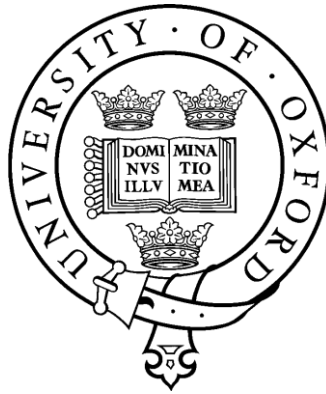


The Politics of Performance in Viking Age Skaldic Poetry



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Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

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This thesis examines the political functions of the performance of skaldic poetry during the Viking Age. It aims to establish the vital role that skaldic verse plays in the establishment and maintenance of power, as well as the importance of skaldic performance in the negotiation of that power in the inter-community relations between various courts both within and outside of Viking Age Scandinavia. The first chapter provides a contextual understanding of Viking Age power structures by considering the central ideological constructs surrounding the concept of *óðal* (ancestral property). *Óðal*-derived power, it will be shown, is based on ruler-presence (which extends to ancestral presence) in the landscape, which is perceived as a crucial element in the legitimisation of authority and power. My second chapter will consider the political significance of skaldic performance within the context of ruler itinerancy, which develops in response to political practices based on the importance of *óðal*-derived legitimacy. Of particular importance in this respect, will be the use of ‘presencing’ proper- and praise-names in skaldic poetry that effect both spatial and temporal itinerancies in a highly distributable format. My third chapter will establish the representational features of skaldic performance and elaborate on the definition of Performance not only as action (in the Austinian sense), but also as a type of action that is defined by its artifice, its temporal continuity and its emergent dialogism. This will provide the theoretical context for my fourth and final chapter which will aim to examine the employment of skaldic Performance in Viking Age diplomatic praxes. Here the phenomenologically perceived ‘binding’ of the Self through the dialogic rhythmicity that arises out of skaldic ambiguity and crypticism will be of central importance.

Acknowledgements

The following text is not so much a lone-standing study as an indirect anthology of all the conversations, debates and performances I have had the extreme privilege to participate in during the course of my doctoral research. I am especially grateful to the following friends and colleagues who have been at times reassuring, at times critical and always, inspiring: Brian McMahon, Carina Venter, Gareth Evans, Michael Hart, Tessa Champion, Anna Koch, Tom Clucas, Jessica Hancock, Tim Bourns, Myriam Frenkel, Becky Lu, Sumarí Viljoen, Luís Gomes, Sewook Oh, Luke Lewis and Sonja Noll.

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Abbreviations

Primary sources

- Ágr-Fsk* *Ágrip af Nóregis konunga sögum; Fagrskinna - Nóregis konunga tal*, ed. Bjarni Einarsson. Íslenzk fornrit 29. Reykjavík: hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1984.
- Edda* *Eddukvæði*, 2 vols., ed. Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason. Íslenzk fornrit 36. Reykjavík: hið íslenska fornritafélag, 2014.
- Eg* *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, ed. Sigurður Nordal. Íslenzk fornrit 2. Reykjavík: hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1933.
- Hkr* Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, 3 vols. Íslenzk fornrit 26-28. Reykjavík: hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1941-51.
- Ht* Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Háttatal*, ed. Anthony Faulkes, 2nd ed. London: Viking Society for Northern Research, University of London, 2007.
- Skm* Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Anthony Faulkes, 2 vols. London: Viking Society for Northern Research, University of London, 1998.
- SkP I* *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas 1, From Mythical Times to c.1035*, 2 parts, ed. Diana Whaley. Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2012.

- SkP II* *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas 2: From c.1035 to c.1300*, 2 parts, ed. Kari Ellen Gade. Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages. Turnhout: Brepols, 2009.
- SkP VII* *Poetry on Christian Subjects*. 2 parts, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross. Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 7. Turnhout: Brepols, 2007.
- Run* *Rundata 3.1*, Samnordisk Runtexdatabas. Uppsala Universitet, 2015. <<http://www.nordiska.uu.se/forskn/samnord.htm>>

Reference works

- CV* Richard Cleasby and Guðbrandur Vigfússon, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary: Based on the Ms. Collections of the Late Richard Cleasby* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1874) .
- DONP* *Dictionary of Old Norse Prose*. 2017. <<http://onp.ku.dk/>>
- LP* *Lexicon poeticum antiquae linguae septentrionalis: ordbog over det norsk-islandske skjaldesprog*, ed. Sveinbjörn Egilsson and Finnur Jónsson, 2nd ed. Copenhagen: Atlas, 1966.
- DOE* *Dictionary of Old English: A to H online*, ed. Angus Cameron, Ashley Crandell Amos, Antonette diPaolo Healey et al. Toronto: Dictionary of Old English Project, 2016.
<<http://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2359/doi/>>
- OED* *Oxford English Dictionary. OED Online*. 2016.
<<http://www.oed.com>>

Preface

A Note on Translations

All translations of Old Norse and Old English sources are my own. I must note, however, that my translations of skaldic verse, primarily cited from the *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages (SkP)* series, are greatly indebted to the translations offered by the various editors of *SkP I*, *SkP II* and *SkPVII*, as well as the translation resources offered by the *SkP* online database. All skaldic poetry not yet published in the *SkP* series, as well as all eddic examples, are cited from the *Íslenzk fornrit* series. Translations are placed within parentheses unless the source text is cited in block-quotation (in which case the translation is placed beneath the indented text) or unless the context requires the use of inverted commas.

All proper names are given in the Old Norse form with the exception of common place-names, which are given in their modern English equivalents. I also maintain the use of the Old Norse form for words or concepts that I employ consistently throughout my thesis, such as *óðal* and *ofljóst* which I define in Chapters One and Three respectively. I do not generally provide kenning referents unless I explicitly analyse or refer to a specific example since I strongly advocate readings of skaldic poetry that embrace its crypticism and open-endedness. Since I must, for the most part, limit the translations of skaldic poetry in my thesis to singular interpretations, I would not wish to impose the monopoly of these interpretations on the reader by also denying the metaphorical possibilities of the kennings. The inability of

translations to accommodate the numerous instances of wordplay will already limit many of these interpretative possibilities. Where I do provide referents I do so in square brackets. Translations of titles and bynames are provided upon my initial mention of them only, unless a specific context demands clarification. The names of skalds and rulers are also mentioned in full only initially, after which persons are referred to either by their name and patronymic, or name and byname where such a byname is suitably distinctive. As is the practice in *SkP*, I do not italicise bynames.

A Note on Sources

My thesis, as the title suggests, is primarily concerned with skaldic poetry from the Viking Age as a poetic product of Norse court-culture and, therefore, as a poetry which quite naturally presents itself for political scrutiny. As such my focus will be on skaldic verse from the ninth to the middle of the eleventh century, although I do refer to later examples where particular vocabularies or linguistic features serve to enlighten earlier practices. It is important to note that I examine skaldic verse both as a representational source (that is, the poetry refers, describes or alludes to an idea or concept under discussion, whether or not that concept relates directly to skaldic verse), as well as a demonstrative source (that is, the performance or Performance of the poetry illustrates an idea or concept under discussion that does relate directly to skaldic verse). I may, for example, cite a skaldic example which mentions the concept of ancestral lands in a discussion on presence an memory in the landscape (see Chapter One), or I may refer to a skaldic example which demonstrates the manner in which skaldic poetry

establishes presence through naming (see Chapter Two). Where I quote longer lines of text in their poetic word-order to demonstrate structural or grammatical points I show line-breaks.

A substantial amount of the poetic sources analysed in my thesis are also eddic or mythological in nature and their inclusion may require some justification if I am to maintain the assertion that the principal focus of my study is indeed on skaldic performance. My reasons for relying on mythologically-orientated Norse material during the course of my thesis are twofold. Mythology – as a cultural phenomenon which participates in the sculpting and expansion of socio-religious world-views – constitutes, in the first place, a mode of discourse that incorporates and defines key ideological constructs that serve as the foundations for cultural value-systems and contextualise other forms of cultural production and practices. Eddic poetry is, in short, a cultural repository that allows the reader of skaldic poetry to navigate the ideological landscape of Viking Age Scandinavia. In those instances where I explore Viking Age ideologies that seem to underlie and contextualise skaldic performance, I therefore examine or refer to relevant mythological materials that clarify the ways in which certain ideological concepts are both understood and expressed. This is certainly the case in Chapters Two and Four in which I pay particular attention to the confluence of ideological constructs found in eddic verse that illuminate the relationship between those socio-cultural concepts such as *óðal* (ancestral property) and fame that appear, at times more cryptically or elusively, in skaldic material.

The second reason for my analyses of eddic material is the fact that the language of skaldic poetry (kennings in particular) whilst not concerned with the production of mythologies – though some poems such as the anonymously composed *Eiríksmál* and Eyvindr skáldaspillir (Destroyer of Poets) Finnsson's *Hákonarmál* are notable exceptions – nevertheless integrates mythological tropes as a means of definition and expression. As such, an examination of eddic sources is often required for a more holistic understanding of skaldic performance.

Other oft-used primary sources are Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda*, his *Heimskringla*, some of the *Íslendingasögur* – which either include, or contextualise, skaldic poetry – as well as various runic inscriptions. I furthermore employ Old English material from various sources such as poetry from the Exeter Book, *Beowulf* and *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* at certain points in my thesis. These references or analyses are based on the premise of a shared cultural heritage and ongoing cultural contact between Anglo-Saxon England (as far as that term may be applied to the amalgam of insular communities in England between the Migration Period and the end of the Viking Age) and Viking Age Scandinavia. My approach to the analysis of *Widsith* in Chapter Two is therefore similar to my approach to the analysis of eddic material: that is, these texts aid one's understanding and offer cultural perspectives on *how* one should interpret and contextualise skaldic material.

