and travel writing, which happily switch between tense, register, and even narrator. Indeed, tense switching has been used for a long time in spoken and written English, not only in 'high', (faux)-naïve, and/or

experimental literary work. Tense switching is also natural to literature in some other modern languages, and used in other literature in English translation.

Presumably the *CS* reference to 'modern English' is to literary English rather than to any other spoken or written variety. In this case, the search for naturalness cannot be the whole motive. There is an implicit norm of the best literary English in use, or in existence. This would somehow combine accessibility with enduring value, and be the model for the best literary English henceforth.

Not only is there this implicit norm for literary English at work. There is also the (by now familiar) low expectation of the audience for the translation - apparently imagined as monoglot, and unaccustomed to reading any other literature in translation: exactly (not) the sort of audience to pick up a thick, dark volume of sagas in the local library. The 'economical phrasing, paratactic style, understatement and the limited use of adjectives' are the sort of features which give the *Complete Sagas*, like other saga translations, a deceptive passing resemblance to children's literature. Simon Keynes, reviewing Hermann Pálsson's *The Confederates and Hen-Thorir: Two Icelandic Sagas* for the *TLS*, noted this in 1976 as one of the side-effects of linguistic accessibility.<sup>43</sup> There is little expectation that readers, childlike or not, can enjoy a challenge.

The *CS* fear of too much complexity can further be diagnosed from the refusal to relate tense switching back to the SL. SL tense switching presents at least three difficulties which might be considered in the space of a translation's peritext.

Tense variation is differently, often silently dealt with in the various editions which translators have used as their base text. It is not always possible to tell, from manuscript

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<sup>43</sup> 'Readers of Pálsson's previous translations will be familiar with the style he prefers to adopt: he does not always reproduce the idiom of the Icelandic text, and tends to simplify sentence construction in order to make the narrative flow more freely. As a result the sagas read rather like children's stories'. Keynes 1976.

abbreviations, which verb, far less which tense, is intended, especially for some common verbs, and the choice of editorial expansions affects the narrative pace. It is not easy to tell where ST tense fluctuations, if original, were intended to have a literary effect; or where, regardless of scribal/authorial/editorial intention, they do have a literary effect; or what the effect may be.

The peritext can be used for educational as well as explanatory or self-justificatory purposes. The opportunity could have been taken to make the audience (constructed as so naïve) a little less naïve about the text base from which each saga in the *Complete Sagas* has to be constituted. By extension, the audience for English-language sagas would have become more able to cope with, or enjoy, idiosyncrasies within and variations between translations as well as between TL and SL texts.

The discussion of ‘the sheer number and variety of manuscripts’ in the Preface (pp. (xiii) - (xiv)) glosses over problems of SL editing, sounding more like the story of an eight-hundred-year collaboration of experts, ending in successful consensus.

The distrust of archaisms involves similar complications and evasions to the disapproval of tense switching. To mention the inaccessibility of earlier, archaizing translations is to suppress the consideration that a modern, fluent translation may, because of its modernity and fluency, eventually fall out of fashion perhaps as much as a more eccentric text. Even literary English is not static.<sup>44</sup> Here again we may infer the model of progress which takes the present as an assuredly enduring standard.

Many translators and translation reviewers criticize the inaccessibility of translations which archaize their language. However, archaizing translations do find readers.

The *Complete Sagas* policy, like Pálsson and Edwards’s but unlike Gwyn Jones’s, treats the modern reader as if her or his taste or experience were limited to certain kinds of

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<sup>44</sup> Risks of datedness particular to archaizing/idiosyncratic translation are discussed in Chapter III.

modern literature. In fact, archaizing translations are accessible to, and enjoyed by, at least three possible groups of readers.

Some readers like, or are familiar with, Victorian or earlier English literature *not* in translation. Similarly, there are readers who know or like earlier or contemporary literature in English which uses regional or other non-standard English. Some of these readers will recognize that, in several of the archaizing translations, much of the obscurity for which the archaisms are blamed is in fact no more than Victorian obscurity. Many more will simply accept the TT language as part of the TT world.

Some readers of the *Complete Sagas*, and other saga translations, will also be used to the experimental or extravagant language that can be found in 'fantasy' literature or science fiction. These often linguistically eclectic genres sometimes draw on older and/or 'exotic' literatures. Eddison's *Zimamvia* series is one example of fantasy/science fiction's intersection with Icelandic translation. Another, more casual example is the name and nature of the shapechanger heroine of the American author Patricia McKillip's *Riddlemaster* trilogy, 'Raederle'. This name seems to be derived from Old English or Norse, meaning something like 'noble counsel'. There is also a huge number of Old English/Norse-based fantasy websites, which flourish without regard for accessible English.

It is likely that the popular, or the general, audience who receive the *Complete Sagas* will contain a fair proportion of readers happily able to cope with outlandish names, diacritics, and unfamiliar vocabulary, had the TT required them to do so.

Moreover, the *Complete Sagas* claims to target the world-wide English-reading audience. In this global audience, there are many readers whose regional or national spoken varieties of English, and in some cases the written standard as well, contain constructions and

expressions that the *CS* translations' implicit norm of bland modern literary English English would class as archaic or dialectal.

The *CS* desire to accommodate, not disturb, the reader, is reflected in the treatment of place-names.

For easier recognition, the modern form of mainland Scandinavian place names has been used when it is known, with a few exceptions; Oslo, for example, is referred to by the earlier name of the town there, Vik, while the fjord is named Oslofjord. In place names outside Scandinavia, the common English equivalent is used when known; otherwise the Icelandic form is transliterated.  
(p. (xviii))

However, whose recognition is eased by creating a map of places which, under those names, were never all at once in the relation shown to one another?

Few readers with sufficient knowledge of modern Scandinavian geography not to need the maps will be naïve readers of sagas in English translation. The medieval Icelandic place-names for Scandinavia could have been retained. The mild unfamiliarity with which such a map would present such a reader would be useful. It would re-endow a narrative which has been re-embodied in accessible language with some of its strangeness of context.

If a reader has little or no knowledge of modern Scandinavian geography, it follows that this reader has no positive reason to find a map with medieval names more difficult than any other. It would take an exceptionally assiduous reader to find pleasure in looking for the correspondences and noncorrespondences between a map with medieval names in the book, and her/his real or remembered copy of a modern map, or recollection of travels.

The translation policy is in any case short-sighted in assuming that the place-names in use at present in Scandinavia are as fixed as, or at any rate more durable than, the *Complete Sagas* texts and their readership. Books can outlast place-names and boundaries.

The CS policy of retaining modern Scandinavian names perhaps tries to assert continuity between the ‘saga world’ and modern Scandinavia, i.e. the self-conscious traditionalism of the peritext inflects the text. This translation policy has other, more serious implications for how it situates the TL sagas.

In effect, it weakens the Icelandic geographical focus of the Family Sagas. The sagas are re-centred in two ways. The first is, necessarily, English-based. The second allows mainland Scandinavia to define itself by its own present-day place-names. This very much goes against the geographical centering of the Family Sagas. The creation of Iceland as a new primary centre, and the redefinition of mainland Scandinavia in relation to Iceland, is an outstandingly important theme. Affirmation of Iceland, as itself, and also as against Scandinavia, may even be part of the motivation for the composition of this extraordinary medieval prose literature.

The CS translation policy for place-names has some problems which are glossed over or absent in the peritext.

Old place-names cannot always be replaced accurately by new names. Consider ‘Trondheim’, which designates different areas in medieval and modern Norway.

To say, also, that ‘[t]he modern Icelandic form of place names is preferred, but readers should bear in mind that a few place names are now lost and do not appear on modern maps’ (p. (xviii)), suggests that all named places are real in the external, non-saga world. There are, however, fictional locations in the sagas, for example in *Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*, or Grettir's idyllic ‘Þórisdalr’ in *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*.

There is a ST tradition of using the peritext to give fictional locations the manifest appearance of reality. In the Íslenzk fornrit series, Grettir’s legendary Þórisdalr is shown in a full-page black-and-white illustration.

Conversely, the *Complete Sagas* uses an illustration to give a real location a legendary air. There is heavily mysterious and misty black-and-white double-page picture (including the pastedown) at the back and front of each volume of the *Complete Saga*. This is identified by a scroll inscribed 'THINGVELLIR/SITE OF THE OLDEST NATIONAL ASSEMBLY/IN THE WORLD AND FOCAL POINT/OF THE SOCIETY OF THE SAGAS'. The geography of Saga Age Iceland is superimposed on the historical Iceland of the settlement period. This geography of shadowing is further superimposed on the modern nation. The folding-up of history with literature achieved through such uses of illustration (peritext) is analogous to the folding into geographical modernity achieved by the translation policy as regards place-names (text).

The whole question of place-names, of course, relates to the linguistic status of Icelandic. 'Modern' Icelandic place-names look 'old'. Attention is called to this status, a few pages earlier in the Preface:

Compared with most European languages, Icelandic has changed remarkably little over the centuries. Icelanders today have little problem in understanding and enjoying the medieval sagas if spelling is modernised (as it is with Shakespeare in English).  
(p. (xiii))

To 'have little problem in understanding' something, especially in an Icelandic/English context where the use of litotes is popularly expected, sounds like an understatement for having 'no problem'. It is not true that the sagas lack expressions unfamiliar to the modern Icelander. The Íslenzk fornrit editions, which the Preface (p. (xx)) lists as 'the most authoritative' and one of the two editions most commonly used to provide the base texts for translators, offer extensive footnotes. Many of these footnotes are there to clarify the meaning of a word or phrase. The modern Icelandic editors must have supposed that these expressions were strange to the modern

Icelandic reader. Their diagnosis may be understood to apply to Icelandic reading throughout much of the twentieth century, as the ÍF editions which would have been used for the *Complete Sagas* appeared between 1933 and 1991.

Otherwise, the description of the relationship between language and literature in the Icelandic community is generally fair. It is, unfortunately, yoked to a rather contentious cultural claim.

Not all readers in England, far less all speakers of English, can understand or enjoy even a modernised Shakespeare play or poem by reading it. They need a few footnotes or other apparatus which elucidates Elizabethan usages for apparently familiar expressions, Elizabethan expressions no longer in use, and a host of allusions and significances. It is unlikely that the *CS* reference is to only the plot level of understanding, or nostalgic admiration.

It is time to ask again the question often asked in this thesis when another writer (especially poet) is invoked in the course of paratextual presentation of a saga translation.

What does ‘Shakespeare’ mean here?

If ‘Shakespeare’ is named as a playwright whose dramas were written for performance, mentioning his name supports the mid- to late-twentieth century critical interpretation of the Family Sagas as dramas, with plot, character, dialogue, and enduring human value. However, when Jónas Kristjánsson describes the ‘objective narrative’ saga style, elsewhere in the *CS* peritext<sup>45</sup>, the correspondence drawn is with modern literary (i.e. novel-writing) technique in other countries. The novel is highly valued because of the way that the *CS* binds together modernity, progress, and the arrival at enduring forms. Jónas Kristjánsson’s description of ‘objective narrative’, nonetheless, also fits the technique of the theatre. In drama,

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<sup>45</sup> In the opening of his foreword, p. (xi).

whatever the characters tell us, all we have to go on is the external. The audience for a play cannot imagine itself 'into' the characters in the way that non-objective narrative (or, perhaps, even objective narrative?) encourages in a book, where the reader's private imagination inhabits the narrative more freely. 'Shakespeare' can be made to endorse both the saga as drama and the saga as novel, as these depend on very similar observations. The change in terminology hardly amounts to so much as a change in metaphor. The observations do not go very far, and the invocation of 'Shakespeare' is more impressive than useful.

If 'Shakespeare' is the Romantic Shakespeare, a poet whose universe lives best between reader and page, this would correspond better to the *reading* of the sagas as *drama*. Even this is not a useful correspondence. Shakespeare's plays exist in more than language. They make use of the visual and temporal dimensions of dramaturgy and the personal appeal of embodied action. If the language of the saga, whether TL or SL, fails to hold the reader's imagination, there is no other dimension at work. Moreover, the Romantic contract is between poetic drama and poetic individual reader. The *Complete Sagas* contract is between a literature that is a national heritage and an indigenous/academic SL reader community that, through translation, can link up with an enlarging community of TL readers across the world.

Perhaps the 'Shakespeare' invoked is understood as the anticipator of the novel. In that case, Shakespeare and the saga authors resemble each other only in having had the genius *almost* to have written novels, despite the supposed restrictions of genre in their period. Again, if novels are to be seen as literary achievements superior by virtue of evolved genre, this depends on the idea of progress.

The main and most obvious motive for using Shakespeare as a point of comparison is to suggest an analogy with the genius of the sagas and their classic status. This concern runs throughout the *Complete Sagas* peritext. Nonetheless, the naming of authors throughout the

paratexts of all six translations - compare John Lucas's contrastive use of Robert Bridges and Alexander Pope, when discussing verse translation – always has other uses. It raises questions of genre and the value of certain genres, of what makes ‘good’ writing.

The scope of the *Complete Sagas* permits the development of a fascinating ability in the peritext. A large amount of peritextual material is provided. Many people are variously and visibly responsible for different sections of it. This allows nuances and contradictions to arise within and between its sections. The reader is freed to sidestep the monolithic appearance of the enterprise and read with a sceptical freedom, developing a parallel ability to sift information and opinion.

This critical space, which emerges when peritext and peritext, or epitext and peritext, refine one another, is one of the advantages of paratext. In some ways, paratext can be coercive. In other ways, it can open debates for the reader. A few quick examples will follow.

Whereas the first Foreword, by President Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson, tends to the declamatory, the second Foreword (p. (ix)), by Björn Bjarnason, the Icelandic Minister of Education, Science and Culture, prefers more delicate constructions, such as: ‘we have formed the notion that’; ‘[w]e also entertain the notion that’; ‘[w]hatever approach we may take towards them’; ‘[i]t is very gratifying to see’. Björn Bjarnason’s diplomatic style, mostly in the indicative, holds open the possibility that ‘however, one also may [...]’. There has been a rapid shift in nuance which coincides with the reader’s physically getting closer in the approach to the literary text, if the book is taken in order.

The interplay of metaphor increases as the peritext increases in complexity. Consider the third Foreword (pp. (xi) - (xii)), by Jónas Kristjánsson, former Director of the Manuscript Institute of Iceland. The second and third paragraphs of his four-paragraph Foreword contain a clear, summary account of saga narrative and early Icelandic society. The first paragraph

contains the comparison between the modern novel and saga style discussed above. It is the last paragraph which is of interest here. It contains a fabular account of the three roots of the World Tree Yggdrasill, comparing them to the sagas' 'three roots' in 'the ancient culture of the Viking Age', the 'old Icelandic nation state', and 'Christianity'. It ends with an exhortation: 'May the sagas grow and flourish like the sacred ancient ash, and spread their boughs across the whole world'. Elsewhere in the peritext, the *Complete Sagas* enterprise presents itself through metaphors of colonization or invasion, drawn from the Icelandic seafaring accomplishments. Here, the overall effect of such images becomes softened. In his turn, Kristjánsson presents an image of the *Complete Sagas* enterprise, but this time, the metaphor is organic and quasi-religious. The sagas are imaged as fertile in themselves and inclusive of their growing audience. They share in and create a living environment. They are not objects conferred on other peoples by one venturesome, imposing people. The tripartite structure of Kristjánsson's image could be extended figuratively to the tripartite construction of the introductory peritext, with its triple Foreword and publisher's acknowledgement by Icelandic officials, its anonymous editorial Preface, and its academic Introduction. These are three aspects offered to the reader on his or her approach to the literary text, and Jónas Kristjánsson's image can be read as implying the possibilities of complex appreciation.

A final example of this peritext's developing richness through interaction with itself also can be traced in the transformation of a metaphor. The first Foreword (pp. (vii)-(viii)) refers to the sagas as a 'rich heritage' and to the translations as a way of 'opening up the whole world of the Sagas of Icelanders to readers of English'. A little later, in the Preface (pp. (xiii) to (xiv)), the sagas have become 'a national treasure in Iceland for centuries', and their world 'needs to be carefully opened and presented to make its full extent apparent'. Reading this in terms of Old Icelandic (and Old English) metaphor, which is perfectly possible given the

intersection of cultures and texts that the *Complete Sagas* represents, another level of understanding is reached. The sagas are the precious work of people long ago, like treasure in a mound or a riddling casket. The team of people who have opened them up and are distributing their translations to the world are like kings or lords, at once *givers of rings* and *damagers of gold*, enlisting recognizable and worthy strangers (readers) in their retinue. Although hierarchical, this is an even more positive image for, and sense of, the *Complete Sagas* project than Jónas Kristjánsson's organic metaphor.

Strictly speaking, of course, the *Complete Sagas* peritext divided in Volumes I and V may be seen as epitextual to the other *CS* volumes. It is physically separate from them. In practice, there may be an epitextual future for this peritext. It could find new life in other translations, either by its epitextual relation to them or excerpted to form part of these future works' peritexts. The *Complete Sagas* peritext has a substantial and authoritative appearance. It can be consulted in or copied from Volumes I and V, while being used with translations not produced for the series. The production of a coordinated English version of the family sagas is, in itself, highly significant for reasons beyond its own concern with providing the definitive English version of the sagas for the canon of world literature. No translation offers everything that some other translation could. The practice of translation only stops when a literature stops being a source of excitement to creative readers.

### III

## TRANSLATION AND TRANSLATION ANALYSES

### Translation

The name of this section is less transparent than it looks. To opt for translation *analysis* rather than *criticism* has been a conscious choice in ‘Translation Studies’ for some twenty years.<sup>1</sup> Translation analysis moves away from the emphases of traditional translation criticism. It is concerned with the creativity of the translator, the unavoidability of interpretation, the speciousness or danger of a search for ‘equivalence’, the translated text as product (rather than translating as process), and the translated text in its own right. In Translation Studies, differences are observable between writers who use a case-by-case or methodologically eclectic approach (often practising translators), and those who try to develop a model or framework for the relation between ‘source’ and ‘target’ systems. However, some or all of the concerns listed above remain constant.

In this thesis, there are specific ways in which the view of translation adopted and the analyses of the six translations of *Egils saga* diverge from the concerns of Translation Studies.

First, it is notable that, even in newer approaches where the finished text is not considered secondary, but is read in its own right, the flow of power is discussed or treated as if from ‘source’ to ‘target’. This vector belongs to older translation criticism. Strangely, it has been carried over into the new. This remains true even where the target text influences the

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Bassnett 1991.

‘afterlife’ of the source text. The amount and kind of scholarly effort put into translation analysis have done little or nothing to reverse this vector.

Although, for the sake of conformity and convenience, I have been using the abbreviations ST (source text) and TT (target text, or, more rarely, translated text), these terms are not adequate to my concern, which is with the reader of the so-called TT, especially in two cases. One is the case where many readers (as with Norse texts) are students, who expect to become acquainted with the ST, or even discard the TT entirely for ST reading. The other case is where the TT fails at certain points, so, to make sense of the narrative, an imaginary ST value must be posited before the reader can continue. There is an example of such failure when Egill has to ransom his head from his enemies King Eiríkr and Queen Gunnhildr by means of his brilliant verse (Chapter LXIX). The story can continue only because Egill fulfils the condition of brilliance, which none of the translations manages. The reader therefore has to take on trust that the poem which is in the TT is not a fair representation of the ST poem.

It seems to me that (although I shall not do so) the terms ‘source’ and ‘target’ should be reversed.

The translated text *is* the source for the reader, the point of origin for any future contact with the ‘source’ text. The ‘source’ text is a ‘target’ text in that it is something aimed at, a shifting target, just outside view, but known to exist. The source text is a ‘translated’ text in the etymological sense of a text that has crossed to another place, when the reader of the translation has to rely on an imagined ‘source’ text version in order to complete his/her reading of the ‘target’ text, as with the example given above.

The traditional (pre-‘Translation Studies’) reading would be that the reader tries to gain the original through the veil, colour, etc. of the translation. This is not what happens. The

reader constructs an *imagined original*. The reader uses the imagined original to complete the reading of the translation as a text in its own right as much as texts ever are.

This could be formulated in terms of an essential intertextuality. I would prefer to keep the focus on the translation, and to consider how the reader makes the saga narrative work, in terms of what Frank Kermode has discussed as the blanks or gaps necessary to the process of reading literary narrative.<sup>2</sup> These cannot be exactly ‘filled’ in the saga translation(s). However, there can be an imaginary reflex towards the ST. Some ‘blanks’ and ‘gaps’ are likely to encourage the reader to make an automatic back-projection of this sort, precisely in order to produce and proceed with a coherent, *independent* reading of the translation. It has nothing to do with actual knowledge of the ST.

As an extension of the idea of the blanks and gaps necessary to the reader of literary narrative generally, near the start of the next chapter I analyze the turning-points for interpretation which occur with a special feature of the *Egils saga* narrative - the self-conscious formulæ such as ‘sem fyrr var ritat’ [as previously was written] and ‘svá er sagt’ [so it is said]. The function of these within the SL saga acquires an even more complex character within the translation-as-version, and, simultaneously, the translation as needing its displacements of the SL saga.<sup>3</sup>

To select these features is not to invent a pattern, nor is it to look for ‘equivalence’, i.e. for point-by-point corresponding or compensatory features between TT and ST. It is to see how the source saga narrative apparently positions itself with reference to its own external sources and its internal structure. These phrases can be read as directives straight from ‘author’ to intended reader/audience, or from ‘author(s)’ to ‘author(s)’ as deliberate articulations. They

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<sup>2</sup> Kermode 1985.

<sup>3</sup> For turning-points in saga narrative, see also below, p. 40 ff.

mark a one-sided dialogue of thirteenth-century contemporaries who involve themselves in a tenth-century narrative.

This ST pattern is one of several which translators of this saga could use as conveniently inbuilt 'turning points' to position their translations in two ways: as TL source for the SL text (in the eyes of readers who move from TL to SL) and (with conscious manipulation of the imagined original) as TT for their contemporaries. This is not a question of the (non)-equivalence of phraseology, or patterns followed because they are there. The question is what happens to readers of translations of a text which seems so aware of itself.

It is often said that the translator starts as a reader. Of course, the translator would have to analyze, in an SL to TL text direction, the recurrent phrases which create this appearance of textual self-awareness. This is why the final chapter of this thesis offers a reading which could be a stage in translating, and which will, I hope, be complex enough to demonstrate that there is loss, and there must be new creation, in that process. As a preliminary to that reading, this chapter looks at how the extant translations of *Egils saga* carry out their selections, and how their inventions differ. Sometimes the analyses may recall the kind of translation criticism which accepts SL-TL power flow. However, rather than imposing on the translations by choosing an SL pattern by which to judge them, my reading will attempt to take account of their internal criteria.

What is the position of the reader who makes the move from TL reading to SL, if it is accepted that the translation should then be considered the *source* for the *imagined original* text? I would suggest that two main stages are identifiable in the experience of a reader who comes to the ST(s) after reading TT(s). The imagined original is the target text resulting from the displacements occurring during translation/reading of the translation(s). The source text is displaced, and becomes the target text resulting from translation/reading of the imagined

original. That is, the possible interpretations of both STs and TTs are mediated by the imagined original. The presence of the text actually present to the reader will not have a primary quality.

The SL text may not match up to what the imagined original 'should have been'. This quite possibly may arise from the SL text *translating* (displacing) the imagined original as a *target* text. The imagined original enjoys, as it were, a huge space of existence. It can be anything, it will be as good as the reader needs or wants it to be: because the purpose of taking aim implied in the metaphor of 'target text' where this is an imagined original cannot be to reach the target, but must be to create a horizon and carve out a certain space. The actual SL text, once reached, may be disappointing, because this is where things come to a point: reading stops here. The less mastery the reader has of the SL, i.e. the more recently the reader has switched from translation to SL text as target, the more disappointment may be suffered, as less appreciation of the SL edition, or awareness of ST variation, will be possible.

A habit of trust in reading would lessen or even prevent this disappointment. Readers making a transition between languages are unlikely to have this habit. They have for so long held on to a translation which they view as a provisional stage in acquiring the ST.<sup>4</sup> Their successful continuous reading of the saga narrative in translation has required appeals 'outside' to an imagined original. As they often are having or have had some scholarly training, they typically may read with suspicion, even with more suspicion the greater the value they place on the text.

The reader avoids disappointment only by managing either to reject the familiar translation, or to reconsider it in terms of the process of translating rather than its status as (independent) translation, thus clearing the way to take the SL text on trust and/or keep readerly

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<sup>4</sup> In this paragraph I am primarily considering academic, student, or amateur readers, who do often want to make this move - provisionality to commitment via rejection and dependency - as well as the translation to SL text move. Their position as readers needs to be analyzed, though the results may not conform to popular values in translation theory

expectations in suspense: i.e. where the translation is re-read and the reader's idea of the SL text is not fixed according to its translation(s).

Some of the terminal simplification and/or frustration which can characterize the reader's transition from TL to SL text may result from the different strengths and weaknesses of the translation from those of the SL text. The reader may not find in the SL text what 'ought' to be there. This would be true, for example, of a reader turning from Gwyn Jones's exuberant, visual tale to the comparatively sparse, controlled *Egils saga*. Then again, s/he may not see what *is* in the ST, for example if the remembered TT had eliminated difficult figures of speech or used summarization as well as rearrangement in dealing with the Norse sentence structure and detail (as with the Penguin translation).

In the extreme, if the reader never achieved the double re-reading which would make SL text into source and translation into target text, but irrepressibly experienced the power flow the other way round, the SL text would have to be imagined in a kind of permanent interlinear or parallel or bipinnate relation to the TL text. The reading of both texts could become a strained performance. The SL text, compared to the soft, all-suggesting diffusiveness of the 'source' translation with its imagined original, could remain for the reader a particularly reductive, shiny and obdurate 'target' text, like the outline of knives on the board after a circus act, when the human subject has walked away.

The work which can, and sometimes (even in the poor conditions of much commercial translation) does go into literary translation, certainly deserves to be re-evaluated. These translations can and sometimes do have merit as works in their own right, especially where the 'same' source text is fortunate enough to be re-translated by different minds, times and cultures at different points in the history of the language (into different varieties of the

language). Unfortunately this has not been the case with the *Egils saga* translations considered here, except perhaps Christine Fell's.

The case for translation and creativity (I have deliberately avoided the term 'creative translation') needs to be complemented by an idea of the *contract of translation*. This is the second point which I would wish to develop from Translation Studies.

The contract of translation would hold between translator(s) and reader, with respect to the text, not between translator(s) and real or possible author(s). This textual responsibility would be threefold. Roughly, I would divide it as follows. (i) A responsible exploitation of the peritext. (ii) A responsible relation to the translation's text as an articulated system of words. This would require text-critical awareness of how the base SL system of words is understood to exist. Such awareness will both limit and vary (increase and decrease) the relative ways in which the translation's system of words can be generated. (iii) A responsible development of the imagined readers' relation both to the TT and the 'imagined original'. The language-culture relations between all levels of, for example, source *texts*, original readers, translator as reader of the source texts, translated text and its readers would have to be treated with imagination and knowledge.<sup>5</sup>

However, textual *appropriations* should be exempt from any idea of contractuality. The reader is always a potential rewriter. If s/he is 'inspired' by a text, or thinks it would be 'fun', or 'exciting', to do something to, with, from it, that is where the source text may gain both new life and an afterlife. Even travesty can more strongly (re)motivate rediscovery of the ST, or purism. Perhaps, sometimes, 'irresponsible' rewriting is more likely to help bring about the renewal of both 'source' and 'target' language literary traditions than any amount of

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Hewson and Martin 1991.

exemplary twisted syntax or calqued lexis as practised by translators who believe that ‘formal equivalence’, the invention of a third language, can be revolutionary.

In my view, such creative interventions can and should also remain outside the grasp of theory, as a random factor in the game of literary production (writing), which otherwise becomes closed if not predictable, with acceptable new texts being by definition those which are amenable to pre-existing systems of analysis, or which match themselves to restrictive ideas of literary acceptability.

It could be telling to study how many students of medieval literatures in their original languages were initially attracted to them in part by non-academic retellings or spinoffs. They will have made a related but highly dissimilar move to readers who switch from contract-governed translations to SL texts. I suspect that there would be a great many, which reinforces my wish to *exclude* these productions on principle from a study of this kind (which is concerned with contract and potential reception more than actual reception), not to stigmatize them but in order to leave them alone.

To return to the contract of translation. Peritextual factors such as the physical appearance of the book and the series in which it was published should be a fair indication of the type of creativity the translator has intended to exercise, and so of the type of reading/reader imagined in the construction of the translation.

This means that a translation intended for readers who are likely to make the TL to SL switch at some point, or who intend to use the saga for non-literary purposes, should provide a different level of annotation, including some notes on the status of the *source text as base text*. These notes would also cover interpretative issues from manuscripts to editions, such as the abbreviation of common verbs and alternations of tense entailing the regularizations and expansions in the Íslenzk fornrit series, or the problems with insertion of verse in the saga.

More radically, a translation for TL-SL or non-literary readers should employ a different translation strategy, where the translation presents itself as provisional, and where the specifics of the ‘saga world’ are given in their strangeness, not pasted into a similar spread of target culture references and effects. It would be difficult to decide how far the language/cultural structures would undermine themselves if mimicked in English for non-literary purposes, but a far greater degree and more radical kind of strangeness may be more tolerable than seems to be imagined. Moreover, non-English English structures and usage quickly become ‘acceptable’, even where at odds with ‘normality’, if the translated text is thorough in insisting on its own systems. To indicate where the process of translation deviates most from its literalist strategy, the provisionality of the translation could extend to both text and peritext, as in the presence of a glossary, or parallel-text printing of verses.

Conversely, a translation packaged for readers who read the saga for simple enjoyment, for example, as a ‘story’ (as Gwyn Jones seems to have thought his readers would, despite the apparatus he provides), would be produced from the full set of choices open to reworkers producing an original related to an original. The translation would have to hold itself apart by a kind of equal and opposite force from the SL text if the reader were ever to come know both.

If the publishers mean to distribute the book in English-reading territories outside Britain and North America, account should be taken of this in the translator’s understanding of the reader’s probable general knowledge and the appropriateness of peritextual supplements to the text. I have discussed this previously with reference to the absence of maps of Britain, and the restrictive imaginative implications for British readers too, in the translations of *Egils saga*. I would be less worried about tailoring colloquialisms to a particular audience (as happens, for

example, between American and British editions of the 'same' children's book)<sup>6</sup>. The truism that cultures which are not 'dominant' have to be very flexible in their ability to understand a number of 'standard', 'non-standard' and 'dominant' varieties of language largely holds true for the educated casual reader of a saga translation into English, who is always in a minority.

If the text for translation is treated as an articulated system of words, as in point (ii) above, the contract of translation should also require that the translator(s) pay attention to the layout of the text as part of its articulation, in terms of implied genre. Should the provisional type of translation be a simulacrum of some manuscript or base edition in its paragraphing, conventions of dialogue, space for omissions, and so on? Should a creative saga translation appear like a novel - like a certain kind of novel from a certain period, for example a serial or historical or action-adventure novel, or like contemporary novels from the same publishing house which produces the translation - or like a chronicle?

Most of these questions have been touched on or hinted at before, in the chapters on paratext. It is urgent for translators and readers of translations to start working with an idea of *contractuality*. The split between traditionalism and the experimental is misconceived and inherently prescriptive. By showing this, contractuality will bring about a greater freedom, where the terms of literary production and reception are made as clear as possible from the start, and no reading (no reader) is thwarted for the wrong reasons.

Translation Studies has been conceived as an interdisciplinary field of study, capable of overlapping with or subsuming others. The practice *and* productions of literary translators cannot, I think, successfully be considered as belonging to a single category of 'literary translation', however internally various that may be, even where versions of the same text or the same text (differently received) are being translated. I am not suggesting that each

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<sup>6</sup> I am grateful to Jane Stemp (Wickenden) for drawing my attention to this.

realization of the translation contract is in a category by itself (though, at a micro-level, of course it is). I mean that, for purposes of classification and understanding, different types of translation contract are, in another sense of the word, different *disciplines*.<sup>7</sup>

Finally I should like to explain my choice of the term ‘analyses’ rather than ‘criticism’. In practice, translation criticism too often has recourse to catalogues of real or perceived mistakes, the detection and explication of which make it a negative exercise. Frequently, examples from a set of translations are chosen to illustrate some point, but, taken out of context and juxtaposed with arid humour, illustrate nothing so strikingly as the platitude that tastes change in literature as elsewhere. These are commonplace objections within Translation Studies to the use of the term ‘criticism’.

I prefer the term ‘analyses’ because my discussion of various issues relating to the production, existence, and possible use of the six translations of *Egils saga* is meant, not to be used as a reference document with any of these translations in hand, but more generally to sharpen the awareness of readers - whether of translations or SL texts or both, including the readers who are or may become translators - by exploring these issues. Readers need never fall back on or make do with a translation<sup>8</sup> in a way they hope or believe is simple or straightforward when in fact it introduces complications. Total independence is impossible for any literary text. To expect it from a translation would involve a real oversimplification, misunderstanding or refusing to consider the kind of thing it is on its own terms. Part of its identity is its particular interdependency.

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<sup>7</sup> I am grateful to Dr. E.L.C. Dillon for discussing this with me.

<sup>8</sup> I should hope this especially where students are restricted to the use of translations, or where writers are using them for some communicative purpose without being able to check the SL text for themselves.

My analysis of the translations uses them as texts exemplary of translation, i.e. is not the kind of complete technical analysis which I would call 'criticism' in a more positive meaning of the word.

This is not because I value incompleteness as such. I have no wish to provide a so-called complete analysis (criticism) of any one of these translations, because such a study would serve a different function. In fact, it would serve the opposite function, helping the reader to deal with particular versions of one saga, or with the practicalities of doing another translation (or an Icelandic edition with English peritext: much to be wished for) - i.e. looking after the trees; whereas the intended function of this study is to show (or remind) the reader how to find ways out of the wood.

### **Translation analyses**

#### The Penguin Translation: Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards, 1976

Even if reviewed with reference to the ST, this translation 'reads very well'. Reacting against the various kinds of formality and stylization represented by the three previous translations and more generally the reception of Norse in English where translated rather than reworked, it is deliberately normal, true to the remarkable ordinariness of the remarkably extraordinary events of the saga. If it seems perverse not to take it on its own terms, this is in part because one way of taking it seriously is to look at its coexistence with the SL text as a transformative and diagnostic relation. Understood in terms of paratext, the entire SL text (the ÍF base text) and the entire Penguin text exist as epitext to each other, i.e., the translations, associated with each other and with their STs by their shared title and in other ways, are always part of the textual material surrounding SL versions of the saga, and the converse is also true.

Understood in terms of readership, many students (though not exclusively students) are likely to read both TL and SL versions, in which case these versions are *in effect* interdependent, and can be analyzed as such.

As an experiment, before I was thoroughly acquainted with the SL text, I read through the Penguin text, marking everything which I would note if I did not already have some slight idea of what the SL text might be like or how ‘family sagas’ work. This, of course, was a flawed experiment, as I was simply a more suspicious version of the kind of reader whose experience I want to analyze, someone in process of transition (someone translating) between TL text and SL text. The flaw, however, was much more a dynamic characteristic of the situation than a problem with the method: an extreme version of any study which fixes on an object while of course resorting to *introspection* as an inverted *reality check* (if it does not add up according to what one thinks one knows, how does it add up?).

In the event, a pattern emerged which amounted to a transformative strategy. The translation was more than so many individual cases of random creative inventions or solutions, which is an image of translation sometimes inadvertently presented by comparison studies where criticism or analysis proceeds case by case. Because the Penguin translation is likely to have been the introductory translation for many readers remaining with the TL or moving eventually between TL and SL, I should like to use it, not in a particularized analysis, but to pinpoint certain characteristics which set the parameters of reader expectation.

### Fluency

The rightly famous fluency of Hermann Pálsson’s translations often is ascribed loosely to their use of colloquialisms and elisions. Really, it is achieved by a double process of summary and expansion.

Expansion works by 'writing up' of tags in Icelandic which could come across as exceptionally terse in English. For example, 'ætla ek' (III, p. 8) becomes 'Take my word for it' (3, p. 24). Contrary to what might be expected, there is also a strategy of *undertranslation* whereby the SL text is toned down, so that 'ógryn timer' [uncountable goods/boundless wealth] (X, 28) becomes 'a fair amount of plunder' (10, 38). This particular undertranslation also is a stereotypical anglicization, so that the achievement is understated, made exceptionally satisfactory but also normal, rather than expressed by what could sound like the narrative voice indulging in a boast.

The process of summary works by eliminating the blow-by-blow or detail-by-detail accounts typical of the SL narrative. I do not think that this is strictly necessary to achieve readability in English. In fact the slower, faceted development could quite naturally be retained in the English narrative. Often the elements in the sentence are reordered, with the final statement which brings together the picture in the SL text made into the initial statement then followed by a number of qualifiers in the TL text.

Summary is also the technique by which the poems in the saga are translated, with occasional, exiguous alliteration. They are present more as a token that poetry manifested itself in the SL narrative than as poems in their own right, and so provide recurrent moments where the reader invokes an imagined original.

The very short paragraphs and sentences also contribute to an experience of space and speed while reading. Personal names and pronouns are freely substituted to avoid suspected repetitiveness or real ambiguity.

#### Undertranslation and overtranslation (partial translation); missed translation

These function as transformative strategies, not as failures to render the original. For example, the usual levelling of SL text formality does not occur in the description of Bárðr's

marriage proposal at the end of VII, p. 18/7, p. 31. This means that, by stylistic contrast, the preceding commonlaw marriage or concubinage of Hildiríðr with Barðr's father is disadvantaged. This is an early sign of the consistent disadvantaging in translation of the Hildiríðarsynir, which corresponds with my previous paratextual analysis.

In X/10, as part of the favouring of Þórólfr Kveld-Úlfsson, the peoples in Finnmark are made to seem even more primitive by the undertranslation of 'þorp Finna' [the Finns' village] (p. 28) as 'one place' (p. 37), which helps defuse an anachronistic readerly revulsion from the Norwegians' glorious looting. The usual translation of 'konungr' [king] as 'sir' in direct speech, eschewing the more obvious 'Sire' as well as 'King', brilliantly presents the reader of the translation with the comparative approachability of the king's person and his rôle as military leader, in contrast to the modern understanding of royalty. The TL ironically understated tone goes amiss, however, in the family banality of the remark 'but Egil takes after his family' (45, 104). This undertranslation of 'en þó er Agli of mjOk ættgengt' [but still there is in Egill too much family character] (XLV, p. 113) hides the way in which Egill is not merely true to type, but the consummate example of the 'dark' strain in the family, so important for an understanding of him as the supreme skald and (anti)hero of the saga.

'Overtranslation' might almost as well be termed 'partial translation', as in this translation it is often both a summarizing technique and a privileging strategy. In Hárekr Hildiríðarson's slanderous speech to King Haraldr, Þórólfr Kveld-Úlfsson's guests and household are described as 'all those fighting men' (12, p. 40), while the SL text simply reads 'fjOlmenni þat it mikla' [that large crowd] (XII, p. 30). This is an especially wicked phrase to give to Hárekr, as the participle encourages the king to imagine them in their capacity as men who can fight, in a past which never happened where they were in the process of fighting against him, and in an undesirably conflictual future. This favours Þórólfr's comparative

straightforwardness. This privileging is continued at the level of sentence structure, as in XIII, p. 33/13, p. 42 where praise of Þórólfr's companion Þorgils gjallandi is repositioned so that his fine qualities belong to the section of the sentence where he is shown in relation to Þórólfr, not the King.

When, at the King's order, Eyvindr marries Þórólfr's widow, and some reluctance on her part can be inferred from the saga prose, the translation, although it has no consistent policy for translating epithets or nicknames, which means that the TL reader has not become accustomed to the practice of nicknaming in all the seriousness of its unlikely range, tongue-in-cheek translates: 'Eyvind was a fine man and these were his children by Sigrid: Finn the squint-eyed, father of Eyvind the Plagiarist, [...]' (22, p. 61, corresponding to XXII, p. 56). Similarly, the reader's probable unfamiliarity with the kinds of food and drink available, combined with literal translation, works as an overtranslation, when Atleyjar-Bárðr offers Egill and his men 'sour curds' and 'sour whey' ('skyr' [a semisolid dairy product] and 'afr' [whey]). This has a folktale or nursery-rhyme ring to it in English, and sounds as if it refers to spoiled foodstuffs rather than, as it does in the SL text, to everyday foodstuffs (43, p. 99/XLIII, p. 107).

Just as 'undertranslation' (konungr > sir) helped define for the reader the rôle of the king, the proverbial perils attendant on a young king in charge of a country teeming with experienced, restless warlords are brought home to the reader by an overtranslation of Aðalsteinn's situation in England: 'gerðusk þá margir ótryggvir, þeir er áðr váru þjónustufullir' [then many became unreliable, who previously were devoted] (LI, p. 130) becomes 'and there were many who had been eager to serve him, but could no longer be relied on' (51, p.117).

Now, it is not clear in the SL text whether what is meant is (i) people who were attentive to him as heir apparent were ready to cut loose from him when he became a young king or (ii) people who were attentive to the former king did not transfer their primary loyalty to the new one. The

first alternative would involve a change of status for and focus on Aðalsteinn. The second would be no more than positional but none the less menacing. The translation, however, makes the sense of peril come close to the young king, opting to make the first alternative the only one. This contrastively will reinforce the importance of Egill's potential and realized strength and loyalty, as character trait as well as behaviour, especially as he comes from overseas.

I name as a sort of null set the cases of 'missed translation', the places where overtranslation and undertranslation have not been used even if they could have contributed to a compensatory strategy with respect to the relation between SL and TL texts, or brought out a transformation within the TL text. To elaborate on this would be to begin a new translation of the saga. However, two examples will indicate the nature of 'missed translations'. In XVII, p. 41/17, p. 49, the magnificent ship which Þórólfr owns and which King Haraldr will order to be seized is described at length. This description is glossed three times in one note for the modern Icelandic reader, in the ÍF edition. The phrase 'lagt til hafs' is explicated as 'haffærandi' [oceangoing], and the ship defined as a 'knorr' [merchant ship], therefore wider and higher than a longship and sailed rather than rowed. (ÍF p. 41, note 2). This seems to be the source of the Penguin translation's compound adjective, 'ocean-going'. ST peritext and TL main text weld together, but the TL chooses to remain terse. Pálsson and Edwards do not choose to use a special word or description here, or to correspond to 'steindr' [painted], although this adjective seems to be considered archaic by the ÍF editor, who adduces Modern Icelandic 'málaður'.

Penguin translation policy for the main text, though not the peritext, is very similar to the *Complete Sagas* (1997). Where it is very different is in the surprising number of un-'creative' omissions and errors. Some of these can be read for how they work, without any grand claims being made for their failing (or not) to work relative to the ST.

There are few real errors of sense in the translation, and few misprints. There are, however, more than a few omissions, some without apparent motivation. Common to all these is their increased frequency towards the end of the text, though it would be illegitimate to speculate that this is the result of translator fatigue during linear checking. A sketch of their pattern follows.

### Omissions

#### **Chapter 6/VI, p. 30/17**

The Hildiríðarsynir are described: ‘They were short men but very intelligent, taking much after their mother’s kinsfolk.’ This omits the first element of the SL description, ‘fríðir sýnum’ [goodlooking] and introduces the ‘but’ into what is a SL list. This belongs to the strategy of partial translation which tries to favour Þórolfr Kveld-Úlfsson, often by means of contrast.

#### **8/VIII, p. 32/21**

‘[S]em satt var’ [as was true] is omitted from Bárðr’s invitation home to Þórolfr Kveld-Úlfsson, where he says that Þórolfr will meet many unknown relatives. Perhaps the omission registers translational sensitivity to the recurrent words related to ‘satt’ which pattern Þórolfr’s tragedy in the SL text, although this pattern is not rendered in translation.

#### **9/IX, p. 34/23**

There is no mention that Þórir haklangr, killed at Hafrsfjórðr, was king ‘af Ogðum’ [from Agðir], the largest kingdom involved in this battle more or less on home territory, although ‘Agder’ features on the Penguin ‘Norway 1’ map.

#### **12/XII, pp. 41/31-32**

Favouring Þórólfr Kveld-Úlfsson, this chapter omits some of the Hildiríðarsynir's slander against him to King Haraldr: 'ok þat til jartegna, ef ek hefi rétt spurt, at yðr var fylgt í kornhlöðu eina, því at Þórólfr vildi eigi brenna upp stofu sína, nýja ok vandaða mjök.' [and this [is] proof, if I have heard correctly, that you were led into a granary, because Þórólfr did not want to burn up his hall, new and very carefully-decorated.]: as if the reader were not to be trusted to appreciate Þórólfr, or the translation would not *repeat* such slander.

### **13/XIII, p. 63/59**

'[Í] Fljótshlíð' [in Fljótshlíð] is omitted from the description of Herjólfur Ketilsson's landtaking in the genealogy which closes the chapter. This is too arbitrary to be part of any considered attempt at clearing the prose, considering what detail is left in and indeed what expansions are sometimes made.