Introduction

The Purpose of Praise

The recognition that skaldic poetry, and particularly skaldic poetry in its courtly context, is a poetry of praise is well-attested in Old Norse scholarship.¹ This is, indeed, what skalds themselves consistently declare in their own verse: the tenth-century poet, Einarr skálaglamm (Tinkle-Scales) Helgason, ‘bears praise’ (*berk lof*; lit: ‘I bear praise’) for his patron Hákon jarl Sigurðarson in *Vellekla* (Lack of Gold);² Hákon’s son, Eiríkr jarl, is celebrated a generation later in a ‘praise-liberal’ (*mærðarorr*) *drápa* by Þórðr Kolbeinsson;³ and Bersi Skáld-Torfuson regards himself as a ‘skilled imparter of praise’ (*hróðrs hagkennandi*) in an eleventh-century *flokk* addressed to Óláfr inn helgi (The Holy) Haraldsson.⁴ The ready typological classification of skaldic verse as *encomia* – with which I would largely agree – has, however, led to difficulties in addressing skaldic poetry’s ‘function’ or ‘purpose’. Though scholars seem to agree that skalds, for the most part, praise living kings and other rulers, there is less agreement on why they do so and

¹ See, for example, Anthony Faulkes, *What Was Viking Poetry for?: Inaugural Lecture Delivered on 27th April 1993 in the University of Birmingham* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham, School of English, 1993), 9–10; Heather O’Donoghue, *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Short Introduction*, Blackwell Introductions to Literature (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 69; Margaret Clunies Ross, *A History of Old Norse Poetry and Poetics* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2005), 17; Margaret Clunies Ross et al., “General Introduction,” in *SkP* I, xvii. For the purposes of this thesis, I shall be primarily interested in skaldic verse as court poetry and will therefore largely avoid discussing ‘extra-political’ forms of skaldic poetry such as love poetry or other situational verse, variously treated in the volumes above.

² *SkP* I, v. 9, p. 293.

³ *SkP* I, v. 2, p. 491.

⁴ *SkP* I, v. 1, p. 791.

those skaldic examples which do not conform to the mould of praise are often dichotomised, labelled as exceptions, or recast under generic sub-categories. In her 1985 review of skaldic scholarship Roberta Frank recounts an apparently collective interest in the skald's 'dual role' of 'praise and blame' –⁵ a formulation still advanced by the editors of the 'General Introduction' to the most recent and complete edition of the Viking Age skaldic corpus, *SkP* I.⁶ This introduction also notes a 'special sub-category of the encomium' that is, 'the *erfidrápa* or memorial poem for a dead ruler'.⁷ Russell Poole, in a similar vein, speaks of court or 'political' poetry as a tripartite 'vehicle for praise, commemoration, and satire' whilst Margaret Clunies Ross presents courtly criticism or 'blame' as an opposing counterpart to praise and articulates her perception of such poems as 'agonistic speech acts' dangerously related to illegal, slanderous genres such as *níð* (insult), *spott* (mockery) and *flim* (satire).⁸ Panegyrics composed in a different mode – those celebrating the deceased, a royal lineage or artistic representations on, for example, shields – are partitioned into distinct sub-genres such as commemorative-, genealogical- and picture-poetry (*ekphrasis*).⁹

⁵ Roberta Frank, "Skaldic Poetry," in *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*, ed. Carol J. Clover and John Lindow (Toronto; London: University of Toronto Press in association with the Medieval Academy of America, 2005), 181: "we recognise that a skald might not only toast but also topple a king."

⁶ Margaret Clunies Ross, "What is Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages?" in "General Introduction" in *SkP* I, xvii: "skaldic poetry appears [...] to have been largely a poetry of praise, sometimes of criticism, of rulers and their deeds."

⁷ Clunies Ross, "What is Skaldic Poetry", xvii.

⁸ Russell Gilbert Poole, "Introduction," in *Skaldsagas: Text, Vocation, and Desire in the Icelandic Sagas of Poets*, ed. Russell Gilbert Poole, *Ergänzungsbände Zum Reallexikon Der Germanischen Altertumskunde* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2001), 6; Clunies Ross, *History*, 40.

⁹ Clunies Ross, *History*, 48, 51, 54–55. The generic separation of genealogical poetry from other eulogistic compositions based on formal and content-based discrepancies has recently been challenged by Erin Goeres through her analysis of the enumerative poems, *Ynglingatal* and *Háleygjatal*, within a commemorative framework: see Erin Michelle

Typological subdivision and analytical categorisation are not necessarily unjustified or unhelpful – indeed, these processes can be vital to the productive examination (often comparative in nature) of skaldic aesthetics or compositional methodologies. Although the often debated distinction between an ‘eddic’ (mostly a-temporal and mythological) and a ‘skaldic’ (mostly contemporaneous and political) corpus is not unproblematic, some degree of differentiation can, for example, help us reflect on poetic choices involving metre, structure and subject-matter:¹⁰ we can say that skaldic poetry is characterised by the common use of *dróttkvætt* (court poetry metre) and a profuse employment of kennings; eddic poetry generally employs a mythological or mytho-heroic narrative framework, making extensive use of gnomic utterances and forms such as dramatic dialogues and lists. The distinction can also aid our contextual understanding and scholarly articulation of certain poetic practices or characteristics such as the highly self-reflexive language and named authorial identification in skaldic texts that support the impression that courtly skalds attempt to take ownership of their work – proclaiming political agency and advertising abilities in order to gain or sustain patronage. This contrasts powerfully with the often theatrical and anonymous nature of eddic material in which the composer’s voice - or voices, which may belong to one, to many or to a historical palimpsest of composers in and through time – retreats, allowing mythological or legendary

Goeres, *The Poetics of Commemoration: Skaldic Verse and Social Memory, C. 890-1070*, Oxford English Monographs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

¹⁰ For a detailed overview of scholarship concerning the definitions of eddic and skaldic poetry, as well as the various complications that such definitions and genericising can give rise to, see Martin Chase, ed., “Introduction,” in *Eddic, Skaldic, and Beyond: Poetic Variety in Medieval Iceland and Norway*, Fordham Series in Medieval Studies (FUP) (Fordham University Press, 2014), 1–15.

characters to speak and act.¹¹ But as with periodization and disciplinary differentiation, discursive tropes concerned with contrast and disparity often undermine attempts to identify (and demonstrate) continuities, connections and parallels. One may take the pervasive narrative of the Christianisation of medieval Scandinavia as one such example. In this narrative Norway, Sweden, Iceland and, to a lesser extent, Denmark are portrayed in terms which situate them in pre- or post-conversion frameworks, citing dramatic ideological change and a systemic overhaul of political infrastructure.

Such pre- and post-conversion infrastructure is very much at the forefront of *SkP I*'s consideration of 'the circumstances of skaldic production' and liberal references are, for instance, made to 'pagan orality' and 'Christian textuality'.¹² This oversimplified dichotomy resists competing discourses of 'transition periods' and 'marriages' put forward in the same text and disregards a very long history of runic traditions in which poetic examples can be found, as well as overtly Christian oral traditions in the liturgy and missionary practices.¹³ The employment of skaldic poetry in a Christian context may very well strike one as unexpected under such circumstances:

Skaldic poetry thus played a highly significant political and religious role in the ninth, tenth and eleventh centuries, but was then turned into

¹¹ Gabriel Turville-Petre notably makes constructive, if not unreserved, use of an eddic-skaldic dichotomy in Gabriel Turville-Petre, *Scaldic Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), xvi: "I have said a little about Eddaic poetry, chiefly to show ways in which it differed from skaldic poetry. Since I cannot define skaldic poetry precisely, I must content myself with mentioning some of the characteristics which it does not share with Eddaic poetry. These characteristics are both in subject and in form".

¹² See, "General Introduction," Clunies Ross, ed., in *SkP I*, xci.

¹³ The predominantly oral dissemination of Gregorian chant, even amidst ongoing contemporary developments in musical notation reproduced in chant books, is one palpable example of Christian orality in the early medieval period.

one of the most surprising building blocks of the Christian textual culture of the North [my italics].¹⁴

Archaeological evidence is crucial to a more balanced understanding of Viking Age cultural contexts and reveals a socio-political landscape constantly adjusting itself to new influences through re-appropriation, reformulation, innovation and absorption. In conclusion to a recent, multidisciplinary collection of essays on power and ideology in Viking and Middle-Age Scandinavia – aptly entitled, ‘The Long Adaptation of Pagan and Christian Ideologies of Rulership’ – co-editor Jan Beuermann summarises the findings of the collection and points out that scholars treating Christianisation in Scandinavia ‘note a high degree of continuity in the ideology of rulership’.¹⁵ Most conspicuous amongst these academics is archaeologist Olof Sundqvist who further reminds the reader that:

[T]he Christian culture which reached [Scandinavia] in the Viking period had been Germanized for a long time. For centuries Christianity had been influenced by the Germanic culture of Continental Europe and Britain. [...] When Christianity came [to Scandinavia] with ‘new ideas’ about ruler-ideals [...] they were therefore not wholly new.¹⁶

Even without ‘Germanisation’, it seems almost intuitive that the biblical formulation of a sovereign God – an omnipotent ‘ruler’, ‘king’ and ‘lord’ – in, for example, the Book of Psalms (the Hebrew, תהלים or *Tehillim* means

¹⁴ Guðrún Nordal, "Poetry and society: The circumstances of skaldic production" in "General Introduction," in *SkP I*, xci.

¹⁵ Ian Beuermann, "The Long Adaptation of Pagan and Christian Ideologies of Rulership," in *Ideology and Power in the Viking and Middle Ages: Scandinavia, Iceland, Ireland, Orkney, and the Faeroes*, ed. Gro Steinsland et al., Northern World; v. 52 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 369.

¹⁶ Olof Sundqvist, "An Arena for Higher Powers: Cult Buildings and Rulers in the Late Iron Age and the Early Medieval Period in the Mälars Region," in *Ideology and Power*, ed. Steinsland et al., 204.

‘Praises’), will have suggested skaldic verse as an appropriate medium for religious expression in Norse contexts, becoming a ‘vehicle of the Church’.¹⁷ Similar to the late medieval re-appropriation of melodies and themes from *trouvère* courtly love-songs (*chansons courtoises*) for devotional use (often by means of contrafacta in Marian antiphons), skaldic poetry as the established mode of panegyric expression in a Norse pagan milieu continues to be employed in Christian contexts whilst the subject of praise is replaced: if the *trouvère*’s virtuous lady (*dame*) inspiring chivalric devotion becomes the Sacred Virgin (*Notre Dame*) requiring pious adoration, the skald’s *dróttinn* as chieftain or king, becomes *Dróttinn* as Divine Ruler. What is important to note is that such mixed uses of form and genre are not carried out in temporal isolation and are almost always reciprocal, with practices occurring together and influencing each other over long periods of time. In the words of Kari Ellen Gade,

the upshot of this upheaval [of Christianisation] was, however, that the skalds, rather than abandoning their craft, adapted their poetic language to accommodate the demands of the new faith.
[...]

The change that took place in skaldic language did not occur overnight. Nor did pagan imagery disappear entirely from the poetry, and the skalds and their audience certainly retained knowledge of the old myths and the pagan kenning system.¹⁸

While the division of courtly *drápur* into types – for example, encomiastic, memorial and critical – is not unwarranted, it can at times, as with the example above, hinder the observation and understanding of connections

¹⁷ Kari Ellen Gade, “Poetry and Its Changing Importance in Medieval Icelandic Culture,” in *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature; 42 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 75.

¹⁸ Gade, “Poetry,” 74.

between genres as well as the influence that one type of courtly poem might exercise upon another within a larger poetic practice and its historical development. This is particularly true when one considers the purposes for which poems are composed or the functions which they serve at court and in society, and this is a salient feature of the praise-and-blame dichotomy that pervades the literature on skaldic verse. In order to gain some clarity about the various functions of skaldic poetry and a more cohesive vision of the manner in which different genres relate to one another, it will be helpful to pick apart some key notions regarding the main purpose of panegyric composition in a Viking Age context. It is especially important to consider the language and perspectives employed in scholarly considerations as they too reflect the ideological framework within which researchers operate. One may take, for example, the passage from Clunies Ross's seminal *History of Old Norse Poetry and Poetics* in which the author states that 'one of [skaldic] poetry's main social purposes [is] to serve as a public endorsement of the dominant values of early Norse, especially Norwegian, court society and of the figure of its ruler'.¹⁹ This sentiment is slightly problematic for two reasons: in the first place, even when a skaldic composition praises a ruler or a society's actions, behaviour and values, it hardly ever does so in a straightforward manner. It can, as I hope to demonstrate in following chapters, simultaneously communicate ambiguous messages which lament or contradict facets of the dominant 'warrior' culture – at times even conveying an entirely self-reflexive meaning which has little or nothing to do with the informational content of the poem – all the while seeming to

¹⁹ Clunies Ross, *History*, 40.

condone the ruler through praise. This secondary level of meaning which is often brought about through wordplay and which I shall investigate in more detail in Chapters Three and Four, does not necessarily endorse the perceived dominant values of Norse society, and yet the compositions in which they occur cannot be labelled as ‘blame’-poetry since they simultaneously praise their subject – be he living or deceased.

It does not, secondly, always follow that skaldic poetry endorses a ruler – as ‘endorsement’ in a political context usually implies – when it appears to endorse the dominant ideology. This is an important distinction since the equation of an endorsement of values and actions with the endorsement of the ruler suggests that skaldic poems with alternative objectives – especially those poems which fall into the ‘blame’ or ‘criticism’ categories – do not, therefore, endorse the ruler at whom they are directed. Poems critical of a ruler’s actions are often, therefore, assumed to undermine the ruler’s authority and are even situated, as is the case in Clunies Ross’s overview, within the ambit of illegal insult or *níð* poetry. The paucity of extant examples of courtly ‘blame’-poetry results, according to this stance, from the dangerous nature of their content so that the repetition and hence the preservation of such poems are compromised.²⁰ And yet there seems to me to be a clear difference between the damage and destabilisation that libel and slander (aimed at rivals or enemies) generate through verbal emasculation

²⁰ Clunies Ross, *History*, 33–34, 40–41. It is possible that the lack of survival of critical poems might be due to the fact that such poems, unlike most examples of skaldic encomia, are designed to be context-specific and this diminishes their value as infinitely repeatable entities as soon as they are deracinated from that precise context. Such verses are therefore less likely to be repeated and preserved unless, as is the case with Sigvatr’s *Bersqglisvísur*, the poetry’s context remains historically relevant.

and mockery, and the effects of considered, diplomatic criticism composed by loyal and seasoned court skalds, delivered to their own, often longstanding, patrons in a public forum. Sigvatr Þórðarson's *Bersögglisvísur* (Plain-speaking Verses) in which the respected eleventh-century skald addresses a young King Magnús inn góði (The Good) Ólafsson of Norway regarding his oppressive treatment of those Norwegian farmers who had participated in the deposition of his father, Óláfr Haraldsson, is usually cited as the foremost example of blame-poetry. It does not seem, however – given Sigvatr's continued presence at court and the successful outcome of the poem's performance in the form of Magnús's resultant leniency towards the people of Sygnafylki, in the case of *Heimskringla*, or the people of Þrændalög, in the case of *Ágrip* and *Fagrskinna* – that Sigvatr's 'plain speaking' constitutes a punishable offence.²¹ Indeed, it would be difficult to classify a poem which so consistently praises Magnús's forebears as libel: a poem which is, moreover, composed in order to *strengthen* Magnús's rule, not undermine it.

Anthony Faulkes's understanding of the political value of skaldic verse in its 'original context' at court is very similar to that of Clunies Ross though it is perhaps more subtly phrased:

[Skaldic poems] were part of the ritual of the royal court, encouraged by the king since they supported his role and legitimised his claim to kingship; they *reflected and affirmed* the values and ideology of the warrior class to which they were addressed, praising the king above all

²¹ For a more in-depth discussion on the reliability of the contextual information surrounding Sigvatr's poem in the various *konungasögur*, see Shami Ghosh, *Kings' Sagas and Norwegian History: Problems and Perspectives*, Northern World; v. 54 (Leiden: Brill; Biggleswade, 2011), 91–96.

for the traditional viking [sic] virtues of generosity and valour [my italics].²²

Faulkes's statement agrees with Clunies Ross in accepting that court poetry affirms dominant ideological values but it is significant that for him the 'endorsement' does not necessarily stem from the poetic message itself but rather, from the *reflection* of courtly values in the language of praise that the poet employs. Poems that are critical of their patrons but which nevertheless employ this encomiastic language may therefore be seen as ideologically affirmative even if they do not directly endorse the actions of the ruler in a specific context. This view would seem to solve the apparent contradiction of loyal and supportive 'blame'-poetry: that is, poetry such as Sigvatr's *Bersögglisvísur* and Jórunn skáldmær's (Poet-Maiden's) *Sendibítr* (Biting Message) – the latter of which is classified as blame-poetry primarily on the grounds of the interpretation of its title which is not necessarily beyond dispute. The difficulty with this solution is, however, that the language of *nið* and other forms of insult no less 'reflect and affirm' the values and ideologies of the warrior class than the language of praise. By undercutting one's opponent through emasculation, for example, one displays and reinforces the power and value of masculinity in a warrior society as much as the sexualisation of the process of conquering land may do in an encomium.²³

The sanctioning of an ideological construct through its employment in a libellous composition may well also '[strengthen] the identity and sense of

²² Clunies Ross, *History*, 9–10.

²³ See Gro Steinsland, "Origin Myths and Rulership. From the Viking Age Ruler to the Ruler of Medieval Historiography: Continuity, Transformations and Innovations," in *Ideology and Power*, ed. Steinsland et al., 30–32, for a discussion on the eroticisation of territory in *Háleygjatal* and *Hákonardrápa*.

power of the group', yet it cannot be said to endorse the ruler whom it undermines.²⁴ As with Clunies Ross's statement one must reach the conclusion that the endorsement of an ideology does not equate the endorsement of a king. It is therefore perhaps not altogether surprising that Faulkes, like Clunies Ross, groups critical poems such as *Bersǫglisvísur* together with *níð*-poems.²⁵ The more noteworthy difference between Faulkes's and Clunies Ross's understanding lies, instead, in Faulkes's distinction between the political purpose of court poetry and the means through which that purpose is achieved: what Clunies Ross deems to be one of the main purposes of encomia (that is, endorsement or affirmation), is for Faulkes the means through which the purpose of *legitimation* is effected. Though I have questioned the means, I believe that the purpose is quite credible.

It is this purpose which I hope to explore in more detail in Chapters One and Two of this thesis. I would like, specifically, to investigate the ways in which skaldic encomia are able to contribute to the support of Viking Age rulers and will propose that the 'means' through which legitimisation is accomplished is related to another function of skaldic poetry mentioned in Clunies Ross's study, that is, propaganda.²⁶ This is not to be understood as propaganda in its modern context, specifically associated with the encouragement of ignorance and practice of dogma – something which skaldic verse actively resists, as I hope to demonstrate in Chapter Four – but

²⁴ Faulkes, *What Was Viking Poetry For?*, 10.

²⁵ Faulkes, *What Was Viking Poetry For?*, 16.

²⁶ Clunies Ross, *History*, 45.

rather, it is to be understood as a mechanism for perpetuating and disseminating the name of a ruler through space and time. In this latter sense I hope to link such propagation to the purpose of immortalisation that Faulkes and Gade also feel to be strongly connected to the composition of skaldic verse.²⁷ In both its spatial and temporal dimensions propagation is, importantly, related to ‘presence’ which plays an essential role in the political arena and I shall argue that skaldic encomium is an important tool with which the presence of a ruler may be established where they are absent.

Yet another way in which skaldic verse is able to support Norse rulers is through the incorporation of the art of skaldic performance into Viking Age diplomatic praxes. This is the role of skaldic performance that I shall be preoccupied with in Chapters Three and Four. The conceptualisation of skaldic poetry as a diplomatic tool builds on the notions pertaining to skaldic itinerancy developed in the initial chapters of the thesis and retreats from the microscopic view of single performance contexts to embrace a macroscopic view of inter-community negotiation, arbitration and regulation in which skaldic performance plays an integral part. Such a macroscopic view of the contextual surroundings of skaldic performance should not, however, be conflated with a macroscopic view of the poetry itself since the primary means through which skaldic poetry is able to enter into a discourse on Viking Age diplomacy requires, conversely, that one regard the subtler nuances of skaldic artifice – particularly its dialogic engagement with language and its purposeful employment of crypticism.

²⁷ Faulkes, *What Was Viking Poetry For?*, 16; Gade, “Poetry,” 71.