### **57/LVII, p. 146/168**

'Egill greip þá skjótt meðalkafla sverðsins' [Egill seized then immediately [the] grip of the sword] is omitted. In the SL text it forms the beginning of a closed narrative unit, typical of the focused progress of the saga prose, balancing the description of the sword blows exchanged between Egill and Berg-Onundr, which corresponds to ÍF ll. 19-24.

### **64/LXIV, p. 169/201**

The berserk Ljótr, whom Egill defeats in a duel, loses his nickname 'inn bleiki' [the pale], although in chapter 68 it is translated as if this nickname were well known both within the story and to the reader. Again, this omission seems arbitrary.

**71/LXXI, p. 186/224**

‘en þó kómusk þeir af hálsinum’ [but nonetheless they got over the ridge], in Egill’s journey to Ármóðr’s household, is another apparently arbitrary omission.

**77/LXXVII, p. 202/243**

‘fannsk þat inn við Reykjahamar’ [it [the boat] turned up near Reykjahamarr] is omitted, possibly like other omissions of geographical detail, possibly because it could be thought to detract from the emotional effect of the death of Egill’s son if it were to follow or close the sentence ‘The following day their bodies were washed ashore, Bodvar’s at Einarsness and the others south of the fjord, where the boat drifted.’ It cannot be to keep to a word limit that this is omitted, given some of the expansions elsewhere. It must be that the last detail is rejected, either because it is judged prolix or irrelevant, or because it is judged to be the detail of an author bent on quasi-historical completeness and/or literary realism, or because it is somehow too brutal to finish the account of drowning by following up the fate of the boat. There is no way of knowing which, so it is impossible to use this kind of omission to discover a reading of the SL text. It is possible that the sentence is cut off there for its cadence, as the final clause has a rhythm very like an Old English Type C line (\*) \* // \*, which would reinforce the impression of terseness which is reputedly characteristic of family saga prose.

**81/LXXXI, 225/282**

‘Steinarr reið síðan heim’ [Steinarr afterwards rode home] is omitted, although it would close the narrative unit (and Penguin paragraph) where he seeks Oddr’s help in his case against Þorsteinn Egilsson. The construction of the narrative in both progressive and variously

articulated blocks or closed units - even ‘set pieces’, like Skalla-Grímr’s diving for his anvil stone (Chapter 30/XXX) – goes generally unrecognized in the translation, perhaps in order to avoid what could be seen as repetitiveness, not control. The translation achieves a different *kind* of terseness and fluency from the SL text. I do not think that a strategy more like ‘formal equivalence’, which would have taken note of this feature of narrative construction, would have produced a translation which seemed unnecessarily burdened. An element of formality and the interventionist quality of the *Egils saga* narrative (one of the qualities that helps produce the sense of authorial work) has been diminished, out of fear of the otiose.

**82/LXXXII, p. 230/288**

Probably for the reasons given above, ‘þegar eptir fardaga’ [immediately after Removal Days], the specification of the time from which anyone can kill Steinarr, is omitted, as there is an almost immediately previous reference to Removal Days. Moreover, the entire speech where Egill passes judgement is marked by elisions and a relaxed style. This makes Egill sound like a casually unfair and bullying judge, almost a gangster, rather than, as in the SL text, someone who can and does correctly use the formal language of law to bind someone into a flagrantly unjust situation.

**83/LXXXIII, p. 231/290**

‘[...] ok mann hjá; var þar húskarl Olvalds’ [and someone nearby: [a] household servant [of] Olvald’s was there]. This man disappears altogether and is turned into ‘servants’ in general, which could support the possibility that the saga itself is being made more terse in order to seem terse enough to correspond to TL notions of this quality. The specificity of the interaction is lost, which is a visual and dramatic loss of an aside involving two people. Two things are

gained: a more marked social snobbishness about what kind of people are important in absolute terms as speakers in the saga; and an oddly chorus-like quality, ‘and the servants said yes’. If the interaction of characters and construction of scenes with dialogue in the family saga were often conceived in terms of drama or theatre in scholarship more or less contemporary with this translation, the translation has changed the kind of drama which it is.

**84/LXXXIV, p. 233/292**

‘[H]ann rasaði ofan á sandinn’ [he rushed/stumbled down to the sand] is another phrase which closes a narrative unit but which the TT apparently omits as otiose. Here we lose Steinarr’s position as recipient of Lambi’s attack, the next sequence being a rôle reversal as Steinarr pursues Lambi.

**85/LXXXV, p. 235/294**

‘hann gerðisk ok fótstirðr’ [he also became stiff-legged] is omitted, perhaps because it is considered otiose after ‘gerðisk hann þungfærr’, ‘his movements became heavy’. It seems more likely that it is part of the consistent strategy of privileging in translation the members of Kveld-Úlfr’s family (and occasionally detracting in translation from their enemies), which could be compared with the strategy of privileging in translation accorded to Melkorka the Irish princess in the Penguin version of *Laxdæla saga*, given that an undertranslation follows (235/295), so that the cook berates ‘a man like Egil’ for getting in the way, not the crueller SL ‘slíkr maðr sem Egill hafði verit’ [such a man as Egill *had been* [my emphasis]].

**85/LXXXV, p. 296/236**

‘Þat var um sumarit, er [...]’ [That was during the summer, when [...]]. Ignoring the introductory formula to another narrative unit perhaps accords with the fact that Penguin would otherwise have had to make the second sentence of their desired paragraph into an introductory formula.

However, this makes for a bumpy transition:

In the early years of Hakon the Powerful, Egill Skallagrimsson was in his eighties but still an active man apart from his blindness. People were getting ready to go to the Althing and Egil asked Grim to let him go to the Assembly with him.  
(p. 236 )

which cannot really be classed as ‘compensatory’ for the interpretative linking of juxtaposed events which occurs elsewhere in the translation. ‘Compensatory’ treatment of structural features across a narrative does not work in ways truly analogous to compensatory treatment of small stylistic features, such as having on average a certain amount of proverbial speech.

### Mistakes

#### **34/XXXIV, p. 89/107**

A second ‘Thorir’ for ‘Thorolf’, producing nonsense but not ambiguity: ‘[...] Eirik Bloodaxe and Thorir went back to Fjord Province and sent a messenger to Thorir [...]’.

#### **77/LXXVII**

Penguin p. 200 misprints ‘Ireland’ for ‘Iceland’ without real risk of misunderstanding.

#### **78/LXXVIII, p. 218/273**

‘[...] hann fór norðr á Víðimýri með Þorkatli Gunnvaldssyni ok þeir Rauða-Bjarnarsynir, Trefill ok Helgi’ [He went north to Víðimýri with Þorkell Gunnvaldsson and the sons of Rauða-Björn.

Trefill and Helgi] is translated, '[...] he went north to Vidimyri along with Thorkel Gunnvaldsson and Trefil of Helgi, the sons of Ore-Bjorn', which is the first real mistake and no oversight. It makes two people into one, apparently translating 'ok' [and, also] as 'of', and does this in spite of the clear patronymics. Gunnvaldr's son becomes Rauða-Bjorn's. This is inexplicable, and the more misleading of the two genuine errors in the translation, if one thinks of the TL reader who may not even have picked up on the use of the patronymic.

### **80/LXXX**

Penguin p. 200 misprints 'where' for 'were', without ambiguity.

### **87/LXXVII, p. 239/299**

In the genealogy of Skalla-Grímr's line which concludes the saga, 'Helga in fagra' [Helga the Fair] suffers a sex change in her first name, to 'Helgi the Fair'. This looks like a mistake, not a misprint, as 'i' does not share much with the letterform 'a' and the position of the hands on the keyboard makes it difficult to mistype 'i' (a mid-righthand letter in the top series) for 'a' (an extreme lefthand letter in the middle series). Perhaps it is the fault of someone later in the publishing process than the translators, who knew the name 'Helgi' and hypercorrected 'Helga'. It is in any case not a disastrous mistake as regards the TL reader.

The fluency, neutrality, modernity and other virtues which make the Penguin translation a fairly enjoyable read in the TL give way to a rather depressing analysis, once the reader is situated between SL and TL, as so many readers of translations are. The arbitrariness of the Penguin changes – their unproductivity – mark the translation as being, though the effort of two scholars, the most like a 'commercial' translation of the six studied here. As will be seen

over the course of the next five analyses, even the wild and positive policies and errors of the three earliest translations are more 'creative', less finally null. In the long term, they can be returned to as objects. The Penguin's attempt to provide a modern text by levelling shortens the term of its usefulness.

The Everyman translation: Christine Fell and John Lucas, 1975

In her 'Note on the Translation', Christine Fell remarks:

It is entirely owing to John Lucas that in my translation *Egils saga* remains the saga of a poet. I read through my translation of the saga when it contained my own prose versions of the poems, and read it again when these were replaced by Lucas's work, and I appreciate the full extent of my debt. (p. (xxvi))

This remark is one of only two features of her translation which were found to be genuinely problematic, in my analysis - problematic, that is, as a rare failure of insight to be found in her work. In several important ways, Fell's prose translation is poetic. This is especially appropriate to *Egils saga*. As discussed in the reading of the saga in Chapter IV below, a metaphorical understanding of translation-type processes is crucial to an understanding of the place of poetry in the saga, the sense of the saga narrative, and the poetics of the saga prose. The need for this understanding is true at a thematic level: for example, how controlled violence of action and controlled virtuosity of language rework one another. It is also true of the patterns of meaning set up by such words as *hlýða*<sup>9</sup> and *þýða*<sup>10</sup> together with the various words for speech and the speaking, making or relaying of narrative/legend as well as of verse.

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<sup>9</sup> To listen, to yield to, to obey, to do, to be permissible or proper.

<sup>10</sup> To win over, attach, to explain, interpret, to signify; reflexive, to attach oneself to, to associate with one, to be on a friendly footing with one - or, in Modern Icelandic, to translate.

The second problematic feature of Fell's translation is the solution to the first.

According to Fell, '[t]he problems of translating the prose are comparatively slight' (p. (xxv)), a remark cited previously with regard to paratext. Here, for once among the translations of *Egils saga*, a set of problems is minimized and the contribution of a collaborator excessively valued, not from any failure to perceive the complexities of the work, but because the translator is so nearly adequate to these complexities that her failure belongs to a modesty which will not realize that the comparative lack of difficulty experienced has nothing to do with the necessary quality of the process of translating the prose of *Egils saga*, but everything to do with the ease of expertise sharpened by aptitude.

As this is to be an attempt at translation analysis, it is time to leave aside praise of the translator, however merited, and to begin to ask questions. Why do I say that Fell's translation is 'poetic'?

First, there is her concern with establishing the coherence of the saga's world. This concern is not as limited as that phrase may suggest. It has several aspects. There is, as was predicted before from the paratextual material of some of Fell's other work as well as from her translator's peritext, a wish to get details right, which elaborates itself as an insistent grasp on the naming of things. There is none of the blurring or indeterminacy of landscape or movement which marks stretches of the more neutral Penguin prose. If something in the 'source text' receives a calque translation, or does not generate a corresponding degree of specification in the 'target text', it also gets an endnote just often enough to show that thought has gone into this, but just seldom enough for the reader to learn to exercise her or his imagination against the odd, evocative opacity: 'The skull was all wrinkled outside like a harp-shell.' (Chapter 87, p. 171) where the word is 'hOrpuskel' (ÍF p. 299).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Of course, more than one translator can use the 'same' phrase without it being functionally identical. Compare a musical note whose recurrences within a set of Variations are different in duration, tone and harmonization.

Fell's deftness with names and things is typical of an attitude in her work already deduced in the previous section, here to be defined as belonging to a 'poetic' imagination, i.e. an attempt to make the language in which her saga world is re-created sufficient to the richness with which she unavoidably imagines this world. This exceeds what reasonably might be expected from scholarly respect for exact rendering, reading more like an absorbing engagement with the saga world as itself for its own sake.

In addition to this, Fell shows a deftness with the sounds of words, both within and between SL saga and translation. Her use of this device is a true echo, not an imitation, in that it meets the literary requirements of SL and TL equally. In Chapter 78, a passing mention is made of 'the sons of Red-Bjorn' ('þeir Rauða-Bjarnarsynir', ÍF p. 273). Penguin translates this as 'Ore-Bjorn' (p. 218), from *rauði* [iron ore], rather than *rauðr* [red]. Fell's translation is poetically effective between TL and SL because it draws on an invisible SL form to produce a not too dissimilar set of sounds in English, while 'red' can subsume 'ore' (as 'ore' cannot subsume 'red') if one thinks of the glow of iron heated for smithying. Within the TT, the associations of 'red' as a *sound* in English are not immediate, because the word is common and denotes a strong colour, and the name is mentioned only in passing. By contrast, the Pálsson and Edwards's 'Ore-Bjorn' is strange enough to draw more attention to itself than is useful in context, and is caught between 'yore' and 'our' – ironic, in a translation that does not quite make it at this point to its desired modernity. Again, the phrase 'inn sama formála' [the same form of words], describing a toast that is being drunk (LXXI, p. 225; 71, p. 133) becomes 'the same formula', another small instance of a general ingenuity with all the resources of both languages which across the text amounts to what might be termed a *positive fluency*, in contrast with what I would term the *negative fluency* of the model for saga translation established by the Penguin series. This positive fluency, a scrupulous lack of scruple about what can be made to

work for *both texts at once*, SL and TL, is what more typically might be associated with the translator of poetry.

It could be illuminating to compare the Pálsson/Edwards and Fell/Lucas translations. The main reason for this would not be the formal resemblance of the collaborativeness of both projects, or their contiguity in time (1975 and 1976). The reason is that the readers who opt for recognizable, dependable, available Penguin series translations are as likely to opt for an Everyman translation for related reasons. How different can the two translations be?

Rather than set out a full-scale comparison of the two (which also would not be exhaustive in so far as the criteria for selection could not be complete), I shall focus on a series of translation choices in Fell/Lucas, with reference to Pálsson/Edwards only where the norm of their model is brought into question. This is justified in so far as Fell's translation, a single project, needs more of a hearing than the Penguin translation, which is part of a series that has done much to form the readers who make the transition from SL to TL, as well as those who never do. This method will also show Fell's attention to the articulation of sequencings, of time, of reporting, and of relative importance of event, another aspect of the 'poetic' degree of attention which she brings to the saga prose, and how a high degree of positive fluency becomes normal in the course of the TT. The layout of this comparison will give primary place to ST and TT alike, presenting them as texts for my commentary.

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## Chapter I/1

**'En dag hvern, er at kveldi leið, þá gerðisk hann styggr, svá at fáir menn máttu orðum við hann koma [...]' (p. 4)**

**‘But every day when it came to evening he became withdrawn, so that scarcely anyone could get a word across to him.’ (p. 1)**

Eschewing a Penguin-style summary approach, Fell’s order of clauses and articulation of prepositions sticks close to the SL. This is not dry ‘formal equivalence’, or even the most gentle foreignization. It is a recognition of where it is fortunately possible to use similar structures between medieval Icelandic and a version of modern literary English. It needs to be said that this is desirable, not because there is some virtue in unsettling the reader by obvious language ploys, but because the reader becomes *familiarized* with a manner of constructing meaning by an accumulation of detail with slight changes in focus. This should not be viewed in terms of isolated communication or linguistic conventions of language-culture systems, but more immediately in terms of the preferred ways of encouraging the creation of meaning in one literary text. ‘Literary’ implies the taking for granted of the *ordinary* possibility of otherwise (elsewhere) non-ordinary language.

**‘búsýslumaðr mikill’ [Kveld-Úlfr] (p. 4); ‘umsýslumaðr mikill’ [Skalla-Grímr] (p. 5)**

**‘very efficient in the management of his estates’ (p. 1); ‘a very efficient man’ (p. 2)**

Again there is more and other than ‘dynamic equivalence’. One reason to render in the TT echoes in the ST is that they may signify more than they seem to, not as byproducts of SL conventions but within the system of the literary text. These two phrases link Kveld-Úlfr, who is the actual authority figure, with his younger son Skalla-Grímr as a potential authority figure, never mind the presence of a handsome, gifted elder son like Þórólfr.

**II/2**

**‘Þá var Atli inn mjóvi jarl; [...]’ (p. 6)**

**‘At the same time there was an earl called Atli the Slim.’ (p. 2)**

With the expansion of ‘Þá’ [Then] and the change from definite to indefinite reference in the naming of Atli, Fell transforms the rapid switch which the ST intended for an audience who might have been expected to hold several narrative strands in their heads simultaneously (to a degree not commonly expected today, as she notes in page (xx) of her Introduction) into a deliberately achieved simultaneity. This begins to accustom the TT reader (who might have expected succession of reference to indicate progress or causality in the narrative) to a different articulation of time. Again, positive fluency does not leave the reader alone, as with negative fluency, but it works by *familiarization*, not foreignization.

## VI/6

Whereas the Penguin text tended to champion Þórólfr Kveldúlfsson through patterns of ‘overtranslation’ and ‘undertranslation’, Fell privileges Skalla-Grímr by interpretation of circumstances of communication. This is in line with her remarks in the Introduction on the paradoxically weaker attractiveness of the superficially more attractive people in Kveld-Úlfr’s family - ‘The two Thorolfs are overshadowed by their uglier and cleverer fathers and brothers’ (p. (xv)). The privileging in translation, like the peritextual remarks, is as much as anything else a preventative measure, to stop the reader losing heart and interest after the death of the first Thorolf/Þórólfr in Chapter 23 (of eighty-seven). When the first Þórólfr comes home, ‘til foður síns’ (p. 14) [to his father] becomes, in Fell’s translation, ‘to his family’ (p. 6), and the conversation between ‘þeir feðgar’ [father and son[s]] definitely includes all three, ‘Father and sons’. Her Skalla-Grímr is already more part of the power structure than he might seem to be otherwise at this point in the saga. He is presented as someone who is to-be-returned-to (by

Þórólfr as by the reader). The translation does not interpret Kveld-Úlfr as receiving his elder son in solitary state.

Moreover, this translated inclusion of Skalla-Grímr familiarizes the reader with an important feature of this and other saga narratives, i.e. the non-speaking character whose silence is a positive presence and indicative of things to come *later* - a double feature, of character and pace/time, as Fell's inclusion of Skalla-Grímr in the speech situation requires his silent presence to be imagined throughout the chapter. Finally, Fell's translation allows Skalla-Grímr to hear Kveld-Úlfr's advice to Þórólfr, about the mysteriously quantitative gift of luck which is measured against others' possession of the same, and about not overreaching oneself. Skalla-Grímr's later behaviour, which corresponds to this advice, thus acquires an extra layer. He becomes a character who will have learned from Kveld-Úlfr, rather than another - grimmer - version of his father simply by heredity and general example.

## VII/7

Fell also uses undertranslation against Þórólfr I's enemies, though to a lesser extent than can be found in the Pálsson/Edwards translation. She starts high up in the genealogy, with their grandfather, Hogni. Within a short space in the narrative, three good-looking characters are described. In relation to Þórólfr, two of them will prove to be 'bad', one 'good'. Hogni, 'allra manna fríðastr sýnum' [of all people handsomest in-looks], is demoted to 'very good-looking'. His daughter Hildiríðr, 'dóttur allfríða' [very beautiful daughter] is patronized as 'very pretty'. Bárðr, 'fríðr sýnum', gets his due, 'handsome'. (ÍF, p. 16; Fell, p. 7-8).

## VIII/8

'ok var þar in prúðligsta veizla.' (p. 21)

**‘It was a brilliant wedding.’ (p. 10)**

The adjective chosen to describe Bárðr’s wedding is perhaps rather well-worn. Fell notably has made no attempt to ‘compensate’ for the fact that *prúðligsta* contains a loan element and is a chivalric-magnificent word. It would, anyway, be difficult to attempt such compensation in a translation that does not claim to replicate the relation of medieval SL text and lexis to earlier subject-matter. The brilliance of Fell’s translation choice is in the poetic relation of the sound of the TL adjective to the sound of the invisible SL adjective. They both announce themselves with a bilabial consonant plus liquid, followed by another liquid consonant, and lend themselves to being grandly drawn out. This is also a regular choice. ‘Veizla var in prúðligsta’ (XI, p. 29) becomes ‘It was a brilliant feast’ (11, pp. 14-15).

The patterning of phrases is never slavish. Following Fell’s policy of familiarization, it is close enough to suggest the typically somewhat limited vocabulary of the saga prose, where intricacy is achieved through complex narrative structuring devices, not through *recherché* expressions, and where the recurrence of a familiar locution can be turned to good effect. In Fell’s translation, for example, ‘ógrynni fjár’ becomes ‘riches beyond count’ often but not always, because the kind of wealth represented by *fjár* is variable, and the phrase sometimes needs to be changed; while ‘ógrynni liðs’ (p. 130) does become ‘men beyond count’ (p. 76).

**‘logðu þá ok margir góð orð til, sögðu [...]’ (p. 29)**

**‘Many put in a good word at this point, saying [...]’ (p. 15)**

This shows several characteristics of Fell’s translation. ‘Þá’ [Then] is expanded to articulate the time more sensitively for the TL reader. In order to show the pile-up of sequenced events which follows, and convey it not through syntactic mimicry but as an integral mode of narrative perception, ‘sögðu’ [said] becomes ‘saying’. The use of the participle to keep large

narrative units together in an appreciable order shows Fell's awareness of the unit to be translated above word level, and her preference for the logic peculiar to the narrative rather than a textbook avoidance of rendering 'the Germanic' by 'the Latinate'. By contrast, the Pálsson/Edwards translation tends to keep finite verbs, but it breaks narrative units by full stops and rearrangement as well as summary, none of which is strictly necessary for appropriate cultural communication in the TL, though much of it is relevant to Pálsson/Edwards's narrative (literary) priorities.

### **IX/9**

**'Þórólfr svarar þá styggliga: "Því síðr ætla ek ykkar arfborna, at mér er sagt móðir ykkur væri með valdi tekin ok hernumin heim hofð."'**(p. 27)

**'Thorolf answered irritably, "Why should I think you legitimate, when I've heard that your mother was taken by force, and brought back as loot?"'** (p. 13)

When the Hildiríðarsynir bring to Þórólfr their supposed claim on Björgólfr's estate, which Þórólfr has inherited by marrying Bárðr's widow, Fell turns his answer from a statement of their undeservingness into a rhetorical question, which shows that culturally appropriate TL communication works alongside techniques of familiarization elsewhere in the TT. Such a question in English removes the possibility of response from the Hildiríðarsynir far more effectively than a statement would have done, reinforcing also Þórólfr's power at this moment, as someone whose questions do not call for equal answers but place his interlocutors as he wants. There is a striking counterpart to this translation choice in chapter LIV/54, in Þórólfr Skallagrímsson's speech.

### **X/10**

**‘en sumt með hræzlugæði.’ (p. 27)**

**‘though the Lapps were slightly suspicious.’ (p. 14)**

Sigurður Nordal’s note to this phrase in the ÍF edition suggests that he interprets this phrase more strongly: that the Lapps are compliant because they find or feel themselves intimidated. This possibility is lost in Fell’s translation, and replaced with a word that could simply suggest the kind of mistrustfulness which arises from shrewdness or from unfamiliarity with another people. When Fell comes to the phrase ‘í einu bóli’ (p. 28), which denotes the place where the Kylfingar, who also are trading and raiding in Lapp territory, can be found, although Nordal glosses this as ‘þorp Finna (Lappa)’ [a Finnish or Lapp village], she translates ‘[i]n one camp’. This is, it may be recalled, also a phrase given a twist in the Penguin translation.<sup>12</sup> By describing the use (presumably) of a Finnish/Lapp village by the Kylfingar as the setting up of a camp, she emphasizes at once their temporariness and their invasiveness, which implicitly contrasts with the regular or expected Norwegian presence there for the ‘finnkaup’ [trade with the Finns].

### **XIII/13**

There is a good example of overtranslation which also involves a slight cultural adjustment at p. 15, where ‘as was natural’ translates ‘sem líkligt var’ [as was likely] (p. 30). This is during Hárekr’s flattery of King Haraldr, where Hárekr is claiming that Haraldr’s extra good fortune, luck, and wisdom made it natural/likely for him to escape Þórólfr’s supposed criminal plot. This translation brings out the way in which good luck is something the individual is born - gifted - with, in the world of this saga. Hárekr’s cheap slander is given a

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<sup>12</sup> See p. 15 above.

sort of journalese here and there: 'ok var Þórólfr höfðingi þeirrar ráðagerðar' [and Þórólfr was chief in their decisionmaking] (p. 31) becomes 'Thorolf was the prime mover in this' (p. 16).

However, Hárekr's speech is generally translated with *less* fluency than has been usual for Fell's translation. Even the description of the Hildiríðarsynir's flattering, malicious overactivity, near the end of the chapter, is translated oddly. 'Þeir bræðr gáfu sér ørendi inn í Naumudal ok fóru svá í svig við konung, at þeir hittu hann at Oðru hverju; tók hann jafnan vel máli þeira' [The brothers gave themselves business in Naumudal and went so in circles round the king, that they met him every other moment] (p. 33) becomes, 'The brothers provided themselves with an errand into Namdal, and made such circles round the king that they were forever running into him' (p. 17). The last two clauses sound as if they should be idiomatic, but they are not. To *run rings round* someone (outstrip someone) is not the same as to *circle around* someone (hover, hesitate about approaching), and to *run into* someone is no more than to meet them by chance.

If this passage alone, or the local effect of this passage, were to be evaluated for translation technique, it would be possible to say that the incoherence of idiom enacts the bewildering activity and bewilderingly successful deception which the brothers practise, in the confines of a certain society and space. As it is, it comes after the Hildiríðarsynir's clumsily translated long speech which is supposed to be an instance of persuasion, the undertranslation of which has had great effect on how one views the balance of Haraldr's character in the TL saga, between gullibility, paranoia and rightful kingly suspiciousness, as he appears to give this speech a favourable hearing.

It is as if, in keeping with her policy of translating by the larger narrative unit, Fell has prejudiced the Hildiríðarsynir in her version, just as the Penguin in translating smaller linguistic units tended to privilege Þórólfr. It is as if she uses their weapon against them

(distortion of speech) whereas Pálsson and Edwards seem to use the translators' position to plead Þórólfr's case. A similar effect of translation may be seen in chapter LIX/59.

## XXV/25

Fell's text is generous in its annotations, and unafraid of translating culturally difficult material, as well as courageous in recognizing where the scope of literary language in the English translation can make good use of linguistic difficulty in setting out the way that the saga world seems to ask to be read.

Conversely, the lack of annotation in certain places counts as genuine omission, exclusions, not oversights, especially where those places are marked by what looks like translational anxiety. These are extremely few. An outstanding occurrence, however, is the omission, in Chapter 25, to explain that the names of Skalla-Grímr's companions on the journey to try to claim compensation for Þórólfr's death from King Haraldr characterize them as preternatural in some way, such as 'Þórir þurs' [Þórir ogre]. These names characterize the strange power cultivated by and around Kveld-Úlfr's family, which will have to wear out once such excess is not required, towards the end of the saga, as Iceland becomes a well-established country. It is also notable that the medium-term consequences of this gathering precipitate Kveld-Úlfr's household's move from Norway to Iceland, which could at this point in the saga be viewed as a land less settled, in two senses, than it will be by the end. The sign of translational anxiety lies in the second of two notes to this passage which Fell does provide. The first note explains the term 'coal-biter', the only translated epithet. The second points out that although the narrative names only eleven men, it says that twelve were there, and further that all eleven names but one 'recur in the descriptions of Skalla-Grim's gifts of land to his followers' (p. 181). The quibble about 'eleven' or 'twelve' is hardly so important; either the

reader will add up the names, or have an impression that there are *many*. If it is important, it is only to show that the ST itself is not infallible. Even a very short-memored reader would probably make the connection between Skalla-Grímr's companions here and in Iceland, a scant six pages later. It is as if the peritext and TT were interacting to note that these men are remarkable, without quite wishing to say how.

## XXVIII/28

Another of these rare omissions occurs at this very point: six pages later. When Skalla-Grímr's company takes land in Iceland, they give names to the places they find. These names are important in two ways other than the staking of a claim. Some of them are still used in modern Iceland - Borg, for example. What is happening is not only the giving of names *then*, but the changing of those names' status *since then*, from language to confirmed legend, and from legend to a 'confirmation' of legendary history. Perhaps not much of this can be made accessible to the TL reader. However, the other way in which the names are important is in their transparency. For example, 'þá kómu þeir á nes eitt lítit ok veiddu þar álptir nokkurar ok kolluðu Álptanes' (p. 73) [Then they came to a small headland and hunted there some swans and called [it] Swan-headland] becomes 'they came on a little headland where they caught some swans. They called it Alptanes.' (p. 41). Perhaps this pattern of naming is left obscure out of a wish to avoid making the narrative seem cute, folkish, simple, unimaginative, primitive or awkward (hardly a reasonable fear, given the quality of saga and translation). Perhaps it is absent in the TT because of such possibilities, or because it would raise the question of translation of names more generally. Perhaps there is no annotation because of constraints on expense and/or space in the production of the book. It is a real loss, however, not least because the transparent naming need not be seen as in any way simple.

**XXX/30**

Fell is not averse to introducing a folktale-type idiom where it seems appropriate, for example to clinch the strongly typical episode where Skalla-Grímr dives into the sea to bring up a hard enough stone to serve as an anvil. He brings up a stone so heavy that four men hardly would manage to lift it. The stone still exists (existed) at the time of the narrative – incidentally drawing attention to the narrative’s lateness relative to events narrated, and Skalla-Grímr’s legendariness, at this point. The ST prose becomes fairly discursive, ‘En er hann fekk þar engan stein þann, er svá væri harður ok slétt, at honum þætti gott at lýja járn við - [...]’ (p. 78) [And when he got there no stone such, as was so hard and smooth, that to-him it-seemed good to hammer iron on], proceeding to involve itself in an aside, then a new time-setting, so that the ‘því at’ [because], ‘var þat’ [it was], ‘þá er’ [then-when] and ‘at’ [that] of the text are required before the expectation of action set up by ‘En er’ is fulfilled. Fell introduces a break into the narrative unit, translating ‘But he could find no stone which was so hard and smooth that he thought it adequate for beating iron on.’ (p. 44), which, in eighteen monosyllabic words out of twenty-one<sup>13</sup>, and retaining the adversative introduction to a superhuman feat, definitely has the ring of popular legend.

**XXXI/31**

There are only five textual omissions in Fell’s translation; not quite five, as one of these is the print omission of a comma within the TT. The others occur in Chapter XXVII/27, where ‘til liðs síns’ [to his company] (p. 68) is omitted (p. 38), as if for streamlining; XXX/30 ‘er nú var frá sagt’ [as just was recounted] (p. 77) which would have been on page 43, again as

<sup>13</sup> Nineteen, if ‘iron’ is reduced as in some varieties of modern English English.

if for streamlining; one in Chapter L/50, to be discussed later; and, here, the most significant. This omission is, I think, a case of overtranslation (not to say improvement). It will be seen to contribute to narrative memorability and interpretation, as well as towards narrative forgetting of any patchiness there may be in the sources of the source text.

The three-year-old Egill, accused of (drunken?) unruliness and left at home by his father Skalla-Grímr, who is going to a feast, decides to go too, setting off on a cart-horse. The saga narrative announces, ‘Er þat at segja frá hans ferð, at [...]’ [There-is this to say about his journey, that] (p. 81). Fell omits ‘frá hans ferð’, translating instead, ‘The story goes that’ (p. 45). The SL narrative uses the introductory phrase to (re)tell a particular anecdote about the young Egill and his journey. Fell transforms this into a phrase more largely introductory: to the story of Egill as the story goes/grew up, to the saga here and now telling this story, and to how that story is about to proceed. This translation choice recreates the sense of past-future which is how one might characterize the *saga*’s *structural tense*. It also uses the opportunity given by one of the *Egils saga* directive phrases about the telling of the story, construction of the narrative, and relationship to sources, in order to give the reader a concentrated (what would be termed in some translation analysis, compensatory) feel of this self-awareness built into the *saga*.

## L/50

The second significant textual omission in Fell’s translation is of Æthelstan’s/Aðalsteinn’s title, when first he is referred to as ‘konungr’: ‘En Aðalsteinn konungr safnaði herliði at sér’ [But King Aðalsteinn gathered himself an army] (p. 128); ‘But Æthelstan gathered an army’ (p. 74). Aðalsteinn gathers this army because his situation as a young king with rebellious former kings among his new subjects is precarious. Fell’s translation makes this

precariousness more of a thing of the present by omitting the title, incidentally weakening the way in which the saga narrative (here as so often) works with what I would call a structural tense of past-future (i.e. we know x also as y, and know that x became y, at the same time we see x is becoming or about to become or has not yet become y within the narrative).

### LIII/53

**‘Þá mælti Aðils jarl: “Nú mun þat fram komit, konungr, sem ek sagða, at yðr myndi þeir reynask brogdóttir, inir ensku; [...]” (ÍF, p. 135)**

**[Then said jarl Aðils: ‘Now will it appear, king, as I said, that to-you would they prove-themselves crafty, the English]**

**‘Then Earl Adils said, “Now, Sir, it will be seen to be as I said it would. They show themselves cunning, these English.”’ (Everyman, p. 79)**

**‘Then Earl Adils spoke up. “It’s happening, sir,” he said, “just as I told you it would: you’ll find the English tricky people to deal with.”’ (Penguin, p. 122)**

Neither Fell nor Pálsson/Edwards sticks very close to the Icelandic word order. If direct speech provides what could be called the turning points between Icelandic saga and saga translations, here it can be seen that the Penguin translation ‘novelizes’ the saga. A superficially more interesting verb is used: ‘spoke up’. This is supplemented by ‘he said’, inserted to break the speech and call attention to the speaker’s position, in a ‘novelizing’ device typically found in Pálsson/Edwards’s translation. Aðils’s speech is translated to be neutrally colloquial. He speaks saga-soldier-speech, like a good many others in Pálsson/Edwards. Fell breaks up the sentence divisions quite a lot, but seems to do so with the purpose of making Aðils sound a little foreign - ‘these English’ - as would be appropriate for a Welsh chieftain plotting insurrection with a Scottish king. Taken as wicked-foreigner idiolect, her translation is more

lively and more colloquial while also being more literal than Pálsson/Edwards.

#### LIV/54

‘Þórólfr mælti: “Látum vit konung ráða, hvar hann vill okkr skipa. [...]” (pp. 139-140)

‘Thorolf said, “Shall we let the king decide where he wants to put us? [...]” (p. 82)

As with Þórólfr Kveldúlfsson in Chapter IX/9, Þórólfr Skallagrímsson (who is supposed to be strikingly like Þórólfr Kveldúlfsson) has a SL statement (or, in this case, order/exhortation) translated by a very English English, reticent, polite, but firm question. Just as the earlier statement/question was fateful, with the very long-term consequence of the rejection of the Hildiríðarsynir being death, here this order to Egill (who inherits and has learnt Skalla-Grímr’s and Kveld-Úlfr’s prudence/foresightedness) proves fateful, though much more immediately so. This echo of style and fate (whether intentional or not) works, across the TT, to bring out one of the patterns of likeness also to be found, though differently achieved, in the ST.

#### LVI/56

‘ “[...] eða hvat kveðr þú nú? Láttu mik nú heyra.” (ÍF, p. 148)

‘ “[...] What are you reciting now? Let me hear it.” (Everyman, p. 87)

‘ “[...] What are you composing these days? Let me hear something.” (Penguin, p. 132)

Egill’s friend Arinbjörn has noticed his melancholy. He decides to find out whether Egill is still mourning his brother’s death. He discovers (soon after the enquiry made above) that Egill wants to marry his brother’s widow, Ásgerðr, who grew up with them both in Iceland. Egill had not attended her wedding with Þórólfr. Here is another instance of overtranslation to good effect. In contrast with Pálsson/Edwards, Fell places the emphasis on reciting, rather than

composing, and on the present moment, rather than the present including the recent past. This enhances the picture of Egill-in-love - which does seem to be the situation, although some readers have wanted to interpret his attachment as mercenary. If Egill is *reciting now* something that Arinbjörn cannot hear, he must be imagined muttering to himself, perhaps with his head under his cloak, as his general mood that autumn has just been described in the prose narrative and as he himself is about to avow in a stanza.

For Fell to translate in this way is for her implicitly to suggest to the reader, who may need to be familiarized to this idea, that Egill composes verse, not by writing and revising but by talking to himself, trying bits out, memorizing and revising by varied repetition. However, in doing this, her translation achieves more than familiarizing the reader to the idea of a tradition of original oral composition while dramatically showing Egill as lover in preoccupation and poet at his occupation. It also *normalizes* the working-over of a skaldic verse by the poet, thereby releasing the reader from having to apply to all verse in the saga one of the conventions which may provoke incredulity, i.e. the preternatural ease and seeming spontaneity with which verse can be spoken. This normalization matches the family saga SL treatment of the supernatural.

#### LVII/57

**‘Þá kómu sveinarnir at, ok mælti Egill við þá: “Gætið hér til Onundar, húsbonda yðvars, ok þeira féлага, at eigi slíti dýr eða fugla hræ þeira.”’ (pp. 168-169)**

**‘Then the boys came up and Egil said to them, “Look after Onund, your lord, and his companions here, so that birds and animals don’t tear the bodies.”’ (Everyman, p. 99)**

**‘Then the herdsmen came up and Egil spoke to them.**

**“Keep an eye on your master Onund and his companions,’ said Egil, ‘we don’t want birds**

**and beasts ripping up their corpses.”” (Penguin, p. 146)**

Fell takes pains in her Introduction to show that Egill, even when apparently outrageous, often acts within the law and according to a personal or ‘viking’ code (Fell, p. (xviii)). This is brought out in her translation, where Egill, having killed the person obstructing his landclaim, instructs the dead man’s servants in what should be done next. Egill’s advice is frighteningly proper. Effectively, he tells them what to do ‘sem títt var’ [as was fitting] or ‘sem siðvenja var til’ [as the custom was], phrases which he does not use but which the narrative prose itself uses on other occasions when funeral customs or due honours are described.<sup>14</sup> This is not the only occasion where Egill has something like narrative control over his life and others’. Some of the other tags which the narrative prose uses to position and analyze itself are elsewhere to be found in his speech. Egill’s character in the Penguin translation lacks this complexity. The introduction in the TL of the first person plural makes Egill sound like a plain bully, who takes over the voice of authority, upholding a shared code, in order to mock the dead, the violated and the powerless. Fell’s Egill speaks as someone who knows how things are, and how they should be. Pálsson/Edwards’s Egill is childish or primitive in comparison. He only knows what he has done, how much he likes it, and how much he likes that other people won’t like it.

## **LIX/59**

Most translations are embarrassed or embarrassing about the supernatural element in *Egils saga*, making it difficult to legitimize it as an area of interest in the saga world, let alone an area for serious consideration for the student reader who eventually has to switch from exclusive use of the IT to the SL text. When it is reported that Queen Gunnhildr supposedly

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<sup>14</sup> The contemporary (thirteenth-century) audience may have been unfamiliar with the saga’s version of ‘old’ customs, or may have liked them to be ritually described.

worked spells to bring Egill back into her presence and power. Fell translates ‘Gunnhildr lét seið efla ok lét þat seiða’ [Gunnhildr had magic done and had this [magic] worked] (p. 176) as ‘Gunnhild worked spells and spelled out this’ (p. 103).

Avoiding the expression ‘to cast a spell’, Fell excludes the popular image of the witch from the saga. By avoiding the expression ‘to perform witchcraft’, or anything similar, the perhaps slightly less well-known image of the ritual practitioner, and his/her elaborate ceremonies, is also excluded. The choice of ‘spell out’ is good for several reasons. Retaining something of the SL repetition (Fell’s poetic ear and poetic inventiveness), the translation retains the move from the process of magic to the effect of magic, across similar but not identical forms of words, indeed from noun object to transitive verb, which enacts the way magic may be supposed to work. It familiarizes the reader with the idea that Icelandic magic may be a thing of language (gaining credibility for the power of Egill’s runes), where words have efficient power over things, indeed are powerful things in themselves.

This emphasis on words and power may not actually be as appropriate to the practice of *seiðr* as to runes, in which case Fell’s translation has a double interest beyond that already discussed. First, it would privilege Egill at Gunnhildr’s expense, by using the moment of the effective magic which Gunnhildr works against Egill to familiarize the saga reader with the kind of language magic which more properly belongs to Egill. This would be a similar strategy (conscious or unconscious) to that of distortion in chapter XIII/13, very suitable for a sympathetic translator of the saga of a poet devoted to Óðinn. Second, it would privilege what, metaphorically, is one of the moments of translation within the saga. The privileging of such moments by saga translators would, of course, be a study in itself.

**LXIV/64**

Fell translates ‘óðala’ [hereditary landownership] (p. 206) as ‘ownership rights’, although in chapter 4 (p. 5) and endnote 4 to that chapter she introduces ‘odal rights’ as a term and a concept. The several obvious ways of explaining this (change of policy over course of translation, possibly from distrust of readers’ memory; perceived difficulty of individual contexts for readers - here in the presence of a berserk and two verses; free variation of derived and TL terms) do not allow real analysis. The move from the annotated, ‘foreignizing’ term at the beginning, to the TL term here, is consistent with Fell’s translation policy of familiarizing the reader to the saga world, so that by now it can be hoped that the reader will match an approximately accurate Norse imagining to the English phrase.

**LXV/65**

There is a mild, but telling, case of overtranslation where Fell introduces an adjective: ‘valid law’ (p. 122) where there is none in the ST (p. 208). This underlines the fact that the law admitted settlement of property and other claims by single combat, or the anachronistic-sounding ‘duel’. The lawfulness of Egill’s chosen method of arbitration might otherwise have seemed unlikely to a reader who associated duelling with an aristocratic or adolescent encounter beside or above the law.

**LXXXIV/84**

Part of the inventiveness of Fell’s translation is its refusal to be afraid of literalism. When Egill’s very unwarlike son, Þorsteinn, is taunted by his enemy Steinarr, who turns the nickname for his light complexion into a slur on his character, Fell renders ‘Þorsteinn hvíti’ (p. 291) as ‘Thorsteinn the White’ (p. 166). Citing a similar usage in *Laxdæla saga*, Sigurður

Nordal adduces a note in the Íslenzk fornrit text, as if the modern Icelandic reader would not realize that the epithet was derogatory of Þorsteinn. The Penguin translation overtranslates to ‘whey-face’ (p. 233), indirectly associating Egill’s disappointing son with Egill’s two disappointing hosts, Atleyjar-Bárðr and Ármóðr, who tried to fob him and his men off with dairy products instead of strong drink, one dying for that and other offences, the other losing an eye. These two men, like Egill’s son, variously fail to appreciate Egill’s demands and Egill’s requirements, his needs (or deserts) and his code. This association is absent from the the SL text, and the weak patterning undermines itself, ultimately more belittling of Egill and his family than on Egill’s side in some way. Fell’s literal translation brings the taunt into the same class as *giving the white feather* and *being lily-livered*, both of which connote a lack of proper aggressivity as well as of masculinity, quite correct for Steinarr to use against Þorsteinn.

After these close readings with commentary, in which I hope to have demonstrated both the evolving experience of the translation from the point of view of reader (rather than of translator and translation process), and some characteristics of Fell’s translation practice, I should like to make three general observations.

(i) Fell’s literalism is usually an instrument of her imaginative thoroughness. In the few cases where the imagination does seem to be suspended, there are snags which resemble the earlier translations (which Fell judged less readable) more than the later. This may be because the earlier translators were also trying for familiarization, foreignization, and adequacy to the saga world, rather than level modernity. These very few jarring literalisms mark Fell’s divergence from the Penguin translation, towards excessive difficulty (excessive expectation of reader adjustment) rather than towards erasure of particularity. Two examples should suffice. From Chapter XXIX/29: ‘Stóð þá á mOrgum fótum fjárafli Skalla-Gríms.’ [Then Skalla-

Grimr's wealth stood on many legs] (ÍF, p. 76); 'Skalla-Grim had by now more than one leg to stand on.' (Everyman, p. 42); 'So the wealth of Skallagrim rested on a good many foundations.' (Penguin, p. 76). From Chapter LXXXI/81: 'Þá mælti Onundr: "Ekki þarf ek at eiga þetta undir tungurótu Odds; [...]"' [Then Onundr said, 'I do not need to keep that under Oddr's tongue-root'] (ÍF, p. 285); 'Then Onund said, "I have no need of Odd's tongue-roots.[...]"' (Everyman, p. 162) [the name 'Tungu-Odd' has not been annotated or clarified]; 'Then Onund had his say. "I've no need to depend on the tongue-twisters of Odd," he said, [...]' (Penguin, p. 227) [the name is translated, 'Tongue-Odd', usefully in this case but perhaps otherwise unfortunately].

On balance, Fell's is still the best translation for the reader who may or may not move between TL and SL. The small areas of opacity in her text are no real obstacle. They guarantee the co-dependency of TT, ST, and imagined original.