Before outlining the general structure of my thesis it is imperative that I explore, at some length, two key concepts upon which my chapter divisions and, indeed, their content are largely contingent. These concepts are *orality* and *performance* respectively and an introductory examination of both is necessitated, in part, by the frequency with which they are conflated or amalgamated in academic scholarship. What I shall be most concerned with in my consideration of these terms is, in the first place, the performative value of skaldic poetry in literary sources which may provide relevant information about skaldic performance in general and which might subsequently be applied to interpretations of Viking Age oral, or runic manifestations of skaldic poetry; and, in the second place, with the crucial distinction between performance as action and performance as a *type of action* pertaining to (re)presentation, since both of these understandings of performance provide quite different insights into the political value of skaldic composition, recitation, and interpretation.

Orality and Literacy – Again.

Orality and literacy are two concepts that have mutually generated a tremendous body of scholarship pertaining to both their definition and characterisation. These two processes of description and delineation are, of course, interdependent – a detail which has, at times, prompted the development of circumlocutory arguments and the drawing of conclusions based on questionable inferences. Particularly relevant in this respect is the early research influenced by the findings of Milman Parry and Albert B. Lord

in their respective studies on oral-formulaic composition.²⁸ Many subject-specific investigations concerning orality and literacy, including certain areas of Old Norse scholarship, have subsequently demonstrated the influence of a polarising stance engendered by insights and interpretations found in earlier, yet authoritative, studies. If, for example, it is found in one cultural manifestation of orality or literacy that oral texts are variable and adaptable due to their ‘ephemeral’ nature, while literary texts are found to be unchanging and ‘fixed’ because of their seemingly static physical expression, then there is a resultant tendency not only to define oral texts as variable and literary texts as fixed, but conversely, to categorise variable texts as oral and fixed texts as literate.²⁹ Skaldic verse, due to its constancy and inherent resistance to variation, is therefore seen as ‘striving towards literacy’, while variations in saga texts encountered in divergent manuscripts potentially evidence oral influences.³⁰ The latter is akin to Stefan Brink’s conception of runic inscriptions as ‘fossilised’ or ‘petrified orality’ – that is, orality which

²⁸ Milman Parry, *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Parry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971); Albert Bates Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, ed. Stephen Mitchell and Gregory Nagy, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 2000). For a detailed overview of Parry and Lord’s oral-formulaic theory, as well as a more general overview of early associated scholarship, see John Miles Foley, *The Theory of Oral Composition: History and Methodology* (Bloomington, Ind: Indiana University Press, 1988).

²⁹ Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Routledge, 2002).

³⁰ Judith Jesch, *Ships and Men in the Late Viking Age: The Vocabulary of Runic Inscriptions and Skaldic Verse* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2001), 11; Judith Jesch, “Skaldic Verse, a Case of Literacy Avant La Lettre?,” in *Literacy in Medieval and Early Modern Scandinavian Culture*, ed. Pernille Hermann (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2005), 188. Roberta Frank also states that “Skaldic verse, orally composed and transmitted, is in many ways a more literary phenomenon than the written sagas, where a later version can easily wipe out an earlier one” in Frank, “Skaldic Poetry,” 175. See also: Gísli Sigurðsson, *The Medieval Icelandic Saga and Oral Tradition: A Discourse on Method* (Cambridge, Mass; London: Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature, 2004).

has somehow been captured in writing.³¹ Though such considerations clearly demonstrate a discomfort with the terms of orality and literacy (defined as they are), these terms and definitions are simultaneously reinforced through studies which continue to employ them in order to signify certain problematically delineated characteristics.

During the last few decades there have, however, been promising developments in the scholarly deterioration of oral-literary polarisation – primarily due to the vast number of ‘exceptions’ that scholars encounter when attempting to apply terms defined by culturally-specific characteristics. Various authors have successfully problematised the over-simplifying dichotomisation of orality and literacy as perfectly distinct modes of verbal communication.³² Prominent among these is Mark C. Amodio who develops the idea of ‘oral poetics’ as ‘a powerful, supple, and highly associative expressive economy’.³³ Such an ‘expressive economy’ constitutes compositional idiolects that traverse the boundaries of orality and literacy. Amodio stresses continuity as opposed to rupture and proposes that one see certain ‘traditional’ modes of expression functioning within an ‘oral-literate

³¹ Stefan Brink, “Verba Volant, Scripta Manent? Aspects of Early Scandinavian Oral Society,” in *Literacy in Medieval and Early Modern Scandinavian Culture*, ed. Pernille Hermann (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2005), 99.

³² Old Norse scholars who have questioned the validity of such oral-literary polarisation include: Clive Tolley, “Oral Assumptions: A Warning from Old Norse,” in *The Kalevala and the World’s Traditional Epics*, ed. Lauri Honko (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2002), 128–35; Judy Quinn, “From Orality to Literacy in Medieval Iceland,” in *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 30–60; Joseph Harris, “Romancing the Rune: Aspects of Literacy in Early Scandinavian Orality,” *Atti Accademia Peloritana Dei Pericolanti* 70 (1994): 109–40. Jürg Glauser, “The Speaking Bodies of Saga Texts,” trans. Kate Heslop, in *Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World: Essays in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross*, ed. Judy Quinn and Tarrin Wills, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 13–26.

³³ Mark Amodio, *Writing the Oral Tradition: Oral Poetics and Literate Culture in Medieval England* (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), xvi.

nexus' (which one may compare to the concept of an 'oral-literate continuum' employed by Ruth Finnegan and Slavica Rancovic among others).³⁴ The general discussion on orality and literacy has also benefited from integrating concepts put forward in anthropological and folklore studies. These stress not only continuity – which still implies a trajectory and the use of 'evolutionary terms' that Amodio seeks to avoid – but also the notion of continuous interaction that Anil K. Boro refers to as 'two-way traffic'.³⁵

Due to the often ethnographic investigations of current or recent cultural practices in verbal art and the resultant witnessing of on-going interactions between oral and literary modes of expression (or poetics to use Amodio's term), anthropologists and folklorists tend to place oral and literate texts within a larger, foundational cultural context referred to as an 'oral tradition'.³⁶ For John Miles Foley such a 'tradition' signifies 'the continuing, extratextual presence of which any given performance or text is but one perishable avatar' – a view echoed and advanced in Tamsula Ao's study on the oral influences in contemporary North-East Indian written poetry:

'It seems to me that in a certain sense we are all made of words; that our most essential being consists in language. It is the element in which we think and dream and act, in which we live our daily lives. [...]

³⁴ Amodio, *Writing the Oral Tradition*, 11; Ruth Finnegan, "The How of Literature," *Oral Tradition*, Performance Literature, 20, no. 2 (2005): 168; Slavica Ranković, Leidulf Melve, and Else Mundal, *Along the Oral-Written Continuum: Types of Texts, Relations, and Their Implications* (Turnhout: Brepols ; Abingdon, 2010).

³⁵ Amodio, *Writing the Oral Tradition*, 3; Boro quoted in Tamsula Ao, "Writing Orality," in *Orality and beyond: A North-East Indian Perspective*, ed. Soumen Sen and Desmond L. Kharmawphlang (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2007), 91.

³⁶ See Ruth Finnegan, "'Oral Tradition': Weasel Words or Transdisciplinary Door to Multiplexity?," *Oral Tradition* 18, no. 1 (2003): 84–86, for a discussion on the advantages and complexities of this terminological usage.

These words, again from Momady, seem to capture the very essence of what we mean by the term ‘oral tradition’ and which transcends the boundaries of time, space and memory because through the stories, songs, myths, legends, proverbs and riddles man has recorded his understanding of the human experience through language.³⁷

For Ao both literature and orality are verbal products which mutually contribute to a wider cultural product of human understanding. As such they constantly interact: oral texts influence written poetry and written texts inspire the creation of new, often improvised, oral performances. Perspectives that incorporate social and cultural contexts in textual criticism pertaining to orality and literacy lead scholars such as Judy Quinn to consider the influences of concurrent oral practices on saga authors and scribes;³⁸ in a later medieval framework, Joyce Coleman considers the ways in which orality and literacy interact through *aurality*, that is, the oral performance of written texts such as public reading.³⁹

Helen Leslie too examines the interaction of orality and literacy in the context of eddic poetry and focusses on one particular aspect of this subject which has become integral to the on-going attempt to differentiate one mode of verbalisation from the other: that is, *performance*.⁴⁰ Leslie sets out from the conventional standpoint in which orality is characterised by ‘performance’ and literacy by a non-performative ‘textuality’ in order to show that performance might permeate the written text, firstly, only in terms of *content*

³⁷ Ao, “Writing Orality,” 100.

³⁸ Quinn, “From Orality to Literacy in Medieval Iceland.”

³⁹ Joyce Coleman, *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁴⁰ Helen F. Leslie, “The Prose Contexts of Eddic Poetry - Primarily in the ‘Fornaldarsögur’” (Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Bergen, 2012).

through ‘descriptions of actual performances’.⁴¹ Her views on the verbal depiction of performance are similar to those of Ardis Butterfield who investigates the relationship between orality and literacy (or as she indicates in a chapter heading, between ‘*Text and Performance*’ [my italics]) in her study on song and poetry in medieval France: for Butterfield ‘songs are also “written” in the sense that they are described in the narrative’.⁴² Leslie’s second proposition regarding performance also concurs with Butterfield who, elaborating on the manner or ‘senses’ in which performance can be ‘written’ examines the role of, for instance, musical notation in the same way that writing may be examined as a type of ‘notation’ for speech.⁴³ This then is performance in terms of textual *representation* – what Leslie calls the ‘extended text of a performance’ – that in its seeming ability to ‘capture [...] performance on a page’ echoes, once more, Stefan Brink’s notion of ‘fossilised orality’.⁴⁴ An example of such performance ‘notation’ in a prosimetric context which is meant to substitute or perhaps ‘express’ the ‘actual performance’ context is supplied by Leslie who is influenced by Ursula Schaefer:

Schaefer argues that the divorce of the verse from a physical poet’s gestures and intonations, used by aural receivers of texts as interpretative aids, prompted the poet to supply in his narrative a substitute voice by employing a speaker, and in skaldic poetry we might suppose that the lack of performer is compensated for by naming the person responsible for the composition of the stanza. In eddic

⁴¹ Leslie, “Prose Contexts,” 40.