(ii) Fell's use of endnotes has implications for her translation policy. She freely acknowledges her use of the ÍF notes. Indeed, she credits them to Sigurður Nordal by name. This sets up a complex of texts and establishes the collaborative aspect to the creation of this (like any) TT. Taken further, this can be seen as an exemplary relationship, acknowledged within the book and accessible to the reader, between editor(s) of the base text(s) and translator(s). This relationship is analogous to the contract of translation between translator and reader which I have outlined.

Fell's use of endnotes is discreet, and refuses to spoil surprises. It would repay closer examination. A single example is the lack of endnotes for Olvir's illegal love-poems in Chapter II, followed by an endnote to Chapter IV, explaining that the attack on him by the woman's brothers is legitimate (legal) revenge for such unwelcome attentions. Fell sometimes uses her endnotes proleptically, to prepare explanations for features in the saga narrative which are yet to occur. When they do occur, they are, therefore, uncluttered on the page. The pace of reading

is not interrupted. The narrative develops by the reader's educated anticipation, rather than by her or his backward-looking bafflement, if the notes are used in order. The endnotes used in these ways take over some of the functions of the pointers within the SL narrative, such as 'sem fyrr var sagt' [as was said before], which are not consistently translated.

(iii) New patterns, meaningfully related to patterns in the ST, are formed from the imaginative thoroughness with which Fell takes on the SL, saga narrative and saga world. There are three basic kinds of verbal pattern which I would wish to distinguish in the ST read for translating. (1) Patterns where some other dynamic matters more than linguistic echo, so that the reader does not depend on remembering verbal tags. One example occurs when Skalla-Grímr claims land, founding his 'realm' in Iceland, and 'X þekkiðisk þat' [X accepted that] recurs in the account of others' relation to him. (2) Patterns which are rhetorical, and can truly be lost, as variation is not freely available to the translator. One example occurs where 'sannr' [truth] and derived words or phrases ring throughout the minor tragedy of the slandered Þórólfr Kveld-Úlfsson. (3) Patterns such as the 'sem fyrr var ritat' variants, where the narrative seems to reflect on or direct itself, and where this can be used to trace the interpretative course of translation, like a radioisotope scan. I leave out syntactic patterns, which are sometimes (for literary purposes) arbitrary (source-language/culture conventional) and sometimes relate to the poetics of meaning/perception. I do not propose this as a scheme for a general theory of literary translation. I have formulated it according to what I see as characteristic of the SL narrative and possible TL versions in their co-dependency. It may be modified for similar sagas.

Fell's TT creates new patterns of verbal association to bring together occurrences of these three basic types or their interaction. Where the TT creates these new patterns, there is not always a corresponding *lexical* pattern in the ST. The TT uses its own lexical patterning where the ST is thematically patterned. One example is the expression 'to value (highly)' which

brings together dead SL metaphors of weighing, measuring, judging, honouring, where esteem or estimation are in question. Another instance is the carrying over of ‘persuasion’, ‘persuade’, ‘persuasive’ etc. from the Introduction’s discussion of Gunnhildr’s, the Hildiríðarsynir’s, and Arinbjorn’s ‘techniques of persuasion’. It is again a saga of translation - a poet-translator’s saga, thematizing the power of the exchange of words - the exchange of the power of words.

Finally, I must state (rather than try to prove) my disagreement with Fell on the necessity of providing a poet’s translations for the saga verse. Instead of directly analyzing John Lucas’s poems, I can simply juxtapose an extract from his *Sonatorrek* (Chapter 78) with Fell’s translation-endnote, without reference to the SL text:

And though men try to ease my  
Pain, I prefer solitude.  
Dear son, with Odin now, son  
Of my wife, you’ve joined your kin.

But the cold and constant sea-  
God has left me lonely, wrecked.  
I cannot hold my head up  
Such weariness drags it down.  
(Lucas, p. 148)

I take no pleasure in the company of men, though each keeps peace with me. My son is come to Odin’s home, the son of my wife to visit his kin. But against me stands with unshakable mind Ægir (the lord of the fen of mixed malt). I cannot hold upright my head (earth of the hood) my head (wagon of thought). [*The fen of mixed malt* is beer.]  
(Fell, pp. 197-198)

What is the effect on the reader of the coexistence in the translation of two versions for each poem? Which looks more like a poem? Lucas’s is more traditional, in the proportion of white space to columns and squares of print, but it is also banal in diction, thought and feeling, and less plausible as rhythmic speech. Is a translation to be read by readers from the year 1975 onwards not allowed to draw on twentieth-century freedoms of verse layout? Is a prose poem not a poem? How *travaillé* is the text allowed to look? Can a close prose translation of a poem,

with someone who has Fell's ear and understanding, look like a more experimental - more compelling version than the apparent poet's poem?

I should like to close the analysis of Fell's translation by responding to these questions with two recommendations. First, that no-one who has not worked on the saga prose should attempt to translate the poetry. Second, that a prose translator who is attentive to the poetics of prose should be confident in offering his or her own prose poems to the reader, at least in future commercial translations where space for greater innovation (parallel SL and TL text within the TT text, for example) may *not* be allowed.

#### W.C. Green's translation (1893)

One reason not to follow chronological order in analyzing the translations of *Egils saga* is twofold: to do with translation type, and with likely translation use. In my discussion, the (probably) least well remembered translation (Green's) follows the two which (almost certainly) are most used. The second reason relates to Fell's remark in her Introduction, that Gwyn Jones produced the first *readable* translation. Green's translation raises the question of what is readable, and Fell's remark, viewed now after the analysis of her translation, can give a key to what makes for unreadability.

It should be said at once that Green's translation is very different from the later, professional productions, first, in the way his sources are used, second, in the sheer amount of misunderstanding and error which arises from translation by instinct.

Here is Green's claim about his use of sources:

For this translation the following have been used: The large edition, with a Latin translation (Havniæ, MDCCCIX); Einar Thordarson's (Reykjavík, 1856); Finnur Jónsson's (Copenhagen, 1888). Also Petersen's Swedish translation (1862). The text of Thordarson's little book has been followed in the main; Jónsson's differs from it in many places, being generally shorter. Into the critical merits of these

texts I am not competent to enter; the variations are of no importance to the story or to an English reader.

(pp. (viii) - (ix))

It seems impossible to reconstruct exactly what use Green has made of his materials. There is no simple relation between ‘source’ and ‘target’ here. He is disingenuous, however, in detracting from Jónsson’s edition because of its shortness. The licence which Green’s regard for ‘the story’ gives him, and the duty which he feels towards his ‘English reader’, show in his many incontrovertible omissions and inexplicable conflation. Towards the end, chapter divisions and paragraphing increasingly become his own. Moreover, almost everything which Green does use in his translation, if not given in Finnur Jónsson’s main text, is available in Jónsson’s variants in the critical apparatus. When quoting an Icelandic version of what Green may have translated, I shall cite Finnur Jónsson’s text, thus creating (or upholding) the primary split in base texts.<sup>15</sup>

The first issue with Green’s readability is that it does in fact exist, for a reason which raises a second issue of readability. Green becomes more readable as the reader adapts to his style of translation. What is this style, and why should the reader adapt? That is the second issue.

It is possible to analyze translations, in theory, as acts of communication between ‘language culture one’ (LC1) and ‘language culture two’ (LC2).

What would this mean, in practice, for literary saga translation?

It could mean that there is an unconscious attempt at, or belief in, a *standard* literary translation: not, of course, ‘standard’ as matched against other translations of the ‘same’ work,

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<sup>5</sup> The 1960, 1975, and 1976 translations all use Íslenzk fornrit (1933). The 1930 uses Finnur Jónsson (1924). The base text for the 1997 *Complete Sagas, Íslendinga Sögur*, also refers back to Jónsson.

but in terms of its internal coherence, which often is measured in terms its stylistic recognizability - conventionality. It could mean that the basic *non-ordinariness* of the translation *situation* is made to disappear. The reader knows, after all, that s/he is reading a translation. Is LC2 coherence so very important? How would coherence be defined?

There could be a translation which never allowed any set or interplay of codes or effects to *settle*. It would use the full range of effects available in modern literary English, coming at the reader in all sorts of ways, deliberately dramatizing the reader's situation and the temporal/cultural perspectives in play. Would there be many writers capable of this who would undertake to become translators, however, even with the increasing value attached to translation?

How Green's translation begins to become readable (the second problem) is because its style can be read as if it were manipulating several literary levels in order to complicate the reader's relation to the saga and its world. This brings up a third problem of readability, that of quality. Green's translation is not a clever, conscious literary manipulation. It is too hit-and-miss, uncoordinated, a pastiche. This matters, because the reader who finds Green's translation increasingly readable does so because s/he is remembering the coherent use of the various kinds of writing and levels of style which the translation seems to invoke. The reader then projects this coherence back on to Green's enterprise - and yet the end result is not fair either to the possibilities of complexity in translation, or to *Egils saga* either as a text which the reader is to have in both SL and TL or in TL alone.

There is a biographical (epitextual) part-explanation for this in Green's habitually non-ordinary relation to the English language, as seen in his own writing. He seems to live in several languages, as a sensitive, delighted reader, but likes them too much to be able to master any one of them, let alone their interrelationships, as a literary writer.

Some of the styles which apparently inhabit Green's translation can be mentioned briefly.

There is some influence from Dasent's saga translation, which could make it easier for a reader familiar with Dasent to take Green on trust. There is the partial-to-complete elucidatory translation of place names ('Odd dwelt under Lonehouse'. XXIX p. 52). There is a common stock of words between Dasent and Green (which is truer to say than that there is a familiar stock of words between Victorian standard English and Norse), such as 'busk', 'house-carles', and 'lading'. However, these usages cannot really be read as contributing to a translation stock between medieval Icelandic and English. They are comparatively rare, being against Green's own tendency as a translator to polish, which often means to naturalize if not latinize. For Green, a *goði* [chieftain(-priest)] is a 'priest'; a *hersir* [early Norwegian version of *goði*] is a 'lord' - Arinbjorn eventually becomes 'Lord Arinbjorn'; a *holdr* [hereditary statesman or landowner] is a 'yeoman'; a *lendr maðr* ['landed-man', sometimes a later equivalent to *hersir*] is a 'baron'. It is impossible to tell, here as elsewhere, whether these are Green's own correspondences, or lifted from explanatory approximations in the Cleasby-Vigfússon-Craigie dictionary.

It could be argued that the coexistence of two types of translation tendency within Green's text is useful, preventing the reader from mapping the saga world inappropriately on to some other. In practice, the effect is not very considered, and can be confusing, as if the translator had taken on a job which is exciting but too heavy and sometimes must be rushed through. For, at least as much as the complexity of SL or saga world, the translator at work is what is imagined or glimpsed by the reader who finds that translation styles fail to overlap. The failed overlapping (lack of patterning) of the various styles clots the narrative. The reader may

well pause to think about the translation situation, not (as Green might wish) about how ‘the story’ proceeds.

Eddison (1930) blames Green for not sticking more closely to SL word order and not using cognate forms. This is true of Green’s general tendency, as mentioned above. However, it is also true that there are places where Green does something like what Eddison blames him for not doing. Sometimes Green even overcompensates with a saxonism - for example, ‘fain were folk to see him’ (LXXIX, p. 168); ‘Vrðu menn honum fegner.’ [People welcomed him] (FJ, LXXVI, p. 280).

A third style which may familiarize Green to some readers, and make him more readable, is a kind of high style to be found in what could be called children’s books for adults, such as Kipling’s *Jungle Book* or T.H. White’s *The Once and Future King*. For any reader who ever has enjoyed this kind of writing, it quickly can become easy to hear Kveld-Úlfr command, “‘Briefly ye may say when ye meet your king [...]” (III, p. 4): “‘Er yðr þat skjótaz at segja, þá er þeir hittið konung yðuarn, [...]” [‘That is quickest for you to say, when you meet your king’] (FJ, III, p. 9).

However, the new and, for Green, unforeseeable set of associations this may bring about in the reader’s understanding of character and genre may not even work in their own right. T.H. White (for example) makes his characters use the high style when they want to assert the value of a vanishing code in an increasingly chaotic world, and this style is in variation with others which are plainer (more contemporary), more ‘natural’ or more cynical. Green loses by contrast with this model. He uses the high style chaotically, sometimes as if to get over an embarrassment with the text which he has chosen to translate. There is the episode where Egill pushes his host Ármóðr up against a pillar and vomits in his face so that Ármóðr vomits in return once he gets his breath back. Egill then speaks two verses (one about his

satisfactory spewing, one about his hard drinking) while going on drinking more or less unaccompanied in a rather less cheerful hall (Green's chapter LXXIV, more often chapter LXXII). Green censors this severely. We get no more of the story than that Egil spits in Armod's face then goes back to drink, while Armod, a little over-sensitively, runs out. Nor does Green let this be an occasion for verse. Beside the censorship, there is an embarrassment in the deployment of style. The TL's lively, contemporary expressions, such as 'to drink bumpers' (p. 158); 'druckinn einmenningr' [drunk one man to one horn] (FJ, p. 262), quickly die out. Ordinary verbs such as 'told' give way to 'bade', 'sat' to 'sate', from page 158 to page 159 and the end of the chapter. High style is drawn like a cloak over the text. Green often uses it as if it were the only means for his characters to live up to themselves. This is very much the anxiety not only of someone working imperfectly from SL to TL, but of the amateur who feels proprietorial, responsible for the ST and having full power over it, knowing that not much has yet been done to translate the SL literature which is his enthusiasm.

Perhaps the idea of *working imperfectly* between SL and TL may be considered questionable, closed-minded or censorious, given that there are theories of *creative mistranslation*.<sup>16</sup> I would agree that creative mistranslation can happen. However, I would want to signal the question of creative ability and its variability within and between the practice of individual writers. I would want to reassert the importance of the *contract of translation*, in the light of which Green's responsibility to be less creative and more correct (practical if not necessary alternatives) is greater as he provides the first (only) translation of the saga for English-language readers, i.e. for use by non-transitional and transitional readers alike, advertises it as 'An Icelandic Family History of the Ninth and Tenth Centuries' (cover and title

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<sup>16</sup> Webb 1976.

page), and lists his own affiliation to King's College Cambridge on the title page. This presentation of the TL text implies that the author is adequate to the SL sources.

A brief mention of some errors in Green's translation will show that this is not so, and why the idea of 'creative mistranslation' is not applicable in most cases here.

Two Norwegian districts have their names rationalized and generalized to 'firths and fells' (IV, p. 11), which makes King Haraldr more of a conqueror perhaps, but detracts from the substance and boundedness of his victories and kingship. In IX, p. 14, the three ranks of crew who are rewarded for their conduct in battle are translated as being rewarded *by promotion to* the ranks they already have. At the end of chapter IX, 'Epter þat skildu þeir þessa ræðu' [After that they closed this conversation] (FJ p. 30) becomes 'After that they left talking together'.

Such careless ambiguity changes the breaking-off of a consultation into a picture of the speakers sauntering away, deep in conversation. The Hildiríðarsynir, excusing themselves for getting poor tribute from the Finns (Lapps) by claiming that Þórólfr Kveldúlfsson obstructed them, say 'ok kómu vér firi þá sok skamt frá bygðum á fjallit' (FJ, p. 50) [and that was why we only got a short way from the settlements onto the mountain]. This becomes 'therefore we quickly left the settled districts, and went on the fell' (Green, p. 28). This is a different kind of excuse, which shows them wandering around, pathetically unwelcome and unhoused, rather than trying to get somewhere and finding their mission frustrated. The TT slander becomes less clever, appealing to the king's sentimentality, not his keenness.

There are some mistranslations which result in nonsense: 'He held oversight in Hordaland and the Firths.' (XXXVII, p. 65); 'Hann hafði ifersókn á Haurðaland ok vm Fjorðu.' [He had the government of, etc.] (FJ, XXXVII, p. 116), where the calque is not even etymologically appropriate, and 'supervision' would have been a better, if equally unetymological, version of the same technique.

There are too many occasions to cite extensively, where unease with the SL is evidenced - three should suffice. Chapter XL, ‘Helgi var faðer Brynjólfs fauður þeira Serks ór Sogni ok Sveins’ [Helgi was the father of Brynjólfr father of Serkr from Sogn and Sveinn] (FJ, p. 128) has a new character added and a district removed: ‘Helgi was father of Brynjolf, father of Serk, Sogn, and Svein.’ (Green, p. 71). ‘Bjórskinn’ [beaverskin] is mistranslated consistently as ‘bearskin’, giving a different picture of the strenuousness of the hunting. ‘Tryggva’ is left in its inflected form, not changed to ‘Tryggvi’ (Green, LXXIX, p. 168; FJ, LXXVI, p. 279).

There is a sub-class of mistranslation in *The Story of Egil Skallagrimsson* where what appears in the TT has the opposite meaning to the ST(s). In Chapter XXIII, ‘þá rufu þeir safnaðinn’ (FJ, p. 69) [then they broke-up the gathered-forces] becomes ‘then they called a gathering’ (Green, p. 39). This translation is out of sympathy with the energy of the narrative at this moment. It is the force of fission, not fusion, which drives Hœngr’s undertaking to avenge Þórólfr in so far as possible. Similarly, in Chapter LVII, when the fishing village which Egill uses as a hideout is described: ‘þat er komið af þjóðleið’ (FJ, p. 199) [That is off the usual course], Green’s TT reads ‘[i]t is on the high road of the seas’. This makes no sense for a hideout, especially as Egill (as he himself notes later, in Jórvík) is not easily misrecognized. The earlier days of Hákon the Great become the later days (Green, XC, p. 196; FJ, LXXXV, p. 318), in a misunderstanding of ‘aundurðum’, which is certainly a ‘creative’ mistranslation in its resiting of the narrative in imagined history!

These are a very few examples of representative types of mistranslation. Nothing interesting results from them. Often the translator of the saga fails to make his text comprehensible.

This may explain Fell’s decision that the earlier translations were unreadable. Green is more amiable an author/translator than the dogmatic Eddison. His hotchpotch of styles makes

the reader fleetingly comfortable, as if having a chance conversation with a stranger who looks a little like many people one has known, though ultimately baffling. However, Green lacks Fell's ability, which she may (rightly) have felt to be a prerequisite for the rôle of translator, sufficiently to imagine the saga world.

Very often there are instances, not of pure nonsense or linguistic inaccuracy, but of failure of imagination, which reflect on translator as reader no less than on translator as writer. When, for example, in chapter XIX, Green translates the description of a ship's course as running 'but at times through channels between hill-slopes' (p. 31), this is scarcely intelligible, and could be taken to mean the opposite of how the course is set, 'en stundum suá, at sjórr var í miðjum hlíðum' (FJ, p. 55) [and sometimes so, that [the] sea was in mid-slopes]. The hills are half hidden by distance and the slope of the horizon, the point being that the ship is far out to sea, but Green has inexactly imagined what the ST may mean, apparently envisioning something like a veering between small high islands. Again, when Olvir and Eyvindr see to the *bú* [estate] for the newly widowed Sigríðr (Chapter XXII), they organize the 'house' (Green, p. 38). The context is too diffuse for the strength of an idiom like *putting the house into order* to be recalled.

It seems that Green omits details which he finds uninteresting because he has insufficiently imagined the saga world. However, such details are crucial to the careful scene-setting which is part of the technique of a family saga (SL or TL), such as the detail in Chapter XLV that it will only be possible to count Þórólfr Skallagrímsson's men when they are all at the shore again, which introduces double focus and the factor of time to Egill's absence. One such omission occurs in Chapter XLVIII. Green translates that Aki and Thorolf (p. 86) pledge friendship and part as friends, overspecifying the general 'þeir'. It would make more sense to see it as an agreement between groups, if not between both of Skallagrím's sons and Áki, not

least because Áki's messengers go to Egill's ship later, not to Þórólfr's, to issue their helpful warning. Green also omits preliminary, scene-setting sentences, concentrating instead on action, presumably for the sake of the 'story'. This can be seen in chapter XXII, p. 36, where Green erases Olvir's rôle as messenger, thereby presenting a direct speech relation between Þórólfr and King Haraldr. It is as if Green had an ideal of 'story' which was not compatible with the workings of saga narrative but entirely compatible with his enthusiasm for the idea of 'saga narrative'.

Certain features of Green's translation resemble some of the later translations. His tendency to summarize in translating, and his rearrangement of narrative structure so that final events or their conclusive description are switched to initial position, are like the Penguin translation policy. His wish to tell the story is akin to Gwyn Jones's approach. Sometimes his translation is word for word almost the same as Fell's and Pálsson/Edwards's - as in chapter V, 'The king let the matter rest.' (Green, p. 7); 'The king then let the matter rest.' (Fell, p. 6); 'and there the king let the matter rest.' (Pálsson/Edwards, p. 28). This near approximation of local phrases or sentences perhaps does not count for much in itself, unless or until it is seen as exemplary of Green's uneasy multiplicity of styles, in which many of the later, professional, differentiated translations can recognize some features more developed in themselves.

It is also true that some of the difficulties which a modern reader may experience with Green's translation arise merely from the passage of time. There are four main effects here.

First, the translation situation as then construed allowed the translator to work within certain boundaries of unreality, or with a greater exploitation of literary possibilities, than now is normal. Nowadays, critical awareness of the relationships of original audience / translator as reader / reader as reader of a translation, and corresponding relationships between SL and TL texts and cultures, seems to dishearten translators from experimenting with different levels of

perception or engagement. They simplify the reader's textual access to some version of 'the saga', while using the peritext to suggest and discuss complexity.

Second, Green's imagined audience seems to have comprised élite, eager, probably multilingual amateurs like himself. Nowadays, the reader may be used to receiving all his/ her literature (translated or not) in the TL, or may be a student working to a university schedule and in the process of TL to SL transition.

Third, temporal and cultural (class) remoteness, besides the change of English over time, can make Green sound more dated than he was. His ordinary language, like the commonplace use of the subjunctive, 'in case the harness need mending' (Green, LXXVIII, p. 164) ('ef at reiða þarf at gera', FJ, LXXV, p. 273), has become non-ordinary. This is an important point about literary translation in general.

Last, the perishability of language implies that where Green's translation is lively or innovative, this may not register.

Sometimes this liveliness is straight overtranslation for the sake of the story (cf. some of Jones's translation choices), as when 'kanna land' [to explore the country] becomes 'to spy out the land' (Chapter XXVIII). Like Fell, Green can pay a poetic attention to the relation of sounds between SL and TL, so that, in Chapter I, 'vinsæll' [popular] (FJ, p. 5) becomes 'winning the hearts of all men' (Green, p. 2). Some of his poeticisms and inversions can be overly precious: 'er áðr hófðu þeir gera látið þrjá vetr' [which they had had made over three winters] (FJ, p. 7) becomes, in brackets, '(they were three winters at the making)' (Green, p. 3). Still, his word compounds can be felicitous: Chapter XXX, 'surf-worn boulder' (Green, p. 54) for 'brimsorfit grjót' (FJ, p. 97). In Chapter XXXVII, the archaic-sounding 'lay' can be read as an indication of (Green's awareness of) a theory of poetic composition from fragments complete in themselves into a more complex whole, when 'suá sem seger í kuæðum hans' [as it

says in his poems, i.e. about him] (FJ, p. 117) becomes 'as is told in the lays about him' (Green, p. 63).

Green's normally ornate language allows him to translate 'gersemi þá' [that treasure] (FJ, LXXXVIII, p. 291) as 'that costly work' (Green, LXXXIII, p. 179), in the episode where Einarr leaves a valuable shield for Egill, who, before being told that Einarr is too far away, briefly considers following Einarr and killing him so he will not have to commemorate the gift in verse. There is productive ambiguity here. 'Work' could apply equally to shield and poem, and shows the convertibility of object into gift and gratitude into verse - ultimately object into verse, two would-be lasting works held together by effort.

Green's use of both simple and ornate language within one TT produces patches of excellent translation. In Green's Chapter LXXXIV, Egill's son Þorsteinn, with his mother Ásgerðr's connivance, secretly helps himself to the precious robe which was given to Egill by his friend Arinbjörn. Þorsteinn wears it to the Alþing, brings it back muddy and dragged at the hem because it is too long for him, and puts it away again quietly. Green translates: 'Long after, when Egil opened his chest, he found that the robe was spoiled, and questioned Ásgerðr how that had come about.' (pp. 180-181); 'en mjög miklu síðarr, þá er Egill lauk vpp kistu sína, þá fann hann, at spillt var slæðunum, ok leitaðe þá máls vm við Ásgerði, huerju þat gegndi.' [and much later, when Egill unlocked his chest, then he found, that the robe was ruined, and enquired of Ásgerðr, how that happened.] (FJ, LXXIX, p. 293). Green's use of 'spoil' as a cognate to *spilla* retains a closer association with the SL verb. SL and TL texts appear more closely co-dependent. For readers in transition between SL and TL, the cognate looks thematically appropriate in the wider context of SL literature, where *spilla* can denote the abuse of familial bonds.<sup>17</sup> It also works in the TL cultural context, where 'spoilt' can describe an overindulged

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Voluspá*, 'sifjum spilla' [break kinship bonds], Nordal 1952, stz. 35 (45), p. 164.

child, as well as things which have deteriorated, the former perhaps being a fair description of the relation between Egill's son and Egill's wife, in contrast with the lack of affection between Egill and his son and what this must mean - the effect it must have over time (though this is never narrated) for the relation between Egill and Ásgerðr.

Although Green's translation is eccentric in some ways, it is not, strictly speaking, remote in all ways. Green could and did make fluent use of the habits and manners of his time and class of reader and writer. Eventually, the colloquialisms of the Penguin translation may come to seem equally remote. If read in the context of its period, and not judged by anachronistic standards, Green's translation even gains, in historical interest. A comparison could be with Penguin's occasional use of contemporary 'upper class' English English variants for Skalla-Grímr and Egill, which suits their status as descendants of a self-exiled aristocrat.

When the boy Grímr threatens to injure ('meiða', FJ p. 123) the young Egill at the games in Chapter XL, Green has him threaten to 'thrash' him (Green, p. 69). The language of emotional interaction between the saga characters and its relation to time could be from a novel contemporary with Green himself, when he translates: 'And when Thorstein Egil's son came to dwell at Borg, there was at once a coolness between him and Steinar.' (Green, LXXXV, p. 182); 'Ok er Þorsteinn Egilsson bjó at Borg, þá gerðiz þegar fátt vm með þeim Steinari.' [And when Þorsteinn Egilsson lived in Borg, then a coolness at once arose between him and Steinarr] (FJ, LXXX, p. 295). A Penguin-style translator working now might produce a colloquial translation like 'they did not really get on'. The language of Green's characters is not always archaized into a pastiche high style. Sometimes they speak as Green's contemporaries and acquaintance must have done, so, Steinarr to Þrándr: "'I make a great point of their being well kept at pasture'" (Green, LXXXV, p. 183); "'Þiki mér þat miklu skipta, at þeim sé vel til haga halldit.'" ['It seems to me to matter a lot, that they should be well kept in pasture'] (FJ, LXXX,

p. 297) - though when Steinarr hands over the axe with which he hopes Þrándr will murder Þorsteinn, both characters revert to `deem` and `methinks`, with a scatter of extra prepositions and inversions, a shift of level not in the ST, but perhaps intended to take the reader through their change from supposedly being normal everyday characters to their apparently being saga-like and violent within the story.

Green's enthusiasm for boating, narrated in his memoirs, carries over into his saga translation, quite differently from Fell's informed precision about what boats and ships were like to use *then*. In Chapter XLI, where Þórólfr orders his ship 'vpp setja ok vm búa' [brought ashore and seen to] (FJ, p. 129), Green renders this as 'drawn up and made snug' (p. 72). In Green's Chapter LX (FJ LVII), 'hallaði honum suá' [it leant so] (p. 207) becomes 'which so heeled over' (p. 121). In Green's Chapter LXXXI (FJ, LXXVIII), pp. 169-170, where Egill's son Boðvarr dies by drowning, Green translates the episode into the typical narrative oddity of good contemporary sea language embedded in archaizing high language.

There is what could be termed a 'Victorianism' in Green's translation of the saga world. The Victorianism I refer to is cultural and aesthetic rather than specifically linguistic. It consists in Green's assimilation of the saga world to ideas and values current in his own milieu. This assimilation is sometimes traceable in language. For example, Green has Egill, as a wandering poet of another time, repeatedly describe himself in his verse as a 'minstrel'. Similarly there is Green's unselfconscious Christianization of the language of sentiment (loss, grief, gratitude, friendship) in the translation of the verse. Green is not concerned (as a twentieth-century translator might be) with 'otherness' but with common, i.e. Christian humanity.

The Victorianism/assimilativeness of Green's translation is traceable sometimes not so much in language as in the selectivity of translation policy. This can be seen in the

squeamishness with which Green cuts both the excesses of vomiting from Egill's encounter with Ármóðr and the deliberation with which Egill gouges out Ármóðr's eye, and in his suppressing of the references to male genitalia and impotence in his chapter XC (FJ, LXXXV), where Egill complains in verse about his ageing. This is not a personal, blameworthy squeamishness, but consistent with contemporary translation policy. A similar embarrassment, presumably about the relative importance and acceptability of honour, glory and violence, means and ends, registers in considerable alterations made to the episode where King Haraldr sets fire to the house with Þórólfr Kveld-Úlfsson in it.

Such 'Victorianism' also inflects the treatment of women in the TT. In chapter VII, when old Björgólfr unwisely fixes his attention on the pretty, young, socially inferior Hildiríðr, the attraction - 'Leiz honum mærin fōgr' (FJ, p. 18) [To-him the girl looked lovely] - is translated as less lustful, sweeter and more coy: 'and the fair maiden charmed the old man.' (Green, p. 9). There is, too, a remarkable ambiguity in 'charmed', which leaves the responsibility with the female and her loveliness, whereas any ambiguity in the ST is in the looker's readiness to be seduced. In chapter XL, when the momentarily crazed Skalla-Grímr kills the young Egill's fostermother, Egill avenges her, killing in the hall his father's favourite and chief man on the estate. Green undertranslates Skalla-Grímr's reaction - 'lét Skallagrímr sér fátt vm finnaz' (FJ, p. 124) [Skallagrímr showed he was displeased] becomes 'Skallagrim said little about it' (Green, p. 69). He omits the verse the young Egill then speaks (thus failing to make the initial link between the physical violence and its processing, or translation, into controlled linguistic form, which is characteristic of Egill throughout the saga), omitting therefore the circumstances in which the verse is spoken. What vanishes is Egill's mother Bera's open disagreement with her husband, her greater ruthlessness, and her siding with Egill, praising his viking potential. Egill encounters all three patterns of behaviour in other women in

the ST. What disappears too is the fact that Egill's verse, which is about the viking ship his mother promised that he would have one day, is addressed to a powerful or esteemed female listener. This is an omission not only of circumstance in the saga, but of an inbuilt feature of much skaldic verse. In chapter XLVIII, at a feast where the host's daughter is assigned to sit next to Egill for the evening and he flirts with her by exchanging verses, the girl is said to be 'ok þá vel frumuaxta' (FJ, p. 147) [and then in her prime, [i.e. nubile?]], which is translated as less dangerously sexy, and conventionally sweeter - 'then in the flower of youth' (Green, p. 85). Although the same SL verb is used for their speaking of verse, hers is devalued in the TT, changing the power relation of their exchange. 'Hon kuað' [She said/recited] (FJ, p. 147) becomes 'She said in verse' (Green, p. 85), whereas 'Hann kuað' [He said/recited] (FJ, p. 148) becomes 'He sang'. This makes the gender rôles more like what they 'ought' to be in Green's Victorian heroic story than like what they are in the SL saga. Given this cultural gendering of Green's translation, it is possible to see his translation of 'Dóttir bónda var á gólfinu, .x. vetra eða .xí.' [*Ketilsbók* 'gekk' for 'var'] [The farmer's daughter was on the floor, ten or eleven years old] (FJ, LXXI, p. 261) into 'The master's daughter, ten or eleven years old, was *running about* the hall-floor' [My emphasis] (Green, LXXIV, p. 158) as belonging to a world where the division between freely moving, playful, pre-pubescent children and sweetly seductive but more placid well-grown girls has to be sharply marked. The ST's own tendency to group females separately from the males, and after them, in genealogies, receives from Green an appropriate overtranslation. In Green's Chapter LXXXIV, pp. 181-182 (FJ, LXXIX, p. 294-295), the line descended from Þorsteinn Egilsson starts with Helga the Fair and her rôle in *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*, then lists eight sons, finishing with 'Þóra hét dóttir þeira' [Their daughter was called Thora]. This must be because Helga is a famous character in her own right and more properly belongs in another saga. Thora, in the usual daughter's place, seems even more tacked-

on, and Green underlines this with a definite article and distancing adjective: ‘The other daughter was Thora’.

Green is generally less scrupulous with the translation of genealogies. He seems to take them as accretions to the saga, primitive roughnesses to be smoothed out, or impediments to the story. He leaves much of them out. There could be another reason why he omits them: the anxious, partisan desire to present ‘his’ saga in its *uniqueness*. This desire is present in the very first page of his Introduction, in a challenging, protective comparison with the popular fame and happy translation of *Njáls saga*. Paradoxically, this desire may well be one of the reasons behind the translation style’s opportunistic, uneasy employment of varying literary or linguistic means for local effects within in the TT, and consequently the lack of coherence and vision of the translated text as a whole. To say why, or how, Green’s personal relation to the SL and ST results in a disappointing translation, even beyond its unavoidable datedness, while also saying that a different translator with a more professionalized but still personal relation to the SL and ST could produce a true creative reworking, is outside the remit of this discussion. However, it remains that Green’s translation *is* readable, but, read as an independent text or as one in a co-dependent cluster of SL and TL texts, it lacks coherence.

#### Gwyn Jones’s translation (1960)

Jones’s is the first professional translation of *Egils saga* into English, in that he is a practising academic with formal training in Icelandic studies. However, in many ways it is as personal as W.C. Green’s 1893 work, for example in the self-declared emotional engagement with source text and culture. Jones’s involvement with his translation appears from the interplay of peritext and main text. The endnotes are not always academically informative. They include an effusion about Arinbjörn’s nobleness that, in passing, faults Egill for being

‘childish’ (note 22 to chapter 78, p. 253); a tiny travel essay on the view from Borg in modern Iceland (note 1 to chapter 80, p. 255): and anecdotes such as the following:

At Kalmanstunga, near the eastern or inland extremity of Hvítarsíða, in July 1952, the translator who had expressed some doubt whether the brows could be moved in such sensational fashion received from a descendant of Egil a convincing demonstration that they can.  
(Note 1 to chapter 55, p. 247)

What does it mean for the saga that this strong sense of the translator-as-author extends into translation policy or translating ‘style’?

A basic difficulty of the SL saga’s style of dialogue and narrative prose, for a writer like Jones, whose concern is with the lively saga world and whose style is expansive, is its laconicism. It does not explicitly delineate the attitudes in play. They are understood to be in place. The tone of speech is left unspecified. Indeed, *segja*, *svara* and *spyrja* [to say, to answer, to ask/learn] all can be represented by a manuscript *s*. The reader has to interpret the tone and impact of speech in his/her inner ear. The narrative’s concern is with how things are manoeuvred, not their particularities. People of various social significance travelling at a range of paces all are merely said to *fara* [go]. An expensive shield is ruined in a dairy vat, but the description does not judge the carelessness of the act, or say what the vat looked like, or what the damage exactly was.

In the SL saga, this high level of abstraction makes for a correspondingly high level of intensity. Even where, in terms of plot summary, a passage may strike the modern reader as slow or involuted, everything happens much more quickly than in prose concerned with realism through simulation. The reader’s mind is whetted by the stubborn blanks of the text, which invite the exercise of imagination. The reader has to focus on the possible significance and feel of what the narrative relates, not on building up a series of pictures. The stereotypical

characterization of the SL saga style as external or objective does not go far enough. It does not say how this externality, or what I would call lack of particularization, can provoke the reader to internalize what is narrated. The style rewards active attention.

The above description is somewhat general. It is intended to project backwards a sense of the ST, so that the examples which I shall give of the type of intervention which characterizes Jones's translating and the type of literature which is his TT will have a context. The SL saga's 'style' is the expression of the saga, not expressive of it. Paradoxically, changing that style creates an entirely different TT 'saga world' from the world for which Jones's endnotes show a loving fascination.

Compared to his ST (*Egils saga*), Jones's translation (*Egil's saga*)<sup>18</sup> uses far more concrete images, which naturally concretize the TL 'saga world'. Many of these are variants of clichés. Perhaps these may be taken to familiarize the reader to the strangeness of the named characters and their doings. Perhaps they work like oral tags, markers of storytelling, another inflection of narrative control than the 'sem fyrr var ritat' [as previously was written] and 'ekki er getit' [it is not mentioned] of the ST. The language itself in Jones, independent of the narrative, allows the reader to relax into an experience of liveliness. This is the opposite of the demands made by the ST.

Clichés can have a transformative effect. When Olvir 'gerði sér um títt' [courted her] (ÍF II, p. 6), he 'fell head over heels in love with her' (Jones 2, p. 32). When Kveld-Úlfr is 'hryggr' [grieved] (XIV, p. 60), he is 'heavy-hearted' (14, p. 70). These characters in translation have updated, culturally translated relations to their emotions and to their bodies in language. They exist in timeworn language, less as if they are or ought to be well-known characters in the TL tradition, more as if they are predictable, or perhaps most of all as if *Egil's*

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<sup>18</sup> Chapter references to Jones will be in Arabic numerals, to ÍF, in Roman.

*saga* should be read as if it were written not as a literary artifact, but to give the impression of being told by a fly-on-the-wall witness who enlivens events with stock phrases so easily to hand that the reader/hearer immediately knows how struck the witness must have been by what happened. This is a different matter from working towards (the appearance of) manipulating the reader into a direct response, or, as I would say the SL texts more often do, managing to make the reader work for something felt to be memorable and consequential *in the narrative* (a structural tense of ‘it will have been like this, I think’), not significant *to the knowledge of the narrator* (‘according to him, it must have been like that’). Jones’s TT sometimes adds phrases, as if the bare SL style needed realization like a figured bass.

Through what I have called particularization, the tone can become reminiscent of folktale or fable. The advice, ‘ “[...] You can then see to it that he does not puff himself up too big” (12, 49), unlike ““megu þér þá sjá yfir, at hann gerisk eigi of stórr” [‘then you can watch out, that he does not make himself too grand’] (XII, 32), although a translation of fairly abstract dialogue, is not the colloquial idiom of literal or foreignizing or appropriated speech. It does not imitate an idiom from another language/culture, so it does not have the purpose of reminding the reader that the TT, though in English, ‘is’ also foreign. It is a literary idiom, invented to sound colourful and colloquial, by a translator who entertainingly draws on as many languages and as much reading as he has at his disposal. Jones has a self-conscious, trained equivalent to Green’s amateur and élite shifting levels of style.

Jones’s peritext insists on the geographical continuity between old and modern Iceland, his acquaintance with it, and the specialness of the ‘saga world’. However, this is not a straightforward clue to his translation policy, which has no consistent way either of registering the saga’s ‘otherness’ or of normalizing it for reception into English literature. The peritext is a

compensatory addition to a TT which is normal only to an individualized, Comparative Literature world.

If the ST sometimes reads like a history, the TT can read like sensational journalism. When Haraldr seizes Kveld-Úlfr's and Skalla-Grímr's property in Norway, ST 'lagði eigu sína á' ['brought into his possession'] (XXX, p. 77) generates 'drew into his clutches' (30, p. 83). This is only one of several levels of language in Jones's saga. These levels will be discussed after the effects of particularization.

Where the method of particularization calls attention to itself, the reader can be distracted into questioning the factuality, or authenticity, or probability, or simply the intended detail and plain meaning, of what seems to be conveyed. In chapter 50/L, the ceremony which allows the pagan Norsemen to associate with the Christian Anglo-Saxons in Aðalsteinn's army is described: 'þeir menn, er prímsignaðir váru, hófdu allt samneyti við kristna menn ok svá heiðna.' [those people, who were 'primesigned', could mix equally with Christians and heathens] (ÍF, p. 128). The TT asserts, 'those who were primesigned held *full communion* with Christians and heathens too.' [My italics] (Jones, p. 120). Really?

There are other ways in which TT particularizations can be distracting. Thórólf is 'a free-handed man and one to be reckoned with' (Jones 9, p. 45), whereas Þórólfr is 'Orr maðr ok stórmenni mikít' [generous person and very great] (ÍF IX, p. 26). 'Free-handed' is a limited, obsolescent idiom. It could be taken to mean 'quick to violence', along the lines of *quick-witted* and *sharp-tongued*, rather than synonymous with *open-handed*, which would be a more usual phrase. Eyvindr and Olvir, after Þórólfr's death, are 'hljóðir' [quiet] (XXII, p. 55), but in Jones they are 'close mouthed' (22, p. 67), which is suggestive of secrecy, whereas *tight-lipped* might better have conveyed their outrage and constraint. In chapter 40/XL, Egill's fostermother, Þorgerðr brák (killed by Skalla-Grímr in his shapechanger's rage), is, in the ST, 'fjólunnig

mjOk' [very much a sorcerer] (ÍF, p. 101). In the TT, she is 'up to her eyes in magic' (Jones, p. 100). Why this transformative, particularizing expression? Is it because she is going to drown? Is it because of the power of the gaze attributed, in medieval Icelandic literature, to people of uncanny nature and skills? Is it just that there is a lot of magic around, in the household at Borg? In any case, it is a missed idiom. Its meaning is unclear, and could well be (mis)interpreted as Þorgerðr's not being able to cope with lots of magic, as though it mounted up like housework.

The fractured idioms can invite a reader who moves between ST and TT to overwrite what already looks written up, and mentally start producing his/her own translation to 'correct' the TT ('if this, why not that?'). When Skalla-Grímr makes his two-stage getaway from Haraldr's court, 'sem skjótast' [as fast as possible] and 'sem skyndiligast' [as fast as possible] (XXV, p. 64), he gets away 'as hard' (25, p. 73) and 'as fast' (25, p. 74) as he can. People are not usually described as getting away as *hard* as possible. More obvious would be 'fast' and (with a sound-echo) 'quickly'. The reader only with access to the TT meets a particularized text. The reader between ST and TT may find the TT's policy arbitrary, and begin to rewrite it, distracted by the translation itself towards the unreconstructible process of its being translated. If the translation does not mean to encourage this activity, but wishes to be accepted as a story, it has failed on its own terms, although the re-reading it encourages has its own good points. When King Haraldr condemns the nature of Kveld-Úlfr's family, in Jones's saga he makes a rather grand pronouncement which tails off into colloquialism with 'and care not a rap with whom they contend' (36, p. 94). This lapse in style, corresponding to nothing linguistic in the ST, could be ascribed to the character, a mark of his bafflement. The reader between SL and TL may wonder if the sound of 'hirða' [to mind/care (for)] (XXXVI, p. 92) reminded the translator at some level of *hurð* [door], throwing up by association an expression with the word 'rap'.

The interaction of several levels of language in *Egil's saga* is variously effective. Clashes between these levels can be interesting to analyze. However, I would suggest that where narrative coherence falters, the reader's attention may not turn to the translation as process or as the inscription of a complex, problematic relationship between languages/cultures/texts. Instead, the reader (who is not reading for translation analysis) may be disappointed by what s/he sees as 'translationese'. This may happen even if the reader believes that s/he ought to consider translations as a qualitatively different category of literature, to be judged or enjoyed by separate standards.

There are countless examples of such clashes in Jones. This in part is because his translation is like a compendium of what it is possible to do when translating *Egils saga*. When Jones's Queen Gunnhildr commands her brothers to see whom they can kill among Þórólfr Skallagrímsson's and Egill's company (ideally Þórólfr and Egill), she is given archaic, formal language: "I want you so to contrive in this press of men [...]" (49, p. 117).<sup>19</sup> Shortly after, also on p. 117, in good, normal, modern British speech, Þórir tells Arinbjörn: "I am off now to the sacrifice".<sup>20</sup> Here, one seems to find a translation policy of allotting different translation registers to different types of character as occasion demands. The variation of style in characters' speech matches the speakers' rôles and situation, but this changes moment by moment. Characterization through speech subserves the drama of the narrative, and is not consistent in everything the characters say. Its effects are local, and varied. This would explain why the TT Þórir, who is momentarily living closer to 'us' in his social phrases and implied value system, deprecates Egill's 'madheadedness' (p. 118), where the ST Þórir is concerned about Egill's 'kappsemð' [competitiveness, ebullience] (p. 124).

<sup>19</sup> "Þat vil ek, at þit hagið svá til í fjölmenni þessu [...]" XLIX, p. 124.

<sup>20</sup> "Nú mun ek, [...] fara til blótsins," XLIX, p. 124.