⁴² Ardis Butterfield, *Poetry and Music in Medieval France: From Jean Renart to Guillaume Machaut* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 56.

⁴³ Butterfield, *Poetry and Music*, 14, 55.

⁴⁴ Leslie, “Prose Contexts,” 40; Brink, “Verba Volant, Scripta Manent?,” 99.

prosimetra, we might consider the function of putting verses directly into the mouths of characters a similar reflex.⁴⁵

According to Leslie such performance ‘demands’ a reconstruction of the ‘performance event captured’ and this process, particularly in its mental capacity, is something to which I shall later return.⁴⁶

The final area of performance and ‘textuality’ that Leslie investigates is one that significantly diverges from the conventional perspective which situates performance in the realm of orality: this is performance in terms of literary *mediation* or ‘performance on the manuscript page’.⁴⁷ Though I would argue against Leslie’s inference that the manuscript itself *is* a performance – a matter that, again, is one to which I shall return presently – her notion that manuscript variations constitute witnesses of performance in the acts of inscribing, authoring or compiling are invaluable in (re)locating performance in the realm of literacy. By seeing performance in acts of writing, one widens the lens with which scholars have most often approached the subject of orality and literacy since this extends the peripheries of classification beyond the limits of a fundamental, yet flawed, characterisation. Since the concept of performance plays such a key role in the academic differentiation between orality and literacy, and since it is, furthermore, vital to the poetic manifestation of politics which constitutes the central topic of this thesis, it is important that I now turn towards a more thorough investigation of *its* definition and various uses.

⁴⁵ Leslie, “Prose Contexts,” 45. For a more in-depth perspective on the role of the human body in performance, see Glauser, “The Speaking Bodies of Saga Texts.”

⁴⁶ Leslie, “Prose Contexts,” 40.

⁴⁷ Leslie, “Prose Contexts,” 40–41.

The How of Performance

One of the more subtle and nuanced views of performance in relation to the question of orality and literacy is offered by Ruth Finnegan in her paper, ‘The How of Literature’ (2005).⁴⁸ It is to this paper that I wish to respond in the current section, as a means of entering into the somewhat murky and turbulent waters of ‘performance’, ‘performing’ and ‘performativity’. Before I proceed to do so however, it is necessary to digress by way of, firstly, the dictionary and secondly, Speech Act theory, in order to clarify the way in which I shall, at least provisionally, be employing these terms. According to the *OED* ‘perform’ has eight distinct senses of which two in particular, with their lineage of subsequent linguistic relations, seem to characterise the primary distinction between these variations: in the first instance we have ‘perform’ as *action*, signifying, ‘to do, to carry out, to execute [...], to act’ etc.; while in the second instance we have ‘perform’ as a *type* of action pertaining specifically to *presentation*, signifying, ‘to present (a play, ballet, opera, etc.) on stage or to an audience’ and ‘to act or play (a part or role in a play, ballet, etc.); to represent (a character) on stage or to an audience’.⁴⁹

These definite, if subtle, conceptual distinctions between the variant uses of ‘performance’, must subsequently affect one’s view of John Langshaw Austin’s theory on Speech Acts, in which the concept of the *performative*

⁴⁸ Finnegan, ‘The How of Literature.’

⁴⁹ Oxford English Dictionary, ‘Perform, v.,” *OED Online*, accessed 5 April 2013, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/140780?redirectedFrom=perform&>.

utterance is first developed.⁵⁰ The use of ‘performative’ in Austin’s theory, as well as ensuing linguistic theory and philosophy, refers to the effecting of action through utterance. This employment of the term, evidently derived from the prior sense of ‘performance’ (as action) noted above, is also the only usage recorded and therefore acknowledged by the *OED*.⁵¹ However, many scholars (particularly in the fields of literature and music) have used ‘performative’ in equally valid and relevant ways, but bearing far closer resemblance to the latter sense of ‘performance’ (as [re]presentation).⁵² In order, therefore, to clarify my own use(s) of the term during the course of my thesis, I propose to differentiate between a) ‘performance’, ‘performing’ and ‘performative’ as terms referring to all uses of ‘perform’ in its action sense (including its Speech Act sense); and a capitalised b) ‘Performance’, ‘Performing’ and ‘Performative’ as terms referring to ‘Perform’ in its representational, or ‘theatrical’ sense. It is this second Performance that I shall be primarily concerned with defining now, since it is this sense which has come to be used as a referent for the concept of ‘public Performance’ and therefore, at times rather simplistically, also of ‘oral Performance’ due to its ostensible public and societal dimensions. I should also note, however, that one use of the term in either sense does *not* necessarily preclude the other as they are not mutually exclusive. It is particularly in the performance of cultural rites and ceremonies that we often find a use of ‘Performance’ which straddles *both* of the senses elaborated on here.

⁵⁰ John Langshaw Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, ed. J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

⁵¹ Oxford English Dictionary, “Performative, Adj. and N.,” *OED Online*, accessed 5 April 2013, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/140785?redirectedFrom=performative>.

⁵² These scholars include Mark Amodio, *Writing the Oral Tradition*; Leslie, “Prose Contexts;” and Butterfield, *Poetry and Music in Medieval France*.

I may now return to my point of departure at the start of this section, that is, Ruth Finnegan's paper on 'The How of Literature'. Finnegan's contribution to the way in which the concept of performance is employed by scholars in their investigations of orality and literacy is two-fold: in the first place she attenuates the focus on the purely verbal dimensions of performance by demonstrating its 'multiplex' nature.⁵³ In this model, performance is always a multi-modal realisation of artistic expression in which verbalisation may simply represent one aspect.⁵⁴ Of particular value is Finnegan's exploration of multi-dimensionality in the written text, both in terms of tangible manifestations through media that are inherently 'meaningful' – such as calligraphy, illustration and oral delivery – and in terms of more abstract manifestations through those mental media that a reader brings to the text – such as memory, visualisation and *auralisation* by virtue of one's 'inner ear';⁵⁵ these observations lead on to Finnegan's second key contribution, that is, her exploration of the cognitive phenomenon which Lauri Honko, with reference to singers of oral epics, refers to as 'mental texts'.⁵⁶ These texts, situated in the mind of the reader, constitute another plane of textual manifestation that Finnegan conceptualises as a product of the reader's mental 'en-performancing':

This complexity is enhanced [...] in the cultural variability of *how* people read and relate to writing and the contexts in which they do so.⁵⁷

⁵³ Finnegan, "The How of Literature," 171.

⁵⁴ Finnegan, "The How of Literature," 172.

⁵⁵ Finnegan, "The How of Literature," 173–74.

⁵⁶ Lauri Honko, "Introduction: Epics along the Silk Roads - Mental Texts, Performance, and Written Codification," *Oral Tradition* 11, no. 1 (1996): 1–17.

⁵⁷ Finnegan, "The How of Literature," 175.

The abstracted externalized text, detached from the immediacy of the temporal and personal present, carries the potential of meaning precisely insofar as its user has the experience to activate it here and now, while even in the midst of performance the experience is likely to be imbued with memories and connotations [...]⁵⁸

This view is an invaluable conceptual recourse as it enables one to regard the reader themselves as a potential site for performance – in so far as they are already always the site for textual interpretation.

However, there are some problematic aspects of Finnegan's article that require dissection if one is to apply her notions regarding the performance of written texts to performance more generally. The first of these is her conflation of *orature* – which one might tentatively define as that body of verbal art that exhibits 'the use of [vocal] utterance as an aesthetic means of expression' – with *literature* in an attempt to shift focus from verbalisation as the primary medium for Performative articulation. According to Finnegan,⁵⁹

too narrow a focus on the 'oral' [can result in the] exclusion of other perhaps equally significant elements of performance. For performances may not be principally a matter of 'words' – or at any rate not just of words. Characterizing a performance as 'oral' may actually turn us away from a full appreciation of its multiform mode of existence.⁶⁰

She subsequently suggests that 'literature' – encompassing modes of orality as well as other media in its multiplex structure – should be envisaged,

not as definable by reference to Western written genres, but as an *umbrella notion* [my italics] that can embrace all those displayed forms

⁵⁸ Finnegan, "The How of Literature," 176.

⁵⁹ Pio Zirimu in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, "Oral Power and Europhone Glory: Orature, Literature, and Stolen Legacies," in *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams: Towards a Critical Theory of the Arts and the State in Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 111.

⁶⁰ Finnegan, "The How of Literature," 170.

and events in which verbal artistry in some way plays a significant part.⁶¹

Finnegan's understanding of 'oral' art as defined primarily by its verbal realisation is clearly problematic and runs counter to the understanding that most scholars of orature display in their research. South African artist Pitika Ntuli, for example, envisages orature as 'more than the fusion of all art forms. [...] It is the capsule of feeling, thinking, imagination, taste and hearing. It is the flow of a creative spirit' while Kenyan author, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, has more recently elaborated on his view of orature as the epitome of integrative, ecological hybridity accomplished through performance.⁶² As a result of her desire to expand the concept of literature so that it may encompass all forms of verbal art holistically (thereby absorbing orature as though it were only another – if integral – *literary* manifestation), Finnegan overlooks certain of the key political and conceptual implications of her terminological dissolution.

On the political front, Finnegan's conflation of orature and literature *into* literature continues and fulfils what scholarly proponents of orature perceive as the Western cultural bias already implicit in the term 'oral literature'. According to Wa Thiong'o, the Ugandan linguist, Pio Zirimu, who tragically fell victim to Idi Amin's regime before he could develop his coinage of 'orature' much further, conceived of this term amidst wider post-colonial

⁶¹ Finnegan, "The How of Literature," 180.

⁶² Pitika Ntuli, "Orature: A Self-Portrait," *Storms of the Heart: An Anthology of Black Arts & Culture*, edited by Kwesi Owusu., 1988, 215; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, "Notes towards a Performance Theory of Orature," *Performance Research* 12, no. 3 (November 30, 2007): 4–7.

debates on the political and cultural significance of language and literature in East African education.⁶³ In rejection of the term ‘oral literature’ Zirimu coined ‘orature’ in order ‘to counter the tendency to see the arts communicated orally and received aurally as an inferior or a lower rung in the linear development of literature’.⁶⁴ This is a ‘hidden assumption, prevalent in Western scholarly sites’ which Finnegan herself points out, even noting that ‘literature’ as a concept ‘cannot altogether get away from culture-bound connotations and ambiguities’.⁶⁵ In light of this political context the use of ‘literature’ as an umbrella term is therefore, however involuntary, still a *selection* through which Finnegan unwittingly participates in the very cultural bias she is attempting to avoid.⁶⁶

There are, furthermore, conceptual repercussions from the conflation of orature and literature akin to their *amalgamation* in ‘oral literature’ as problematized by Walter Ong.⁶⁷ Ong specifically notes that Finnegan’s resolve, already exhibited in her earlier scholarly writing, to ‘generalise the specific’ – to extend the term ‘literature’ ‘to include related phenomena such as traditional oral narrative’ – is an insufficient solution to the use of what he deems to be a ‘strictly preposterous term’.⁶⁸ This ‘generalisation’, or conflation, implies the belief that the presence of a similar potential for multiplex Performativity in both oral and literate modes of discourse on a

⁶³ Thiong’o, “Oral Power and Europhone Glory,” 105.

⁶⁴ Thiong’o, “Oral Power and Europhone Glory,” 4.

⁶⁵ Finnegan, “The How of Literature,” 182.

⁶⁶ She is, for example, at pains to stress a lack of hierarchy between written, alphabetised verbal art and other forms of Performative expression (including pictorial).

⁶⁷ Ong, *Orality and Literacy*.

⁶⁸ Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 11–12.

micro-level invalidates the impact that a sometimes vastly different Performance-context may have on the content and reception of a particular Performance. Both orature and literature demonstrate Performative processes, but it does not follow that they are, accordingly, the same phenomenon. By manner of an example we might consider the conceptual implications of conflating the concepts of ‘tree’ and ‘flower’ due to their both being, in essence, ‘plant-growths’ – that is, *growing* vegetable matter. Such conflation, based on generalising abstractions drawn from the culmination of *process* in form and content, must result in diagnostic failure.⁶⁹ It is, in fact, such confusion regarding the form and content through which Performance takes place, with the process of Performance itself, which accounts for the second fundamental problem encountered in Finnegan’s article: that is, her claim that (written) text *is* performance: ‘it makes little sense to set up either “text” or “performance” as separate things or to make assumptions about the prior ontology of either’.⁷⁰

To me, this equation of Performance with Text is akin to treating a cake as though it were the baking of a cake. Indeed, it is perfectly acceptable to refer to ‘baking’ not only as a verb, but as a noun signifying the products of the process: one can ‘try’ someone’s ‘baking’ by eating it. This evolution in terms is in fact a common linguistic phenomenon and is inherent in the development of ‘performance’ from ‘perform’. However, in the case of

⁶⁹ Unlike Performance and Form, Form and Content are not as easily distinguishable and ‘text’ may refer quite aptly to both the form which shapes the content and the content itself.

⁷⁰ Finnegan, “The How of Literature,” 176. Helen Leslie conducts a similar argument in her treatment of palaeographic Performance in, “Prose Contexts”.

Performance, which by its very nature denotes a temporal process, it is crucial that one does not derive from the ‘noun-property’ (for lack of a better word) of the signifier, the notion that the *signified* is an *object*. When I see a Performance, what is always implied is that I am seeing a Performance *of* something. When I see a Performance *of Hamlet*, I see one unique Performative *rendering of* a play (the text-as-form) concerning the melancholy Prince of Denmark and his murderous uncle (the text-as-content). The Performance here is not the ‘story’ in terms of either its form or content, but rather, the *telling of* the story and, as telling, is essentially the stuff of presence and present-ness. Finnegan herself acknowledges the ‘here-and-now’ nature of Performance – it is inextricably situated in the present-continuous – but contradictorily seeks a text within that time-traversing phenomenon, ‘that performed literary realization’ which is simultaneously able to ‘exist beyond [the] temporal moment’.⁷¹

That there is a text which *arises out of* each and every performance – what Finnegan calls a ‘text-in-the-performance’ – seems undeniable. However, this text is not a text that exceeds temporal bonds; is reproducible. This text is the mental text which, by virtue of equally ‘temporal’ semantic processes in the cognitive construction of meaning, is first and foremost a text-in-*interpretation*. Interpretation too is a temporal event and an essential ingredient of Performance, though it need not be Performative itself. The text which arises out of the spacio-temporal Performance event is, therefore, categorically unique: its reproduction is absolutely beyond our means. Even

⁷¹ Finnegan, “The How of Literature,” 176.

in the process of remembering the text it is altered, since the inexorable flow of space-time – which automatically restructures contextual surroundings – continuously shifts the material nexus of our thoughts. The mental text is, as Honko points out, an open system.⁷² Amodio, influenced by Stanley Fish in particular, emphasises the importance of interpretation in the formation of the mental text, as well as its resultant fluidity:

‘The text as an entity independent of interpretation and (ideally) responsible for its career drops out and is replaced by the texts that emerge as the consequence of our interpretive activities.’ At this level of abstraction, we can see that the reception of verbal art in oral and literate societies is similar, for in a vital sense literature is only and always *within* the recipient in oral cultures in just the way fluid texts, for the active, participatory reader, are constructed by subjective criticism. The reader in a literate society plays an important, active role in ‘writing’ the ‘text’ he or she reads and thus plays a role in creating the ‘text’ in just the way listening audiences in oral cultures are co-creators of the text they receive aurally [...]. As Stanley Fish has argued, readers perceive the text that their ‘interpretive strategies demand and call into being.’ The text that we thus read/create is in constant flux [...]⁷³

The text which *does* exist ‘beyond the temporal moment’ is not the Performance or the text-in-performance: It is not the ‘cake’ or the baking-of-the-cake, nor yet the type of cake which one may think of as being representative of *genre*. Finnegans’ notion of a text which is more ‘externalised’ and ‘transcendent’ as ‘something that can be referred to or in some way reproduced’ can, instead, be likened to a ‘recipe’.⁷⁴ Each interpretation of the recipe either through baking or through copying the instructions down in one form or another will be different and inimitable –

⁷² Honko, “Introduction: Epics along the Silk Roads - Mental Texts, Performance, and Written Codification,” 8.

⁷³ Amodio, *Writing the Oral Tradition*, 8.

⁷⁴ Finnegans, “The How of Literature,” 176.

but the recipe itself, as a set of instructions, remains unaltered. Amodio sites *this* text – which I shall henceforth refer to as the Instruction-text (shortened to I-text) – in the physical manifestation of the written text:

the text produced within literate culture has an attendant physicality, and hence fixity, that oral texts lack. [...] The text that we thus read/create is in constant flux, but the physical object that remains the source of the varied and various “texts” we (co-)produce remains a static monument.⁷⁵

Yet this view overlooks the variable nature of such monuments in themselves (the loss of colouring and entire graphemes on rune-stones due to weathering is a prime example) and forgets the already mentioned lack of ‘fixity’ in the reader’s approach to the monument in each separate reading (I might decipher the graphemes in the inscription differently from one occasion to the next even if their shape and form remain unchanged). Nor does Amodio’s postulation regarding the location of the I-text account for the constancy of the recipe that may be variously manifested: the recipe emailed, written in short-hand or conveyed orally in conversation remains ‘the recipe’. *Hamlet*, whether Performed on stage or read silently in its script-form has some ‘*Hamlet*-ness’ about it, even if each textual rendering in the mind of the interpreter may differ vastly. The physical manifestation of the written text is, instead, the witness of a construal in the same way that the physical manifestation of an oral text, through voice and gesture, serves as an object evidencing interpretation. It could be argued, in fact, that written texts are *as ephemeral* as their oral counterparts in the very nature of their being perceived interpretatively: if oral texts only ‘exist’ when they are spoken or

⁷⁵ Amodio, *Writing the Oral Tradition*, 8–9.

heard then written texts only really ‘exist’ themselves when they are either written or seen. As soon as the reader looks away from the page the text-in-interpretation is ‘transferred’ to exactly the same location in which oral texts are situated post-performance, that is, in the reader’s memory.

Where is the I-text situated then? Rather than having one particular physical manifestation – be it oral, written or mental – the I-text might best be defined as a composite of all those textual elements that are present in every attempt at rendition: that is, all those elements that are consistently reiterated. In short we might say that although no text-in-interpretation/performance is repeatable, the I-text is a conceptual compound of ‘what-is-repeated’. In a strange way the I-text is therefore without body as every attempt to ‘embody’ it through interpretation must result, instead, in a text-in-interpretation. In fact, the closer any attempted actualisation of the I-text comes to manifesting an absolute replica – that is, a repetition without the mediation of interpretation – the more that actualisation resembles not Performance, but dogma. It is the application of law without judgement, an eradication of individualised otherness through the replication of the collectivised self:

But even a more concrete *passive* understanding of the meaning of the utterance, an understanding of the speaker’s intention insofar as that understanding remains purely passive, purely receptive, contributes nothing new to the word under consideration, only mirroring it, seeking, at its most ambitious, merely the full reproduction of that which is already given in the word [...] Therefore, insofar as the speaker operates with such a passive understanding, nothing new can be introduced into his discourse; there can be no new aspects in his discourse relating to concrete objects and emotional expressions.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Mikhail Mikhaïlovich Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 281.

Performance, on the other hand, is essentially un-dogmatic. It inherently displays what anthropologists refer to as its ‘emergent quality’ – a quality which results in perpetual singularity.

According to Richard Bauman, the ‘concept of emergence is necessary to the study of performance as a means toward comprehending the uniqueness of particular performances’.⁷⁷ And if emergence

refers to the dynamic quality of performance that allows each expressive event to be shaped by the interactions between performers and audiences [so that,] due to its emergent quality, variation in performance is inevitable,⁷⁸

one might well conclude that, apart from its temporal qualities, it is also its *dialogic* qualities that grants Performance its singularity. Korom’s explication of emergence is all the more relevant because it is not founded on the limited observation of ‘theatre-based’ Performance alone, but also on Performance practises enacted in wider cultural contexts: it is not only the more apparently Performative recitations of skaldic poetry at court that may be construed as Performance, but also such highly symbolic ceremonial practices as gift-giving and funeral rites. The most significant characteristic of any emergent Performance is simply its dialogic foundation in the interpersonal exchange between performer and audience. As such it is useful to return to Bakhtin – who categorises the discourse of ‘passive understanding’, that is, non-interpretive repetition, as the epitome of non-

⁷⁷ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 302.