It is as if the lively TT tries to make up in persuasiveness (charm) what it deliberately loses in authenticity (conviction). The effect of such different levels of dialogue being deployed in close succession is as if the characters were in fancy dress. There is little to recognize them by. They all speak with Jones's virtuosic shifts of archaism, slang, folktale language, and so forth. This extends to the narrative voice. Two examples should demonstrate the problem of shifts and clashes. Jones's characters put on their 'over-mantles' (7, p. 39) in their host's 'living-room'<sup>21</sup>. Where the ST tries to project itself into the believable, historical future with the reckoning of Þorsteinn Egilsson's *ætt*, the TT turns this backwards into a fictionalized assurance conveyed by a literary blend of the Latinate and the unspecifically regional: 'Frá Þorsteini er mikil ætt komin ok mart stórmenni ok skáld mOrg,' [From Þorsteinn a great family-line has come and many important people and many poets] (LXXVII, p. 299). 'From Thorstein has come a great progeny, a power of fine men, and many a poet.'

Theoretically interesting translation policy can make a baffling TT. Consider an instance which could be taken as exemplary compensatory translation. In chapter 84/LXXXIV, 'Þorsteinn var maðr órefjusamr' [Þorsteinn was not a trickster] (ÍF, p. 293) is transformed into the TT 'Thorstein was no fox of a man' (Jones, p. 236). This image is reminiscent of Skalla-Grímr's verse about Eiríkr's gift of a showy, flimsy axe; Skalla-Grímr finds 'fox' [deceit] in it (XXXVIII, p. 96, stz. 6, l. 3). The TT allows the imagery of a verse, 'lost' in translation, to reappear further on as a literary influence in the prose.<sup>22</sup> It also educates the reader: some medieval Icelandic proverbial associations are shared. However, the TL resuscitation of a dead SL metaphor (*ó-refju-samr*, unfoxsome) also, momentarily, surreally, transforms Þorsteinn into the cancelled likeness of a fox. The narrative verges on what it seeks to avert but often plays

<sup>21</sup> 'yfirhafnir'; 'í stufu' (VII, p. 16).

<sup>22</sup> The literary influence of the verse on the prose (rather than the genetic relationship) is an important aspect of *Egils saga*, as will be discussed in the final chapter of this thesis.

with: what Tolkien termed 'Beast fable'.<sup>23</sup> In so far as Jones's TT wants to be a good story, it does not always meet its own terms.

There are instances of 'translationese', such as 'She was walking about the floor, diverting herself.' (58, p. 115)<sup>24</sup> which sounds more like an imitative translation from a modern Romance language. Is Jones's translation postmodern avant la lettre, his sweeping story deliberately cutting the verbal ground from under its own feet in order to shock the reader now and then into a total realization that this is, after all, an alien literature in translation? There is no satisfactory answer. Such speculations verge on the sophisticated, while seeing the translation as eager but uneven crosses into the judgmental.

Jones's translation seems to try to pep up the ST, as if the essential saga (however that is determined) were so exciting that its narrative voice cannot do itself justice in the TL. Fortunately, this means that he relishes some passages from which other translators shy away. When Egill gouges out Ármóðr's eye, 'síðan krækði hann fingrinum í augat, svá at úti lá á kinninni' [then he crooked his finger into his eye, so that it lay out on the cheek] (LXXII, p. 228), Jones physicalizes the action even more, 'Next he crooked his finger into his eye, so that it *spilled out* on to the cheek.' [My italics] (72, p. 191). A comparison between TT and ST is analogous to comparing a radio play, with its hinting, exaggerated voices and audible, longdrawn breaths, to a theatre performance, where even without speech the actors' bodies are in their movement and positioning eloquent.

Often Jones's words run away with themselves. The narrative voice sounds jocular or patronizing. The events being narrated are made to sound primitively entertaining. The narrative voice may sound possessive of the story and personally invested in its telling. One instance, singled out by Lee Hollander in his review of Jones's translation, occurs at the end of

<sup>23</sup> Tolkien 1975 [1964], pp. 68-69.

<sup>24</sup> 'hon gekk um gólf ok skemmti sér', LXVIII, p. 120.

chapter XXVI, where Hallvarðr and Sigtryggr are taking Guttormr's sons to King Haraldr. They are 'allkátir' (ÍF, p. 67) [Fell translates, p. 38, 'everyone in good spirits']. In Jones's TT, they all are 'as merry as crickets' (Jones, p. 76). This is a pseudo-traditional simile, typical of the cosiness of Jones's narrative voice. As a mode of heightening the tragic irony of their cheerfulness, the simile reads oddly, given the slaughter that is to follow. Jones's narrative voice, magician-like, shrinks the doomed characters into chattering insects unaware of their coming winter, an image again reminiscent of folktale or fable.

Similarly, when the ST King Haraldr is 'heldr ókátr' [rather cheerless] (XI, p. 29), the TT King is, childishly, 'rather sulky' (11, p. 47). From this translation, any of the King's more puzzling behaviour, such as his readiness to listen to rather incompetent slander, now risks seeming like mere emotional immaturity. Another King of Norway, Hákon Aðalsteinsfóstri, suffers a similar diminution into the emotionally childish or primitive: ST, 'Ok er konungr tók þessu máli svá þvert' [And when the king took this suit so badly] (LXVIII, p. 216); TT, 'When the king took this suit so crossly' (68, p. 181). This is not the result of an anti-royal, discriminatory translation policy, which denigrates Norwegian kings in order to buttress the dignity of the Icelandic republic – for Egill's own family receives the same treatment. When Jones's Egill hears of the ill success of his suit, he 'wore a great scowl' ('varð allófrýnn'). Christine Fell's Egill, by contrast, 'frowned heavily' (Fell, p. 127). When Skalla-Grímr leaves for Haraldr's court with his preternaturally strong, uncanny band of men, Jones leaves untranslated or unannotated the nickname 'Þurs' [ogre], transliterating 'Thurs'. He chooses to blur and expand 'Beigaldi var kolbítr' [Beigaldi was a coal-biter] into 'Beigaldi was a slugabed who had grown into a hero.' (XXV, p. 62; 25, p. 72). Why? Coal-biting is weirdly

dysfunctional<sup>25</sup>, memorable for the reader. It is on a behavioural continuum that stretches to the twisting of young poultry's necks in *Grettis saga*.<sup>26</sup> Here, as elsewhere, the vividness of the ST is let down by the liveliness of the TT. The 'slugabed' phrase has a rollicking, all-here-for-the-journey, self-depreciating swagger. This tone marks the characters as well as the narrative voice. When young Egill recites for Yngvarr, 'Yngvarr helt upp vísu þeiri' (XXXI, p. 82) [Yngvarr praised this verse], 'Yngvarr made a great to-do about this verse' (XXXI, p. 86). The narrative voice makes Yngvarr share in its patronizing, adult tone. There is comedy in the ST, but very unlike this TT lightness. The scene could have been given a mock-heroic grandeur, celebrating the young Egill's cleverness without losing perspective on his child-sized achievement.

Like Jones's narrative voice, where the extravagant use of language can give the impression that the plot is well-understood and comfortable, not spare and driven, Jones's King Eiríkr in York is made to speak as if he *knows better* than the occasion he participates in, when Egill recites a poem to ransom his head from the King. Instead of speaking deadpan or being genuinely impressed by Egill's high-pressure composition, Eiríkr seems to patronize *Höfuðlausn* for being a clever scam, mostly mere flourish: "The poem's *delivery*," he said "could not be bettered. [...]" (61, p. 165). Jones does something to justify Eiríkr's opinion by translating the last stanza as two pairs of couplets with masculine endings plus two pairs with feminine endings. The TT poem's conclusion is a rhythmic falling-away, as if Egill did not want to end on a marked cadence, had run out of steam or could not pretend any more. (There are feminine endings elsewhere in the ST poem, but the last stanza has none, and is strongly final). Even if the literary critic doubts the quality, age or authorship of the SL poem, the

<sup>25</sup> Jones also inadvertently removes some of the exact observation behind ST inherited superstition. The eating of coal, clay, wood etc. is a recognized modern disorder, 'pica', in emotionally disturbed children, and tends to be associated with anaemia, which could cause apparent laziness.

<sup>26</sup> *Grettis saga* (ÍF VII, 1936), chapter XIV, p. 37 (and stanza 8).

narrative situation needs to be taken seriously. Here, as generally throughout the SL saga, the uncertainty of motive behind the certainty of response is a characteristic pleasure. The ST reader is never quite sure of Eiríkr's feelings when he spares Egill's life after the performance. The SL account of Egill's success and Eiríkr's response seems plausible/historical, and the outcome feels fated/inevitable, yet it appeals to the reader's curiosity as to the reason for the events, and what else they may have signified apart from the way in which they are seen to transpire.

Jones's translation, in closing down these narrative possibilities and inventing a narrative voice with uneven, exuberant language, ignores the SL saga's structural and hence transferable properties, only doubtfully providing equivalent, compensatory or new pleasures. Jones's is the only translation where the narrative voice resembles the storyteller in the translator's other, authorial work. This is qualitatively a very significant change. In so far as the saga represents a text attempting to deal with an historical or inherited tradition, the imaginary narrator who belongs to the saga's narrative voice is the first person for whom his own narrative is being told. He is the nearest approximation we have to an implied audience, as well as the means through whom an audience is/was reached. By changing the narrator into a storyteller, Jones makes the saga another, and easier, and less compelling kind of literature. An example may be taken from Chapter X (10), when Þórólfr Kveldúlfsson's company successfully trades and raids in Finnmark, in exceptionally sparse and compressed SL narrative, 'ok kómu aprtr um várit við svá búit' [and they came back in spring without more ado] (ÍF, p. 28) - 'and with so much for their trouble made their way back in the spring' (Jones, p. 46). Something quite close to a chronicle in the ST is a complacent tale of difficulty vanquished in the TT.

Sometimes the conscious manipulation of levels of language works very well. In chapter 7, the various male/female sexual relationships, including marriage, are contractual and formal, and are put in business terms. Björgólfur's picking up with Hildiríður after offering her father money is a 'transaction' (p. 39) [‘ráðagorð’ [match], VII, p. 17]. Bárður 'set out his business and asked for Sigríð in marriage' (p. 40) [‘Bárður hefir upp orð sín ok bað Sigríðar’ [Bárður made his proposal and asked for Sigríður], VII, p. 40]. In chapter 9, when the level of language shifts away from the economic, the style has been so consistent that a new inflection is meaningfully possible. Hárekr's high claims for the implications of his mother Hildiríður's association with Brynjólfur touch on the fact that she was ‘mundi keypt’, ‘bought with dower’, but Þórólfur Kveld-Úlfsson terms her sons ‘frillusonu’ [concubine's sons], ‘base-gotten’ (ÍF, p. 26; Jones, p. 45). This archaic language supplants the business terms because class, shame, honour and (dis)possession are at stake.

W.C. Green, misunderstanding the SL, sometimes translated an opposite meaning to that of the ST. Jones, trained in the SL, nonetheless, through his elaborate TL style, sometimes produces a contrary inflection to some situation. This may be related to the desire to make the TT sound more positive. It may be related to the idea that negative constructions in the SL really work like positive constructions in the TL. In chapter 18/XVIII, King Haraldr orders his men not to attack Þorgils (who is in charge of Þórólfur Kveldúlfsson's ship and cargo) ‘ef þeir vilja ekki verja skipit’ (ÍF, p. 44) [if they do not want to defend the ship]. Jones's King orders no attack ‘unless they want to defend the ship.’ (Jones, p. 59). This is not a trifling transformation. The ST King's remark could well be a kind of indirect directive, like gangsterspeak, where he absolves himself of immediate responsibility by leaving his desire to be interpreted out of the negative, i.e. it could be paraphrased, ‘I'd prefer if there weren't any fighting - always a costly business - but I won't say anything to stop you using violence as you

need or want.’ The TT King sounds more as if he is envisaging a conflict, and wants to leave his warriors with the image of it. Similarly, in chapter 74/LXXIV, when Egill accuses Jarl Arnviðr of keeping King Hákon’s tribute and killing the King’s messengers, ‘Jarl segir, at þat var eigi satt’ (ÍF, p. 233) [The jarl says, that that was not true]. In Jones’s TT, ‘The earl denied that this was true’ (p. 194). These are two completely different takes on the matter. In the ST, there is no denial. Denial would have implied an engagement with the possibility of Egill’s suggestion. The Jarl simply refuses to consider it. It will be a matter of his word against Egill’s, if he has to testify before someone who, unlike the reader, has not witnessed the narrative events and will only have the Jarl’s and Egill’s equally positive, perfectly opposed speeches. In the TT, the Earl is responding to Egill. The weight of Egill’s accusation drives the sentence to a positive construction, but the Earl to a negative position. The TT clause ‘that this was true’ leaves the emotional conviction with Egill’s words as the image of truth, while the Earl’s paltry ‘denial’ has to stand against this as well as the narrative events lived through by Egill and the reader.

The tone of speech does not usually call attention to itself in the ST, which may be one reason that theatre metaphors have been used to discuss saga narrative: the switch from narrative voice to direct speech is usually signalled, and the speaker identified, but little else. Gwyn Jones’s *Egil’s saga* characters, however, ‘urge’, ‘agree’, ‘maintain’, and so forth. This, compared to the ST, can be exhausting for the reader. Each descriptive verb closes down the possibilities of how to hear what is said. The ST is structured to manoeuvre readers into predetermined blanks, where interpretations have to be made only to be reconsidered. In the TT, ‘ordered’, ‘confessed’, ‘assured’, ‘promised’ . . . provide a running interpretation that does not invite the reconsideration of what has passed, though the situation often calls for just such re-reading. However, Jones’s speech words can create a dramatic linguistic pattern in the TT

from a thematic pattern in the ST. This happens in chapter 5/V: the King's would-be persuasive messengers to Kveld-Úlfr are given the more colourful 'informed' ('sOgðu' [said]) and 'urged' ('mælti' [said]), whereas the unmoved Kveld-Úlfr and Skalla-Grímr stick with 'answered' ('svarar' [answers]) and 'said' ('sagði' [said]) (Jones, p. 36; ÍF, pp. 12-13).

Jones sometimes uses exclamation points, rarely found in his ÍF ST. Again, the TT apparently feels the need to do something extra to live up to the spirit of the ST. Instead, the points mark weakness in the TT language. In line 2 of a verse contemplating exile and vengeance, Egill calls on the 'landálfr' [land-spirit] (LVII, p.165). Jones's Egil, at the end of the first *helmingr* [half-stanza], calls out, 'Hear me, Land-Elf!' (57, p. 147). Although Jones sprinkles Tolkienesque 'even as' and 'For' constructions throughout the saga, Tolkien's dignified elves are not momentous enough to cancel by association the sillier associations of the TL invocation. It does not help that all verses are *chanted*, which would have been a fair enough verb, other things being equal. The exclamation point puts the finishing Victorian touch to the old Egill, who cries, '“[...] And how dismal a thing is blindness!”' (85, p. 237).<sup>27</sup> Fell's Egill, with admirable concision, classifies his state as '“very dreary”' (Fell, p. 169), while Penguin's is capable of being dismissive, '“[...] It's a bore to be blind.”' (Penguin, p. 236).

A more effective use of the exclamation point occurs when Þórólfr Kveldúlfsson dies. '“Now,” cried Thórólfr, “I came three feet too short!”' (22, p. 66) ('Þá mælti Þórólfr: “Nú gekk ek þremr fótum til skammt.”' [Then said Þórólfr: 'Now I went three feet too short.'] XXII, p. 54). In the ST, Þórólfr's words, which do not have to be imagined as loudly spoken, can be read without the thought of a particular kind of voice. They therefore seem more measured. They grant a kind of eternal present tense to the dying Þórólfr, who, commenting on his action, takes narrative control of his past tense, leaping beyond his own death to a promised future, to what

<sup>27</sup> '“ok er ofdaufligt sjónleysit.”', LXXXV, p. 296.

*will be* the memorable, laconic, famous utterance, his commemorative words. In the TT, Thórólf's words are marked by 'cried' and the exclamation point, like the last, frustrated expenditure of energy. It is as if he has died in framing the utterance, so that he speaks as someone already dead, as someone passing into legendary time. This contrast, emerging from ST and TT brought together at this point, is analogous to the contrastive relation of ST to its source traditions and TT to ST.

The way that, in Jones's translation, verse supposed to be performed is enclosed within quotation marks, continuous with those enclosing normal speech, has been mentioned in the discussion of paratext. Jones's ability as a storyteller, in its positive aspect, enables him to make proverbs sound proverbial, or to slip in an expression which imitates the SL convincingly enough not to need an endnote. He is also sensitive in marking off speech with a proverbial ring within a character's normal speech. This is done with single quotation marks, as when Arinbjörn cites the wisdom maxim 'skal maðr eptir mann lifa' [man shall live after man] (LVI, p. 148) to Egill, whom he supposes to be grieving for his late brother, but who proves to be lovesick for his brother's widow. However, the translation effect is patchy because mixed with less self-aware work. As happens elsewhere, sometimes embarrassingly much, in Jones, the narrative is a little spoiled for the non-innocent reader by the hovering presence of an apposite, inadvertent double entendre:

One day Arinbjörn went to find him and asked what caused his unhappiness. "For though you have now suffered great loss in your brother, it is a man's part to bear it well. 'Man must live after man.' And what verses are you making now? Let me hear!"  
(Chapter 56, p. 135)

The enclosure within brackets of what should be held apart from the course of the narrative for immediate interpretation, in the TT's version of events, is another inventive yet simple use of

punctuation to suggest the layering of memorability, importance or time in what is narrated.

There are also discreet omissions of phrases apparently to be considered redundant because they repeat some information given not long previously (although a convincing case could usually be made for their literary importance). These very few omissions need not be listed.

Jones's hand is evident in the way that the syntax of the TT divides itself up. 'But', 'And', 'So now', and similar, are inserted in paragraphs as links or breaks, or introduce sections, often to little apparent purpose except to satisfy the story-teller's ear in a way that might not be obviously satisfactory to other readers, and possibly to differ as a matter of translator's principle from the ST, avoiding the charge of imitation. 'En' [and/but] and 'ok' [and/also] are often ignored. This is not a mere difference between SL and TL. Literary English would be flexible in this respect. Jones chooses to create new sequences and new juxtapositions, welding or splitting the structuring of ST sense. Like the Penguin translation later, speech is often broken with an inserted 'he said', or similar. Where such phrases occur in the ST, they are often repositioned in the TT, though standard English seldom would require it. The manipulation of syntax is most justified and convincing, perhaps, in battle scenes, where Jones alternates short, reportorial sentence clusters with long, blood-and-thunder amalgamations.

Jones translates nicknames case by case, a pragmatic and common solution in saga translation. When this fails, it fails in ways related to the TT's habit of overparticularization, that is, the policy of making vivid and concrete what in the ST was left more abstract or less sharply defined. This TT policy reduces the characteristic ST system of exploiting the reader's skill with imagining potential meanings. Again, I use 'failure' to refer to the drawing of the reader's attention to the process of translating and the existence of other possible translation choices, because the translation as a whole does not deliberately dramatize this process. On the

contrary, it seems to wish to sweep the reader along. That is, I define failure on the TT's terms. In chapter 18, 'Sigtrygg Smartfarer' and 'Hallvard Hardfarer' (p. 58) ['snarfari' and 'harðfari', XVIII, p. 43] do not sound like what they are in the ST, i.e. rather frightening hit men who, when the King upstages them by the speed and ferocity with which he performs his own killing of the unwanted Þórólfr, become the butt of general laughter which has something of the force of momentary release from habitual fear. Their TT names already sound cartoonish, appropriate for comic, *would-be* executioners. This is caused by the TL associations evoked by their TT nicknames, not by calque translation per se. *Fare*, in the eclectic language context of Jones's saga, cannot avoid its strong associations with food. *Smart* was by Jones's time already a slightly patronizing word to use in the relatively élite context of a literary saga translation, however much that translation tried to undo its own status, and it has dated badly: *smart alec*, *smartypants*, *smart-ass*.<sup>28</sup> Its secondary association is with minor pain. From its English formation, a 'smartfarer' is likely to be someone who fares through, journeys through, lives with, experiences a smart, i.e. pain, than someone who inflicts it. A 'smartfarer' could also be someone who is smart (shrewd, clever, canny) at organizing provisions (fare) while travelling (faring), which would in fact be an important consideration elsewhere in the world of ST and TT alike, although not for this character's limited and violent rôle. A 'hardfarer', on the other hand, sounds like someone who takes things hard or who experiences, not inflicts, difficulties, and even more like someone who finds himself ill provisioned. Keeping the calque, but translating 'Sharpfarer', would have been sufficient to change the associations of 'Hardfarer'. The comedy of the calque nicknames is not offset by the puzzling praise, 'They were gallant big men' (p. 59) ('hreystimenn váru þeir ok miklir' [they were bold big men], ÍF, p. 44). 'Gallant' and 'bold' are dictionary definitions for *hreystimannligr*. but the more general spread of

<sup>28</sup> American usage of 'smart' is less relevant as Jones is Welsh.

English meanings for derivations and compounds here is to do with boldness and valour. A better translation in similar style might have been ‘big bold men’. They are heavies, not soldiers, and entirely lacking in *kurteisi*, the refinement of a chivalric code. The clashing particularizations of name and description in the TT lessen the coherence of Sigtrygg and Hallvard’s image.

Jones’s translation of nicknames is most effective where the point at which the nicknames are translated becomes a point at which the translation defines itself as singular yet dependent. In chapter 4/IV, there is a self-contained narrative unit about the acquisition of a nickname which already has been the character’s regular nickname for some while in the narrative:

En Solvi klofi komsk undan á flóttu ok var síðan víkingr mikill ok gerði opt skaða mikinn á ríki Haralds konungs ok var kallaðr Solvi klofi.

(IV, p. 10)

[But Solvi klofi escaped by fleeing and was afterwards a great viking and often caused much harm to King Haraldr’s kingdom and was called Solvi klofi.]

But Sölvi Klofi made his escape by flight, to become in course of time a noted viking; and such great and frequent hurt did he inflict on King Harald’s kingdom that he gained the nickname Sölvi Cleaver.

(4, p. 34)

Here, in the TT, the hitherto opaque SL nickname comes into TL focus at the moment when the character is seen to earn the name which he ‘already’ has in the untranslated SL form. This is analogous to the relation of the SL and the TL, which is, if analyzed in terms of the reader and the translation as product (rather than the translator and the translation as process), a relation where the ‘target’ text functions as the source for the ‘source’ text, both when a reader moves from TL to SL, and when the exclusively TL reader has recourse to an imagined original projected backwards from the TT. What happens with the SL to TL move in the character’s nickname is, furthermore, analogous *by opposition* to the relation of the ST to its traditions,

where Solvi klofi probably is already known as a named character, and the explanation of his name is a revelatory confirmation.

Skalla-Grímr's nickname provides another occasion for the translation's self-definition. Here Jones's habit of including brief, unmarked glosses in the main text allows SL and TL to clash against one another and spin away again, for the TL gloss is never used as a name which denotes Skalla-Grímr in the TT. It is not a naming, but a mention, a point of reference: 'and ever afterwards he was called Skallagrím, Bald-Grím.' (20, p. 63) 'síðan var hann kallaðr Skalla-Grímr' [afterwards he was called Skalla-Grímr] (XX, p. 50).

In the ST, the time reference dates the nickname to Skalla-Grímr's going bald at the age of twenty-five, and implies that this is how he was known for the rest of his life. Jones's inflation of the time reference places the nickname as Skallagrím's sobriquet for all legendary and remembered time. Jones's sometimes folktale-like rendition of saga narrative can free the translation from having to claim either modernity, or *simultaneity with the ST*. Jones does not bring the TT up to date, like the Penguin translation. He makes the translation seem old in a new way: retold. The imagined original can be 'reconstructed' as probably being new in an old way: given shape. Jones's *Egil's saga* more properly owns the title which in another sense Green gave to his translation: it attempts to convey the story of the saga (the saga as story), not the saga itself built from lost stories.

The interrelation of shifting levels of language with anglicized/untranslated words can be another means of placing the TT's 'time'. In chapter 56/LVI, Egill seeks the restitution of his wife Ásgerðr's inheritance, which Berg-Onundr, backed by the King and Queen, has amalgamated with his own property. Queen Gunnhildr has the court broken up by violence. Egill challenges Berg-Onundr to a duel, which is a lawful method of settling a claim. The Icelandic for 'duel' is anglicized, 'holmgang' (Jones, p. 141; cf. ÍF, p. 157), without an endnote

until the endnote to another duel in chapter 64/LXIV. However, the SL epithet which Egill flings at Berg-Onundr should he refuse, ‘níðingr’ (ÍF, p. 158)<sup>29</sup>, becomes the TL ‘dastard’ (Jones, p. 141). Temporally, this points two ways: to the old-fashioned, swashbuckling duelling-and-honour language of another region and era probably familiar to the TT reader, and to the otherness of the old Icelandic practice. In Jones’s TT, the SL noun marks the difference, while the language surrounding it is from a culturally approximate, historically later TL tradition. It is not that the reader relates back through the familiar to the strange - the reader is freed to exist in two, mutually interpretative literary times at once.

Jones’s 1960 translation is placed chronologically somewhat after the midpoint of the tradition of translating *Egils saga* into English up to this time (1893-1997). Its status as the first professional translation has been mentioned. It is also a real turning point, in so far as its stylistic fluctuations are like a compendium of translation possibilities. How is this so?

Some of Jones’s translation techniques popularly would be more associated with later or earlier translations.

Sometimes there is a brief step back to a Victorian or Victorian-influenced style. This throws up calques like ‘at the playmeet’ (39, p. 99) for ‘á leikmóti’ [at the games] (XXXIX, p. 99), or translation stock words such as ‘lading’.<sup>30</sup> The step back can be longer: ‘There was a man named Yelling-Thorgils, a retainer of Thórólf’s, whom he held in highest regard of all his housecarles.’ (13, p. 50; cf. XIII, p. 33). This could be George W. Dasent writing. More important than foreignization, here, is the preservation of the currency of earlier translations by familiarizing modern readers with some of their features, intermixed with other styles.

<sup>29</sup> Not easily translatable. ‘Coward’ with overtones of effeminacy; used for objects of public, sometimes ceremonial scorn. See Grønbech 1931.

<sup>30</sup> See Rabin 1958 for the idea of a translation stock, i.e. a conventional set of correspondences which becomes recognizable and is built up through the regular practice of translating from one language (literature) into another. Stock words and phrases are interpreted through these conventions of understanding rather than as they would be in a text that was read as independent and monolingual.

The poetic technique of sound echoes between SL and TL, remarkable in Fell's 1975 translation, occasionally appears in Jones's: 'a mort of money' (12, p. 49), 'morð fjár' (XII, p. 31) [lots of money]. Like the Penguin translation, direct speech is novelistically broken. Like the Penguin translation, too, is the use of slang. There are even 'typical Penguin' phrases like 'big talk'.

In a startlingly 'modern' intellectual move, Jones can use the process of translating to let the TT make a metacommentary on the saga (translated or not) or on the relations and differences of ST and TT. In chapter 62/LXII, the spinning out of the plot and the weariness of a main character kept so active for so long can be apprehended from Egill's reply to Aðalsteinn's offer of the post of commander-in-chief:

"This offer," said Egil, "seems to me a most desirable one to close with. I should like to accept it, not reject it. Still, I must go to Iceland first and see to my wife and the property I own there."  
(Jones, p. 161)

Egill segir: "Þessi kostur þykki mér allfýsiligr at taka; vil ek því játa, en eigi níta; en þó verð ek fyrst at fara til Íslands ok vitja konu minnar ok fjár þess, er ek á þar."  
[Egill says, 'This opportunity seems to me very exciting to take; I will/want to agree, and not refuse; but nonetheless I must first go to Iceland and visit my wife and that property, which I own there.']  
(ÍF, p. 196)

Here 'close with' is more conclusive than 'taka', and hints at a possible desire for narrative closure, for the character to be at rest, out of the story.

There are even stretches of TT prose which (like an unconscious reflection on the development of saga narrative) chime with styles of translating saga verse, stressed, slipping between assonance, alliteration and internal rhyme, unlike the ST prose: 'and so laid their axes to them that not one remained seaworthy' (25, p. 74) ('ok hjuggu svá, at ekki var fært' [and

hewed so, that they were not-fit-for-travel], XXV, p. 64) - there would be a cæsura between 'them' and 'that'.

To isolate one element, Jones's translation of the words for ships provides a running index of his translation styles.<sup>31</sup> He keeps certain words, such as *snekkja* [fast longship] and *karfi* [galley], untranslated, and typographically unmarked except with an endnote at their first occurrence. Other words, such as *knørr* [(merchant-)ship], are translated (in this case, as 'ship of lading').

It is possible to read Jones's foreignization (unlike Fell's), not as initial stage in the reader's gradual familiarization with new concepts or objects over the course of the narrative. He is retaining some of the established 'translation stock' (Rabin's term), while reinforcing, for future translators, the use of anglicized Norse words in describing the saga world, i.e. he follows and strengthens precedent in building up the translation stock. To establish these stock anglicized words, Jones uses the interaction of main text and paratext (older translations - epitext; endnotes - peritext). Jones's ideal reader may be imagined, not as a one-off reader of this TT, but as going from translation to translation of *Egils saga* and others, with an increasing freedom of thought and mastery of a specialized, growing lexicon proper to the canon of sagas translated into English. Jones's apparent whimsy and innovativeness could then be read as part of a restorationist yet essentially conservative enterprise.<sup>32</sup>

This theory is not adequate to Jones's *process* of translating, however. His TT is too strongly marked by an individualized, poetical response. Many of his particularizations, sometimes in combination with other techniques such as SL/TL sound echo, are drawn from the

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<sup>31</sup> This is also evident in Fell's translation, though the source for her concern is in her own work as well as Jones's example.

<sup>32</sup> I use 'restorationist' in an analogous sense to its use about the preservation of monuments (trying to recreate a specific, past version) where it is in opposition to 'conservationist' (freezing the monument at its present point of decay). Cf. Koshar 1994, pp. 220-221.

nautical world; because it has seized his imagination, it must seize his readers', it must be believed to saturate the saga world. Arinbjörn, for example, offers, ‘ “ [...]skal ek víst leggja þar orð til, at þau ráð takisk.”’ [‘I certainly must give my voice, for that match to be made’] (LVI, p. 150) - ‘ “[...] I must certainly put my oar in here, so that the match comes to something.”’ (56, p. 136).

Is it possible to speak of a translation that holds close to the ST, while giving it a few turns here and there (Fell’s?) Is it the duty of creative translators (reworkers) to theme and streamline their changes, to justify their own responses before translating, in terms of effect on their audience (what reading, what interpretations) as well as in terms of relation to their ST (what imagined original, what inflections of reading)? Are they only ever free when producing a work of thorough and dazzling originality, and how can that be measured? Even in the latter case, should they consider matching paratext with text? Translations like Jones’s and Green’s, where the translator’s personal involvement is made clear, raise these questions, providing little in the way of answer except the radically subjective criteria of their readers’ pleasure, and the translators’ own.

#### E.R. Eddison and the 1930 translation

In translating *Egils saga*, E.R. Eddison’s intention, set out in his peritext, was to use a purified English. What this purification would consist of was less clear. He made the familiar remarks about the superiority of the Saxon to Latin (the saxonism to the latinism). He also believed in the closeness of medieval Icelandic and Modern English, both language and culture. In his view, the newer was required to work towards the older in order to redeem itself, to regain its true character. In his translation, this happens by an odd formal equivalence which combines imitative word order with an archaizing vocabulary drawn from (among others)

Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Shakespeare, border ballads, and the glosses in Cleasby-Vigfússon's Icelandic-English dictionary (1874). These are cited indiscriminately in the endnotes, to justify Eddison's usages. The endnotes often call attention to (sometimes without explaining) the use of a strange TL word, not of a calque or anglicization from SL into TL, as with other translations. What, in practice, could be the effect of Eddison's avowed translation policy?

Eddison's agenda of revitalization through purification means that he declares his text to be in some way authentic, and himself to be sincere. The reader who reads Eddison's peritext, but does not already agree with his principles and ambitions, is unlikely to be convinced by the main text, which, paradoxically, looks most understandable as a kind of reproduction. This is also true of the reader who ignores the translator's peritext but has the paratextual (common sense) information that the TL text is a modern production.

Why do I say that the reader is unlikely to be convinced? The primary reason is that Eddison's attempt to recreate an old-style language, or, more precisely, to reinvigorate the new by means of the old, forces all his innovatory, archaizing usages to be what I would call context-poor. The reader is bombarded by unfamiliar language, or language in unfamiliar combinations, and cannot place it in the context of a literary tradition. Where the reader struggles to decipher the basic sense of the TL text, the brain throws up richer contexts for understanding where Eddison's usages may be recognizable. Unfortunately, given Eddison's idiosyncrasy, these associations are often unhelpful for interpreting Eddison's version of the TL. Eddison's translation therefore 'dates' much more quickly than would have a less intellectually ambitious translation, where greater fluency with established codes was unoriginal but ensured coherence, because its usages were context-rich. Both Gwyn Jones's fantastic interplays of levels of language and the flat, chatty Penguin style gain some of their

readability from the relative ease with which their usages can be contextualized. The contrast between Jones and Eddison here is deliberately drawn, for the relationship between their translations is quite close, as will be seen later.

The secondary reason for the unconvincingness of Eddison's text for the reader lies in the relationship between TL and SL. Sometimes it is less productive and less fair to consider translations as texts 'in their own right'. Translations may wish to draw attention to, play with, exploit, their own status as translations. The fact that whole texts stand as one another's epitexts, and that whole texts may be invoked in the manner of citations by other texts, which in this case happens not only with Eddison's disparaging remarks on, and quotations from, his predecessor W.C. Green's English version of *Egils saga*, but with Finnur Jónsson's 1924 Icelandic text, to which Eddison often refers the reader (sometimes noting that he himself translates from a different reading of his ST from that sanctioned by its editor) implies that an adequate understanding of any one such text should consider it as more than a bounded set of words. It is *not unique*, except in so far as its system of significant relations is unique. This is true both of interpretative conventions of presenting the text in the book and of the texts themselves, the split into these two levels of course not ultimately holding as a division in literary readings.<sup>33</sup> In Eddison's translation, the unit-by-unit closeness of TL to SL is such that the TL units, read alone in long sequences, are difficult to grasp.

Steinarr rode to the Thing, and made great throng of men. There had Odd-a-Tongue rule over the company, and was all thronged about with men. Einar of Staffholt was likewise thronged about with men. They tilted their booths. The Thing was thronged with men.

(LXXXI, p. 210)

"But I will not", quoth he, "that he come and see me. But thou mayest make him, Eric, as dear to thee as thou wilt, aye, or more of these kinsmen; but one of two ways will it be, either that they will show themselves gentler unto thee than unto me they have shown them. or thou wilt repent thee of this boon, and of this too,

<sup>33</sup> I am greatly indebted to Dr. E.L.C. Dillon for her pioneering scholarship in this area.

that thou lettest them be long with thee.”

(XXXVII, pp. 70-71)

As these two quotations from Eddison show, his style, sometimes involved, sometimes repetitious, can be harsh on the inner ear.

Though Gwyn Jones’s translation is, at points, very close verbally to Eddison’s, Jones’s echoes and citations live in a differently managed context. It is possible to read Jones’s TT alone, with its own cadences. If Jones’s translation is read with the ST for comparison, it is possible to hold fairly long sections of one or the other in memory and not to have to shuttle between the two. Eddison’s is easiest read, perversely, with the ST to elucidate the TT. This is not an argument for facility. It is an argument about the nature of the translation contract. So long as translation need not be viewed as communication, or as embodying a communicative impulse, Eddison’s translation policy is workable - but only so long.

Eddison’s use of archaism is more flexible than his stated policy. Far from sticking to one TL equivalent to each SL unit, he varies his TT in the interests of style as well as comprehensibility.<sup>34</sup>

There is often TT variation in what I would term *turning words*, by which I do not refer to a grammatical category, but to those words (or phrases) which the saga narrative uses as some of its more subtle structuring devices.<sup>35</sup> Different shades and ordering functions of ‘síðan’ in the ST are brought out, or created: ‘therewith’, ‘therewithal’, ‘and now’. ‘Ok’ [and/also] can be ‘withal’, or, in a willing disruption of syntactic mimicry to preserve conceptual links, ‘and [...] withal’. ‘Þá’ [then/when] can be ‘then’ or ‘now’ (cf. Jones’s similar method of bringing the

<sup>34</sup> Eddison’s attempt to mimic medieval Icelandic word order or, as nearly as possible, syntactic order in units smaller than the sentence, does not have the desired effect of demonstrating the closeness of the two languages, but rather their difference, if TT and ST are read together, notably in the function of prepositions.

<sup>35</sup> See earlier in this chapter (pp. 3, 4, 40, ff.) for turning-points in saga narrative structure, and chapter IV throughout.

reader into the narrative present). Two close occurrences of ‘norðr þagat’ [north from-there] (FJ, VIII, p. 28) find ‘northaway’, then ‘north thither’ (Eddison, VIII, p. 13). Despite his stated one-for-one strictness, Eddison recognizes that one Icelandic word may convey more than one English idea; ‘njósn’ [spying, with a range of related meanings] can be ‘espial’ or ‘warning’. There is variation, too, as the TT evolves; ‘undan komz’ [escaped] (FJ, III, p. 7) finds ‘escaped away’ (Eddison, III, p. 3), while ‘komz undan’ [escaped] (FJ, IV, p. 11) finds ‘came off’ (Eddison, IV, p. 5), which becomes the preferred translation.

Although it is a stated point of principle with Eddison to keep to the fluctuation of tenses found in his ST (narrative past and narrative present switching sometimes rapidly), he does not always do so. He often regularizes tenses at crucial moments in the plot, as if not to attract attention to the saga’s status of translation. This inconsistency may result from Eddison’s text’s attempt to educate the reader in the ST aesthetic, not to make him or her experience it. In practice, occasional demonstration of tense fluctuation suffices.

Eddison avails himself of non-‘Saxon’ expressions when these have the requisite patina, of courtliness, or age: ‘nakkvat’ [(FJ, XLIV, p. 127) - ‘perchance’ (Eddison, XLIV, p. 84); ‘furðuliga’ [strangely/incredibly] (FJ, XLV, p. 127) - ‘marvellous’ [adverbial] (Eddison, XLV, p. 84). Note how, as with Jones, TL stylistic features, or ST-TT translation strategies, tend to cluster.

There are, unavoidably, many archaisms which are awkward or opaque. Most - the kind which, piled up, furnish the crueller jokes of some translation criticism - are also uninteresting. What readers would easily come to terms with ‘Finn-cheaping’ (‘finnkaup’ [Lapp trade])?<sup>36</sup> What sensible idea is evoked by ‘“few I ween may know themselves sackless if the truth come up”’ (‘“fáir hygg ek at sik viti saklauss, ef et sanna kemr upp”’ [‘I think few would

<sup>36</sup> Eddison, VIII, p. 11; FJ, VIII, p. 25.

acknowledge themselves blameless, if the truth emerges')?<sup>37</sup> Where does Þorsteinn Egilsson's company go, when they ride 'out to the force' ('út til fors' [out to the waterfall])?<sup>38</sup> What is the 'quant-pole'?<sup>39</sup> These are the places where the TT ceases to be a narrative, and becomes an exercise in the 'otherness' (or, from Eddison's point of view, the rapprochement) of the ST. That said, few sentences are totally opaque.

The archaisms are not simply that. They can be read as a running index of the TT's self-relation. The desire to overlap ST and TT language-cultures is marked when 'Tungu-Oddr' becomes 'Odd-a-Tongue' (LXXXII), like Robin Hood's minstrel Alan-a-Dale. A sort of reverse archaism claims Norse antiquity for the English explicitly in Eddison's peritext, when 'Olvir' becomes 'Oliver' (I), i.e. the characters belong to two language-cultures and two peoples which are *really* one. The worthwhile texts for renewing the English language, as promoted by the TT, would seem, to many readers, to include King James Bible-derived style, despite the translator's paganism evident in the peritext and his probable intention merely to evoke a general archaism. The TL characters have a habit of interjecting 'yea', where their SL counterparts are more succinct, and, in the description of Finnmark, 'The main sea goeth by the west thereof' (Eddison, XIV, p. 25) ('gengr haf fyrir vestan' [the sea goes along the west], FJ, XIV, p. 46).<sup>40</sup>

The translation seems rather nervously and opportunistically to insist that everything which happens in the narrative, perhaps the fact of saga narrative itself, *is* non-ordinary. This is registered by the use of archaisms which, when the TT and ST are compared, do not add up

<sup>37</sup> Eddison, XII, p. 22; FJ, XII, p. 41.

<sup>38</sup> Eddison, LXXXIV, p. 216; FJ, LXXXIV, p. 284.

<sup>39</sup> Eddison, XLV, p. 85; FJ, XLV, p. 128.

<sup>40</sup> The King James Bible has had great influence on the language of English literature. Readers who do not pay attention to Eddison's peritext may well assume Biblical influence on the archaic language of his 1930 translation. This would miss the point of Eddison's general agenda of linguistic revitalization through eclectic archaism. It would also misread Eddison, who distrusts Christian culture, preferring his construction of the Germanic and natural.

either in terms of rendering non-ordinary SL with similarly non-ordinary TL, or in terms of keeping the reader mildly aware of the strangeness of the TT's world as compared to the world of other TL literary texts. For Eddison, even 'þat var eitt haust' [That was one autumn] is too close to modern English. He refuses to imitate it formally - that would, by his theories, be misleading; the simple-seeming Icelandic is translated true to the spirit of a richer English, 'That was of an autumn' (VII, FJ p. 20, Eddison p. 9). '[Þ]eir hófðu þat skip' [They had that ship] needs to be inverted to become dignified English: 'That ship they had' (XXVI, FJ p. 81, Eddison p. 50). Similarly, 'mundi keypt' [bought with dowry] is 'dower-boughten' (IX, FJ p. 34, Eddison p. 17); 'gnóg' has to be 'enow', not 'enough' (X, FJ p. 36, Eddison p. 18); 'vápnaðr mjök' is a saxonized 'much weaponed', not 'heavily armed' (LXXII, FJ p. 240, Eddison p. 174). Examples could be multiplied. To choose one, 'meðan' [while] is 'whiles' and 'longum' [for a long time], 'for long whiles'; it is as if the time that these words measure should be imagined as qualitatively different from time as measured in Eddison's modern reader's everyday.

Some ideas are too unfamiliar even for Eddison. His flexible archaisms write over the identity of the word 'átti' [owned] (meaning both 'married' and 'possessed' [often land]), rendering two close instances as 'had to wife' and 'owned' (LXII, FJ p. 205, Eddison p. 147). His TT is more formulaic than the ST; he translates 'fæddiz upp' [grew up, was brought up] with his standard rendition of 'óxu upp', i.e. 'waxen up' (XXXI, FJ p. 95, Eddison p. 60).

Sometimes Eddison's TL register, in its attempt simultaneously to renew essential English and estrange itself from modern English, paradoxically sounds like literal translation from another language than medieval Icelandic. The repetition of 'there', in '[t]here perished there all the company that were within there' (Eddison, XLVI, p. 90) and the occasional 'then when' construction, where the rhyme recalls Anglo-Saxon *þa þa* [then when] more than Norse

*þá er* [then when], could be from Old English (so, not too far from his agenda). More surprising is the echo of French *poindre*, 'But at point of spring' (Eddison, XXX, p. 59).<sup>41</sup>

For the reader with both SL and TL in mind, Eddison's translation sounds stiff. 'Stiff' is a traditional derogatory adjective in translation criticism. Can the 'stiffness' be analyzed more closely?

I would suggest that the reader who can move between SL and TL suffers, when reading Eddison, from what could be called back-translation. Wherever the TT narrative fails because language draws the reader's attention to the process of translating, Eddison's TT is found to be like yet unlike something which could be understood in and as the SL. The reader stops to reconstruct what the SL must have said. This becomes more frustrating, the closer the reader's acquaintance with SL or ST, as the imagined original cannot be constructed freely, but must operate according to the equation between ST/SL and TT.

If, proportional to competence, different languages are understood by different systems, not by a set of transformations from mother tongue to others, i.e. if more than one language can be or become immediate to the mind, not forever hierarchized by degree of internal translation, then the difficulty of back-translation to an imagined original from Eddison's text becomes clear. It makes the mind keep switching between systems. It is stiff, and also phantasmagoric, like the appearance of a friend in a dream who is identified as that person only by name, so that the dreamer is progressively bewildered when attempting to decode the words and gestures of the dream-stranger for whom familiar claims are made, yet cannot shake free of the attempt to make the identification believable.

This 'stiffness' does not mean that there are no fluctuations in Eddison's TT; far from it. Having isolated TT features and policies, let us see how Eddison's translation proceeds, both

<sup>41</sup> 'Týndiz þar lið allt, er þar var inni,' (FJ, XI.VI, p. 134). 'En at vári', FJ, XXX, p. 93

as product and as implied process.

The reader soon becomes accustomed to saxonized, or ‘formally equivalent’, compounds. The SL/TL competent reader will see that some of these are more ‘saxonized’ in TL than in SL. There is ‘a-herring-fishing’ (Eddison, I, p. 2), i.e. ‘í sildfiski’ (FJ, I, p. 3). There is a thou/you distinction. Old-style third person singular verbal endings are used: ‘saith’, for example. There are many abbreviations and elisions, in dialogue as well as narrative voice, such as ‘’ticed’ for ‘auðbeðinn’ [easily persuaded] (V, Eddison p. 7, FJ p. 17); ‘með’ [between] finds ‘’twixt’. This may be to speed the pace of the prose, or to colloquialize it, in line with the ‘freeprose’ theory of saga genesis, where the saga declines away from pure oral composition. The language of equivalence can be used to discuss Eddison’s translation, because this is the nature of the translation’s self-understanding, and a wide sense of equivalence is what Eddison’s whole project seeks to demonstrate.

A feature which quickly becomes familiar is what I would term a drama stoppage. At a crucial point in the narrative, Eddison uses an opaque expression, as if to tantalize the reader with the unknowability of the ‘real’ saga or with the inadequacy of the reader’s modern, debased English. Such shows of withholding are congruent with Eddison’s harsh interpretation of the translation contract. In chapter IX, p. 15, there are two occurrences of ‘let give lyke-help’ (‘veita umbúnað’, FJ, p. 31) [to bandage], which Eddison glosses in an endnote. Equivalences continue to be created: ‘játa’ [agree] and ‘yea-say’, ‘nærr’ [nearl(y)] and ‘nigh’, ‘anigh’. Returning to the idea of the context-rich and context-poor, when Þórólfr Kveldúlfsson answers the Hildiríðarsynir’s claims ‘styggliga’ [shortly] (FJ, IX, p. 35), Thorolf answers ‘moodily’ (Eddison, p. 17), which is clearly intended to hark back to Old English, but sounds peculiarly anachronistic, infusing Thorolf with a melancholy which makes him emotionally complex in a different way from Þórólfr. Similarly, the ‘drekahöfuð’ [dragon’s head] on Þórólfr’s ship is

misleadingly etymologized as a ‘drake’s head’ (X, FJ p. 36, Eddison p. 18), to be understood as ‘dragon’s’ but more likely to be (mis)read as a male duck. ‘Firedrake’ might have been clearer.

Given Eddison’s declared association of the Latinate with the decadent, it is telling that he uses Latinate words when Þórólfr’s/Thorolf’s and the King’s relation begins to be falsified and patched up: ‘bað’ [asked], ‘prayed’; ‘virða’ [value], ‘esteem’ (XI, Eddison p. 19, FJ p. 38). The context-rich/context-poor comes in again to undo the TT’s subtleties, however. The unremarkable Icelandic construction ‘þeir X’ denotes a group of two or more people of whom the named one has narrative focus and often the dominant rôle at that moment. It sounds regional/colloquial/homely rather than unremarkable or alien/archaic in Eddison’s translation, ‘X and his’ - ‘þeir Þórólfr’, ‘Thorolf and his’ (XIX, FJ p. 60, Eddison p. 35). Similarly, ‘Sigrid took well with them’ sounds as if the TT Sigrid was well received by them, flourished in their company. This reversal or misconception results from formal imitation of ‘Sigríðr tók vel við þeim’ [Sigríðr welcomed them] (XXII, Eddison p. 42, FJ p. 69). Without being read in the light of the translation policy in the peritext, the main text does not mean what it intended.

The fluctuations continue. Imitative translation, meant to bring TL and SL close, can actually bring Eddison’s text close to his contemporaries, with what sounds like modern, even modernist concision, as in some of Mansfield’s short stories: ‘That river is named now Thursowater: ran then much narrower and was deeper than now it is.’ (Eddison, XXIII, p. 43).<sup>42</sup> Eddison, too, activates the poetic relation of SL to TL, productive of sound echoes, seen in other translations: ‘fýsiligt’ [desirable], ‘a thing to be desired’ (XXV, FJ p. 79, Eddison p. 49). A sense of marvel, appropriate to Eddison’s mapping of Elizabethan venturesomeness and discovery on to Icelandic seafaring and landtaking, is written in to the TT, where the ST perhaps records only curiosity. Characters who have never seen a glacial river before name the

<sup>42</sup> ‘Sú á heitir nú Þjórsá, fell þá miklu þröngra ok var djúpari, en nú er.’ FJ, XXIII, p. 71.

Hvítá [White River] because it is ‘undarliga lit’ - ‘of a wondrous look’ (XXVIII, FJ p. 88, Eddison p. 56); in the Penguin translation (p. 74), the river is just ‘a strange colour’. Still, Eddison’s earnestness in setting up and working out his TL policy makes his prose more didactic than deft. His reader has not only to believe in the project but to suspend a sense of the ridiculous, beyond the suspension needed when learning or meeting anything new. Eddison’s enthusiasm flashes out into poetry and inadvertent contemporaneity with TL literature, but also into absurdity. When SL ‘Oddr’, TL ‘Odd’ settles in Iceland, ‘After him is named Live-aloneness’, which sounds less like a compound with -ness (geographical) than a derivation - Odd gives his name to the quality of being eremitical (Eddison, XXIX, p. 57).<sup>43</sup> Close imitation of the relatively limited saga vocabulary can produce a TL style unfortunately reminiscent of TL lead-in to comic rhymes or patter: Yngvarr ‘bade Skallagrim to a bidding’ (Eddison, XXXI, p. 61).<sup>44</sup>

Freed by the work of its extensive peritext, Eddison’s main text is not generally characterized by what were termed ‘overtranslation’ and ‘undertranslation’, in the analysis of Pálsson and Edwards 1976 above. It adjusts itself as regards language policy, but tries to be ‘faithful’ to ST tone. Eddison’s endnote characterizes Queen Gunnhildr as wicked and lustful, naming Þórólfr Skallagrímsson and Berg-Onundr as likely candidates for her attentions. However, his translation records her attractiveness, just as the ST does, when her marriage to Eiríkr is mentioned. If anything, it underplays the possible sexualization of the affection between Gunnhildr and Þórólfr: ‘great loving-kindness was betwixt those two, Thorolf and Gunnhild’; ‘kærleikar miklir váru með þeim Þórólfi ok Gunnhildi’ [there was great fondness between Þórólfr and Gunnhildr] (XXXVII, Eddison p. 71, FJ p. 110).

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...] við hann er kent Einbúanes’. FJ, XXIX, p. 90.

...] bauð Skallagrími til boðs’, FJ, XXXI, p. 96.

Egill himself does receive privileged translation, or overtranslation, when doubt is introduced into the TT as to whether Skalla-Grímr really disapproved of his son's first, precocious killing, or simply presented a stern face for the sake of discipline. The ST contrast is gender-divided typically between Skalla-Grímr's disapproval of the violence causing disorder, and Bera's approval of the strong character which expresses itself in violence.

Now when Egil came home, Skallagrim made as if he found little to be pleased with in this. But Bera said that Egil was of viking stuff, and said that that would be his lot, as soon as he had age thereto, that they should find him warships.  
(Eddison, XL, p. 76)

En er Egill kom heim, lét Skallgrímr sér fátt um finnaz, en Bera kvað Egil vera víkingsefni ok kvað þat mundu fyrir liggja, þegar hann hefði aldr til, at honum væri fengin herskip.  
[But when Egill came home, Skallagrimr showed his disapproval, but Bera said Egill was viking material and said that it would follow, as soon as he was old enough, that he would be give a warship.]  
(FJ, XL, p. 117)

To say that Skallagrim 'made as if' he was displeased is to overtranslate 'lét [...] sér' [looked as if, seemed to be].

This is not to say that the TT does not have its ways of reinflecting the ST. The TT version of Þórir's/Thorir's speech has a different bent from the ST version, thus altering the characterization of the conflict between Egill's family and the kings of Norway:

Thorir saith, "That will be the talk of men, that Bard will have gotten his deserts in this, that he was slain. And yet goeth it over-much in Egil's family, to look too little before them lest they stand in the King's wrath; and that turneth out for most men a thing heavy to bear. Yet even so will I bring thee into atonement with the King as for this time".  
Eddison, XLV, p. 86

Þórir segir: "Þat mun vera mál manna, at Bárðr hefði verðleika til þess, er hann var drepinn; en þó er Agli of mjök ættgengt. at sjáz of lítt fyrir at verða fyrir reiði konungs; en þat verðr flestum monnum þungbært; en þó mun ek koma þér í sætt við konung at sinni".  
[Þórir says: 'People will say, that Bárðr had deserved it, when he was killed; but still Egill is too like his family, in underestimating the king's anger, but that turns out burdensome for most people, but still I shall bring you to a reconciliation

with the king this time.]  
FJ, XLV, p. 130

The possibility of *natural* failure in foresight and/or excessive *kappsemd* [energy, competitiveness] where the kings of Norway are concerned, in Egill's family character, is partly closed down by Eddison's fractured idiom, 'goeth it [...] in [the] family', which is caught between something that *runs in the family* and something which the family chooses to do, or finds themselves repeatedly doing. By the very resemblance to the TL idiom *to run in the family*, i.e. by not being what it almost is and could have been if the translator wanted, Eddison's created TL idiom seems to incline towards the other meaning, of deliberate confrontation: a drama of wills, not a clash of natures. The meaning arising from this idiom-splitting could be related to the philosophical influences and political beliefs evident in his peritext.

It may seem as if Eddison's style of translation is a dead end, especially in the light of the quality, and monumentality, of the next translation for discussion. Literalists who, out of their theoretical concern, in practice inadvertently refigure or fracture both ST/TT relations and TT will always have their advocates, though.<sup>45</sup> In a context of various and varied editions and translations of the same saga, the existence of more daringly literal versions is a fine corrective.

Bernard Scudder's translation (*The Complete Sagas of Icelanders*, 1997)

Harking back to chapters I and II, before the translation analysis begins, it must be said at once that the quality and groundedness of the TT far exceed the peritext which seeks to introduce and interpret it.

The translation policy of the newest English-language version (CS) of *Egils saga* is very similar to that of the 1976 Penguin translation. Based on the modern-spelling *Íslendinga*

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Durrenberger and Durrenberger 1992.

*sögur* (ÍS) edition<sup>46</sup>, it is fluent, and reads well. However, the apparent errors and omissions – possibly marks of commercial pressure of the Penguin translation – are not present in the *Complete Sagas* text. There is only one mistake, where subject and object are reversed: ‘Egill tók vel á því og fýsti Þorstein að hann léti hann þangað fara’ [Egill took this well and encouraged Þorstein to let him move there] (ÍS, chapter 86, p. 512); ‘Egil took his request well, and Thorstein urged his father to let him move there.’ (CS, chapter 86, p. 171). There are outstandingly few cases where the translation overtly privileges one character above another.

Where the translation does do so, the privileged focus is always on Egill or his family, i.e. translational partisanship serves the subject of the narrative, and is not arbitrary or a reflection of the translator’s quasi-authorial intervention. For example, in chapter 47, although Þórólfur Skalla-Grímsson shares leadership of their expedition, Egill’s leadership is more credited. ‘Síðan bjuggust menn til uppgöngu’ [Then people got ready to disembark] (ÍS, p. 425) finds ‘Then Egil and his men made ready to go ashore’ (CS, p. 87). ‘Varð þar mannfall mikið’ [There was great slaughter there] (ÍS, p. 425) finds ‘Egil and his men inflicted heavy casualties’ (CS, pp. 87-88). Hárekr Hildiríðarson, in chapter IX, complains to Þórólfur Kveld-Úlfsson about ‘sá ríkismunur’ [that difference in power] which prevents him from getting his alleged rights (ÍS, p. 378). Hárekr is more shameless about his own debasement in the TT (a debasement, therefore, enhanced as well as explicated by translation choice), referring to his ‘low standing’ (CS, p. 42).

Four examples of different aspects of the TT’s practice will be sketched, before a discussion which deals with that general practice, ordered according to particular features.

The reader can become accustomed to the CS use of italics, remarked on in the discussion of paratext, to indicate an apparently normal English word which needs to be

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<sup>46</sup> Reykjavík 1987.

checked in the Volume V Glossary. The reader not aware of the peritextual injunctions as to their significance simply may become accustomed to de-emphasizing them mentally, taking them as an aberration, so the inner ear does not interrupt the flow of narrative with jumpy emphases. Ideally, the reader who uses the Glossary will separate the sudden use of italics in the main text from the idea of emphatic or intensified tone, understanding CS italicization as a sign of opaque ST strangeness under TL transparent meaning: a kind of semantic emphasis.

There are occasions, though, when the italicized expression interacts very strongly with the TT context. It then can scarcely avoid seeming like emphasis. This sometimes inflects TT meaning. In chapter 6, Þórólfur Kveld-Úlfsson, disagreeing with his independent-minded father and insisting on the happiness of joining Haraldur's men, asserts: ‘ “[...] það hefir eg sannspurt að hirð hans er skipuð afreksmönnum einum [...]"’ [I have a reliable report that his guard is picked only from the valiant] (ÍS, p. 372). He elaborates on this, going on to say how badly things go, by contrast, for people who do not join Haraldur. In the TT, a snide, disrespectful, already-comparative tone suddenly seems to enter Thorolf's contention: ‘ “[...] I know for a fact that there are nothing but men of valour among his *followers*. [...]"’ (CS, p. 38).

The fluency of the TT sometimes entails narrative simplification, as where the productively open-ended meaning of an ST juxtaposition is resolved by a TT subordination. In chapter 11, when Haraldur feels threatened by Þórólfur Kveld-Úlfsson's magnificence, the scene is described: ‘Veisla var hin prúðlegasta og öll föng hin bestu. Konungr var heldur ókátur [...]’ [The feast was most magnificent and all provisions the best. The king was rather gloomy] (ÍS, p. 379). At this point in the TT, ‘Although it was a splendid feast with all the finest provisions available, the king remained sullen.’ (CS, p. 44). Because of the parataxis of the saga prose, which juxtaposes the description of the splendid feast with the bad temper of the King, there is no interpretative conjunction. No explicit contrast is drawn between the happy reaction

which might have been expected from the King on a happy occasion, and his actual sullenness. No reaction of alarm or jealousy in the King, at the sight of his host's magnificence, is specified. The possibilities which would have been expressed (and limited) by the choice of the conjunction *although* or the conjunction *because* are present with equal tension in the ST, since these possibilities are left unresolved and simultaneous. Neither is allowed to reduce the complexity of the situation. The King's reaction floats enigmatically yet clearly, a death's-head at the feast. The TT relies instead on a blatant ironic riddle of although/because reversal, where the jealous King is unhappy '[a]lthough', i.e. because, the feast is good.

The TT's tendency to clarify the ST sometimes works precisely to preserve the ST's strangeness by normalizing it, however. Characters described as 'fjölkunnig(ur)' [sorcerers] are 'well versed in the magic arts' (see, for example, two instances in chapter 37, CS p. 75, ÍS p. 412). The description of magic as a discipline, not as something uncanny in one's nature, and the definite article before 'magic arts', make the practice acceptable within the TT world's beliefs.

With no 'loss' of drama in translation, the type of suspense created in the narrative can vary from ST to TT with the TT's fluent (re)ordering of events within its ST-derived paragraphing. In chapter 79, Egill locks himself into his bed closet, prepared to die by neglecting himself, lethargic with grief for his drowned son. His wife Ásgerður sends someone for their daughter, Þorgerður, to deal with him:

[...] reið sá sem ákaflegast vestur í Hjarðarholt, og lét segja Þorgerði þessi tíðendi öll saman og var það um nónskeið er hann kom þar.

(ÍS, chapter 79, p. 490)

[he rode as fast as possible west to Hjarðarholt, and informed Þorgerðr of these events all at once and it was about midafternoon when he got there.]

He galloped off westwards to Hjarðarholt and when he arrived in mid-afternoon he told Thorgerd the whole story.

(CS, chapter 79, p. 150)

The ST is arranged to emphasize the messenger's arrival time, which measures how time is ticking away while Egill persists in his damaging, depressive withdrawal. The TT is arranged to show the importance of Þorgerðr's receipt of the communication, which prepares for her brave, ingenious behaviour. Up to this point in the saga, she has not really figured, so this TT arrangement is a way of grounding and heightening reader expectations: she will be able to do something.

Like the Penguin translation, the CS achieves its fluent, modern effect in part by summary and paraphrase of the ST, although paragraph units are almost always identical between ST and TT. The summarization and paraphrase are of various kinds and flexibly applied, not as a rule to cut the text down or keep the narrative pace up. The summarization technique can be extreme. Still, the amount of information processing which a TL reader would 'feel' was required by a more literal translation would be less like the concision with which the SL reader would 'feel' the information processed through the familiar micro-adjustments of saga narrative. This is a syntactic version of refusing to translate ordinary language by non-ordinary:

Norður á Hálogalandi heitir fjörður Vefsnir. Þar liggur ey í firðinum og heitir Álöst, mikil ey og góð. Í henni heitir bær á Sandnesi. Þar bjó maður er Sigurður hét. Hann var auðgastur norður þar. Hann var lendur maðr og spakur að viti. Sigríður hét dóttir hans og þótti kostur bestur á Hálogalandi. Hún var einbirni hans og átti arf að taka eftir Sigurð föður sinn.

(ÍS, chapter 7, p. 374)

[North in Hálogaland is a fjord called Vefsnir. There is an island in the fjord and it is called Álöst, a big island and good. In it is a farm called Sandnes. There lived a man whose name was Sigurður. He was the richest man in the north there. He was a 'landed-man' and wise/intelligent. His daughter's name was Sigríður and was considered the best match in Hálogaland. She was his only child and was due to inherit from her father Sigurður.]

In the north, in Halogaland, there is a large, fine island in Vefsna fjord called Alost, with a farm on it called Sandnes. A wise landholder called Sigurd lived there, the richest man in that part of the north. His daughter Sigrid was considered the finest match in Halogaland; as his only child, she was his heir.

(CS, Chapter 7, p. 39)

Two kinds of repetition in the ST are not allowed to become repetitiveness by TT language/culture conventions. The ST narrative method of recording adjustments to a situation in order of significance, entailing a kind of repetition of action, can be condensed into TT quick description. An early example of this occurs in chapter 3, when Haraldur's messengers to Kveld-Úlfur, in the ST, are shown arriving, then reported to deliver their message, before the content of the message is revealed. In the TT, message and messengers are hurried over, becoming the news which drives the plot on:

En er sendimenn konungs komu til Kveld-Úlfs og sögðu honum sín erindi og það að konungur vill að Kveld-Úlfur komi til hans með alla húskarla sína, [...]  
 [But when the king's messengers came to Kveld-Úlfur and told him their business and that the king wants Kveld-Úlfur to come to him with all his household]  
 (ÍS, p. 370)

But when the messengers told Kveldulf that the king wanted him to bring all the men on his farm to join him, [...]  
 (CS, p. 35)

Sometimes the small adjustments are present in the TT and ST alike, but ST lexical repetition is not allowed to stiffen TT fluency:

Hann var þá staddur nær skóginum. Síðan fór Egill fram með skóginum og svo til skipanna að hann átti kost skógarins ef hann þyrfti.  
 (ÍS, chapter 70, p. 476)  
 [He was then positioned near the woods. Then Egill went forward along the wood and then to the ship in such a way that he had the choice of [sheltering in] the wood if he needed.]

He was near the forest then, so he skirted it on his way back to the ship to provide himself with cover if he needed it.  
 (CS, chapter 70, p. 136)

A third kind of ST repetition, the narrative ordering phrases ('svo er sagt' [so it-is said], 'sem

ritað var' [as was written], 'ekki er getið' [it is not mentioned], and so on), does not become a consistent TT pattern. The TT, however, consistently translates or translates out the ordering phrases in so far as they refer to speech, reducing the 'orality' of the saga:

En er voraði þá bjuggust menn ferða sinna. Þá var enn sem fyrr var sagt að þeir Hallvarður bræður héldu á því máli að þeir fari til og taki Þórólf af lífi.

[And when it was spring then people got ready for their travels. Then it was still as previously was said that Hallvarður and his brother kept to the plan that they go and kill Þórólfur.]

(ÍS, chapter 21, p. 390)

When spring arrived and everybody prepared to leave, Hallvard and his brother broached the subject with the king once again.

(CS, chapter 21, p. 54)

In this example, the translating-out works in conjunction with a refusal to repeat the subject matter. The allusion to telling, 'sem fyrr var sagt' [as previously was said], disappears between ST and TT, a plain allusion to time, 'once again', appearing instead. The relationship of knowledge is not between ST reader and (saga author's?) self-consciously composed text, but between TT reader and immediate (anonymous, neutral) narrative memory.

The ST is lightly punctuated compared to both ÍF and the *Complete Sagas* translation.

The TT relies considerably on punctuation to attain fluency while retaining the ST paragraphing. This can be inventive, inflecting the saga in ways other translations did not, rather as an actor can break a line with breath to bring out another meaning. Here, for example, it is partly the colon and capital initial in Egill's TL speech which make him sound capable of exacting obedience and practised at command:

Þá mælti Egill: "Vér skulum nú snúa aftur til bæjarins og fara hermannlega, drepa menn þá alla er vér náum en taka fé allt það er vér megum með komast."

(ÍS, chapter 58, p. 451)

[Then Egill said: "We shall now turn back to the farm and go/do like warriors, kill all the people whom we take and seize all the goods which we can succeed in carrying off."]

Then Egil said, “Let us go back to the farm and acquit ourselves like true warriors: Kill everyone we can catch and take all the valuables we can manage.”  
(CS, chapter 58, p. 113)

From this punctuation, a technique which can be compared with the CS inclusion of some proverbial-sounding expressions in quotation marks, Egill seems to be referring to a well-known code of warrior behaviour. Compare another instance:

“Það vil eg,” segir Egill, “bjóða þér sem eg bauð Önundi að Gulþingslög skipi um mál okkur. [...]”  
[‘I want this,’ says Egill, ‘to offer you as I offered Önundr that the law of the Gulathing decide our case’]  
(ÍS, chapter 66, p. 470)

“I shall offer you what I offered Onund,” Egil replied. “To have the case settled according to the law of the Gulathing.”  
(CS, chapter 66, p. 131)

Egill’s personal inflexibility emerges as he invokes the law code. As the TT sets out his speech with a sentence that begins with a capitalized infinitive ‘To have’, containing no other verb, it is clear that Egill is quoting himself, and that his determination will not change until the circumstances fit his description of them.

Translation techniques ensuring TT fluency sometimes take the form of avoidance, for example of the Icelandic patronymic. This seems unnecessary. Modern Icelanders and their visitors are capable of coping with a patronymic system, as are modern English readers of folktale in translation. The CS target audience might expect to include both classes. However, even though by standardized policy the patronymic is avoided, local instances of this can have the appearance of being meaningful.

In phrases such as ‘Kveldulf’s son Thorolf and Eyvind Lamb’<sup>47</sup>, a nickname has more apparent status, capitalized like a surname, than the patronymic. Repeated references to ‘Kveldulf’s son Thorolf’ or ‘Grim, Kveldulf’s son’ (for example, CS. chapter XX, p. 54), may look like attempts respectively to assert the primacy of Þórólfur’s bloodline over his subservience to King Haraldur, and to remind the reader of who Grímur is (since the story has been so much Þórólfur’s). That ‘Þorsteinn Þóruson’ has to be called ‘Thorstein, Thora’s son’ (for example, chapter LXX, ÍS p. 476, CS p. 137), when Þorsteinn/Thorstein is comparatively much better known to the reader than Thora/Þóra, shows how mystifying and unnecessary this technique can look.

In another form of avoidance, with consequences for conversational tone, forms of address which it might be difficult to translate, either for their sense or their frequency, without an archaizing or formalizing effect, are ignored. This is so with the frequency of Hárekr’s ‘konungur’ [king] to Haraldur in his first major slander against Þórólfur Kveld-Úlfsson (chapter XII; ÍS, p. 381; CS, p. 45), or Egill’s title for Gyða, ‘húsfreyja’ [housewife/Lady] (chapter LXV; ÍS, p. 467, CS, p. 128). In the two cases cited, the first makes Hárekr’s flattery more modern in that it oversteps rank. He speaks as one individual flattering another. The second, removing formality from friendly individuals’ conversation, in avoiding such titles as ‘Lady’ does not manage to evoke the chivalric genre to which Gyða’s ST episode belongs.

The fluency of the *Complete Sagas* translation is helped also by a modernization of concepts between ST and TT, which is inextricable even from the level of lexical choice. This modernization, simultaneously technique and effect, will be clarified in the next paragraphs.

For the TT reader, the social life of the characters blends familiarity with its undoubted strangeness. Lexical choice, in chapter 11, when Þórólfur ‘bjó veislu í móti

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<sup>47</sup> ‘Þórólfur Kveld-Úlfsson og Eyvindr lambi’. Chapter 6; CS, p. 37; ÍS, p. 372.

konungi' [prepared a feast to greet the king] (ÍS, p. 379) and Thorolf 'threw a feast to welcome the king' (CS, p. 44), glosses over what sort of preparations might have been necessary and what sort of occasion it must have been. The verb 'threw' suggests a modern party, though the noun 'feast' keeps the occasion situated in the saga world. When Eyvindur is declared 'vargur' [outlaw, lit. 'wolf'], having killed in a holy place (ÍS, chapter 49, p. 429), the TT does not try to reactivate the dead wolf-metaphor. A modern, less religious readership is catered for with the vague, not very colloquial term, 'defiler' (CS, chapter 49, p. 91). Eyvindur's deed defines him, in the TL, as someone who has committed, therefore is capable of committing, defilement: definition by action. In the SL, there is an overtone of definition by nature, nature having been expressed through action. When Egill kills eleven people and makes his way back to his men, so '[p]óttusk þeir hafa hann úr helju heimtan' [it seemed as if they had got him back from Hel], Hel and hell as common terms of reference go by the board, for the TT's non-religious modern Egil, whose men 'had given him up for dead'.<sup>48</sup> Hring and Adils, confusingly, are 'British' ('Bretar') [Welsh, Celts] and rule over 'Britain' (*Bretlandi*) [Wales], though paying tribute to the English king. In this case the modernization is more like an anachronism. A better choice would be 'Britons' if not, as more usually, 'Welsh'.<sup>49</sup>

The modern locutions of the TT define the way that the saga world is constituted, and how characters apprehend it and themselves. This is one area where the 1976 Penguin translation truly is replaced by the *Complete Sagas*, which in turn have their inbuilt obsolescence.

There is the language of business and negotiation. In chapter 6, the idea of joining King Haraldur is 'allfýsiligt' [very desirable] for Þórólfur Kveld-Úlfsson (ÍS, p. 372); Thorolf finds it 'a very attractive proposition' (CS, p. 38). In chapter XXVI, Thorir speaks to the King

<sup>48</sup> Chapter 70. ÍS, p. 476; CS, p. 137.

<sup>49</sup> Chapter 51. ÍS, pp. 430-431; CS, p. 92.

‘diplomatically’ (CS, p. 74), an inspired reading of ‘mjúklega’ [eloquently/conciliatingly] (ÍS, p. 411).

There is the language of damage. In chapter 21, Þórólfur Kveld-Úlfsson causes ‘mannskaða og fjárskaða’ [loss-of-life and damage-to-property] (ÍS, p. 390) while Thorolf causes ‘casualties and damage’ (CS, p. 54). In chapter 75, the Jarl knows he has been accused of ‘aftöku konungsmanna’ [killing the King’s men], which, in the gangster rather than the State sense, is ‘executing the king’s men’.<sup>50</sup>

Prophetic forebodings, more often than not, are called ‘intuition’ (CS, pp. 38, 53, 76, for example).

In the language of hospitality, Skallagrim is old-fashioned: it is his ‘duty and privilege’ to welcome Thora (CS, chapter 33, p. 71), whereas Skallagrímur simply has good manners (‘skylt og heimult’ [obligatory and welcome], ÍS, p. 408).

Scale, widely understood: size, time, intensity: also undergoes a modernization in its TL fluency. Ölvir is hopelessly in love with Solveig: ‘Svo mikið gerði Ölvir sér um Solveigu [...]’ [Ölvir became so taken with Solveig]. Ölvir ‘grew so obsessed with her [...]’.<sup>51</sup> After the King kills their kinsman Þórólfur Kveld-Úlfsson, Eyvindur and Ölvir ‘voru hljóðir’ [were quiet]; their TL versions ‘kept a low profile’.<sup>52</sup> The mustering of troops has to be ‘svo mikið sem þurfti’ [as much as needed] - ‘on the scale they needed’.<sup>53</sup> Egil, who has been glowering extraordinarily, receives compensation for his brother, ‘and his brow went back to normal’ (‘og þá fóru brýnn hans í lag’) [and then his eyebrows went-back into line].<sup>54</sup> It is ‘allóhægt’ [entirely-impossible] to speak to King Eiríkr; ‘virtually impossible’, with his TL counterpart,

<sup>50</sup> ÍS, p. 484; CS, p. 144.

<sup>51</sup> Chapter 2. ÍS, p. 369; CS, p. 34.

<sup>52</sup> Chapter 22. ÍS, p. 393; CS, p. 56.

<sup>53</sup> Chapter 52. ÍS, p. 431; CS, p. 93.

<sup>54</sup> Chapter 55. CS, p. 100; ÍS, p. 438.

where ‘virtually’ has a more modern ring than such adverbial alternatives as ‘altogether’, ‘really’ or ‘quite’.<sup>55</sup>

The layout of the verse in the TT shows the influence of the ST. The ST prints a block of verse on the left, with a prose paraphrase in a similar but italicized block parallel on the right. The TT prints a block of verse on the left, with explications of individual kennings as they occur italicized and parallel on the right. The TT explications are more ragged, less like an account, letting more white space show through, than the correspondingly positioned paraphrases in the ST. Often the translation of skaldic verse, though some attempt has been made at word echo and rhythm, reads like prose with verse lineation. In the TT *Höfuðlausn* (CS, chapter 61, pp. 120-124), the ST rhyming couplets are not imitated. There are rhymes or assonances, some delicate, across or within lines, with end-rhymes only at the refrain stanzas 6, 9, 12 and 15, which brings it up-to-date with the practice of some modern poetry, where rhyme is not eschewed, but need not be line-final. This can be seen, for example, in the second half of stanza 11:

[...]  
 The wolf gobbled flesh,  
 the raven daubed  
 the prow of its beak  
 in waves of red.  
 (CS, Chapter 61, p. 122)

For the TT *Sonatorrek*, ‘The Loss of My Sons’ (CS, Chapter 79, pp. 151-156), a metre like that of the ST poem works well, with two-stress paired lines, and once again with sound echoes rather than alliterative binding. This translation sets up its own poetic system. It uses hypermetric lines effectively (‘how hard to pour forth’, p. 151, stanza 2, l. 3), and renders ‘íþrótt’ (ÍS, p. 495, stanza 24, l.1) with creative ambiguity, in this sea-drenched, oppositional

<sup>55</sup> Chapter 45. ÍS, p. 422; CS, p. 84.

poem, as ‘craft’. The verse translations do not have pretensions beyond their powers, leaving plenty of room for the reader’s imagined original, yet, unlike the verses in the other complete English translations of *Egils saga*, they do not represent a startling loss in TT dignity or consistency.

In the TT prose, there are many new interpretations of passages which hitherto have been translated with some other meaning. These interpretations sometimes merely change the detail of the TL saga. Sometimes, they entirely change what may be supposed to be happening in the narrative. The more striking instances of both kinds of new reading will be set out.<sup>56</sup>

**Chapter 16.** Þórólfur is reluctant to speak to the King who is giving ear to slander against him. He anticipates that he will be ‘skammtalaður fyrir konung’ (ÍS, p. 384). This is usually read as his fear that he will be ‘curt before the king’, and unable to plead his case before a King who also wrongs him, i.e. he fears being a tougher Cordelia figure, or deploying the ominous family silence. Here, his fear is that he will ‘not be granted a very long audience with the king’ (CS, p. 48), i.e. he would have been prepared to speak, but does not trust that he will get a hearing.

**Chapter 43.** Atleyjar-Bárður’s poor hospitality is generally read to extend to his offering his guests a room full of ‘straw’ (‘[h]álm’, ÍS, p. 418) to sleep on. CS translates that the room is full of ‘mattresses’ (p. 81), which could suggest that he is in the habit of fobbing unwanted guests off and has the setup to give them halfway comforts. However, in the parallel episode from Egill’s adult life, at Ármóður’s in Vermaland (chapter 72), Egill and his men lie down ‘í hálm’ (ÍS, p. 481), which is translated ‘in the straw’ (CS, p. 141).

**Chapter 48.** King Eiríkur publicly reproaches Queen Gunnhildur: ‘Konungur segir, “Meir frýr þú mér Gunnhildur grimmleiks en aðrir menn, [...]”’ (ÍS, p. 427). In the other five

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<sup>56</sup> Where the CS reading is a real alternative, I supply no literal translation except the usual alternative, as it is not possible to decide on ‘a’ translation.

complete translations of *Egils saga* into English, Eiríkur is translated as reproaching his Queen or whetting him on to excessive harshness: ‘You, Gunnhildur, more than anyone, urge me to harshness’. Here, at once more grim and more pathetic, he accuses her: ‘ “More than anyone else, Gunnhild, you doubt my courage, [...]”’ (CS, p. 90).

**Chapter 59.** A minor change: Skallagrímur, going out to hide his treasure before he lies, carries a chest on his knees and an ‘eirketil’ (ÍS, p. 453) in the crook of his arm. This is usually read as some type of *bronze* vessel. Here, he hoists an ‘iron cauldron’ (CS, p. 115): the material he is seen working with in his smithy, and which, probably being a lot heavier, would be more of a feat to carry.

**Chapter 63.** King Aðalsteinn would prefer Egill to stay with him in England, promising him various high honours. Egill’s reply is usually translated in terms of a projected visit to Iceland which he would like to make - i.e. he is in two minds, really may come back to England or may let ‘would like’ shade painlessly into ‘would have liked’.

Egill segir, “Þessi kostur þykir mér allfýsilegur að taka. Vil ek því játa en eigi níta. En þó verð eg fyrst að fara til Íslands og vitja konu minnar og fjár þess er eg á þar.”  
 [Egill says, ‘This opportunity seems very desirable to take. I want to/will agree and not refuse. But still I must go to Iceland and see to my wife and that property which I own there.’]  
 (ÍS, chapter 63, p. 464)

In the TT, Egil appears to lie outright to Athelstan:

Egil said, “This is a very attractive offer, and I accept it rather than refuse it. But first I must go to Iceland to collect my wife and the wealth I own there.”  
 (CS, chapter 63, p. 125)

In the TT, Athelstan’s subsequent gift to Egil, a good merchant ship and cargo, is therefore the

King's gift to someone whom he reasonably expects to return. The TT Egil is slightly fraudulent in taking the ship. When they part in friendship, Athelstan is confirming a bond for the future, Egil closing a bond advantageously: used and user. The ST Egill is given a parting gift, which is also a generally appreciative gift, not marked by time-expectations. The ST Aðalsteinn may with relative ease be imagined as being clear-eyed about the possibility that Egill is his ally, but is leaving the King's story for his own: landbound and traveller.

**Chapter 81.** When Hákon Aðalsteinsfóstri and Eiríkur's sons are disputing the kingship in Norway, the country finds itself in a convulsive state:

Í þann tíma var í Noregi ófriður mikill og bardagar með þeim Hákon jarli og Eiríkssonum og stukku ýmsir úr landi.  
(ÍS, chapter 63, p. 502)

At that time there was much unrest in Norway. Earl Hakon was at war with Eirik's sons and many people fled the country.  
(CS, chapter 63, p. 162)

The TT shows the population afflicted and another exodus taking place from Norway, such as happened, according to the narrative, during Haraldur hárfagri's battles to consolidate power. By contrast, in Christine Fell's translation for *Everyman*, 'Earl Hakon and the sons of Eirik [...] fled alternately from the country.' (Fell, chapter 78, p. 153): Norway's population is more or less fixed; fluctuations are at the high political level.

In chapter 81 as well, the CS translation refuses to resolve a structural ambiguity one way, as had been earlier translation practice; both alternatives are written up as belonging to the story:

[Einarr skálaglamm] orti drápu um Hákon jarl er kölluð er Vellekla og var það mjög lengi að jarlinn vildi eigi hlýða kvæðinu því að hann var reiður Einari.  
(ÍS, chapter 81, p. 503)

[(I inarr skálaglamm) composed a drápa (a long poem with a refrain) about Jarl Hákon which is called Vellekla and that was very long that the Jarl did not wish to listen to the poem because he was angry with Einarr.]

He composed a *drapa* about Earl Hakon called Lack of Gold, which was very long. For a long time the earl was angry with Einar and refused to listen to it. (CS, chapter 81, p. 163)

The one phrase ‘mjög lengi’ [very long], which syntactically does double work in the ST, as an adjectival clause describing Einarr’s poem and as a temporal adverbial clause referring to the Jarl’s delay in giving the poem a hearing, is split in the TT into ‘[...] very long. For a long time [...]’.

On a smaller level, this kind of sensitivity can be found throughout the CS translation, for example in chapter 82, where Egill’s ‘silkislæður’ [silk robes] (ÍS, p. 504) is translated sometimes as ‘cloak’, sometimes as ‘gown’ (CS, p. 164). The exact garment is left unclear to the mind’s eye, except for its sweep and slightly archaic formality, belonging to public ceremony.

**Chapter 89.** The priest Skafti Thorarinsson tests (the presumed) Egil’s exhumed skull with an axe, not succeeding in doing anything but whiten it, which makes it clear how resistant to blows it would have been ‘when it was covered with hair and skin’ (CS, chapter 89, p. 177). ST ‘meðan svörður og hold fylgdi’ (ÍS, chapter 89, p. 17) had been translated, for example by Fell, ‘while flesh and skin covered it’ (Fell, chapter 86, p. 171). Either meaning can hold, but a famously bald character, such as Egill, probably should be thought of as counting a tough hide, rather than thick hair, as one of his outstanding features.

The *Complete Sagas* translation is the best available modern read for the TL or TL-to-SL reader. If that reader’s imagined original is to be worn down into a shape not too far from an ST version, whether or not during a TL-SL transition, ideally s/he would read both Scudder’s and Fell’s translations, the former with its positive target language-culture fluency, the latter with its positive fluency in TL language together with SL culture. Such comparative reading is

a better 'foreignizing' and 'familiarizing' technique than any one translation can offer.

## IV.

**LANGUAGE, TRANSFORMATIONS AND TRANSMISSION IN *EGILS SAGA***

A remarkable structural feature of *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* is the recurrence of phrases in the narrative voice which call attention to the status of what is narrated, and/or to the structure of the narrative; in either case, to the fact of the narrative's narration. These phrases fall into several categories.

There is the authorial/editorial apparently direct address out to an audience (or working note *written aloud*) such as 'svá sem fyrr var ritat' [as previously was written] or 'er fyrr var frá sagt' [as previously was told of], where it is, incidentally, impossible to draw from the free variation of 'ritat' and 'sagt' any conclusion as to the performance of the narrative being more or other than takes place on the page for a reader's inner ear.

There are phrases which are notes of placement in time, which in turn are also notes of difference - placement of the reader as observer, such as 'sem siðvenja var til' [as [the] custom was], 'eptir siðvenju' [according to custom], and 'í þann tíma' [in that time], which are particularly useful for a modern reader of SL or TT and interesting to measure in translation, because they signal a proximate *then* against which the reader constitutes and adjusts her or his narrative *now*.

There are phrases which bracket off what is narrated from the narrative voice itself, as when the phrase 'svá er sagt' [so it-is said] is used twice (XXVII, p. 69, p. 70) to describe what is said to have happened during a shapechanging session, and during shapechanging generally.

There are phrases which - independent of the facts of the situation of composition, for writer then or reader now - suggest that the narrative voice belongs to a scrupulous reporter, and suggest a layering of tradition beneath the given saga, for example that there may have been more that could be said but which must have been left out because it is unsupported, such as ‘en ekki er at segja frá’ [but there-is nothing to tell [of]], ‘er þat at segja’ [there-is that to-say], ‘en ekki er getit’ [but it-is not mentioned].

There are phrases which suggest or invent a layer of oral tradition and the busyness of talk contemporary with or just after events which would have been the ground of this layer, such as ‘þat var mál manna’ [loosely, ‘people said that’].

There are other categories, or these categories could be divided differently. As they are, they sometimes overlap, as when (apparently) talk contemporary with events blends into legend contemporary with composition, which is hedged about with reportorial scruple; one instance occurs in the narrative discussion of where Egill hid his treasure, which passes from ‘eru þar margar gátur á’ [there are many guesses about [it]] to ‘geta sumir menn þess’ [some people say]; from there, to ‘hafa þat margir fyrir satt’ [many hold it true], and so, ‘ok geta þess sumir’ [and some say this] (LXXXV, p. 297).

There are two aspects to this which are relevant to this chapter’s discussion of language in *Egils saga*.

First, there is the narrative’s own interest in *translations*, from sequential narrative into self-reflective saga, from accounts into report, from writing to reading, from tradition or legend to writing, from conversation to legend.

Second, there is what could be described as a constant hum of ordering, a strong authorial/editorial voice which reshapes the past narrative and redirects what is to come, which means that the reader’s experience of the saga narrative is never let rest; the prose is not restrained without

the restraining presence being felt, and the famously 'objective' saga narrative is presented as the product of an ordering subjective consciousness which may be lost or illusory in *fact* but which is *real* within the saga's reality. The prose may speak straight into the reader's mind, but not with an illusion of voicelessness. This is the first qualification made to the nature of the 'objectivity' of the saga prose; the second, later, will concern the relation of verse to prose.

It is commonplace to remark on the somatization of emotion in family sagas, i.e. emotion registered by a physical symptom reportedly manifested by the character concerned rather than dissected by the narrative voice itself or in conversation between characters. One well-known example is the change of colour, to red (as happens to more than one king in *Egils saga* and becomes a measure of fluctuating tension in *Laxdæla saga*) or pale (which is a sign of the mood to murder, in *Víga-Glúms saga*). In *Egils saga*, Egill's grief at his son's death by drowning *is said reputedly* to have shown itself by his swelling so that his clothes burst.

I intend to show that the somatization of emotion in *Egils saga* becomes only one feature in a rhetorical and translational system between action, silence, and various kinds of formal speech.

I would suggest further, that rhetorical and translation systems within the saga trace the evolving relation of language and power: not in a familiar, modern, theoretical sense, but in a sense coherent within the saga world. Here, words can have efficient power over things. The individual also has to be conceived of differently. Her or his reputation (legend, loyalty, authority, news) exists *by means of but also in excess of* language, and is central to the idea and existence of the individual within the saga world. A strange and complex set of relations exists between characters and language, and its workings need to be drawn out on their own terms in order to be seen and understood.

In order to look at this set of relations, I use three main techniques.

One is to look at the significance within the saga of certain recurrent words. These include

*hljóð*, which can refer to silence, stillness or a hearing (of a poem; of a case), but has secondary meanings, to do with musical, martial or other sounds. The relation between the two sets of meanings is not of closeness through opposition, but is (metaphorically speaking) translational, as silence gets a hearing through sound, and vice versa. Other words include *hlýða* [to listen (to); to yield (to) or obey; to do, be permissible or proper; in the reflexive form, to listen, or to be allowed, to dare do with impunity].<sup>1</sup> The relation between *hljóð* and *hlýðast* figures the relation between formal speech/silence/action and effective power, which is a telling, if reductive, summary of what Egill himself is about. The highly rhetoricalized nature of the speech/action relation in the first section of the saga, relating to King Haraldr, has something to do with the atmosphere of paranoia which sometimes has been adduced as a failing of the king rather than a feature of this section, and is an important prelude to the transformations of this relation which Kveld-Úlfr's family will manage to effect.

The second main technique which I use is as much one of presentation as of analysis. By juxtaposing sections of the saga, in the way that SL and TL sections are juxtaposed in some translation analyses, the translational - transformed or transforming - relations of action, silence, and formal speech will become evident, or, to change the metaphor, the line of force along which one section has turned upon another.

It follows from this that, rather than extrapolate or perhaps tabulate the results, as might have been expected from the first technique of examining word-clusters, I shall more or less follow the saga's evolution of these relations, with a kind of commentary.

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 easby, Vigfússon and Craigie, p. 274.

Reading Egils saga Skallagrímssonar

Near the beginning of the saga, the situation of conflict is between Kveld-Úlfr, a *hersir* [noble landowner] in the territory controlled by King Auðbjörn, and King Haraldr hárfagri, who is making himself king of all Norway. Kveld-Úlfr will not support 'his' king against Haraldr, because he foresees this will be hopeless, but will not serve Haraldr, foreseeing this will be luckless. Only reluctantly does he let his elder son Þórólfr become Haraldr's man.

How has Kveld-Úlfr's character been established? He is shown, predictably, as a hard worker and early riser, good with his men, but, over the course of the paragraph and a typical day, moving from the giving of advice and foresighted judgements to becoming, as evening closes, 'stygggr, svá at fáir menn máttu orðum við hann koma; var hann kveldsvæfr. Þat var mál manna, at hann væri mjök hamrammr; hann var kallaðr Kveld-Úlfr.' (p. 4)<sup>2</sup> Up till then he has been called simply 'Úlfr'. The retiring movement into night, when normal vision is deprived, and into silence, leads to the allegation of special powers and the acquisition of a special name, not as something which *follows*, but as something which is *of a piece with* the earlier authoritative language and action: cyclical, not linear; positive excess, not negative recharging.