⁷⁸ Frank J. Korom, “The Anthropology of Performance: An Introduction,” in *The Anthropology of Performance: A Reader*, ed. Frank J. Korom (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons Inc, 2013), 2.

variance – since his view on dialogic utterance (which demonstrates ‘responsive’ or ‘active understanding’) suggests the implicit resistance to passivity and replication that we associate with Performance:

the speech of another, once enclosed in a context, is – no matter how accurately transmitted – always subject to certain semantic changes. The context embracing another’s word is responsible for its dialogizing background, whose influence can be very great. Given the appropriate methods for framing, one may bring about fundamental changes even in another’s utterance accurately quoted.⁷⁹

At its least abstract, the ‘speech of another enclosed in context’ could easily represent the dialogic interplay between audience and Performer in the Performance environment – a synergy of production and reception which results *in* Performance.

From an anthropological perspective at least, it seems as though the dialogic relation between Performer (as an agent of communicative action) and audience (as an agent of interpretative observation) is an integral component in the context-bound Performance-process. But how do we consolidate this criterion with the seemingly adverse notion that the lone scribe or private reader may themselves be ‘Performers’ constructing their own textual Performances? The response to this question is vital since the answer is also an essential component in our understanding of yet another central question, which is: how does one distinguish between those acts of communication that one thinks of as ‘Performative’ and those one thinks of as ‘quotidian’ (that

⁷⁹ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 340.

is, the ‘everyday’, ‘ordinary’ or ‘non-artificed’)?⁸⁰ How does one distinguish, in short, between the Performative and the performative? Because of the double-sense one has of performance (discussed at the commencement of this section) as constituting not only ‘stage-action’ but also ‘action’ *tout court*, one’s first instinct when attempting to locate the respective agents of dialogic interaction in an assumed Performance context,⁸¹ is to assign the role of ‘Performer’ to the most perceptibly ‘active’ party. This assignation is of course reinforced by a Western theatrical Performance convention in which there is usually an actor as Performer and a seemingly passive recipient as audience-member. Such association of Performance with action embeds an almost natural reflex to view as Performer the scribe *copying*; the reader *reading*, since these figures are the only active agents in each assumed Performance scenario.⁸² It is the role of the ‘audience-recipient’ then, which at first glance seems to be the most difficult to locate (particularly in situations comprising a single actor). And yet the private reader, for example, in being first and foremost the translator of another’s words into meaning, ‘performs’ nothing so much as *reciency*. One could therefore quite easily assign the role of audience to the reader, even if their physical and mental action as a randomly assigned performer – based purely on the conflation of the performance of action with Performance – differs in absolutely no way.

⁸⁰ The term “quotidian” is employed by English and French scholars alike, particularly in the analysis of post-war realist aesthetics. See, for example, Lynn Gumpert et al., *The Art of the Everyday: The Quotidian in Postwar French Culture* (New York ; London: New York University Press, 1997).

⁸¹ Assumed, because in order to bestow the role of Performer (in the theatre sense) upon performer (in the action sense) one must already assume that whatever action is occurring constitutes a Performance.

⁸² Both Leslie, “Prose Contexts” and Finnegan, “The How of Literature” contribute to this notion.

Should we subsequently assume, as Finnegan and others seem to do, that audience-participation is always Performative as well?

Such a view would completely disintegrate the very conceptual distinctions that, through emergence, are believed to give rise to Performance in the first place. This becomes even more pertinent an issue if, in being careful to avoid the assumption of Performance founded on the presence of performance-as-action in a communication-participant (as opposed to a performance-participant), one realises that the audience or recipient role in Performance is, in fact, always present in processes of discourse.⁸³ At its most fundamental level this role simply constitutes semantic interpretation. It is the presence – within or without Performance – that creates, as demonstrated above, the text-in-interpretation/Performance.⁸⁴ In the Bakhtinian model of dialogue this presence is always inherently implied through the very act of utterance since

every word is directed toward an *answer* and cannot escape the profound influence of the answering word that it anticipates. The word in living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer-word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer's direction. Forming itself in an atmosphere of the already spoken, the word is at the same time determined by that which has not yet been said but which is needed and in fact anticipated by the answering word. Such is the situation in any living dialogue. All rhetorical forms [...] are oriented toward the listener and his answer.⁸⁵

⁸³ However, this is clearly not limited to verbal dimensions alone.

⁸⁴ It is important to note here, once again, that this presence – comprehension through interpretative association – is an essential component of Performance, but does not need to be Performative in itself.

⁸⁵ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 280. Ardis Butterfield, who draws on Julia Kristeva's analysis, states Bakhtin's view concisely: "Bakhtin's thinking [...] begin[s] from an essentially socio-linguistic premiss: that utterance, by being inherently dialogic, always implies an audience. For him, this is a property of language itself, one voice implying another, both of which behave "as if they actually hold a conversation with each other". See *Poetry and Music in Medieval France*, 129.

What essentially links Bakhtin's conception of 'discourse [living] beyond itself, in a living impulse towards the object' with the concept of the audience-recipient as interpreter is his conviction that response and understanding are inseparable.⁸⁶ 'Understanding comes to fruition only in response. Understanding and response are dialectically merged and mutually condition each other; one is impossible without the other'.⁸⁷

If I walk in a park and hear people talking in angry, raised voices, I might decide that they are having an argument. My *response* as recipient, which is called forth by the utterance of their words, is my *interpretative understanding* – the text-in-interpretation which *is* my construal of the utterance as an argument. This interpretative understanding does not, however, constitute Performance. Nor yet is it a Performance when the utterance is issued forth by me as a reader: if I read a description of the above scenario in a paper – hear the angry utterance through my 'inner ear'; see the exaggerated gestures and violent features of the antagonists in my 'mind's eye'; experience, in short, an individualised mental utterance – and interpret this utterance as an argument, I am no less the audience-recipient of that utterance than I am of the 'actual' utterance in the park. This too may be said of those 'actual' antagonists arguing in the park, since each antagonist is not only the interpretive recipient called forth by the other's hostile utterance, they are also, to begin with, the invoked recipients of *their own* utterances. It

⁸⁶ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 292.

⁸⁷ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 282. Bakhtin's notion of the word inherently calling forth an answer and hence an "audience" is remarkably similar to Levinas's philosophy on speech and "the other": "Language, in its expressive function, addresses and invokes the other". See Emmanuel Lévinas, *Entre Nous: Thinking-of-the-Other*, [New ed.]. (London: Continuum, 2006), 28.

is the ‘audience-recipient’ then and *not* the Performer which is the ‘given’ of any discourse context, be that context Performative *or* quotidian. The primary questions posited earlier therefore remain: what constitutes a performer? And what distinguishes the performative utterance from the Performative utterance?

With regard to the latter of the above one finds that Bakhtin poses a similar question (though using different terms). He speaks of *transmission* as the concern of *everyday speech*, as opposed to *artistic representation* which I shall provisionally equate with the concept of Performance.⁸⁸ ‘What, [he asks], is the basic distinction between forms for transmitting another’s word as they exist outside the world of art and the artistic representation of such transmission in the novel?’⁸⁹ His answer, translated into *our* terms offers crucial insight into the nature of Performance:

These extra-artistic forms, concentrated as they are on the transmission (even if free and creative) of utterances, do not endeavour to *recognise* and intensify *images* lying beyond the isolated utterances of social language [my italics].⁹⁰

Key here is Bakhtin’s notion of the ‘recognition of the image’ behind an utterance. The image, akin to the landscape painting; the portrait; the still-life, is not merely a *view* – a text-in-interpretation which Bakhtin calls ‘a social ideologeme that has fused with its own discourse’ – but is a *(re)presentation of that view*.⁹¹ The image is a text which is *recognised* – and

⁸⁸ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 339.

⁸⁹ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 355.

⁹⁰ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 356.

⁹¹ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 357.

in being recognised becomes an object *consciously* exhibited – consciousness which necessarily moulds and sculpts it:

The words of the author that represent and frame another’s speech create a perspective for it[:] The framing context, like the sculptor’s chisel, hews out the rough outlines of someone else’s speech, and carves the image of a language out of the raw empirical data of speech life.⁹²

In short, one may conclude that the image as text is a product of the conscious engagement with artifice – an engagement which, being situated always within the mind of the artist is always also a *self-conscious engagement with artifice*. This then, is how one might define Performance, with the image constituting the text-in-Performance.

At this point an example might aid the justification of such a definition. One such example might be the frightened utterance of a child upon seeing a spider: the shout of ‘Spider!’ calls into being a recipient in the form of a responsive understanding, that is, interpretation. The primary recipient is the child itself who answers, through the shout, its interpretation of the visual ‘utterance’ in its sight of the spider as constituting potential danger. The child is also the interpreter of the shout who may answer its own interpretation of fear through self-comforting gestures such as clinging to its mother’s leg (itself yet another gestural utterance). An answering gesture of fear or comfort may also be called forth in the mother who is the secondary recipient of the utterance as issued by the child (though a primary recipient of her hearing of the utterance!). This scenario clearly constitutes a quotidian

⁹² Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 358.

communicative act. *If* however, the child's shout of fear ('Spider!') is uttered not in response to some arachnid threat, but rather as a *self-conscious verbal act* intended to solicit an answering fear in their mother as recipient – if, in other words, the child *consciously engages the (social) language of fear* in order to trick through persuasion the audience-recipient – the utterance may be said to be Performed. Once again it is important to note that the primary recipient in this situation is not the child's mother (who might answer with a response other than the one intended by the child), but is, instead, the child's mother *imagined as recipient*: by manufacturing, through artifice, the Performed cry of fear, the child already calls forth a recipient through recognising (imagining) a translation of the 'social ideologeme' he is employing.