In chapter II, the skald Ólvir is introduced. His rôle as skald, in the saga, is not central except in so far as it is of a piece with his rôle as intercessor between Kveld-Úlfr's (Þórólfr's) and Haraldr's parties: as translator of their injunctions, refusals, and silences, into negotiations. In his initial, miniature saga, he quits raiding to make love-poems (a criminal act, without familial approval); these must be understood, without narrative comment, to translate, in chapter IV, into the violent action taken by the woman's brothers against him, and his becoming Haraldr's poet in chapter V. Here the offended family's disapproval prolongs itself into the narrative silence about it after the bare relation of the refusal of Ólvir's suit, and the brothers' violence is to be understood as another

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llen, so that few people could get to speak to him; he was sleepy-in-the-evenings. It was rumoured, that he might be much a shapechanger; he was called Evening-Wolf]

response in what effectively is continued communication, just as the same (untold) poems which communicate Qlvir's hopeless love for, and not to, a lady, communicate the need for vengeance to her male relatives. The attack on Qlvir is an answer; it should be read neither as coming out of the blue, nor as breaking a pattern or possibility of communication.

Although Qlvir's activity as negotiator overshadows his poetic activity, the reader is informed that 'Af Qllum hirðmönnum virði konungr mest skáld sín; þeir skipuðu annat Qndvegi.' (VIII, 19).<sup>3</sup> At this point in *Egils saga*, poetry is at the service of kings, translating reputation and event into durable, approved history. *Skáld* does not so much imply a set of behaviours and interests, let alone an allegiance to a shifty god like Óðinn, as provide a job description.

In chapter III, almost the first thing narrated about King Haraldr is, 'hann hafði þess heit strengt' [he had made this vow] (p. 7). The folktale ring of his vow not to cut hair or beard till he is Norway's supreme king should not distract from what matters in the saga's system of meaning, i.e. the strength of this binding resolution which holds out against the 'samlag' [alliance] and 'herboð' [summons to war] of other kings (pp. 8-9), until the rhythmical, alliterative poetry of law and power which lists what comes to belong to Haraldr (pp. 11-12) binds up the land as his in accordance with his vow. The sentence after this, which is the last of the chapter: 'Ok í þann tíma fannsk Ísland' [And at that time Iceland was discovered] (p 12), places the discovery of Iceland as that which is outside what Haraldr has accounted for, outside his power to translate it into the list-poetry of law and power which is the binding language of ownership.

The stretch of saga narrative practically controlled by King Haraldr, i.e. until Skalla-Grímr is well-established in Iceland, lives itself out in language in a way peculiar to a stretch of time controlled by the first supreme king of a large territory. There is a constant back-and-forth of messages and messengers, of groups with errands, of 'sannar jarregnir' [true/authenticating tokens]

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<sup>3</sup>If all his retainers the king most valued his poets. They were seated opposite the king's place.]

which replace linguistic signs of power. The fulfilment of action becomes almost secondary to the bearing of reports. The structuring verbs are *bjóða* [to offer/order] and *biðja* [to ask for], *nefna til* [to name/mention/appoint], *biðja orlofs* [to ask permission] and *lofa þat* [to permit that]. Characters exist as they are monitored, or as they can remain opaque - this latter being Kveld-Úlfr's strength, as set out earlier.

When the Hildiríðarsynir fail as petitioners, they bring about Þórólfr's downfall, succeeding as slanderers; they do not have to do, or prove, anything, other than to translate, for King Harald, Þórólfr's actions from splendour into menace, and his reputation for magnificence and supportiveness into ostentation and self-will. The violent actions arise out of the linguistic manipulation of reputation and a frustrated claim. The Hildiríðarsynir will not 'þegja' [be silent] if Þórólfr will not 'vitni heyra' [hear testimony], and he does not really have the power to support the way that he answers, 'styggliga' [sullenly/curtly]- a word which belongs to his father and the king (VIII, 26-27). Action will not only follow words but take place through words. This general, governing restlessness of reputation and suspicion, report and action - this constant translation excited and exacted by the demands of Haraldr's court - should be kept in mind as the section continues to be discussed in more detail.

Returning to chapter V, Haraldr assumes the adjective formerly assigned to Kveld-Úlfr's ominous quiet; he becomes 'styggur' [sullen/brooding] at the family's obduracy. The skald Qlvir offers to intervene, using the word 'þýðask' [to attach oneself to/associate with/pay homage to] for the required understanding and behaviour; the non-reflexive form of this verb in Modern Icelandic means 'to translate'. The bargain is that, in recognition of service, Haraldr will give power and titles to the family - as if they did not have them already, or as if what they had were in an obsolete language, which they needed to give up, and take on a new one. Kveld-Úlfr says that Þórólfr will be 'auðbeðinn' [easily persuaded] (p. 13) (not dissimilar to Gunnhildr's criticism of Eiríkr much later in the saga as

‘talhlýðinn’ [credulous]), but holds on to his rights to translate power and control historical narrative by *making a concession to the king*, that everyone who obeys his ‘orðum’ [word] will acknowledge Haraldr. However, ‘Lét konungr þá vera kyrrt’ [The king then let things rest]: Haraldr has ultimate control over silence as peace, if not over all silences, and, again like Kveld-Úlfr, can play a waiting game. In chapter VI, Þórólfr speaks the language of obedient interpretation, explaining the King to Kveld-Úlfr, saying that those who ‘þýðask eigi hann með vináttu, sem allir verði ekki at manna’,<sup>4</sup> questioning incredulously whether Kveld-Úlfr is ‘forspár’ [foresighted], i.e. whether he has preternatural access to a projection of the narrative and the reception of promising suggestions.

Even the fateful occasion when Þórólfr holds a feast for Haraldr (XI), who observes that Þórólfr has five hundred men, as against his three hundred, is presented as a set of rhetorical and translational relationships. The wordless, somatized anger of the King undergoes an unreported, undramatized transformation during Þórólfr’s appeasing words, so that the King’s next words express another, different emotion, and reinterpret into a bond of loyalty what had been misinterpreted tacitly as a display or rivalry. This can be figured as happening *between* the sections cited below, one after another to show their transformational relation:

Konungr settisk í háseti; en er alskipat var it efra ok it fremra, þá sásk konungr um ok roðnaði ok mælti ekki, ok þóttusk menn finna, at hann var reiðr.  
[The king sat in the high seat; but when everyone was in place, higher and lower, then the king looked around and reddened and said nothing, and people realized that he was angry]

Konungr tók þá vel orðum Þórólfs ok gerði sik þá blíðan ok kátan; lögðu þá ok margir góð orð til, sögðu, sem satt var, at veizlan var in vegsamligsta ok útleizlan in sköruligsta ok konungi var styrkr mikill at slíkum mǫnnum; skilðusk þá með kærleik miklum.  
(XI, p. 29)  
[The king then was pleased with Þórólfr’s speech and became easy and cheerful; many people also then offered favourable interpretations, said, as was true, that the feast was the most glorious and the parting gift most excellent and there was much support for the king from such people; they left each other on excellent terms.]

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o not take him favourably. all end up as nothing]

This is not a victory for Þórólfr. Haraldr has total narrative control over the situation. When the King is pleased, Þórólfr's grandeur is a sign appertaining to Haraldr's kingship. When he is displeased, the redness in his face and his silence betoken the active translation of the King's emotion, the blood and silence of Þórólfr's death.

Why does Haraldr listen to the Hildiríðarsynir? Paranoia (within the saga world) or a wish to belittle the first supreme king of Norway (Icelandic saga ideology) are unsatisfactory reasons, because they are weaker and less interesting than the demands which the unusually self-reflective *Egils saga* makes of itself and its readers. How interesting is Þórólfr's story, and is it a tragedy (of course it does not compare to Egill's section of the narrative)?

These two commonly asked or intimated questions are, within the framework of this reading, misconceived. *How* Haraldr listens to the Hildiríðarsynir is what matters: what the transformational relation is between hearing and action, conviction and speech. The interest of Þórólfr's story is not tragic, nor exemplary, except in the sense that it is exemplary of a set of such transformational relations, against which Egill's power to use or cut through language and to act will measure itself, and evolve a new set of possibilities.

The relation between Haraldr and the Hildiríðarsynir takes place through language, in a much more complex way than the obvious relation of persuader-persuaded. The moment of transition between their relative uses of language and power (or not) over Þórólfr's fate takes place in chapter XII. From being the one who, if questioned, is in charge of what is happening - of the narrative - and can say curtly that everything is in order, Haraldr becomes the one who has to ask questions, and who, when the Hildiríðarsynir request him to do so, hands over, in effect, the power over the official narrative to upstarts who undo the summary account of order.

King Haraldr listens to the Hildiríðarsynir because, for him, they have acquired a power equivalent to that of a narrative ordering phrase, like ‘Þat var manna mál’ [People said/It was rumoured]. Although he keeps the old manner of controlled tone, and emotion (not suppressed - but mobilized) as silence, what that control and silence *represent* has changed, from security and the status of effective narrator of his own life and kingdom to suspicion and the status of a listener to an account of his own reduced status as an actor in a narrative (apparently) controlled by Þórólfr’s plans and mediated by the Hildiríðarsynir’s words To juxtapose,

Konungr sá til hans ok mælti: “Hví mæltir þú slíkt, Hárekr, eða hvat kanntu þar af segja?” Hann segir: “Hvárt skal ek mæla í orlofi, konungr, þat er mér líkar?” “Mældu,” segir konungr.

[The king looked at him and spoke: ‘Why do you say that, Hárekr, or what are you able to say?’ He says, ‘Can I say with permission, king, whatever I like?’ ‘Speak’, says the king.]

(XII, p. 30)

Konungr reiddisk mjök við ræður þessar ok mælti þó stilliliga, sem hann var vanr jafnan, þá er hann frétti þau tíðendi, er mikils váru verð.

(XII, p. 32)

[The king became very angry during these consultations and spoke nonetheless calmly, as he always used to, when he heard information which mattered a lot.]

Konungr ræddi fátt um þessi tíðendi fyrir mǫnnum, en fannsk þat á, at hann myndi trúnað á festa þessa orðræðu, er honum var sagt.

(XII, p. 33)

[The king said little about this news to people, but it was noticed, that he would place trust in this talk, which was reported to him.]

[...] tók hann jafnan vel máli þeira.

[he invariably welcomed their talk]

(XII, p. 33)

If the King is to regain his status as the person who, as master of the narrative, receives translations of actions into reports, he has to accept that he is being given a non-choice in stopping the translations of himself that are brought back to him, whether as acted upon or as taking action.

Haraldr therefore has several good reasons for refusing to hear of hospitality and self-justifications from Þórólfr, and for trying to take Þórólfr out of his estate, back into the *hirð*: reasons

which are less to do with any threat posed by Þórólfr than with the King's escape from the cycle of vicious rhetoric. He does not punish Þórólfr, but, with pure self-interest, wants to remove him from a situation where, for good or ill cause or no cause, he has *created too much talk*. King Haraldr needs to be the one who orders all significant talk, and, without reference to the truth of the charges, he attempts to put a stop to the waste of time which is the laying and hearing of charges, trying to exchange allegations and the stepping forward of two sets of witnesses for personal supervision and accountable speech.

King Haraldr's listening silences do not have to be read exclusively as the silences in which slander can create belief. Whether or not, or however much, Haraldr gives credence to the extremity of the situation described in the Hildiríðarsynir's slander, as a prudent king he may have a legitimate, quantitative fear about the amount of loyalty in a given population or company. It may be the case that people's motivations and emotions and needs (honour, booty, generosity, grief for a beset or damaged leader, vengeance, tenancy, dependency; *biðja* and *bjóða*) cannot be stretched to accommodate more than one charismatic figure, or cannot be expected to do so. It may be the case that however much a *second* charismatic figure *believes* himself capable of an individual estimation of his own effective personal loyalty, and powerful enough to translate his followers' loyalty into *direct* support for the king, this is not safely to be relied upon. This eventually proves to be so. When Haraldr proposes to strip Þórólfr of his responsibilities and make him a retainer (therefore under supervision) again, Þórólfr looks around at his men, says that he cannot give them up as long as he can see to them, even out of his private means. He invites the king home with him, to hear the truth of the case. Haraldr refuses such contact. Þórólfr leaves. (XVI, p. 40).

Returning to the time before the open break between the King and Þórólfr, the skald Qlvir interprets Haraldr's silences as hostility, for Þórólfr's followers, in chapter XIII, after Þorgils delivers to the King the lavish tribute gathered by Þórólfr in Finnmark, and Haraldr *svavarar engu, ok sá menn,*

at hann var reiðr' [does not answer, and people saw, that he was angry]. Qlvir translates that Haraldr 'þagnar' [falls silent] at any mention of Þórólf (p. 34), because of the Hildiríðarsynir's slander and private conversations with the King. He tries to reinterpret events for Haraldr, who does not answer, but goes to look at the tribute, and is brought to talk, with the result that 'Konungr gladdisk þá, ok spyrr, hvat til tíðenda hefði orðit um ferðar þeira Þórólfs' [Then the King brightened, and asks, what had happened on Þórólfr's journey] (p. 35), i.e. Haraldr now trusts one of Þórólfr's followers to interpret his leader's actions and report them truthfully to the King.

The King is not paranoid, but desires the constant hum of reports and messages to be, as it were, all *dedicated* to him, articulated for him. The significant complementarity of Qlvir's two rôles as skald, and as intercessor who brings the King's perception of his historical truth into line with factual truth, even if only momentarily, cannot be underestimated; nor can the fact that to fill these rôles adequately, in effect he is serving both Kveld-Úlfr's family and the King's.

I would wish to emphasize, for this reading of language in the world of *Egils saga*, how the rôle of the skald in the royal court is being delineated, beyond the link (of anthropological interest) that Qlvir is Þórólfr's maternal uncle, therefore bound to look out for his sister-son, or the existence (of genealogical/inheritance-theory interest) of yet another skald in Egill's bloodline.<sup>5</sup> In chapter XVI, where Þórólfr anticipates being "skammtalaðr" [short-spoken] with Haraldr, (p. 38) because the king has allowed slander to become an effective language in his understanding of the situation, he asks Qlvir to continue his negotiations, but also tries to peg Haraldr's understanding to a different currency, to observed action rather than reported intention, saying that he has not 'lýst' [shown] disloyalty to the king and describing what ought to be 'ljóst' [clear] (p. 39), but Haraldr will not shift

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Work could be done on *genealogical nature* in the sagas (beyond wide groupings like 'dark' and 'light' descendants . Kveld-Úlfr's line): how this is particular to and conventional in the saga world(s), against the often reiterated notion at one interest of the family sagas is their truth to enduring common human nature.

from reports to evidence, reproaching him, not with one thing or another, but with the fact that *two* kinds of highly divergent report are multiplying around Þórólfr.

Hárekr's extraordinarily long, uninterrupted speech to the King in chapter XVIII, where he blames Þórólfr's unlawful and violent interventions for his own failure to accomplish the duties taken over from Þórólfr in collecting the Finnmark tribute, needs to be read otherwise than it risks being read, i.e. as of a type familiar from novels, or as a dramatic monologue.

It displays a range of words to do with relations of speech, hearing, truth and belief, and how Hárekr has co-opted them, changing their significance and context: how, in effect, he *owns* them, and the king's means of interpretation. This is echoed in the conclusion given to the speech by the narrative voice itself. Juxtaposing,

“[...] ok er þat undr, er þér látið honum hvetvetna hlýða. Munu hér sǫnn vitni til finnask um [...]”

(XVII, p. 43)

[and that is strange, that you allow him to do as he likes. Here true testimony can be brought about ...]

Þetta sǫnnuðu fǫrunautar hans allt, er Hárekr sagði, en hér kunnu engir í móti at mæla.

[His companions confirmed everything which Hárekr said, and nobody here knew how to contradict]

(XVIII, p. 43)

Hárekr's narrative mastery here is also shown by his speech's displacement of the narrative voice with a narrative about speech; it is too long and involved to be read as properly within the narrative. The narrative has given way to another kind of voice - a treacherous voice - as if to heighten by contrast with its own usual scrupulosity the nature and effect of Hárekr's language relations.

King Haraldr's silence, all through this speech, also needs to be read within the system of meanings that the saga has set up. His silences or quiet speech have been used throughout as markers of personal emotion or of the public importance which he attaches to what is being said to him. The

length of Hárekr's masterfully malicious speech creates a corresponding length of ominous, endorsing silence in the royal listener.

Chapters XVIII to XXII, charting the rebellion and downfall of Þórólfr, do so, at plot level, by a sequence of events. Þorgils loses cargo and ship to Haraldr's men, visits Kveld-Úlfr, and is re-equipped. Þórólfr lays waste to Hallvarðr and Sigtryggr's farm, goes home to Kveld-Úlfr, but leaves once more. Hallvarðr and Sigtryggr nag the King to let them kill Þórólfr; he dissuades, then allows them, but pre-empts them by doing the job himself.

This chain of events at plot level happens along with a set of parallelisms at the level of language/action relations, which works like a cross-rhythm, making the events inevitable and in a certain way static *at the same time* that they are shocking and dynamic.

The forebodings which Kveld-Úlfr expresses to Þorgils, and subsequently with prophetic strength to Þórólfr, in chapter XIX, find their counterpart in Haraldr's admonishment to Hallvarðr and Sigtryggr in chapter XXI, where the King sees, with the sort of clarity which has the strength of prophecy in the saga world, that they lack the fortune (*gæfa*) to fight against Þórólfr - *gæfa* was early identified (by Kveld-Úlfr) as Haraldr's superior attribute, and he knows it.

The breakdown of communications between the King (the King's men) and Þórólfr is figured as a reciprocal relationship of violence. Þórólfr's 'heróp' [war cry] and attack on Hallvarðr and Sigtryggr's farm, in chapter XIX, finds its counterpart and more than its match in the King's attack on Þórólfr's estate in chapter XXII, when 'lustu þeir þá upp herópi, ok var blásit í konungslúðr herblástr.' [then they raised a battle-cry, and a battle-call was sounded by the king's trumpet] (p. 52).

A last-minute attempt to negotiate is made by Sigríðr, Þórólfr's wife, with the King, and by Ólvir, the King's skald, with Þórólfr (pp. 52-52); at this point in the saga, the rôles of skald and lady share a special immunity and permission to try exchanges of speech, very different from the special peril and confrontational glorying that will characterize Egill's interpretation of the rôle of skald.

It is interesting that the short, 'inset' chapter XX. with no speech at all, relates in the narrative voice how Skalla-Grímr marries the wealthy Bera and, although Kveld-Úlfr is still able, starts to manage the estate; this undramatized, as it were silent, set of actions shows Kveld-Úlfr to be a better master to his sons than the King, as far as devolving power and forming alliances goes. The inset chapter is not a cinematic flash elsewhere, but a compression of family action, a springlike gathering of force to be released later into full narrative as Þórólfr's story, winding down, deteriorates into conflicting sounds, final gestures and brave last words.

After the killing, the brothers Eyvindr and Qlvir see to their nephew's burial and the widowed Sigríðr's estate. Their return to the King marks their discomfort and/or anger by loss of speech - they are no longer *civil* there, in a strong sense of 'civility' - and they ask permission to leave, to be, as it were, out of the saga which belongs to Haraldr. Juxtaposing,

[...] þeir váru hljóðir ok mæltu fátt við menn.

(XXII, p. 55)

[they were quiet and spoke little with people]

Þat var einn hvern dag, at þeir bræðr gengu fyrir konung; þá mælti Qlvir: "Þess orlofs vilju vit bræðr þik biðja, konungr, at þú lofir okkr heimferð til búa okkarra, því at hér hafa þau tíðendi gǫrzk, er vit berum eigi skaplyndi til at eiga drykk ok sess við þá menn, er báru vápn á Þórólfr, frænda okkarn." Konungr leit við honum ok svarar heldr stutt: "Eigi mun ek þat lofa ykk; hér skulu þit vera með mér."

(XXII, pp 55 - 56)

[It happened one day, that the brothers went before the king; then Qlvir said: 'We brothers want to ask your permission for this, king, that you let us go home to our farms, because here such things have happened, that we no longer have the disposition for drinking and sitting with the men, who used weapons on Þórólfr, our relative.' The king looked at him and answers rather shortly: 'I will not allow you that; you must stay here with me.']

In the end, Eyvindr is ordered to marry Þórólfr's widow Sigríðr and Qlvir is retained as skáld, after a sufficiently chafing interval where they are made, in effect, to feel or learn that their end is within the narrative controlled by the King, and that what he allots them must be thankfully received as an honour - 'Þeir bræðr þǫkkuðu konungi þann sóma, er hann veitti þeim' [Those brothers thanked the king for that honour, which he granted

them] (p. 56) - they no longer dispose of the right or power to use independently the languages of vengeance or grief.

The first major move to Iceland in the saga is Ketill Hœngr's (chapter XXIII), who leaves after taking such revenge as he can for Þórólfr.

How is the idea of Iceland established within the saga world?

It is introduced as the place which everyone is talking about: the place which has become news. This means that the rumour of voices-*then* reported by the narrative passes into what becomes the subject of the narrative itself. The slowness of news, so that geographical barriers also imply time barriers, means that portions of the saga world, at various points in the narrative, exist, literally, *in language*, but not in the modern sense, that language may construct the world; rather in the sense that there are *things beyond language*, that new territories for action exist beyond report since through report, and urge the proving of their existence.

To leave one place for another is to become part of a different set of news, and also to change one's status as a newsmaker.

The account of landtaking, with the establishment of Ketill Hœngr and his settlers, is marked repeatedly by the alternation of the verbs *hét* [called] and *átti* [had], where 'átti' sometimes means 'possessed' (land), sometimes 'married'. The poetic effect of these prose listings is like that of a spell, in the efficient power of words over the geography of the imagination. The Iceland being set up for the saga world is not, after all, exactly the Iceland in which the audience contemporary with the saga lived. Poetically, the account of landtaking *works with* the confirmation of traditions about landtaking, without being the same thing as, or even part of the definition of, this confirmed tradition. The confirmation of tradition subserves the effect of the narrative.

Personal names and place names are paired in the narrative, so that the geographical region is not to be conceptualized separately from its settlers, in the saga's idea of early Iceland. Ultimately,

this means that the power of one's name over the land, and the power to give a name to land, can retranslate themselves into the power which the named land/land associated with a personal name (its entire history, as well as its actual wealth and people) may give to a named individual. This retranslated power is what Egill will exert against Qnundr sjóni, who lives on land originally and indissolubly associated with Egill's ancestors (chapter 82), when there is a slight encroachment on the boundaries and land-wealth of Borg: real, if unfair, power, which galvanizes tradition so that it strikes into later fact.

Before Kveld-Úlfr and Grímr make the move to Iceland, they have to finish their story with Haraldr. Qlvir talks to the King and to Kveld-Úlfr about compensation for Þórólfr, trying to translate a royal execution into a personal killing; the King, of course, demands the physical presence of one of the aggrieved parties, bent on extracting words and making relative power felt, refusing to act through an intermediary. Kveld-Úlfr (disingenuously, as it will turn out) excuses himself because of age and infirmity. Skalla-Grímr apprehends that he himself will be 'ekki orðsnjallr' [not eloquent] (XXIV, p. 61). Qlvir promises to undertake the language of negotiation. Grímr proves too obdurate a presence; the King is unable to summon even a courteous reply from him. This provokes a by now familiar series of signs, and the sequence of emotion-in-silence to action-without-direct-speech, but Qlvir manages to translate brute confrontation into slick escape: 'Konungr þagði, ok setti hann dreyrrauðan á at sjá. Qlvir sneri þegar í brott ok bað þá Grím ganga út; þeir gerðu svá, gengu út ok tóku vápn sín: bað Qlvir þá fara í brott sem skjótast.' (XXV, p. 64).<sup>6</sup>

In contrast with the busy energy and individual stamp of land/name claiming and settlement, which is division as well as fellowship, a proliferation of potential family histories, in Iceland, Haraldr's story is a consolidation of Norway into a one-land one-man one-name peacefulness, a political history where all questions have been, or can be, settled, and where gifts of land are not gifts

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<sup>6</sup> [The king fell silent, and flushed blood-red. Qlvir turned away immediately and told Grím and his company to leave; they did so, left and took their weapons; Qlvir told them to go away as fast as possible.]

of liberty but enrollments into, or confirmation of, service rendered to the King: ‘En er Haraldr var orðinn einvaldskonungr yfir landi Ƿllan ok hann settisk um kyrrt, [...]’ [And when Haraldr had become sole king over the whole country and he settled down quietly] (XXVI, p. 66).

The prelude to Kveld-Úlfr’s and Skalla-Grímr’s departure for Iceland is a breaking out of the quiet, thorough occupation and foresighted knowledge which has been the habit of their narrative. They take revenge, shapechanging (it is said) dramatically, on Hallvarðr and Sigtryggr. This belies Kveld-Úlfr’s claim of feebleness. Skalla-Grímr shows himself not only ‘skyggri’ [sharper-sighted] than other people (XXVII, p. 68) but also deft with words, turning one of his surviving victims among the King’s men into a messenger to take his ‘kviðling’ [ditty] (p. 70) to Haraldr. This is the second poem in the saga. The first poem, spoken by Kveld-Úlfr (XXIV, p. 60), is a skaldic verse lamenting his son’s death, and old age which prevents him from taking proper revenge. Here it can be seen that the amount and quality of silence, absence, action not made into language, and prophetic speech which are Skalla-Grímr’s and Kveld-Úlfr’s in the narrative is directly proportional to the energy of their action and speech when it does occur.

It can further be seen that Skalla-Grímr’s little poem happens after the fact of the action it relates, not as a spurt of words in the thick of action or as an announcement/working-up - though of course the recitation of it, and the conveying of it (to be recited again), are in themselves performances, actions. This will also be the pattern with many of Egill Skallagrímsson’s poems. The placement of verse after the fact is characteristic of the concern of the prose narrative with its own credibility, as well as of Skalla-Grímr’s concern with finishing a job properly that, transmitted to Egill, will translate as larger-scale killings and even more verse.

What about Kveld-Úlfr, though? His verse seems to be anticipatory of the action, an infusion of power, as well as a lament for the age which prevents him from taking revenge for Þórólfr. Is this true, however, or can Kveld-Úlfr’s verse be read as happening after a fact, apart from

its commemorative function? It is not impossible that what Kveld-Úlfr laments is that age (*gæfa* [good fortune] notwithstanding) - and the fact that he has only one son left, perhaps - prevent him from attempting to take revenge *directly against the King*, even if this might have been as doomed a venture as Arinbjörn's threatened battle against Eiríkr had Egill not be given a hearing. After all, as mentioned in chapters XXII and XXIII, there had been an enormous mustering to support Þórólfr against the King's men, which only dispersed because the King quickened the expected pace of events by taking action himself; it has been specified already, in an inset section during the time that hostilities are picking up between the King and Þórólfr (chapter XX), that Kveld-Úlfr's men were all exceedingly strong and trained according to their own temperament and capability; and Þórólfr's falling forwards at Haraldr's feet has elicited from Kveld-Úlfr the remark that "þat hafa gamlir menn mælt, at þess manns myndi hefnt verða, ef hann felli á grúfu, ok þeim nær koma hefndin, er fyrir yrði, er hin felli; en ólíkligt er, at oss verði þeirar hamingju auðit." (XXIV, p. 61)<sup>7</sup>. If so, then Kveld-Úlfr's verse comes *after* a series of mental acts: he will have taken this course in his imagination, foreseen the outcome, and come to a realization of the result, which evolves as the decision or urge to produce a commemorative and regretful verse instead. That is, the actions of his life, in the saga, largely consist of a series of foresights, about possibilities to avoid as well as chances to take: he lives, as it were, ahead of himself: which means that this verse, though seemingly anticipatory of action, more typically, for this saga, comes after it, though Kveld-Úlfr's imagined/foreseen/possible/avoided actions are not directly in the narrative. This is the kind of speculation into which the blanks in the structure of the narrative seem designed to manoeuvre the reader. It cannot be proved, but is justified as one way of working out the imaginative coherence of Kveld-Úlfr's final rôle: to reach Iceland ahead of his company, as a corpse in a coffin, which is washed up, as he says it will be, at the best place to take land. One could not imagine a stronger

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[Old people have said that that man would be avenged, if he fell forward, and the vengeance touch whomever stood in front, when he fell.]

silence. The actions and narrative to follow, by the process of transformation which I have been suggesting is crucial to the system of meaning in the saga, will have to be of corresponding strength and uncanniness.

The sending back and forth of messages and interpretations which so characterized the dealings of the Norwegian royal court that even an official skald is only seen in his rôle as negotiator has been entirely absent from the dealings between Kveld-Úlfr and Skalla-Grímr. The constant, uneasy rhetoricalization of life, more wearisome than a background buzz, begins to disappear from the narrative once the interest transfers to Skalla-Grímr's establishment in Iceland, and other language-relations will be set up.

It would be inadequate to the poetics of the saga prose to skim-read Skalla-Grímr's landtaking as conventional and similar to Ketill Høngr's. Høngr's characteristic verbs were *hét* and *átti*, in what works as the *original view of the drama* of settlement in the saga (though discovery and earlier settlements have been mentioned). Skalla-Grímr's characteristic verbs are *gefa* [bestow] and *kalla* [call] (XXVIII, pp. 73-75). It is important to see him as a powerful and generous *giver* from the first. By chapter XXIX, his verbs are *bjóða* [offer] and *vísa* [direct], and the pattern where 'X þekkjust e-t' [X accepted something] from Skalla-Grímr has begun. His government of the region under his control is different from, yet akin to, a king's.

The skaldic verse which Skalla-Grímr speaks in chapter XXX, about the sounds and sights of working early in the forge, could, at this point, be forced to undergo a heavily symbolic reading. It would be more realistic, however, to see in it how, for Skalla-Grímr, the action of achieving something is fixed into the corresponding action of composing and speaking a durable verse. Unlike the King's skalds, he is looking after his own history, and skaldic metaphors for poetry as smithying are actualized in his prose context.

The third generation makes the gentleman, or perhaps, not quite. Does Egill (from Skalla-Grímr from *Kveld-Úlfr*) have the honour of living up to this pattern, or (after Egill after Skalla-Grímr) his irritatingly quiet son Þorsteinn hvíti? The predictive cliché, commonplace in this time and language, needs a little adaptation for the world of *Egils saga*.

Egill's character notoriously concentrates the silence, physical strength and ugliness, uncanniness and poetic power which cropped up every so often in his ancestors.<sup>8</sup> All Skalla-Grímr's and Bera's children die (XXXI, p. 80) until Þórólfr, amazingly similar to his uncle, is born; then two daughters, Sæunn and Þórunn, who are briefly and conventionally described; last Egill, who is said to be 'líkr feðr sínum' [like his father] (p. 80), who in turn had been said to be 'líkr feðr sínum' (I, p. 5). The descriptions of the young Egill and the young Skalla-Grímr are so much alike that it is worth juxtaposing them to see where they differ.

Grímr var svartr maðr ok ljótr, líkr feðr sínum, bæði yfirlits ok at skaplyndi; gerðisk hann umsýslumaðr mikill; hann var hagr maðr á tré ok járn ok gerðisk inn mesti smiðr; hann fór ok opt um vetrum í síldfiski með lagnarskútu ok með honum húskarlar margir. [Grímr was a dark man and ugly, like his father, both in complexion and temperament; he became a very capable man; he was gifted at carpentry and metalwork and became a great smith; in winter he also often went herring-fishing in a boat and with him many servants.]

(I, p. 5)

En er hann [Egill] óx upp, þá mátti brátt sjá á honum, at hann myndi verða mjök ljótr ok líkr feðr sínum, svartr á hár. En þá er hann var þrévetr, þá var hann mikill ok sterkr, svá sem þeir sveinar aðrir, er váru sex vetra eða sjau; hann var brátt málugr ok orðviss; heldr var hann illr viðreignar, er hann var í leiknum með ǫðrum ungmennum. [And when he grew up, then it soon appeared that he would be very ugly and like his father, black-haired. And when he was three, then he was big and strong, like other boys, who were six or seven; he was quickly talkative and smart; he was rather bad to deal with, when he was playing with other children.] (XXXI, p. 80)

Where Grímr is skilful with his hands and works, sometimes with a group, at necessary tasks, Egill's talent is for language, and in play or sporting groups he is difficult, to say the least. *Leikr* [game] is, in

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See, for example, de Looze 1989.

this description, linked by implied anticipation with *íþrótt* [art or skill; Modern Icelandic, sport], the word which Haraldr used for the poetic talent which kept Ólvir, however reluctantly, necessary to his court.

Egill's development of his father's characteristics is also a divergence. Where Skalla-Grímr had containable, pioneering skills, Egill promises to have contentious, excessive strength and art. Skalla-Grímr's nature and accomplishments suit his position as the one who makes the move to Iceland; Egill's suit his position as the one who will return, though always as a stranger, to Norway, and always with a challenge. The first is the strength of transferral; the second, the strength of the contrastive.

Egill's poetic *début* is made at an absurdly young age; this almost goes without saying. More importantly, for this discussion, Egill's first poetry is independently made and is the follow-up to an act of rebellion: he gets himself to his grandfather Yngvarr's feast though Skalla-Grímr had wanted to leave him at home: furthermore, by offering his poetry to Yngvarr, he bypasses an immediate authority (his father), using his art to translate his disobedience and unexpected presence into a praised and welcome one, receiving token gifts but above all thanks and high repute from the master of the hall. This language-relation is an ability to effect transformations, to get out of one situation *and* into another, to appear as two different kinds of person. The act of transformation is from self-justification into self-aggrandizement. Egill's verse effects as well as imposes his identity. It is not, as other verse (cited or not) has been in the saga, primarily an art of commemoration or even of defiance.

The saga returns to Norway with the story of Björn Brynjólfsson, who runs away with, or abducts, Þóra Hróaldsdóttir (their daughter will be Ásgerðr, wife first of Þórólfr then of Egill). This signals a return to King Haraldr's uneasy, rhetoricalized world. Quite apart from the tensions of permission-denied and action-taken between Björn and Þórir Hróaldsson or Björn and Brynjólfir,

there is the indirect relation of Bjǫrn to the King. The unlawfulness of his act, no matter whether coercive or freely desired by himself and Þóra, finally reveals itself as having pursued him from territory to territory. This is the King's power. In Shetland, Bjǫrn and Þóra learn that Haraldr's messengers have been to the Orkneys, Hebrides, and as far as Dublin: Bjǫrn can be killed with impunity and is outlawed in Norway. Until the news of the King's interest in the case, the narrative voice has, as it were, remained *kyrrt* [quiet]; the narrative has been of actions taken, the tension between *leyfi* [permission] and *óleyfi* [prohibition]. To attempt independent action from a Norwegian base is to risk becoming (bad) news (*tíðendi*) to oneself - not having the last word on one's actions.

When Bjǫrn and Þóra escape to Iceland, the reason that they can enter the *bjóða/þekkjast* [offer/accept] relationship with Skalla-Grímr is that Bjǫrn instructs his companions to be selective with the truth. The danger lies in Skalla-Grímr's foster-relationship with the offended Þórir Hróaldsson. It is typical that Bjǫrn uses action and silence, or selective answering, to cut through undesired webs of relationship or language: the journey to Shetland happened safely because his mother exacted silence from the women who witnessed his departure with Þóra; the couple's move to Iceland is his answer to being declared an outlaw. The relationship of Norway's language and power to Iceland is dramatized through the way that not everything has to be told at once to Skalla-Grímr - at Haraldr's court, no doubt there would have been several versions of events already in circulation, in a parallel situation, and cross-questioning in excess of welcome - and the way that, when the rumour of Bjǫrn's unlawful action and outlawry comes from Norway to Iceland, it does not have the force of a pronouncement.

The power of Norwegian royal language degenerates to rumour by the time it reaches Iceland. It is overridden by the *voices* of Þórólfr Skallagrímsson and Skalla-Grímr's people in general - not individual, favoured pleaders - who like and have accepted Bjǫrn. It is also overridden by the fact

that Björn's Icelandic status as Skalla-Grímr's *heimamaðr* [household member] weighs more than the King's laws or Skalla-Grímr's old ties in Norway:

“[...] Mun nú vera á þínu valdi, hverr minn hlutr skal verða, en góðs vænti ek af, því at ek em heimamaðr þinn.” Síðan gekk fram Þórólfr, sonr Skalla-Gríms, ok lagði til mǫrg orð ok bað fǫður sinn, at hann gæfi Birni eigi þetta at sǫk, er þó hafði hann tekit við Birni; margir aðrir lǫgðu þar orð til. Kom þá svá, at Grímr sefaðisk, [...] [‘Now it will be in your power, what my fate shall be, but I hope for good, since I am a member of your household.’ Then Þórólfr came forward, Skalla-Grímr's son, and said a lot and asked his father not to blame Björn for that, since/though he had welcomed Björn; many others lent their voices. It finished with Grímr calming down] (XXXIV, p. 88)

A successful means of communicative exchange, new<sup>9</sup> in the saga, enters language-action relations at this point: peace is made between Þóra's and Björn's families in part by Skalla-Grímr's intercession, and in part by money.

The old set of relations and speech/silence markers comes into play again when Þórir Hróaldsson convinces King Haraldr to allow Þórólfr Skallagrímsson's presence in Norway, despite the King's grudge against the family: ‘konungr svarar heldr stutt’ [the king answers rather curtly], and so on.

However, just as it would not have been adequate to the saga to read the young Egill as a development of or parallel to the young Skalla-Grímr, because he introduces an important variation in his intensification of family type, so it would not be adequate to see the Haraldr/Kveld-Úlfr tension merely as a parallel to or forerunner of the tensions that will arise between Eiríkr (although he repeatedly is named as ‘konungsson’ [king's son] when he comes into the narrative) and the new generation of that family.

This is because Eiríkr, who never is as formidable a figure as Haraldr, does not operate within or control the same or similar systems of constant, uneasy, buzzing, self-aware silences,

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. new to the ‘plot’, not the saga world.

messages, orders, and questions. Instead, his 'meanings', as it were, are at first set up as being registered through a 'language' of objects and symbols.

Eiríkr's proper characterization by symbolic object occurs, famously, in chapter XXXVIII, with his gift of an axe to Skalla-Grímr. Before this, in chapter XXXV, the ship which Þórólfr Skallagrímsson gives the young, covetous, trusting Eiríkr, who promises his goodwill in return, cannot help recalling the ship which Þórólfr Kveldúlfsson gave to King Haraldr, at the moment when Haraldr's worst suspicions were taking hold. This is a fairly simple pattern. Eiríkr travels in the ship on his journey to help put the case for Þórólfr before the King; the earlier dynamic seems to be running backwards, so that the reader almost anticipates that it will have to catch up with itself and turn around to tragedy again. This, of course, never happens: Eiríkr's enmity will belong with Egill, not with Þórólfr II. In chapter XXXVII, the saga narrative's remark that Eiríkr's victory in Bjarmaland is commemorated 'í kvæðum hans' [in his poetry] (p. 94) works for the narrative as more than a scrupulous record-keeping which instances sources. It prepares the idea of Eiríkr as a commemorated king, so that when Egill, much later, ransoms his head by making a praise poem for Eiríkr, the transformation of royal greatness into durable poetry (its preservation, indeed its only existence, after death) is not just a process which is self-evident or a king/skald transaction to be expected by the informed reader, it 'belongs to' Eiríkr (Haraldr's skalds are only seen to be present as prize possessions or negotiators); it is a kind of formalized language which is *about* him, not as what he deploys but as what he needs.

Returning to Eiríkr's gift of a splendid-looking axe, conveyed by Þórólfr to his father, the first thing to notice is that it is the subject of Skalla-Grímr's silences. In this, Skalla-Grímr's relation to speech/silence/emotion/action systems is similar to the King's, but even more to Kveld-Úlfr's. So is his power of assessing signs. Twice he 'ræddi ekki um' [said nothing about it] (XXXVIII, p. 95, p. 96), first when looking at it, second when he tests it severely, in what is almost like the ritual sacrifice

of a pair of oxen, and it fails. He tries to dissuade Þórólfr from going back to Norway, then prophesies, then, when none of this is any use in persuading his son, hands the axe to him again, with no speech as such, but with a warning verse: ‘Skalla-Grímr sá í egg ǫxinni: síðan seldi hann Þórólfi ǫxina. Skalla-Grímr kvað vísu: [...]’ [Skalla-Grímr looked at the blade of the axe; then he gave Þórólfr the axe. Skalla-Grímr spoke a verse] (p. 96). Unlike Haraldr’s encounters where the King uses his silence as a significant marker against a troublesome speaker or tale of trouble, here Skalla-Grímr’s silence confronts an object which stands in for the nature, and future, of its sender and that sender’s relation to Skalla-Grímr’s family. Where physical action would have followed Haraldr’s silence, the mental activity and the utterance of a skaldic verse follow Skalla-Grímr’s.

This is where I would suggest that the *prose* narrative needs to be read as written for an audience at least some of whom have a taste for the complex metaphors of skaldic verse: i.e., that the prose is not plain material in which sudden richnesses in the form of stanzas find themselves embedded. When an axe (not a shield, or sail, or tapestry) is a gift from a king whose nickname will be ‘Bloodaxe’, disappoints in use and subsequently rusts in keeping, it does not simply signify that Eiríkr’s goodwill is not durable - not true steel. The rust on the axe, iron oxide, stands in for dried blood, a near-exact visual equivalent, signifying his future wish for positive violence against the recipient’s family, and perhaps even betokening Þórólfr’s death (which results indirectly from his having to leave Norway for England).

The narrative of Egill’s first murder, in chapter XL, presents the incident by marshalling a sequence of action, levels of sound/language, and silence. The young Egill is physically humiliated during games by a slightly older boy called Grímr. Egill quits the field, ‘en sveinarnir ǫpðu at honum’ [and the boys hooted at him] (p. 100). This whooping, a childish indicator of bad reputation, seems to act on him in ways not unrelated to a *heróp* [battle-cry]. The next day, Egill takes his quarrel to a slightly older friend Þórðr, whose reaction is to translate the rough play into the adult language of

revenge. This formal language is what shocks the reader, as much as the bare decision to avenge Egill: ‘ “Ek skal fara með þér, ok skulu vit hefna honum.” [‘I shall accompany you, and we two shall be avenged upon him’] (p. 100). Þórðr hands Egill an axe; this, and the following violence, which sets the adults fighting one another as well, occurs without further speech, in dispassionate prose whose reporting voice is a kind of silence. When all is over, Egill speaks a verse about it in his parents’ hall.

The sequence set up for, or by, Egill, runs: game/organized community event - minor violence/infringement - offence taken/public humiliation or ridicule - formal language of revenge - silent or narrated violence - chaos for bystanders and/or non-participants in original sequence - formal language of verse/summatory act of performing verse. This shows Egill engineering a personal incident into a main narrative of which he is master. This mastery of narrative is, on its smaller scale, like King Haraldr’s, though without the need for rhetoric-driven middlemen or the division of labour between combative authority figure and commemorating skáld. The sequence will be Egill’s pattern for many subsequent episodes.

In a saga like *Egils saga*, a structural analysis based on transformations of language, action, and silence, like that sketched above, could be a useful supplement or alternative to the analysis of the workings of the narrative as incident- or conflict- (plot-) based.<sup>10</sup>

After the verse, the narrative leaps over some five years. Egill is twelve. Again in the silence of plain report, violence occurs: Skalla-Grímr’s, when he is pitted against Egill and Þórðr in a game. His shape-changer’s nature apparently creeps up on him after sunset. The responsibility for *calling* it shapechanging does not belong to the narrative voice, but to Egill’s fostermother, Þorgerðr Brák, who warns Skalla-Grímr: ‘ “Hamask þú nú, Skalla-Grímr, at syni þínum.” [‘Now you are shape-changing, Skalla-Grímr, against your son.’] (p. 101). Skalla-Grímr’s response is to attack and kill her instead of Egill. This response translates her warning or reproach into description, if not downright

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Andersson 1967.

encouragement. That evening, Egill silently carries out a revenge killing in Skalla-Grímr's hall, then sits down. Skalla-Grímr's response - more silence - is an acknowledgement, which amounts to an endorsement, of Egill's right to act in this way: 'En Skalla-Grímr ræddi þá ekki um, ok var þat mál þaðan af kyrrt, en þeir feðgar ræddusk þá ekki við, hvárki gott né illt, ok fór svá fram þann vetr.' [But Skalla-Grímr said nothing about it, and that case was thenceforward quiet, and father and son said nothing about it, neither good nor bad, and so the winter went on.] (XL, p. 102).

Skalla-Grímr's silence is conveyed by the same phrase as for his silence to Þórólfr about Eiríkr's axe. The axe incident has happened in a previous narrative sequence, but, as a kind of backstitching phrase at the end of this chapter shows, it 'is' happening in the same time frame. Egill and Þórólfr have each offered their father a token of their natures: implacable violence and the sense of one's rights; showy magnificence and slightly credulous goodwill. In his responding silence and its circumstances is Skalla-Grímr's opinion of their natures. Þórólfr Skallagrímsson's token does not match his *future*, however. It is like a message of a latent fate from the less prudent, but (in terms of the saga if not of valuation within the saga) more splendid, Þórólfr Kveldúlfsson's past. Egill's token is definitely of the future.

When Þórólfr refuses to take Egill to Norway with him, in his reply are clustered speech/silence words or wordforms (though not with primary speech/silence meanings), as if he sensed the action/language sequences and relation of energy in Egill's behaviour and temperament:

En er Egill vakði þat mál við Þórólfr, þá kvað hann þess enga ván, "at ek muna þik flytja með mér á brott; ef faðir þinn þykkisk eigi mega um þik tæla hér í hýbýlum sínum, þá ber ek eigi traust til þess at hafa þik útanlendis með mér, því at þér mun þat ekki hlýða, at hafa þar slíkt skaplyndi sem hér."

[But when Egill raised that issue with Þórólfr, then he said there was no chance, 'that I will take you abroad with me; if your father thinks he cannot manage you here in his home, then I have no confidence in keeping you abroad with me, because it won't do for you to have the same temperament there as here.'

(XL, p. 102)

*Tæla*, as noted in ÍF, is from *tól* [tool], and means ‘hafa stjórn á, ráða við’ [manage, influence]: it is not the same as *tæla* [to entice/betray] from *tál* [bait]. The forms, however, are identical, and, with Egill, the meanings cleave together. *Hlýða* is used in the sense of ‘what is allowable’, but its other senses - of silence or yielding - are poetically active in the prose: Þórólfr does not want Egill’s silence-action-formal language abilities to be translated to Norway, because he may not be strong enough for his audience. This is the text beside or beneath the text on etiquette and personal danger.

When, as can be expected, Egill murders in Norway, he murders Atleyjar-Bárðr who first has *lied* to him about the resources available for his welcome (XLII), then *dismissed Egill’s verse*, telling him to ‘drekka ok hætta flimtun þeiri’ [to drink and stop that mockery] (XLIV, p. 108) - a minor public humiliation/offence. Egill speaks a verse and cuts runes on the poisoned vessel which Bárðr has offered to him; it bursts, and the poisoned drink drenches the straw (p. 109). Egill speaks a verse about his companion Qlvir’s drunkenness (p. 110);<sup>11</sup> there are rain metaphors in it, for verse and for battle. Qlvir vomits. Egill runs off after stabbing Bárðr, who dies most bloodily. When Eiríkr, who happens to be a guest there as well, has a light brought, ‘sá menn þá, hvat títt var, at Qlvir lá þar vitlauss, en Bárðr var veginn, ok flaut í blóði hans golfit allt.’ [then people saw, what was up, that Qlvir lay there unconscious, while Bárðr was killed, and the whole floor swam in his blood.] (pp. 110-111).

This has been read as monstrous or brutish behaviour on Egill’s part. That is not an adequate reading. The account of Egill’s behaviour is aesthetically pleasing, because it conforms to sequences and transformations already explored in the narrative, but fulfils the pattern more largely and energetically. Furthermore, it is not so much monstrous, or anarchic, as *preternaturally real*. Egill has translated into action the kind of relation usually kept as metaphoric and within verse. His poetry can, within the system of skaldic metaphor, be (Kvasir’s) blood, (Suttungr’s) drink, or (Óðinn’s)

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Not the same character as the poet Qlvir.

vomit. His poetry has gone unappreciated; drink has been withheld then forced; an attempt has been made to shed his blood. The mess he leaves behind is a triumphant, unfair actualization of what he can do (and has done also in formal words). It is a glorious set of exchanges. The system of equivalences in poetic diction has spilled over dizzyingly into the narrative prose scenario, differentiating itself as a set of acts which also perform equivalences (Egill's poetry, Bárðr's blood, Qlvir's vomit, instead of Egill's blood, and so forth).

Chapters XLV to XLIX compare Eiríkr unfavourably to Egill at the level of the action/language/silence system of transformations. When Eiríkr is angry, it is difficult to speak to him, not because of a heavy silence, but because he is speaking so much (XLV, p. 114). He and Queen Gunnhildr reproach one another with the ways in which they manage language/silence/action - according to her, he is 'talhlýðinn' [credulous], whereas she is accused of egging him on to cruelty (XLVIII, p. 123); and whatever the truth of either charge, the verbal exchange is undignified and uneconomical, a clash and waste of power. On the other hand, when Egill and Þórólfr need to come to a decision, Þórólfr asks for Egill's opinion, and Egill urges their company on to raid in Denmark with a verse, using words-into-action with perfect economy and power (XLVII, p. 119). When Egill is warned of an ambush lying off the coast of Norway, he is quiet, efficient and unfussed, telling his men 'fara hljóðliga; þeir gerðu svá' [go quietly; they did so] (XLIX, p. 126). After the necessary slaughter, he reports back to Þórólfr with the more usual summatory verse, which Þórólfr takes as the cue for a literal translation - a move to England.

Like King Haraldr, King Aðalsteinn (Æthelstan) is in a highly rhetoricalized relation to the people with whom he interacts. Unlike Haraldr, however, Aðalsteinn is looking to build relations of loyalty or service, not sifting suspicions. His concern is introduced in terms of *gefa mála mǫnnum* [take men into service] (L, p. 128) and *taka mála af konungi* [take service with the king] (L, p. 129). It is quantitative as well as personal, as it must be for a king building up a following. It is qualitative in a

way new within the saga, in that these men have to be *prímsignaðir* [given the preliminaries to baptism], which effectively is a test of willingness to undergo the sign of a ceremony for the King's sake, at least as much as a religious ceremony in itself. Aðalsteinn's position is analogous to Eiríkr's, in that his ancestor did for England what Haraldr did for Norway, bringing together petty realms and other territories into a kingdom. His problem, as a young king, is to keep the kingdom together:

Elfráðr inn ríki hafði tekit alla skattkonunga af nafni ok veldi; hétu þeir þá jarlar. er áðr váru konungar eða konungasynir; hefzk þat allt um hans ævi ok Játvarðar sonar hans, en Aðalsteinn kom ungr til ríkis, ok þótti af honum minni ógn standa; gerðusk þá margir ótryggvir, þeir er áðr váru þjónustufullir.

(LI, pp. 129-130)

[Alfred the Great had stripped all tributary kings of name and power; then they were called jarls, who previously were kings or princes; this held throughout his and his son Edward's lives, but Æthelstan came young to the throne, and was considered less of a threat; many became untrustworthy, who before were devotedly attentive.]

The loss of status of the petty kings is measured first of all in the loss of the name of king. If the situation bequeathed by Haraldr is (as the saga text suggests by its juxtaposition of names at the start of the chapter) a parallel to that bequeathed by Elfráðr (Ælfred), the treachery of those who wish to regain their name also can be read as having its rhetorical dimension, without this pattern having to be set up all over again in the narrative sequence. The petty kings are refusing the narrative mastery of Elfráðr's race of kings, who as it were dictate places in the history signed with their own name.

When Þórólfr and Egill take service with King Aðalsteinn, they transform for him the permissible relations between action, language, and silence.

The narrative carefully establishes that the Scottish king Óláfr is belligerent, but plays by the rules. Once a battle date is fixed, he waits as agreed, and forbids looting; he trusts all the messengers who come to him, supposedly from Aðalsteinn, to delay the date by offering money for peace. It is only with Óláfr's last message to Aðalsteinn that Aðalsteinn, having mustered an immense army, is there to receive it, and also to learn what has been done in his name and planned on his

behalf. Óláfr - now having no reason to play by the rules - takes a Welsh jarl's advice to mount a surprise attack by night. The reader is given to understand, but never explicitly told, that the 'ráðagorð vitra manna' [counsel of wise people] (p. 134) must refer to a plan laid by Egill and Þórólfr, according to which Óláfr's followers have been teased into dissenting with one another about the promise of illusory money to be distributed among all the soldiers, not just given to the leaders, and treachery has become good policy. What was unthinkable between warring kings has been translated into cleverness; what was assured, into foolishness. This can be seen as a 'modernization' of techniques of hostility - which would be anachronistic, and not particularly illuminating. It can be seen as ingenious and hard-headed, which helps in reinforcing certain 'viking' stereotypes, but again does not help much in reading the saga.

It is also possible to read it as 'Odinic' behaviour, and to ascribe the plan more to Egill than to Þórólfr. There are, after all, certain parallels with how the ageing Egill - kinglike, an icon of the old authorities - will come in blue cloak and gold helmet to occupy the large, empty booth built by his son who needs his help at the Althing, in chapter LXXXI, or with how the old Egill would like to create chaos for fun at the Althing by scattering real, not virtual, money - the silver which Aðalsteinn is to give him - in chapter LXXXV. Far from offering an old-fashioned, mythologizing reading to justify Egill's behaviour, to see his arrangements for the armies and adjustments to their relations as Odinic would be to link it, by a kind of structural metaphor, to his arraying of action in formal words for performance. His tactical ability and poetic ability are mutually translatable.

Þórólfr's manipulation of real and symbolic languages comes in the thick of battle, shortly after he becomes 'óðr' [furious]:

Ruddi hann svá stiginn fram at merki jarlsins Hrings, ok helzk þá ekki við honum; hann drap þann mann, er bar merki Hrings jarls, ok hjó niðr merkistöngina. Síðan lagði hann spjótinu fyrir brjóst jarlinum, í gegnum brynjuna ok búkinn, svá at út gekk um herðarnar.

ok hóf hann upp á kesjunni yfir hǫfuð sér ok skaut niðr spjótshalanum í jǫrðina, en jarlinn sæfðisk á spjótinu, ok sá þat allir, bæði hans menn ok svá hans óvinir.

(LIII, p. 138)

[So he cleared a path forward to Jarl Hring's standard, and nothing withstood him; he killed the man, who carried Jarl Hring's standard, and cut down the standard-pole. Then he thrust his spear through the jarl's breast, through mailcoat and torso, so that it came out through the shoulders, and he hoisted him up on the spear above his head and stuck the spearshaft in the ground, and the jarl expired on the spear, and everyone saw that, both his troops and also his enemies.]

He turns the standard - the leader's sign of direction and potential victory - into a bearer of the leader's real death: a sign that taunts and threatens the company with following their leader into death and defeat.

Chapter LIV (pp. 140-141) frames the death of this Þórólfr, like the other Þórólfr, with non-linguistic signs. Action happens in a non-verbal situation. Egill learns of Þórólfr's death from the enemies' 'sigróp' [victory shout] and the retreat of Þórólfr's standard. He executes the manoeuvre which Þórólfr had tried to accomplish, and achieves enough slaughter for the Norwegians to raise a 'sigróp'. Verse follows action. In one of Egill's two quoted laments for Þórólfr (LV, p. 142, stanza 17), the verb 'grœr' [grow [together]/heal] is used of the earth over the corpse, evoking the new growth that will cover it (which, by association of word form as well as by sense, will be *grænn*: like putrefying flesh) as well as the paradox of the healing of wounds (over time?) and wounds which will not heal, in the context of the loss of a brother, where this blood relationship could be described as *holdgróinn* [fleshbound]. ['[G]rœr' contains a multitude of meanings for the situation being commemorated and for the poet's grief, just as the prose which actualized the character of verse metaphors in chapter XLIV split into a multitude of meanings. The episode where Egill claims reward and compensation from King Aðalsteinn by louting silence is well enough known, in its interplay between silent communication, symbolic action, and verse, not to need discussion.

In chapter LVI, silence is mobilized to communicate a specific emotion, specified by the translatability of that silence into skaldic verse, where ordinary speech will not do: or, more

accurately, skaldic verse is, for Egill, the ordinary speech for translating such silences. Arinbjörn takes Egill's silent grieving, 'ógleði' [unhappiness] to be a sign of loss, after Þórólfr's death. It is, instead, a sign of want: Egill desires Þórólfr's widow, Ásgerðr. Arinbjörn seems able to grasp much of this from hearing two verses, although these are verses of concealment as well as declaration; Egill is sufficiently humanized, having spoken them, to offer a prose gloss. The verses conceal the name, not of the lost brother, but of the unpossessed woman. This is not sheer love of riddles. There is a convincing quality of passion, even obsession, in how Egill does not speak because, as it were, a name says itself in him, and he wants publicly to *own* it, in one sense, but publicly conceals it, at the same time that he owns up to it.

Still in chapter LVI, the shock of the curse which Egill, at the breakdown of the Gulaping, formally lays on the lands which he claims but which have been occupied by Berg-Qnundr, and his summatory verse (pp. 158-159), are stronger because, although this is a chapter with a major legal conflict in it - an even more than usually verbal chapter, at the level of event - Egill's use of the power/silence/language/action system is, whatever the reader's remembered impressions may be, characterized from moment to moment at least as much by silence and restraint.

After Egill learns of Berg-Qnundr's occupation of the property, the narrative shows him asking carefully about the situation and about Berg-Qnundr's backers. The next time-leap in the narrative is continuous with a busy silence: 'Egill lét þat kyrrt vera á því hausti'. [Egill let that rest during the autumn.] Berg-Qnundr, when confronted by Egill, is 'málóði' [lit., word-furious] (p. 153). Egill, not provoked to similar excess, lets him rant on, then invokes the formal language of the law.

Egill's development of the saga narrative is more nuanced than the reading of Egill which sees him almost as containing several paradoxical personalities in one: 'Demon, killer and drunkard, poet, lawyer and farmer'.<sup>12</sup> At the level of the system under discussion, King Eiríkr tries to meet Egill

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<sup>1</sup> First line of the blurb on the back of the Penguin 1976 translation.

in the same way that Kveld-Úlfr and King Haraldr opposed one another: he is ‘stygggr’ [sullen/curt]. He cannot use silence properly, because Queen Gunnhildr’s active, verbal malevolence overrides his reaction: ‘Konungr var heldr stygggr í þessu máli; Arinbjörn fann, at dróttning myndi þó miklu verr viljuð; [...]’ (p. 154)<sup>13</sup>. She accuses Eiríkr, in effect, of allowing Egill to control the quality of what ought to have been the King’s portentous silence and violent response, saying that he lets Egill ‘vefja mál ǫll fyrir þér’ [entangle all business for you] (p. 157). In the next chapter (LVII), the thoroughness, in method and number, of Egill’s killings, the commemorative verses with which he closes episodes, and the spell which turn the land-spirits against Eiríkr and Gunnhildr, can be read in terms of construction as a bunching of *sǫguligr*<sup>14</sup> material, or, within the system under discussion, in terms of structure, hence not as a clustering, but as a chain of force; the odd feature would then have been the weakening of this chain - nothing needs smoothing out or more leisurely telling.

The somewhat inhuman closing exchange between Egill and Skalla-Grímr, shortly before Skalla-Grímr’s death (chapter LVIII), integrates the language/action/silence system with what happens at the level of plot. The end of the settlers’ era is marked by this death, and the beginning of a new phase of Egill’s saga. At the same time, silence comes up finally against silence in Egill’s verbal acknowledgement that his relation with his father takes place through the equal and opposite tension of this medium: ‘Egill segir: “Þú munt engis lofs þykkjask þurfa at biðja mik um þetta, því at þá munt ráða vilja, hvat sem ek mæli.”’ (p. 174)<sup>15</sup>. The literal formality of their relation is evident from the fact that only Egill can put Skalla-Grímr’s corpse in a suitable posture of death before the correct rites are carried out.

<sup>3</sup> [The king was rather short-spoken about this case; Arinbjörn found that the queen however would be much worse disposed.]

<sup>4</sup> [‘saga-like’, worthy of report]

<sup>5</sup> [‘You won’t think you need to ask me permission for that, because you will want to make the decision, whatever I say.’]

The new phase is galvanized by the *seiðr* [sorcery] which Gunnhildr works on Egill, which manifests itself in his sullenness, ‘ógleði’ - the same word as for Egill’s depression when in love with Ásgerðr and concealing her name in verse. Egill again, though this time negatively, is obsessed with one person (one name), Gunnhildr’s, as the magic works to make him restless until they see each other again. He goes abroad, the weather is against him (the land spirits working for Gunnhildr?), and he is washed up in a place which takes him and his men to Jórdvík, where Eiríkr is now King.

When Arinbjörn tries to get a hearing for Egill that will save his life, thus creating the conditions for the composition and performance of *Höfuðlausn*, several translations occur within the saga’s system of meaning and power (LIX).

Arinbjörn tells the king that his enemies honour him by seeking him out for reconciliation, and that Egill has done this, with great personal difficulty. Eiríkr rephrases this as a question to Egill, in terms not of honour but of overboldness and forfeited life. Egill, as earlier directed by Arinbjörn, takes hold of Eiríkr’s foot. This position of supplication becomes one of intervention: Egill takes the foot *and* speaks a verse, rephrasing Eiríkr’s words back into something like Arinbjörn’s words, emphasizing the trouble to which he put himself to seek out the King, as well as (to a lesser extent) Eiríkr’s bloodline and privilege. Egill makes the moment of supplication, which, if successful, normally may be expected to achieve its own obsolescence, into an occasion for his verse, which normally may be expected to outlive skálds and kings. Eiríkr refuses to be impressed, but rephrases Egill’s presence in terms of miscalculation and forfeited life.

This sequence of translation and retranslation, which amounts to stalling, is ended by Gunnhildr, who calls for action: for Egill’s instant execution. Arinbjörn cuts across this instant, final action by promising eternal reputation to Eiríkr through Egill’s living words. Gunnhildr, who rightly estimates Egill’s powers, knows that she has to stop him speaking before he can be killed: ‘Gunnhildr mælti: “Vér viljum ekki lof hans heyra: láttu, konungr, leiða Egil út ok höggva hann: vil ek eigi heyra

orð hans ok eigi sjá hann.” (p. 181). [‘We do not want to hear his praise: King, have Egill taken out and executed; I do not want to hear his words or see him.’]

Gunnhildr sends, or is, a shapechanger in the form of a twittering bird which Arinbjörn drives away before keeping watch while Egill works through the night: so, the composition of *Höfuðlausn* takes place in a vigilant silence, which, in this saga’s system, is the correct prelude to an act of particular linguistic power.

It is important to remember that the linguistic self-consciousness of the saga narrative and Egill’s poetic self-consciousness do not mean that the saga itself is operating with a modern aesthetic of self-referring language, although such a reading could of course be applied to it. The power of language is in its relation to ‘things out there’, and to be understood in its connection to meaningful action and silence. Language can *impose on* the world, through skill or magic. This truly transformative power is what makes Egill monstrous; it is anachronistic to split off his monstrosity and his linguistic cleverness, or not to see his verse and his violence as parts of the same thing.

In order to get a hearing for Egill’s *drápa*, Arinbjörn forces Eiríkr to choose between a pitched battle with himself, Egill, and their men, which would be costly and ‘frásagnarverð’ [worthy of report] (p. 184), and the earlier promised chance of eternalization in poetry. This is a choice between a future in bad history or good legend, and this is the non-anachronistic sense in which the King is a textual being to himself. In *Egils saga*, (Icelandic) skálds, therefore, are more privileged than (Norwegian) kings, in that their lives are *consistently* textualized. They would not have to temporize with an enemy to be memorialized, and they speak their own afterlife.

When Egill begins to speak, ‘ok fekk þegar hljóð’ [and immediately got silence] (p. 185), this means both that he gets a hearing and gets (imposes) a silence. Silence has been an *active* feature of Egill’s family throughout the saga. The recitation of the poem into the audience’s silence-of-those-

who-are-to-be-transformed releases into the same medium as what has been put together by silence in silence. The circumstances are trebly conducive to the imposition of Egill's type of language power.

*Hǫfuðlausn* works well within the system under discussion, whatever its status as a composition (ironic or not; authentic or not). In stanza 3, the conventional bard's caveat 'ef ek þǫgn of get' ['if I get silence'] (p. 186) refers to the silence in which people hear of the King's battles which Viðrir (Óðinn) saw. Including the kind of metaphors used in skaldic verse within the system of meaning in the entire saga, which I think is aesthetically productive, perhaps even more correct, as a way of reading, what Óðinn saw, or sees, Egill's listeners also 'see' through Óðinn's gift (poetry)<sup>16</sup>, which is not given without the poet, i.e. the poet's function is to give the *idea of the king* to his people - to make his past, and his elsewhere, present to them in his presence; to give the king twice as much life for his people, not just to secure the king's reputation for posterity. This silence also relates, within the saga, to the silence (or absence of reference to speech or direct speech) in which actions are often depicted in the narrative voice. The poet's voice here is outside the court dynamic of rhetoric and recounting, and functions as a narrative voice to his audience, an especially powerful form of the normal. The poem itself does much to evoke the sounds of battle, thereby enacting the authority it takes on itself to translate violent noise into the token of the King's glory, conveyed in formal words.

To add another metaphor, the unusual choice of end-rhymed couplets clinches or clashes together in sound the events narrated. More plainly, the form requires, or produces, safe, frequent, predictable, memorable conclusions. This is unlike Egill's skaldic verse, which, in the saga, usually comes after the event, so that it summarizes, contemplates and possesses all things at once, binding up the time sequence of events as subordinated to their poetic meaning. Even if *Hǫfuðlausn* is read as ironic or tongue-in-cheek, say because of the metaphor for mind in the fifth line of the last stanza (20, p. 192), 'hlátra ham' [laughter-container], and Egill's unthrilled skaldic verse report of the incident to

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<sup>16</sup> 'Óðinn's gift' is a typical skaldic metaphor for poetry.

Aðalsteinn in chapter LXI, and even if the poem's quality is poorly rated compared to other verse shown as being spoken by Egill in the saga - none of which need be the case - the stylistic reading of the form given above would, if right, make it a sensible choice for hammering home again and again to a perhaps not fully Norse-conversant or literary-minded audience the poet's apparent intention to praise King Eiríkr, especially if the audience must be coerced into giving Egill a proper hearing and not get distracted by the dramatic grouping and looks of the chief participants in the scene of tension or by their own partisanship or by the anticipation of violence that would divide them into opposed forces.

This is not too imaginative. It must be kept in mind that Egill recites *Höfuðlausn* in a situation that is simultaneously very public and very closed, where he has to persuade, if not convince, against odds which are numerical as well as personal. At the beginning of the chapter, it is specified that:

Eiríkr konungr gekk til borða at vanða sínum, ok var þá fjölmenni mikit með honum; ok er Arinbjörn varð þess varr, þá gekk hann með alla sveit sína alvápnada í konungsgarð, þá er konungr sat yfir borðum.  
 [King Eiríkr went to table as usual, and a great crowd was with him; and when Arinbjörn realized this, then he went with all his company fully armed into the King's house, when the king was at table.]  
 (LX, p. 183)

Half of Arinbjörn's troop goes into the hall, half waits outside. It can be presumed that the readiness to defend or attack Egill by force if necessary or desirable translates into greater audience distractibility from what he is doing to save himself, hence into greater pressure on him to concentrate their perhaps short-winded or not single-minded attention.

The audience is important because it can further be presumed that there must be popular feeling for the King among those of his men likely to be in the hall with him, and that if Egill can sway this popular feeling even more towards the King, or confirm it, although this response is not

narrated in the saga except in so far as the situation is carefully set up, the King's perception of audience reaction may affect his own reception of Egill's poem, and split him off from his Queen's unchanging, harshly worded malevolence towards Egill. Language use as well as mindset have been dramatized as bringing out a difference between them before.

The repeated references to silence in the poem register an awareness of this tricky performance situation, manipulating it beyond a conventional promise or directive to impress an audience that there is more to come. Apart from stanza 3 quoted above, there is in stanza 7, 'Fremr munk segja, / ef firar þegja,' (p. 187), stanza 19, 'gótt þykkjumk þat, / es ek þögn of gat;' (p. 192), stanza 20, 'Bark þengils lof / á þagnar rof;' (ibid.).<sup>17</sup> These reminders could well be calculated to make Eiríkr feel generous and powerful in having granted the silence/hearing for Egill to do with what he can. Each imposition Egill can make on the granted silence, which he co-opts by naming silence again and again, staves off the final silence that would be loss of his head, loss of life.

When Egill says 'orðstír of gat / Eiríkr at þat.' [Eiríkr got fame, [lit. word-glory], from that] (stz. 6, p. 187), it is more than conventional or trite. It is the bare terms of the king/skáld contract. Eiríkr will not continue to get 'orðstír', strictly speaking, and would not be getting it, unless poets say so memorably enough to be repeated. Egill probably should not be read as mocking, but as setting out the terms, performing for an audience which knows where everyone stands, what is to give and to get by this instance of the contract. For the space of the permitted silence, Egill has to make Eiríkr's glory coterminous with Egill's own life.

When Egill accepts his head, he continues to speak in verse (chapter LXI), which Christine Fell describes as being 'another "little verse" in popular metre'.<sup>18</sup> The narrative typically leaves the reader in tension between reading this as Egill's still being worked up, in an extreme mode of his

<sup>7</sup> ['More will I say / if people are quiet'; 'It is good, that I got silence.'; 'I bore the prince's praise to silence's breaking.']

<sup>8</sup> Fell 1975, p. 193.

usual self, or as speaking from a position of language-power to which he has escaped or removed himself. It is up to Arinbjörn first of all to thank King Eiríkr ‘með fǫgrum orðum’ (p. 194). Egill’s next speech is also poetry, spoken to King Aðalsteinn (whose underking Eiríkr has become), in his more normal mode of skaldic verse. He detracts from Eiríkr, praises Arinbjörn, and boasts about his own fine blood, using similar images (ravens, blood, - metaphorical - sea) when speaking of Eiríkr to those in *Hǫfuðlausn*. Gunnhildr was, from her point of view, right in wishing to stop his speech forever. The Icelandic skald, not really attached to a court, allowed to live, is not an official interpreter of kings, but in the end makes them part of his own personal history.

Egill goes from England to Norway to see about Ásgerðr’s inheritance, a matter still held in suspense since the breakup of the Gulapíng by Gunnhildr’s men (LVI). He tries to influence King Hákon Aðalsteinnfóstri in his favour, reconstructing the sabotaging of his case by King Eiríkr and Queen Gunnhildr. King Hákon, however, makes their relative status and blood-ties clear:

Hákon konungr svarar: “Svá hefi ek spurt, at Eiríkr, bróðir minn, muni þat kalla, ok þau Gunnhildr bæði, at þú, Egill, munir hafa kastat steini um megn þér í yðrum skiptum; þætti mér þú vel yfir láta, Egill, at ek legða ekki til þessa máls, þó at vit Eiríkr bærim eigi gæfu til samþykkis.”

[King Hákon answers: ‘So have I heard, that Eiríkr, my brother, would judge, and Gunnhildr too, that you, Egill, will have hurled a stone beyond your strength in your dealings; I should consider you well off, Egill, if I did not intervene in this case, even if Eiríkr and I were not fortunate enough to agree.’]

(LXIII, p. 198)

After this, Egill’s persuasion uses several tactics, including an outright lie that Eiríkr has allowed him to go in peace wherever he likes (precisely what Eiríkr says he has not allowed Egill, apart from allowing nothing beyond the chance to escape with his life), the offer to become the King’s man (which he has already promised Aðalsteinn himself), and a reminder of the threat posed to Norway’s crown by Eiríkr and his sons, offering his support. This rhetorical tissue of opportunism uses the language of legal rights, and also invokes complementary silences, of an authority’s active refusal to

speak, implying the power to speak, and the obedience (silence) (listening) on to which that speech or refusal imposes itself: ‘Egill mælti: “Ekki máttu, konungr. þegja yfir svá stórum málum, því at allir menn hér í landi, innlenskir ok útlenskir, skulu hlýða yðru boði. [...]” [Egill said: ‘You cannot, king, keep silent over such significant matters, because everyone here in the country, native and foreign, must obey your orders’] (LXIII, p. 198).

King Hákon, however, more powerfully than Gunnhildr, refuses to *hear* the language which Egill wields. He consistently answers it, not with formal language (language using its efficient power over the world) but with language that refers to non-language non-individual power structures in that world, to the relation of one *ætt* to another, and (indirectly) to the difference in *gæfa* [good fortune] which will always make his family more powerful in Norway than Egill’s. His image of Egill’s overreaching his strength while casting a stone links with the prose narrative where Skalla-Grímr’s exceeding strength (exercised in Iceland) allows him to set up his forge with a stone four other men could not manage (XXX), and where Egill’s exceeding strength (exercised in marginal territory, in Vermaland) allows him to strap on a large stone as body armour without apparent decrease in mobility (LXXV). He refuses to deal with the language-power of Egill (the ‘Odinic’ aspect), focusing on *elemental* inherited capacities (luck and the ‘troll-like’ or shapechanging family nature). He agrees to give Egill what he wants this time, but never again; i.e. he does not respond to Egill’s speech, he puts paid to the possibility of Egill’s story continuing along familiar lines in Norway. This sequence ends with the king’s ‘orð’ [word] and the granting of tokens.

In chapter LXIV, Egill is staying with Friðgeirr and his mother Gyða (Arinbjǫrn’s sister). Gyða asks for news of Arinbjǫrn (the reply is reported, not given), then for Egill’s own travel stories. Here, ‘hon spurði, hvat til tíðenda hafði gǫrzk í ferða Egils; *hann segir henni af it ljósasta*. Þá kvað hann: [...]’ [My italics].<sup>19</sup> A verse follows. The phrase which I emphasized occurs in K but not in the

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[she asked, what had happened in Egill’s travels; *he tells her very clearly about it*. Then he said]

two other main manuscripts of the saga. If the phrase is not there, then all that Egill is shown to say of his travels is this verse, which is mostly to do with Arinbjörn. If the phrase is there, is the clear account which Egill is said to give a proleptic description of the verse, or does it summarize a story which Egill is shown to tell but which is not given, i.e. an account of which only this reference and the presumably typically summatory verse survive? I am not referring to a real account sunk in the sources of the saga, but to the imaginative layering which the reader is being invited to exercise and appreciate at this point. In the second case (where the phrase is there), the verse has to be read as if it were *replicated by* as well as *present in* the narrative; as being, in fact, movable between narrative (real) sequences, so that it exists *after*, and in some sense crowning, Egill's narration (not given by the saga narrative) of his travels, as well as *before*, and in some sense responsible for, or initiatory of, the narrative of its own narration. In either case, Egill's clear account of what was important on his travels is represented in the saga narrative mainly by the verse, which undoes the dynamic of *Höfuðlausn* - the old dynamic of poets in the service of political history and the individual reputation of kings - and makes family saga material into what matters, the Icelander's personal history and commemoration of his friend.

Egill's relation to, and use of, transformative sequences of silence, action, and speech, is very different, in chapter LXIV, from what it has hitherto been. Seen just in terms of this system, it attains an heroic simplicity. After the verse-speaking, 'Egill var allkátr um kveldit, en Friðgeirr ok heimamenn váru heldr hljóðir.' (p. 201).<sup>20</sup> There is a maiden who puzzles Egill's company by weeping without ceasing. Nobody will explain this. When, after some delay, Egill is ready to leave, he notices Gyða and Friðgeirr disputing whether to tell Egill something. The upshot is that the maiden needs to be released from imminent marriage to a berserkr, and the untried Friðgeirr from attempting the duel on her behalf.

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Egill was very cheerful during the evening, but Friðgeirr and the household were rather quiet]

The situation as such is plain and chivalric - Egill takes on the fight - but what conveys this is the resolution of complex communicative behaviours, where, as with Egill and King Hákon, two different kinds of language meet. Egill's, however, is the more basic and powerful this time, opposing their quarrels, secrets, and weeping with news, verse, thanks, and direct questions. The simplicity which goes with his power and privilege, registered on the level of language, characterizes him as heroic in this situation. The characteristics of this situation are perhaps less well analysed on the level of plot than on the level of language, where the major dynamic matches Egill's simplicity against his hosts' complicated behaviour.

Gyða's halfhearted and brief attempt at a traditional whetting (p. 202) is transformed into a normal request by the politeness of the reply it receives: ‘ “Skylt er þat, húsfreyja, fyrir sakar Arinbjarnar, frænda þíns, at ek fara með syni þínum, ef honum þykkir sér þat nǫkkurt fullting.”’<sup>21</sup> The critical observation that Egill's opponent, Ljótr, is a stereotypical berserkr with a conventional name, is a self-satisfying observation, in so far as it does not advance analysis of Ljótr's particular rôle in the saga in literary terms. It is more significant, to my mind, that the grim berserkr-type of Egill and his family has predominated hitherto.

Ljótr is the first so-called berserkr in the saga to show histrionic tendencies, howling gruesomely or bellowing malevolently, depending on how one wants to translate it. Egill speaks four verses to Ljótr at various points during their fight. Egill's chosen mode of speech (verse) is concentrated, intricate, and formal. However, in contrast with Ljótr's behaviour, Egill's speaking of verse has the striking simplicity of great control. Egill impresses as someone now comparatively in control, who takes large but always calculated risks (calculated by the measure of his own powers, not by what others would find reasonable). In earlier situations the verses are part of his growing

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t is a duty, lady, for the sake of Arinbjörn, your kinsman, that I accompany your son, if he considers that any help.]

turbulently into naturally excessive powers. This character development over the course of the saga exists in the developing relation of action taken, language used, and interpretation of events.<sup>22</sup>

The beginnings of Egill's first two verses are grimly critical of the situation, first reflecting on Friðgeirr's unfitness to fight (so, by implication, that Egill is righting an injustice by taking on the fight, not being recklessly violent), then stating that Ljótr's demands need to be met. In the third verse, Egill announces an intention to hush him ('kyrrum' [let us hush], p. 204, verse 39, l. 7) with iron. His verse is not summatory, but it is, by anticipation, conclusive, and imposes extreme formality of ordered language over the noisy chaos created by the berserkr. Egill uses the rest period requested by Ljótr to produce another verse: action, whether of physical strength or of powerful words, is not allowed to stop until Egill achieves Ljótr's final silence, the stopping of his breath - 'fell Ljótr þar ok var þegar ørendr.'<sup>23</sup> Then Egill produces his summatory verse, saying that his enjoyment of the killing was reward enough for it. Whatever else this is (perhaps it could be analysed as authentic berserkr temperament against histrionic berserkr), it clinches the simplicity of great, controlled power with which Egill acts to help Arinbjörn's relatives, and certainly is not *reckless* violence, or even violence for its own sake (mindless violence) - violence for art's sake would be a fairer equation.

The successful finish to the case for Egill's wife's Norwegian inheritance, in chapter LXV, comes when Egill challenges Atli, the present possessor, to a lawful duel to settle the question, realizes that magic protection makes Atli invulnerable to metal, bears him down, and bites his throat out. This has, perhaps unsurprisingly, been read as an upsurge of his inherited lycanthropic temperament, or as just plain bestial. It should be emphasized, however, that this striking action is not Egill's preferred action; he had requested a fair duel. He finishes a law case by biting out the throat

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would not say that 'recklessness' is a main characteristic of Egill's violence throughout the saga: the opposite is true and increasingly so over the course of the narrative. 'Explosiveness' could be a better term, and I would argue that he actually has controlled explosions. The impression of 'recklessness' may be a back reading from the *reader's* comfort with the sense of extraordinariness and danger which *Egils saga* is good at producing. Ljótr fell there and was immediately dead [lit. 'out-of-breath'.]]

because Atli has gone outside the formal language of law in using magic. Egill merely meets Atli's tricky magic with his own basic ruthlessness, instead of trying for a sequence of ineffective negotiations. Again, Egill's action is presented as comparatively *controlled*. He uses the same kind of structuring phrase which the saga narrative uses, when laying the case, as he sees it, before Atli: ‘‘[...] muntu heyrtr hafa þar fyrr um rætt; [...]’’ (p. 207) [you will have heard that spoken of before].

Before he turns from prosthetic weapon to natural weapon, Egill sees ‘at eigi mun hlýða svá búit, [...]’ [that it would not do like that] (pp. 209-210) - *hlýða*, with its semantic field including listening, obeying, and what is permissible or proper, being one of the key terms in the saga's system of meaning's existence through language and its transformations. Atli is the first to break the *etiquette* of violence, bypassing the law while keeping its outward form. Egill speaks a summatory verse, the narrative reports that there is no other news recorded at that Assembly, and Egill gets the lands ‘at eiginorði’ [in possession] (p. 211, near the end of the chapter). Narrative mastery - the ordering of events - is his again.

There is a further dimension to Egill's way of killing. When he takes over the weapon's function himself, he *actualizes* the dead or conventional metaphor found earlier - ‘Egill hjó til hans á ǫxlina, ok beit ekki sverðit: [...] Egill reiddi sverðit af ǫllu afli. en ekki beit, hvar sem hann hjó til.’ [Egill struck at his shoulder, and the sword did not bite; Egill swung the sword with all his might, but it did not bite, wherever he struck.] (p. 209). Egill's violence is literally a transformation of language. His violence is not only controlled; it can be seen to be more intimately linked with his skald's nature, the more closely one reads.

The simplest reading of the very short chapter LXVI (p. 211), that it exists to contrast Egill's peacefulness in Iceland with his more or less provoked unpeacefulness elsewhere and so to complicate if not redeem him for the reader, is the kind of reading which survives in translation to dominate readers who move from TL to SL, but which, though simple, ceases to dominate when the

SL saga is read with attention to its own ideas of the creation and manipulation of meaning. A minor, negative point is that the list of Egill's children includes three sons, none of whom is named for either Þórólfr; Egill has written this illfated name out of his family's *ætt* [genealogical line] and saga, but has named one daughter Þorgerðr, perpetuating the memory of his mannish sorceress fostermother whom Skalla-Grímr murdered.

More importantly for a reading of Egill's narrative mastery over his own life, the nature of his peacefulness in Iceland should not be read as a settling down. It is more coercive, or at least stronger, than the prose of the chapter (if detached from the rest of the saga, or not closely translated) would suggest. The qualifier to his lack of aggression, that 'gerðusk menn ok ekki til þess at sitja yfir hlut hans'<sup>24</sup>, draws yet another parallel between his family's rule at Borg and the King's rule over Norway, as it recalls the image which Egill used earlier in verse 36 (Chapter LXIV, p. 200), of the cuckoo not settling/sitting/perching if it knew the eagle to be hovering. Now places have been changed. Egill, unchallenged, can be the predatory or royal creature.

As if to reinforce the fact that his mastery is peculiar to *Iceland*, another case in Norway is provoked in the narrative. In chapter LXVII, Arinbjörn reluctantly lays claim to Ljótr's lands for Egill when they have been seized by the crown. Again Hákon Aðalsteinsfóstri demonstrates his superior narrative mastery in Norway, shortcutting the legal language of claims, questioning instead the basic facts of Egill's unwelcome presence in the land and the firmness of Arinbjörn's allegiance to Hákon as King.

The action is dispersed geographically during chapters LXIX and LXX. In chapter LXXI, Egill goes instead of Þorsteinn Þóruson to collect the King's tribute in Vermaland. His kind of energy now operates in marginal territory. Why does Egill offer to undertake this journey? The positive motivation seems to be service to Arinbjörn's sister's son, and a feeling for what is proper (although

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[and also people did not encroach on [lit., 'sit on'] his rights]

Egill claims that Þorsteinn is too great to be sent on the mission, it is obvious that this is disingenuous, and, like Friðgeirr. Þorsteinn is really too young) - i.e. a kind of unselfishness. The negative motivation could be that, as with Ljótr, Egill's bloodthirstiness is less an appetite than a temper. a need seen developing in the latter part of the saga, just as his compulsion to rake wealth together is seen developing from around the time of Þórólfr's death.

A peculiarity of the critics of Egill's character is that their analyses, though often very sophisticated in terms of sheer scholarship, often work with the notion of appeals to enduring universal human character (which practically means, character reducible to platitudes or maxims), and/or the notion of interesting pagan brutes whose lives are offered for a Christian saga readership but whose brutality (which the critic may view as exciting or deplorable) keeps showing through.

If one is to apply modern notions of human character to *Egils saga* (and I am not sure whether this is better than trying to deduce a theory of character, not an easily applicable typology, from the saga itself), it is only fair to allow the notions to be updated. Egill's bloody adventures in Vermaland can then be seen possibly as satisfying his temperament without that reducing his unselfishness to a pretext or byproduct or afterthought or self-deception. It would in any case, I think, be equally valid to view them in part as an exercise in narrative mastery: he tidies up the stories for Arinbjörn's *ætt* [genealogical line], and continues to do so after his own story in Norway proper has been cut off by King Hákon.

In chapter LXXI, Egill and his men lodge with the wealthy farmer Ármóðr, who offers false hospitality, lying about the availability of food and drink and apparently planning to kill them. Much of this has to be inferred from the narrative. The farmer's daughter is sent by her mother with a verse to Egill, apparently as a warning. As soon as she does this, there is a dramatic set of actions (dramatic in the sense of setting the scene for what will happen), which is like an adult version of the Atleyjar-

Bárðr episode (XLIII-XLIV). Ármóðr slaps her and tells her to ‘þegja’ [be quiet] (another of the key words) because she always says what is best left unsaid.

In the aftermath of the sounding, violent action that is the slap, the girl silently goes away. Egill throws down his near-empty bowl of skyr<sup>25</sup>, the bowls are cleared away, tables set and delicacies served, and hard drinking starts, with Ármóðr (mockingly?) repeatedly toasting Egill who is trying to prevent his companions from getting helplessly drunk (an instance of his good leadership):

Maðr var til þess fenginn, at bera þeim Agli hvert full, ok eggjaði sá mjök, at þeir skyldi skjótt drekka; Egill mælti við fõrunauta sína, at þeir skyldi þá ekki drekka, en hann drakk fyrir þá, þat er þeir máttu eigi annan veg undan komask.  
[Someone was set to carry every drink to Egill and his men, and this [man] urged them on hugely, that they should drink fast; Egill told his companions, that they should drink no more, but he drank for them, what they could not otherwise avoid.]  
(LXXI, p. 225)

Egill pushes Ármóðr against the wall and vomits into his face so Ármóðr cannot breathe.

Ármóðr vomits as soon as he can get his breath. Egill makes this the occasion for a verse (45, p. 226) in which he pays Ármóðr with the vomit for his hospitality.

This gross action, variously censured or censored by translators and other interpreters, is exceedingly complex, and aesthetically pleasing, in terms of the transformations which are the subject of this commentary. As with the Atleyjar-Bárðr episode, the gross action is a marshalling of poetic metaphor as non-linguistic aggression, or rather, marshals the metaphor in the service of a life which lives out poetic language.

The missing liquid, from alcohol, vomit, and (metaphorically understood) poetry, is once again the poet’s blood. The action is literalizing, not mythic, as Egill is no Kvasir, and he swaps vomit for blood. Egill requites his host’s lies and false hospitality with formless vomit instead of formal

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skyr: a semisolid dairy product.

words of praise. He refuses to incorporate the delicacies which his host produced under compulsion, or the skyr which he was forced to make do with at first, into his physical substance: he returns them.

As well as a return, it is an exchange, to be understood further in terms of payment for the offer of night's lodgings where *Ármóðr* himself had been hoping to actualize the dead metaphor *eiga náttból* [take night-quarters], which occurs elsewhere in the saga (LXXXI, p. 280) as a euphemism for finding death. The payment, too, is metaphorical as vomit = poetry = the treasure of the breast. When *Ármóðr* loses his breath temporarily under the stream of vomit, then vomits himself, it is like a weird, unsavoury version of the situation where a skald speaks or offers a verse and someone else learns it by repeating it.

The next chapter (LXXII), which shows Egill volunteering to cure the mysteriously ill Helga, his new host Þorfinnr's daughter, rubbing off the runes written by a rejected suitor whose malice, or ignorance of their effect, worsened her illness, and writing new runes, is naturally a reminder of his magical power to make language impose on the world, and demonstrates his good nature. The simple contrast of behaviour is less important than the continuity of transformative power and concern with the right ordering of things.

In a perverse way, everything which Egill did to *Ármóðr* corresponded to one or another aspect of the murderous host/ruthless skald situation; his exchanges and actualizations of metaphor were all *correct*. Even his gouging out of *Ármóðr*'s eye before he leaves is appropriate: *Ármóðr* is made into the image of Egill's god Óðinn, who lost an eye when drinking wisdom at a well. Egill took care that his upwelling of vomit was interspersed with verses, in a monstrous version of ritual instruction. *Ármóðr* now has practical knowledge of a dark skald's temperament and the duties of a host who cannot outguess his guests. Distasteful as these transformations may be, they make a good pattern. They cannot really be called reckless. Not a move is out of place.

In chapter LXXIV, Jarl Arnviðr decides to set ambushes for Egill after Egill tries to involve him in a narrative whereby the lying, thieving, treacherous, murdering Jarl will be punished by the King. Egill uses narrative-type phrases like ‘men kalla’ [people consider] (p. 233) to make the condemnation understood as general, but the Jarl understands these speeches as something which Egill ‘jós [...] upp’ [served up] to them (literally, threw up in their eyes). Egill’s accusations seem not to be too wide of the mark, and the Jarl’s phrase rewrites their exchange as a metaphorical version of the exchange with Ármóðr, while possibly being a sign that the Jarl knows what happened there. The next chapter sees Egill preparing for against-the-odds encounters with the Jarl’s men by strapping on a great stone as a kind of armoured vest, which ties in with Skalla-Grímr’s episode with the anvil stone, and King Hákon’s image of trying to heave too big a stone. This may be a token of ‘monstrous’ strength. In this chapter, it is more of a token of carefulness. Egill is shown to be a good leader, calculatedly risking this strength to protect his men:

Þá mælti Egill: “Nú skulu þér fara á hæli undan í kleifina ok hlífask sem þér meguð, en ek mun leita upp á bergit”. Þeir gerðu svá; [...]  
 [Then Egill said: ‘Now you must go up the cliff in search of shelter and cover yourselves as you can, but I shall get up onto the rock.’ They did so]  
 (LXXV, p. 236)

Egill hafði mǫrg sár ok engi stór; fóru þeir nú sína leið; hann batt sár fǫrunauta sinna, ok váru engi banvæn; [...]  
 [Egill had many wounds and none grave; they continued on their way; he tended his companions’ wounds, and none were fatal]  
 (LXXV, p. 237)

When Egill is back in Iceland (LXXVII), Þórdís, his favourite ‘child’, the daughter of Þórólfr and Ásgerðr, marries, and Egill hands over her inheritance from Þórólfr so she and Grímr can settle in Mosfell (p. 242). This is not the action of a miser or a tyrant. Like Kveld-Úlfr, who delegated authority to Skalla-Grímr before he strictly needed to, Egill is good at setting his family up and letting them move on - very different from, say, the implosive situation in *Njáls saga*.

The modern myth of 'Egill', the traits which become memorable in summary readings or translations, and which have been popularized by commentators including translators: the antisocial, reckless, animalistic violence, the miserliness and avidity: even around and within the most notorious episodes, are not much of, or the best part of, the truth of his 'characterization' or his power in using silence-action-language transformations to master his own life's narrative.

Chapter 78 is extremely long and the commentary for it will have to cover several pages. As it stands in the ÍF edition, it contains both the long poems *Sonatorrek* and *Arinbjarnarkviða*, with some events surrounding their composition, and Egill's friendship with the young skald Einarr skálaglam.

Egill's excessive mourning at his sons' death is famous; so also, his daughter Þorgerðr's trick to bring him out of it. It is remarkable that the description given of her earlier in the chapter emphasizes her quietness, in what looks like a feminine version of the family temper: 'Þorgerðr var væn kona ok kvenna mest, vitr ok heldr skapstór, en hversdagliga kyrrlát.' [Þorgerðr was a beautiful woman and very tall, wise and rather strongminded, but generally quiet] (p. 242). This quietness deals with a violent silence, initiated when Egill reportedly ('þat er sǫgn manna' [that is people's story]) swells with grief so that his clothes burst, at his drowned son Bǫðvarr's burial. This bursting is rather more than a folktale understanding of a premodern somatization of emotion.<sup>26</sup> Its silent violence enacts a bursting of his body, i.e. of the strands of his genealogy, which is an image that also occurs in *Sonatorrek*. He then locks himself into his bedcloset. Here the idea of *locking*, which is similar to that of binding (as poetry is *bundið mál*)<sup>27</sup>, contains sequence, sanctuary and closure. Something slots into something else to make a sealed space.

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or some notes on somatization of emotions, see Wolpert.

In Icelandic term for poetry is *bundið mál* [linked, or bound, language]. This refers to the poetic ordering of language by such means as alliteration, metre, and internal rhyme, which differentiates it from prose. *óbundið mál* [non-ed, unbound, language]. Medieval Icelandic poetry was understood through metaphors of construction. Given Egill's identity as a poet, these metaphors allow Egill's physical actions of locking, and his relation to enclosed or ritually constructed space, to interrelate meaningfully with his silence (absence of poetry) and his composition or performance of poetry.

Egill's retirement could be viewed as 'shamanistic'. It is also accounted for by this discussion of transformations, because, as in less momentous sequences, the amount and quality of silence/retirement/non-action corresponds to the eventual amount and quality of formal language/composition and performance of verse. This could be said to be true of Þorgerðr, on a lesser scale; her earlier characterization by quietness is succeeded by exceptionally brave and wily speech, which she does not volunteer but is called in to effect, by no less than Egill's wife, her mother, as if her transformative ability is recognized by her family, though it does not come into the saga.

The motif of locking closes a frame around Egill's silent depression. The end of this frame locks into another frame, in which *Sonatorrek* is composed (reported), and the idea of locking returns at the moment of opening into the poem's performance. The lock-frame for Egill's depression itself interacts with a previous lock-frame, to do with the death of Bǫðvarr and his enclosure in a mound. This set of three frames thus enacts formally the theme of *Sonatorrek*, which is within one of the frames, as the ending brought about in Egill's family line becomes a new beginning for the ageing man as skáld. The sequence is as follows:

[1] Þat var þá eitt sinn, at Bǫðvarr beiddisk at fara með þeim, ok þeir veittu honum þat; [...] *lauk* þá svá, at skipit kafði undir þeim, ok týndusk þeir allir. En eptir um daginn *skaut* upp líkunum; [...] Hann [Egill] lét þá *opna* hauginn ok lagði Bǫðvar þar niðr hjá Skalla-Grími; var síðar aptr *lokinn* hauginn, ok var eigi fyrr *lokit* en um dagsetrs skeið. [2] Eptir þat reið Egill heim til Borgar, ok er hann kom heim, þá gekk hann þegar til *lokrekku* þeirar, er hann var vanr at sofa í; hann lagðisk niðr ok *skaut fyrir loku*; [...] [Egill is said to burst his clothes with grief] [...] En eptir um daginn lét Egill ekki upp *lokrekku*; [...] [3] Hon [Þorgerðr] gekk at lokhvílunni ok kallaði: "Faðir, lúk upp hurðinni, vil ek, at vit farim eina leið bæði." Egill spretti frá lokunni; gekk Þorgerðr upp í hvílugolfit ok lét loku fyrir hurðina; [...] Þá mælti Þorgerðr: "Hvat skulu vit nú til ráðs taka? lokit er nú þessi ætlan. [...]" [...] [*Sonatorrek*] [...] Egill tók at hressask, svá sem fram leið at yrkja kvæðit, ok er lokit var kvæðinu, þá færði hann þat Ásgerði ok Þorgerði ok hjónum sínum; reis hann þá upp ór rekkju ok settisk í ]  
 ǫndvegi; kvæði þetta kallaði hann *Sonatorrek*.

[1] It happened once, that Bǫðvarr asked to go with them, and they let him; [...] it ended so, that the ship capsized under them, and they were all lost. And later in the day the bodies were washed up; [...] [Egill] had the mound opened and laid Bǫðvarr down there by Skalla-Grímr; the mound was then closed again, and it was not closed before the end of the day. [2] After that Egill rode home to Borg, and when he came home, then he went immediately to the locked bedcloset, which he usually slept in; he lay down and locked it; [...] And later in the day Egill had not opened the bedcloset; [...] [3] [Þorgerðr] went to the bedcloset and called: 'Father, unlock the door, I want us both to

take one path.' Egill undid the lock; Þorgerðr went up into the sleeping area and relocked the door; [...] Then Þorgerðr said: 'What decision shall we take now? this enterprise is finished. [...] [elegy] Egill began to recover his spirits, as the composition of the poem progressed, and when the poem was finished, then he recited it to Ásgerðr and Þorgerðr and his household; then he got up from bed and sat down in the high seat; that poem he called *Sonatorrek*.]

[My numeration and emphases]  
(LXXVIII, pp. 243-245; 256-257)

A minor pattern within the pattern of locking, not quoted here because too long and distracting, is that of posture: lying down in imitation of death but also for concentrated 'shamanistic' retirement and, inadvertently, the resting of one's forces; rising up and assuming the high-seat once more. The interlocking sequence ends with performance and the act of naming the poem. With the sons eliminated, the skald's proper audience of understanding interlocutors, as so often before, consists of the women: something to do with traditions of transmission (who had the time to memorize verses)? or something to do with the non-reproducibility of the ultimate skald? Egill is the son and grandson of poets, but busy or violent silence links and holds apart the line of inheritance. Still, the point should not be taken too far.

Egill composes the second long poem in chapter LXXVIII, *Arinbjarnarkviða*, after hearing that there has been a change of kings in Norway, that Eiríkr's sons have taken over from Hákon, and Arinbjörn enjoys a position of high esteem once more. This is exactly the kind of situation in which Egill might have planned a visit to Norway, perhaps to claim Ljótr's property. Instead of doing any such thing - any further testing of his friendship - Egill makes a poem that commemorates the friendship as proved. In the time that he might have taken to visit the real Arinbjörn<sup>28</sup>, he creates an Arinbjörn for all time. It is a gift, *and* a message, whether or not sent or received (K specifies that he sent it to Arinbjörn in Norway). The final relation between Egill and Arinbjörn is not in the to-and-fro of action but in the legendary reputation of their friendship, re-created in the language and

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am not concerned to speculate here whether the poem was 'really' written as an elegy for Arinbjörn and needs a different frame or placement.

language-related acts<sup>29</sup> (including acts in/of silence) of composition, memorization, performance, transcriptions and reading of the poem. The image of the poem as an edifice: temple or cairn: with which it ends (p. 267), links it back to *Sonatorrek*, for both poems are monuments, *tombeaux* - whether or not *Arinbjarnarkviða* was composed in Arinbjörn's lifetime, it belongs to his projection into legendary time, therefore placing his life alongside his reputation after death.

What is the place in life of the poet who writes his friend's legend and his own sons' epitaph? *Egils saga* still has some way to go, but Egill is already, by these achievements, moving into pastness. At this point, Einarr skálaglamm enters the saga. He is a young skáld who befriends Egill; they discuss poetry, and other topics, including Egill's life:

Einarr spurði ok í móti Egil at þeim tíðendum, er fyrr höfdu görzk um ferðir Egils ok stórvirki hans, en þat tal þótti Agli gott, ok rættisk af vel. Einarr spurði Egil, hvar hann hefði þess verit staddr, at hann hafði mest reynt sik, ok bað hann þat segja sér. Egill kvað: [...]

[And Einarr asked Egill in return about those events, which happened in Egill's travels and his achievements, and Egill liked that talk, and its effects were good. Einarr asked Egill, where he had been so circumstanced, that he had been most tested, and asked him to tell him that. Egill said: [...]]

(LXXVIII, p. 268)

Egill answers with a verse.

What is Einarr's function, in the saga? To say that he is a substitute for the dead sons, Gunnarr and Bǫðvarr, has nothing to do with the economy of the narrative. Bǫðvarr scarcely figures; Gunnarr is tacked on as an afterthought. They are not characters, but occasions for Egill's verse. There is the general need and opportunity to continue one's line through sons, but Einarr is a particularized character. It is a little sentimental to view him as a substitute child. To say that he is a poetic heir to the old skáld metaphorically relates him to Egill, replacing the dead sons, but is rather limited as an analysis of his function, as well as not being accurate in so far as Einarr already is skáld

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he possibilities of transcription and reading, implicit in Egill's use of runes earlier, are explicit in this chapter where gerðr offers to carve a lasting record of *Sonatorrek*.

enough to have entertaining ('skemmtiligar', p. 268) conversations about composition. He is not apprenticing himself to Egill.

Einarr is less Egill's poetic heir than his vessel. His relationship to the older skáld, in this chapter of narratives and characters locked into their poetic *tombeaux*, is a miniature of transmission. This is where the narrative is justifying its own origins, and the use of all those coordinating phrases which refer backwards and forwards within its time and structure but also outwards to sources and (perhaps continuing) rumour or legend. Einarr's function, here in the saga, and not independent of the fact that he has an independent poetic reputation in the corpus of Old Icelandic literature, is that of the person who has interviews with Egill. At first hand he receives the skáld's version of his life, getting the material in new (and presumably old?) stanzas, of the sort which are the kernels for the saga narrative's 'later' development. As a skáld, Einarr has a trained memory and the skill to decipher what he hears.

Einarr's characterization as 'Qrr maðr ok optast félitill, skQrungr mikill ok drengr góðr' [a generous person and usually out of pocket, of outstanding character and a fine man] (p. 269) highlights the contrast between this skáld's temperament and that of Egill's family, whose nature is not altogether human. Egill and Skalla-Grímr have and hoard treasure. They sink some of it irretrievably in the Icelandic landscape, a secret which keeps Icelanders exercising their ingenuity. Their wealth, like themselves, is literally the stuff of legend. part of the ground for one of their country's myths. In their lives, they actualize metaphors which are dangerous and chaotic to live out, yet beautiful to control in formal language. It should be impossible to essentialize a 'skaldic temperament' on the basis of *Egils saga*, where contrastive figures such as Qlvir hnúfa and Einarr skálaglamm play crucial, if less extended or dramatic, rôles, both at the level of the system of meaning and transformations, and the level of plot. Egill's family, far more strongly than embodying the type

of the skáld, enacts the *nature* of poetry. Einarr's unthrifty generosity and unquestionable nobleness are suitable for the figure of *transmission* for Egill's verse tradition.

There follows an episode entirely to do with Einarr. Einarr has difficulty getting money from Jarl Hákon, who is angry with him. He composes the long poem *Vellekla*, and for a long time the jarl refuses to hear ('hlyða') the poem (p. 270). Einarr speaks a couple of verses about making the poem while other people slept, and about seeking out the (angry) jarl - note the parallel with Egill's transactions. Like both Haraldr with Ólvir and Eiríkr with Egill, the jarl, not wanting Einarr to leave, heard ('hlyddi') the poem (p. 271). Einarr manages the system of transformations so well that the polysemous key word *hlyða* changes from negative to positive. His reward is a jewelled, gold-spangled shield, 'skrifaðr fornsögum' [depicting ancient tales] (p. 271), which is rather heavily laden with symbolic meaning in the saga's system of meaning and its metaphorical connections, discussed in the paragraph above, between verse, wealth, and tradition (by extension, (self-)knowledge). Einarr goes to Iceland and leaves this as a gift for Egill, who is not at home.

Egill's reaction, which is probably not one of affectionate exaggeration, is simplistically read as comic or brutal. He curses Einarr, for giving something Egill will have to sit up and write about. He calls for his horse, so he can catch and kill Einarr (LXXVIII, p. 272). This transaction can be read another way.

Egill has been presented with an artifact, which, in its warlike shape, inscribed histories, and embedded wealth, greatly resembles him. Because of this resemblance, it is a treasure for an old man who is himself important in what he has handed down. With his usual, uncanny sense of his own saga in the making, and ability to master his narrative, Egill has ridden home just after Einarr left. Transmission is running backwards. Egill immediately wants to translate the iconizing gift into active violence (presumably followed by a summatory verse), not just more of the same (poetry, and, what's more, a praise poem because he has been enriched by a younger skáld), proving that there is life in the

old man yet. He is not in time to catch Einarr. Then he composes - no mere occasional stanza - but a *drápa*<sup>30</sup>, the most prestigious and difficult form, which requires stamina in composition. He is able to retranslate the full symbolic weight and quality of the gift into an equivalent quality and weight of poetry. Only its beginning is cited; it emphasizes the lustre which Egill's praise adds to the shield, calling for an attentive audience ('hlýðið ér' [listen], p. 273, verse 54, l.7). He makes the gift into a challenge, and accepts it as tribute, not to himself as a legendary character, but to himself as someone who still can confer value.

Egill and Einarr's friendship is lifelong. The shield, however, is treated carelessly. The chapter concludes with the story of its fate: it is ruined and thrown into a dairy vat, after which Egill has the decorations removed, finding they come to twelve ounces of gold. (LXXVIII, p. 273).

On one level, this is crass and comical. It is bracketed off by one of the narrative phrases, 'svá er sagt' [so it-is said], which can be used as a disclaimer as well as an indication or appearance of scrupulous report. On another level, the valuable shield may be in some ways equivalent to Egill's iconic status. In this case, when it is spoilt and thrown into a vat of sour whey, this is a good image for those two episodes - Atleyar-Bárðr and Ármóðr - which modern commentators tend to find difficult, where murderous, treacherous, inadequate hosts try to fob off Egill and his men with bowls of dairy products instead of food and drink, provoking him to behaviour which could be seen as spoiling his legend, tainting his brilliant record. It also continues the violent, enigmatic series of liquid (alcohol/blood/poetry) transformations, which here are read as an outbreak of actualized skaldic-type metaphor perpetrated by Egill to maintain control while creating narrative chaos for others. Here the inscribed shield is thrown into a vat of another kind of liquid. The information on it and its workmanship have been superseded by Egill's *drápa* about it, and by the solid bits of recoverable gold on it. These bits of gold could be read as being like the verses which the later saga-author used as

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long poem with a refrain.

kernels for the saga, so, as corresponding to, for example, the *drápa* itself. The shield and what it had to say vanish, in what is like another image of transmission and transformation of material from before Egill's time to his time and, by extension, into the times of the saga as it stands. This is the most general set of transformations with which *Egils saga* is concerned.

Egill and his family embody and live out ideas about the genesis of narrative and Icelandic identity as such, beyond cleverly self-reflexive poetic process.<sup>31</sup> This may be one reason why the saga seems to come to an end, to have a summatory or conclusive feel when there are still nine chapters to go. Some critics find that it runs out of steam even earlier. The winding-down of the narrative in terms of plot is, by this chapter's reading, a winding-up of the narrative in terms of the saga's system of meaning through transformations, and the most general application of this, i.e. external to the saga itself.

Egill's kind of silence is in competition with a newer kind of silence, in chapter LXXIX. His son Þorsteinn, whom he does not much care for, is 'kyrrlátr' [quiet-tempered], 'stilltr manna bezt' [the most self-controlled person] (p. 274). If *hljóð*, with its connotations of watchfulness, is Egill's kind of silence - the silence which gets a hearing, then *stilli*, with its connotations of moderation and settlement, is Þorsteinn's. Two meanings of *stilli* are (1) a resting-place; (2) a trap.<sup>32</sup> With Ásgerðr's connivance, Þorsteinn wears Egill's robe (Arinbjörn's gift) at the þing, but draggles and soils the hem, lacking the stature to fill it out. When Egill finds this out, much later, he speaks a verse about his resistance to being overtaken by his heir during his life. Egill's other verse in this chapter thanks Þorsteinn Þóruson for a shield which he sent. This contrast of the two Þorsteinns - one who gives, receiving public commemoration; one who takes, receiving private condemnation - is also a contrast between a figure who belongs to Egill's *söguligr* past, and the figure who belongs to a future too

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his phrase alludes to the title of de Looze 1989. No criticism of the article itself is intended, merely an extension of perception of the saga's intellectual scope. leasby, Vigfússon and Craigie, p. 593.

densely populated to allow for lives composed out of strikingly individual actions. Unlike Kveld-Úlfr, Skalla-Grímr, or Egill, Þorsteinn has a great many children, including two bastards. This is like a dilution of the family line. After the culmination of transformations as a set of images of transmission discussed in the preceding paragraphs, the saga ends twice more. Chapter LXXIX ends by asserting the greatness of the 'Mýramannakyn' descended from Skalla-Grímr. The final chapter (LXXXVII) qualifies this, showing how both 'dark' and 'light' family characteristics appear sporadically among Þorsteinn's and Skalla-Grímr's descendants.

Þorsteinn's land squabble with Steinarr is rhetoricalized. A contrast between two styles of speech and action, 'stillilga' [calmly] and 'festiliga' [hastily] (LXXX, p. 277), opposes them personally from the first. Steinarr keeps letting his animals graze over the limit which divides their properties, on prime pastureland. Þorsteinn kills one herdsman-slave. Steinarr picks a herdsman, Þrándr, to double as hit man. At the end of that chapter, Þorsteinn lets matters rest ('kyrrt vera'), though Þrándr starts watching the cattle day and night (p. 280). In LXXXI, Þorsteinn goes to Þrándr, a smallish axe his only weapon. This is because Þorsteinn intends an execution-style killing, not a traditional outfacing. Þrándr, who does not understand that Þorsteinn is a new kind of authority figure, taunts him. Þorsteinn's answer, alluding to their difference, not of physical capacity and weaponry, but of 'hamingju' [fortune], aligns Þorsteinn, on his much smaller scale, with the kind of power exercised by the Kings of Norway when land had to be kept together, and means justified ends. Enemies are to be worn down if possible, because the cost of wiping them out can be too great. If this is not possible, they are to be removed - not allowed the equality of a challenge. Þorsteinn accordingly kills Þrándr, who is putting on his shoes with head conveniently bent. Steinarr tries to taunt Þorsteinn: killing slaves is not 'framaverk' [an heroic exploit] (p. 281). He, too, does not realize that language and action do not go together in Þorsteinn. The old system of transformations does not work with or on Þorsteinn.

This makes Þorsteinn, for the other characters, paradoxically both moderate-minded and unpredictable, although for readers of the saga narrative, his nature has been made clear from the first incident with Egill's robe. Reputation, for Þorsteinn, is a much more modern thing. It does not go with what can be said about him, or the interpretation of his actions, but with the fact of his holding on to a large and prestigious estate like Borg, which gives him legal and political power as well as wealth. His concern is not with Steinarr but with getting the cattle off the land. This is not because he is petty, compared to Egill, but because he is ruthless in a different way. He does not care for the power of a system of transformations ultimately defined not by power alone but by honour. He cares for rights - rights-to translating into rights-over.

It would be good to know whether the last four lines of the penultimate stanza of Egill's *Sonatorrek* were to be understood as meaning that Egill made concealed enemies declare themselves (the editor's preference) or that he made overt enemies hide their hostility from fear:

ok þat geð,	[ok þat geð,
es ek gerða mér	es ek gerða mér
vísa fjandr	vísa fjandr
af vélǫndum.	at vélǫndum.]
[and such a spirit, that I made myself certain enemies out of deceivers/made my certain enemies into deceivers]	
(LXXVIII, p. 256, stz. 24) [reconstruction not in ÍF main text]	

If the latter meaning holds, Þorsteinn has inherited from Egill a transformation of this power (he pulls rank, and gets Egill to fix his court case, proceeding by intimidation); if the former, Þorsteinn would also inherit a transformation of this power (he plays waiting games). As it is, perhaps not unfittingly, the relation between his behaviours and Egill's remains ambiguous, yet closer than a reading simply for transgenerational contrast would infer. Perhaps the break which some readers feel in the saga, and which (with other reasons) may be thought to lend credence to the theory that there were two authors, can be placed even later. The greater part of *Egils saga* seeks to establish (not only literary) tradition and the workings of meaning. It is nostalgic. The end section, where the focus is off Egill, is aimed at

inheritors of the tradition, so, including the saga-author's contemporaries. More than two centuries separate Egill from Þorsteinn, not just one generation.

Steinarr summons Þorsteinn on various charges which would amount to full outlawry.

Þorsteinn sends messengers to tell Egill. Egill musters his own kind of silence, which directs questions outwards from itself, just as he did when he heard that Berg-Önundr was in possession of lands that should have been shared with Ásgerðr. The difference between father and son, which is also a difference of social context, emerges if a verbal echo is traced back to the aftermath of Egill's first killing of another boy at the district games, which resulted in general chaos and death.

En er Egill kom heim, lét Skalla-Grímr sér fátt um finnask, en Bera kvað Egil vera víkingsefni ok kvað þat mundu fyrir liggja, þegar hann hefði aldr til, at honum væri fengin herskip. [Egill speaks a verse]

[And when Egill came home, Skalla-Grímr showed his disapproval, but Bera said that Egill was viking material and said it would follow, when he was old enough, that he would be given a warship.]

(XL, p. 100)

Egill lét sér fátt um finnask ok spurði þó at í hljóði vandliga um skipti þeira Þorsteins ok Steinars ok svá at þeim mǫnnum, er Steinar höfðu styrkt til þessa máls; síðan fóru sendimenn heim, ok lét Þorsteinn vel yfir þeira ferð.

[Egill showed his disapproval and nonetheless discreetly enquired meticulously about Þorsteinn's and Steinarr's disputes and also about the people, who had supported Steinarr in this case; then the messengers went home, and Þorsteinn was pleased with their journey.]

(LXXXI, p. 282)

Juxtaposing the situations schematically, like ST and TT or the levels of a family tree, I paraphrase:

The very young Egill commits an honour killing in a public place, which (provokes other killings, but) has essentially private consequences. Skalla-Grímr recognizes, perhaps, something of himself in his son, and, recognizing similarity, does not punish him. Egill settles things at home with his parents, but the action furthers his independence. The action is transformed into verse performed for the adults. This gains the approval of his mother, i.e. the lady of the house, who predicts a viking career for him.

The reasonably mature Þorsteinn conceals killings which he carried out for the sake of land. His private squabble has public consequences. He invokes Egill's authority to further his case, taking little other action of his own. Egill recognizes, perhaps, that his son will never be like him, but, acknowledging blood ties, sets out to help him. Þorsteinn experiences personal satisfaction and musters a large troop to accompany him to court where he will consolidate his position as landowner.

re seems little love lost between father and son. Egill will deploy no verse about this case. His 'epic' powers will be used in an emptily formal, unpleasant way.

When Egill arrives to take up his position in the large tent prepared for him, he rides in as a secondary figure, with unchancy powers and empty of personal obligations beyond kinship. He is all glittering metal and dark cloak, and introduced by the saga narrative with a syntactical inversion.

Menn sá af þinginu, at flokkur manna reið neðan með Gljúfrá, ok blikuðu þar skildir við; ok er þeir riðu á þingit, þá reið þar maðr fyrir í blári kápu, hafði hjálm á höfði gullroðinn, en skjöld á hlið gullbúinn, í hendi krókaspjót, var þar gullrekinn falrinn; hann var sverði gyrðr. Þar var kominn Egill Skalla-Grímsson með átta tigu manna, alla vel vápnaða, svá sem til bardaga væri búnir; [...]

[People saw from the Þing, that a host of men rode up along Gljúfrá, and their shields shone; and as they rode to the Þing, there was riding a man before [them] in a blue/black cloak, he had a gilded helmet on his head, and a gold-encrusted shield at his side, in his hand a sharp spear, the socket gold-inlaid; he was girt with a sword. Egill Skalla-Grímsson was come there to the Þing with eighty men, all well armed, as if they were arrayed for battle]

(LXXXI, pp. 283-284)

keeping with this hard shine, Egill uses language without justice or sincerity, but to pervert justice with perverse rightness, mirroring the speech of Steinarr's father Qnundr to achieve an outcome opposite to that desired by Steinarr or expected by Qnundr.

When Egill hails Qnundr at the public assembly, purporting to ask him whether he is responsible for his son Steinarr persecuting/prosecuting Þorsteinn Egilsson, Qnundr gives him the axe with which to hang him. Qnundr admits that he has tried hard to get Steinarr to be reconciled with Þorsteinn, and has always tried to spare Þorsteinn dishonour for the sake of his old friendship with Egill. This is impolitic, if not downright insulting. By his own admission, it is clear that Qnundr would like to see Steinarr discuss Steinarr's behaviour together, and when they choose to spare Þorsteinn, it is not because of his own worth or self-assertion. This is a cue for someone like Egill *not* to spare Qnundr's face. Egill replies that it will soon be 'ljóst' [clear] (p. 285) if Qnundr is serious or not. The only thing that does become clear is that Egill means his family to outshine them all, and his rhetoric to bedazzle

them. He makes a speech about neither of them being able to restrain their sons, or prevent chieftains from setting their sons against each other. This is disingenuous - Egill's family has always been good at silence and remarkably good at handing on authority - and mirrors what Qnundr has let slip about his interventionism with his son. It is also inaccurate. Steinarr has egged on the chieftains; Þorsteinn merely informed Egill. Qnundr, finding his concerns mirrored, agrees to hand over the case to Egill's sole judgement, and is shown to bully his son into doing so. (Egill is still acting only on Þorsteinn's wishes and to consolidate his inheritance).

When Qnundr, in the private conversation where he bullies Steinarr verbally, says, “[...] Trúi ek honum miklu betra en Qðrum” ’ [I trust him much better than others] (p. 285), this is a foolish, ominous remark. If he knows Egill so well, why does he not realize that trust was irrelevant when Egill uses formal language publicly in a case concerning land, wealth, blood, and future rights? Egill would then use his power of language *well*, which would, for a follower of Óðinn, but for no one else, be an adequate manner of using it *truly*. Qnundr is also shown to admit, ‘ “hefi ek enn hér til ráðit fyrir okkr, ok skal enn svá vera.”’ [‘I have up to now decided things for [both of] us, and it shall go on like that.’] (pp. 285-286). Does this mean he has spoken at the assembly for Steinarr, to Egill, as reported in the narrative, only since Steinarr decided to bring charges? Does it extend further back? Is Qnundr then responsible for the charges being brought, or even for the infringements on the land at Borg, perhaps also in the name of old friendship? This is left ambiguous. Enough is there to show that Egill is *right*, i.e. that it is *effective*, to use a mirroring strategy whereby he portrays himself as a father-in-control and so appeals to Qnundr's idea that similar men of the still-leading generation will be properly represented if Egill rules the outcome of the case.

The arbitration takes place in the next chapter. In the speech where he pronounces sentence, Egill's language is so practised in doubleness that he manages to work a private rebuke to Þorsteinn into his public speech to Steinarr - ‘ “ætlaðir, at hann myndi vera svá mikill ættleri, at hann myndi

vera ræningi þinn.” [‘you expected, that he would be such a degenerate person, that he would let himself be robbed by you’] – but his emphasis is on Þorsteinn as “son minn” [my son] (LXXXII, p. 287). He deprives Qnundr and Steinarr of their land and its value, forcing them to move before the set time for removal, on penalty of being killed by *anyone* who should wish to offer support to Þorsteinn (p. 288). This is perfectly double. It uses the formal language of law, but is a scantily veiled threat. Who but Egill (and his company of eighty) has spectacularly offered support to Þorsteinn already, indeed does so in this very speech? To be killed by Egill is a more than horrifying prospect, given his reputation, and the saga reader can appreciate this by now.

Nonetheless, a careful reading of the saga narrative makes the sheer skill of Egill’s exercise of injustice enjoyable. It repays a close look, and is not as gross as it sounds in summary or translation, or after a summary reading. The narrative voice also seems to come down on Egill’s side.

The chapter ends with an exchange between Qnundr and Egill.

Þá mælti Qnundr sjóni: “Þat mun mál manna, Egill, at gørð sjá, er þú hefir gørt ok upp sagt, sé heldr skøkk. Nú er þat frá mér at segja, at ek hefi allan mik við lagt at skirra vandræðum þeira, en heðan af skal ek ekki af spara, þat er ek má gera til óþurftar þorsteini.” “Hitt mun ek ætla,” segir Egill, “at hlutr ykkarr feðga mun æ því verri, er deildir várar standa lengr; hugða ek, Qnundr, at þú myndir þat vita, at ek hefi haldit hlut mínum fyrir þvílíkum svá mōnnum, sem þit eru feðgar. En Oddr ok Einarr, er dregizk hafa svá mjök til þessa máls, hafa hér af fengit skapnaðar virðing.”

[Then Qnundr sjóni said: ‘People will say, Egill, that the judgement, which you have made and pronounced, is rather crooked. Now it is to be said of me, that I have done my utmost to avert their difficulties, but henceforth I shall not fail to do whatever I can to damage Þorsteinn.’ ‘I expect,’ says Egill, ‘that your [pl.] lot will always worsen, the longer our dealings continue; I thought, Qnundr, that you would know, that I have held my own with people like you two. And Oddr and Einarr, who have undertaken so much in this case, here have got fitting honour from it.’]

(LXXXII, p. 288)

Egill’s crookedness is not ‘mál manna’ [people’s speech / generally voiced]. Qnundr’s pitiful attempt to use a phrase of narrative mastery, as Egill can, is left in his voice. It does not pass into the narrative voice or have any reported effect, except the effect of becoming part of the narrative (tradition?) of Qnundr’s defeated voice. Egill puts Qnundr down with a more ruthless version of the remarks once

meted out to Egill himself by King Hákon. ‘“en hér í landi er þess ván um alla þína daga, at várir frændr sé ríkastir.”’ [‘and in this country it can be expected all your life, that our family will be the most powerful.’] (LXIII, p. 199). This is how land holds together and great dynasties can go on producing striking individuals. It is not a ruthlessness peculiar to Egill in the saga, though he exercises it well.

It would be wrong to type Egill’s and Þorsteinn’s father-son relationship as troubled and loveless, though the introductory scene of their antipathy - the spoilt robe - is memorable. Like Egill’s personality, itself often typecast by readers, the relationship changes during the narrative. Early in chapter LXXXIII, when their two kinds of ruthlessness have worked together and Þorsteinn has proved to Egill that at least he does care for his estate, which (by Egill’s probable values, given the weird tense toleration of his own relationship with Skalla-Grímr), is more important in an heir than personal affection, ‘skilðusk með blíðskap feðgar’ [father and son part affectionately] (p. 288).

*Blíðskap* is a rare word in *Egils saga*. Þorsteinn’s character does not change, however. He continues to suppress trouble by avoidance and hushing, though Steinarr repeatedly tries for revenge. Chapter LXXXIII closes with Þorsteinn’s pretending to know nothing, letting things remain quiet (‘kyrrt’) (p. 290). Quietness is no longer the pioneering quietness of something actively quelled (like Ljótr by Egill), or energy charging up for action. Appropriate to the Iceland of Þorsteinn’s generation, it maintains the status quo. There is another miniature ending before the end of the saga proper, when Steinarr gives up and moves far away, ‘ok lýkr þar viðskiptum þeira Þorsteins Egilssonar.’ [and there end the hostilities between Þorsteinn and Steinarr] (p. 293). The next slight trouble, caused by Egill’s nephew Þorgeirr blundr (an ungrateful, problematic replacement on Qnundr’s old territory), comes to nothing, because Egill and Þorsteinn discuss it together ‘ok kómu allar ræður ásamt með þeim.’ [and agree on everything] (p. 293). Egill seals the matter with a verse.

Chapter LXXXV shows Egill in old age, fractious and physically diminished, his verse now turned to laments for the past and complaints about the present. However, as Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards state in the Introduction to the Penguin translation,

[...] as we learn from the last pages of the tale, his killing days are not over, and his actions continue to invite speculation after his death. He disappears one night with his money-chests and two slaves. Next morning the blind Egil is found stumbling about near the farm: [... citation of p. 237 of Penguin translation, cf. ÍF pp. 297-298 ...] Here, as elsewhere in the saga, gossip is seen merging with legend, historical fact with invention, as the author weaves his tale about the shade of this ambiguous hero. (Penguin, p. 17)

The Penguin analyzes at the level of plot, though a vignette is given of the author at work.

The picture of the old Egill is significant beyond its place in the plot. In old age, Egill is shown in sad and grotesque detail in his household, being shooed away from the fire by maids and having to grope along the walls. This is what an historically realistic old Egill might be imagined to look like after his career is over. However, at the same time in the narrative, Egill is also the master of legendary treasure, who still carries out killings and provokes speculation. These ‘two Egills’, who are one, could be understood metaphorically. The Egill who suffers the natural effects of age and diminished scope of activity is like Egill, the ‘real person’ who may have lived in Iceland. This ‘real Egill’ is transformed in transmission into Egill of the saga, a character inherited by Icelanders. The contrast between the two figures is not stark. The final responsibility for this double presentation of Egill is shared by the saga narrative and (its projection of) Egill himself. There is a transition between the blocks of narrative, where Egill has just carried out the decisive actions of killing the slaves and hiding his treasure, and is found waveringly making his way home, immediately before the legends about him take over. Egill has engineered his own narrative again, and assured himself a *sǫguligr* future, in which he will continue to make news, not only be absorbed in legend.

In the passage cited below, I have italicized the directive phrases which the narrative uses to mark that a transition has occurred from the definiteness of Egill's last defining action to the questing nunger and chaotic rumour which, with pleasing effectiveness, he has bequeathed.

En um morgininn, er menn risu upp, þá sá þeir, at Egill hvarflaði á holtinu fyrir austan garð ok leiddi eptir sér hestinn; fara þeir þá til hans ok fluttu hann heim. En hvárki kom apr síðan þrælarnir né kisturnar, ok *eru þar margar gátur á*, hvar Egill hafi folgit fé sitt. Fyrir austan garð at Mosfelli gengr gil ofan á fjalli; en *þat hefir orðit þar til merkja*, at í bráðapeyjum er þar vatnfall mikit, en eptir þat er v]tnin hafa fram fallit, hafa fundizk í gilinu enskir penningar; *geta sumir menn þess*, at Egill muni þar fét hafa folgit. Fyrir neðan tún at Mosfelli eru fen stór ok furðuliga djúp; *hafa þat margir fyrir satt*, at Egill muni þar hafa kastat í fé sínu. Fyrir sunnan ána eru laugar ok þar skammt frá jarðholur stórar, *ok geta þess sumir*, at Egill muni þar hafa fólgit fé sitt, því at þangat er optliga sénn haugaeldr. *Egill sagði*, at hann hefði drepit þræla Gríms, *ok svá þat*, at hann hafði fé sitt fólgit, *en þat sagði hann engum manni*, hvar hann hefði fólgit.

[And in the morning, when people got up, then they saw, that Egill was wavering about on the hill east of the farmyard and leading his horse; then they went to him and took him home. And neither thralls nor treasure-chests turned up afterwards, and *there are many guesses*, where Egill may have hidden his money. East of the Mosfell farmyard a ravine runs down the hill; and *it has been remarked*, that in quick thaws, much water is released there, and after the waters have gushed out, English coins have been found in the ravine; *some people say* that Egill must have hidden his money there. Below the Mosfell meadow are large, incredibly deep marshes; *many people hold it true*, that Egill must have thrown his money in there. South of the river are hot springs and not far from there great holes in the ground, *and some people say*, that Egill must have hidden his money there, because looking in that direction one often sees a will-o'-the-wisp. *Egill said*, that he had killed Grímr's thralls, *and also that* he had hidden his money, *but he told no-one*, where he had hidden [it].]

(LXXXV, pp. 297-298)

The phrases which direct the narrative finally are taken over by Egill. The type of phrases which all along have self-consciously marked the course of the narrative are subsumed in Egill's version of events, the narrative no longer holding its commentary apart from Egill's attempted narrative mastery over his own life. They report his typically selective speech. It is clear that Egill still always has the last word.

Egill's wish to scatter treasure at the Alþing to start people fighting is thwarted by his stepdaughter Þordís, still in chapter LXXXV. This strange wish is susceptible of interpretations of varying degrees of dignity, from the rather grand notion that it is 'Odinic' behaviour to the puzzled

dismissal of Egill as a troublemaker even in his senility. Perhaps Þordís's own diagnosis should be taken seriously. She strings him along, saying that it is a fine idea and will be spoken of as long as the country is inhabited (p. 297). Fame, i.e. continued interest in Egill the rich riddlemaker, is exactly what he achieves by other means when this plan falls through, as shown above. It is also possible, in the light of all the preceding discussion, to see Egill's plan as a last attempt to actualize a poetic metaphor. Egill would have been famous as a 'destroyer of treasure', a 'distributor of wealth', i.e. the gesture would have been lordly or kingly. He would have made this characterization of himself total, by totally disrupting Iceland's law at the national assembly. This would have proved his power of being above the law and of manipulating men who are little enough to fall for his games. The force of total disruption would, in legend, add impulse to the horrible splendour of his last public image.

What if this last desire of his is 'Odinic'? How does this relate to his Christian reburials in chapter LXXXVI? At the end of chapter LXXXV, Egill, finely clad, is interred in a mound in Tjaldanes. When Þordís Þórólfsdóttir's husband Grímr becomes Christian, Þordís has Egill's bones moved to the church. It has been suggested<sup>33</sup> that this makes Egill a candidate for 'retroactive conversion', so that his spiritual future is assured as well as his earthly fame, i.e. he is to have the best of both worlds. This does not seem entirely likely. Three other good reasons to move him would be: purely worldly prestige (Egill benefits from a new *fashion*); to keep property, including ecclesiastical property, under the family's control, and the family close to its most prestigious ancestor; last but perhaps not least, to let the new god help to control any tendencies Egill might develop for walking after death - note the care taken to minimize this problem with Skalla-Grímr's pagan burial. Apart from these reasons, Egill's bones, if they are such, and it seems that we are to believe that they must have been, are found under the altar, the place reserved for saintly relics. Egill is no candidate for retroactive *sainthood*. Nor do they stay there. Once found, they are buried on the edge of the Mosfell

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at the Viking Society Student Conference in Leeds, February 2000.

churchyard (p. 299), a placement which is suitable for someone remembered by the exhumers as the last representative pagan in a respected family on the cusp of Christianity, even though nothing is said about the reason for this decision (can it have been mere lack of room? surely not). Egill can no longer speak for himself. He disseminated himself into secrets and treasure by the end of chapter LXXXV. Now his bones have to take on his symbolic power. The ridged skull and heavy, enormous frame bear out his troll-like nature. The priest, Skapti Þórarinnsson, does not emerge too well from the encounter. He swings an axe at the skull to test it. It merely whitens, does not crack. The saga narrative remarks, not very flatteringly for Skapti, that from that it is clear that it would not be easily damaged by a little man's blows ('fyrir hǫggum smámennis'), when covered with flesh and skin. (p. 299). The priest has some power because of his position in time, the standards of his time, but he would not measure up by the standard of Egill's time, which, even if (in a medieval Icelandic Christian view) mistaken, has by this point in the saga, proved itself *sǫguligr*<sup>34</sup> as well as productive of traditions and systems of meaning on which the 'present' community is founded. The priest's function in the saga is to test Egill's remains, and he does this in Egill's 'language', i.e. with what violence he can summon. Egill's remains are stubborn. Like his verse, they are a structure not meant to yield. The power that was his by language is a power in his nature. This is why, when deprived of words, he still can put himself through three last transformations, from secret treasure (LXXXV), to the speechless statement of some bones which need excising from the heart of the new Icelandic church (LXXXVI), to the power expressed by those who trace their blood to him (LXXXVII). Genealogy is no anticlimactic ending to a saga concerned with evolving ideas of transformation and transmission.

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saga-like', worthy of narration]

V.

## CONCLUSION

Two special concerns have shaped and emerged from this thesis. One is the position of the reader who can move between SL and TL, or who expects to be able to do so eventually. *Egils saga* is likely to find many such readers, because of its importance among Icelandic family sagas, the comparative fewness of native Icelandic readers, and the fact that Icelandic literature in translation does not have a large general English-speaking audience. The second, related concern is the position of texts in translation which cannot avoid existing between two systems, and which can 'lose' from this if they do not consciously exploit and manipulate the SL/TL relation and interplay. My last chapter attempted to demonstrate both the untranslatable complexity of the ST, and how that complexity itself is analyzable in terms of ST concerns and processes which can be used by the translator.

I have found that there are contradictions in the very fact of the low expectations which so many translations seem to have of their readers. Both the translators' remarks in the peritext, and the style of translating, often imply that readers are imagined to come from either end of a continuum - highly inexperienced with any kind of literature, or with a taste for difficulty and strangeness. If this were true, translators need not be so concerned with bowing to implicit literary norms of contemporary English, as their readers would in either case be flexible.

Perhaps all along readers have been supposed to have internalized the notion that Anglo-Saxon and Icelandic cultures resemble each other, so they are imagined to pick up a translation from an older, alien literature expecting and wanting to feel at home at once?

It would be good if the peritext of the TT were more consciously used to situate the reader culturally and geographically, especially given the thematic importance of geography to Icelandic family sagas. This could be done in many ways. Maps provide an easy and obvious way in to the 'saga world'. One effective policy might be the inclusion of both modern English (or anglicized) and Old Icelandic place-names on the maps. This would give a standard measure for the gap between the English-language reader's recognized world, and the world which s/he learns to recognize in the TT. Much is lost by de-Icelandizing the place-names of the sagas' world. There is at best little more than a fictive correlation between the modern places named and their Saga Age map counterparts, beyond the satisfactions of literary nostalgia or tourism. I do not speak in terms of historical facts of geography, but in terms of geographical understanding. There is no simple correlation between the modern places named and the medieval Icelanders' storied, three-dimensional *idea of original locations* in the saga age, which after all is what is being translated. It is in literary and political terms important to let the sagas continue to exercise the power of naming their world Icelandic - naming their medieval imagined Icelandic world. This centres the reader within that world while caught up in the saga.

Arguments found in their epitext often place translations on a continuum, sometimes trying to suggest that translations displace one another. Effectively, these

epitextual coincidences bring the translations into simultaneous existence. In the epitext, the translations coexist as they do in library stacks, as reprints, in memory, or on second-hand bookshop shelves. What is disturbing is the impressionistic quality of translation reviewing: the lack of assessment of the real existence, use and influence of translations in university courses as well as for the general reader; questions of the type: where are they used? in conjunction with what language programs? who buys them? Another type of question is addressed, but without rigour: what reading of the ST informs the TT? what is the translator's agenda? what, in this instance, has it meant, 'to translate'? how does the TL text read, as part of literature in English? Few translators and reviewers move beyond ideas of translation, and writing about translation, which are repetitive, unstable and unrefined. Much of the purpose of this thesis has been to make the second type of question more commonly asked, the first type less commonly forgotten.

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