One could now return to the example of the argument in the park (observed or read), which I have argued is quotidian rather than Performative in nature. What if the shouting individuals I observe or imagine, and have interpreted as arguing, are *not* in fact arguing but are, instead, only pretending to argue (perhaps in a casual rehearsal for a play)?⁹³ If I do not recognise their pretence then it is clear that in my cognition the performance remains quotidian, though from *their* perspective I might well serve as an audience-recipient on a secondary level – the primary level being the imagined *recipient in understanding*. The secondary recipient does of course impact the imagined conceptualisation of the primary: my reciprocity is not the same

⁹³ Hypothetically the reader might find out about this pretence in a later description. This is the case, for example, in *Laxdæla saga* when the reader is made aware that Melkorka, the mute slave-woman purchased by Hǫskuldr, has in fact purposefully affected her mutism.

as that of an elderly lady or of a young boy, whose imagined responses may elicit the employment of radically different ideologemes by the conscious self in Performance. However, I do not need to be aware of my recipiency in order to influence the imagined responsive understanding. In fact, if I *were* to become conscious of my participation in the process of interpretive reception I would cease to be a mere recipient-in-understanding and become, instead, an actor – *the Performer of my recipiency* or my ‘audience-ness’. This is the case even at an extreme level of abstraction in which the Performance of the argument in the park is entirely imagined by me: if I observe an argument in the park and interpret the argument as a manifestation of pretence – that is, I surmise that the would-be-antagonists are only acting (irrespective of whether these individuals are, in fact, pretending to argue or not) – then a Performance can be said to occur *in* the text-in-interpretation. I may, moreover, remain an audience-recipient on a secondary level even in this Performance context if I remain unaware of the fact that my observation is self-generated. The primary recipient in such a case can be said to be unwittingly created by me and consist of the imagined intentionality – used here in its ‘directional’ sense – of the ‘antagonists’.

My purpose in elaborating on this extreme case of abstraction is that certain modes of perception do in fact occur in such abstract forms. This pertains particularly to reading. There is a far higher probability, particularly in the case of the ‘real’ park observation, that I will recognise myself as a recipient through my interpretation of pretence in the antagonists since I am then also likely to imagine myself as being ‘intended towards’ by their (real or

imagined) Performance. In so doing – in becoming conscious of myself as a recipient – I must now become a performer of my reciprocity, since I, through consciousness, become the interpreter of my own ‘language’. I am now become an *audience-Performer*. Such ‘audience-Performance’ is most obviously present in highly stylised Performance contexts or ‘frames’ that employ equally high levels of artifice.⁹⁴ This artifice comprises the conscious use of social language in the sculpting of a particular role. One Performance context which exemplifies the above is the Western classical music concert in which the audience, through *designation*, not only recognises themselves as audience members, but continues to ‘act the part’ of such a member by keeping quiet during that period of the Performance in which the instruments are sounding; by applauding the Performative competence in exactly the right moments etc.

Any circumstance in which artifice is consciously employed or engaged in, may be said to constitute Performance – though not necessarily at the same ‘degree of intensity’, to use Bauman’s terms:

Art is commonly conceived as an all-or-nothing phenomenon – something either is or is not art – but conceived as performance, in terms of an interpretive frame, verbal art may be culturally defined as varying in intensity as well as range. We are not speaking here of the relative quality of a performance [...] but the *degree of intensity* with which the performance frame operates in a particular range of culturally defined ways of speaking [my italics].⁹⁵

⁹⁴ On the concept of Performance frames and keying of performance through the use of ‘meta-communication’ see Richard Bauman, “Verbal Art as Performance,” *American Anthropologist* 77, no. 2 (June 1, 1975): 295.

⁹⁵ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 297.

Defining this degree is not the same as determining whether or not some act constitutes Performance. I might therefore be of the opinion that the vocalised reading of a bed-time story to young children is more Performative than a private, silent, novel reading experience in which my Performance as reader might be determined only by my (more-or-less) conscious recipient-participation in a written fiction of which the artifice is already determined by the ‘keying frame’ of genre.⁹⁶ But this is different from my determining whether a particular reading *is* Performative based on the presence of consciousness: reading and automatically ‘obeying’ a road-sign does not require my self-conscious engagement, although it still requires my basic linguistic faculties of interpretation. Such a ‘reading’ is not less Performative than the types of reading mentioned above: it is not Performative at all. This does not of course preclude it from remaining performative in the quotidian sense of the word.

Bakhtin himself stresses the importance of consciousness in the representation of the image:

The image of a language conceived as an intentional hybrid is first of all a *conscious* hybrid [...]; an intentional hybrid is precisely the perception of one language by another language, its illumination by another linguistic consciousness. An image of a language may be structured only from the point of view of another language [...]⁹⁷

It is this consciousness of the self in its perception of the other’s language which is exactly the prerequisite for being able to represent the other’s

⁹⁶ For a discussion on genre as a performance framing device see Butterfield, *Poetry and Music in Medieval France*, 16.

⁹⁷ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 359.

language through the intonations of my own in Performance. It is also a prerequisite for a dialogic emergence between ‘self’ and ‘other’ in the context of internalised mental Performances which are, as I shall discuss in detail in my fourth and final chapter, central to the pacifying mechanism of skaldic diplomacy.

The self-conscious perception of, and engagement with, the language of the other may certainly be perceived as having political implications and it is significant that Emmanuel Levinas, a twentieth-century philosopher particularly concerned with ethics (a branch of philosophy which almost always pertains to social interactions that are, to some extent, political in nature), believes that the consciousness of the presence of another’s language is essential to the formulation of the concept of ‘the other’, and that this consciousness is *conditioned* by language itself. He states that

[s]peech delineates an original relation. The point is to see the function of language not as subordinate to the *consciousness* we have of the presence of the other, or of his proximity, or of our community with him, but as a condition of that conscious realisation.⁹⁸

This view of language corresponds, at least notionally, to Bakhtin’s understanding above as well as Émile Benveniste’s hypothesis – in which we find many Bakhtinian echoes – that

[c]onsciousness of self is only possible if it is experienced by contrast. I use *I* only when I am speaking to someone who will be a *you* in my address. It is this condition of dialogue which is constitutive of *person*, for it implies that reciprocally *I* becomes *you* in the address of the one who in his turn designates himself as *I*.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Levinas, *Entre Nous*, 5–6.

⁹⁹ Émile Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek (Coral Gables, Fla: University of Miami Press, 1971), 224–25.

How does language condition consciousness? It ‘delineates an original relation’, and according to Levinas it does so by invoking the other *through* expressing the concept of the other. The invocation is not ‘preceded’ or ‘reducible’ (in Levinas’s terms) to an understanding or representation: the *expression* of my understanding *is* simultaneously my understanding of the other. I invoke the other by naming him ‘other’: ‘a vocative is uttered [so that] what is named is at the same time what is called’.¹⁰⁰

Importantly, it is this capability of language to ‘delineate an original relation’, that is the foundation for *deixis* – the

location and identification of persons, objects, events, processes and activities being talked about, or referred to, in relation to the spatiotemporal context created and sustained by the act of utterance and the participation in it, typically, of a single speaker and at least one addressee.¹⁰¹

Deixis is seen, in the sphere of ‘performance studies’, as being the crux of dramatic utterance:¹⁰²

Noting that ‘drama consists first and foremost precisely in this, an *I* addressing a *you here and now*,’ Keir Elam suggests that deixis is the means by which the ‘dramatic world’ is removed from its status as ‘possible world’ and actualised as the hypothetical world we view on stage’.¹⁰³

The language that ‘conditions the consciousness of the other’s presence’ in Levinas, is gestural in essence – though the direction of that gesticulation

¹⁰⁰ Lévinas, *Entre Nous*, 7.

¹⁰¹ John Lyons in Stanton B. Garner, Jr, *Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama* (Ithaca ; London: Cornell University Press, 1994), 124.

¹⁰² See Emily Margaret Osborne, “Thinking Outside the Hall – The Conceptual Boundaries of Skaldic Verse” (University of Cambridge, 2012) for an in-depth analysis of the role of deixis in Skaldic Performance.

¹⁰³ Garner, Jr, *Bodied Spaces*, 125.

need not be fixed. The I-text which is necessarily without body and therefore beyond understanding (that which has no body cannot be ‘grasped’), is only ever called forth by me in my ever-varying Performance of it. It becomes, quite literally, an ‘I’-text – that deictic marker which is absolutely general and thus absolutely empty – which is only called into being through the individualising, spacio-temporal Performance in which I momentarily inhabit the ‘I’. It is the socio-political composition of identity which must always stand in relation to another’s language. Performance is not only used in politics to define and influence social relations: it is *inherently* political, being deictically structured as an interaction *between* social relations.

The Politics of performance ... and Performance

In accordance with the distinctions made above between performance as action and Performance as a *type of action* pertaining to (artistic) representation, my considerations of the political purposes and influences of skaldic P/performance on Viking Age power-structures and diplomatic practices can be broadly divided into two Parts: the first concerns the politics of skaldic performance in which performance serves as a means through which ruler presence is effected; the second concerns the politics of skaldic Performance in which Performance provides a methodological entry into internalised dialogic processes. Each Part of my thesis will, moreover, comprise two chapters of which the first (that is, Chapters One and Three respectively) will seek to provide theoretical contexts for discussions and analyses in Chapters Two and Four. In this way Chapter One will attempt to

introduce and develop the concept of *óðal* (ancestral land), with regard to the legitimisation of power through the establishment and maintenance of presence, whilst Chapter Two will be specifically concerned with the manner in which names – arguably the most important nouns or (as I shall argue) noun-phrases in the language of skaldic praise – contribute to the ‘presencing’ abilities of skaldic performance and hence the role of performance in the legitimisation of power within an ideolexicon (that is, the language or discourse that attends a particular ideological construct) of *óðal*. Chapter Three will attempt, in turn, to provide a theoretical foundation for understanding skaldic poetry as a dialogic and dynamic form of artifice whilst Chapter Four will, finally, examine the manner in which the features of skaldic Performance elaborated on in Chapter Three contribute to the diplomatic purpose of skaldic poetry and the diplomatic duties of skalds in a Viking Age socio-political milieu.

Part 1

The Politics of Skaldic Performance

Fames pillar here, at last, we set,
Out-during *Marble, Brasse, or Jet*,
Charm'd and enchanted so,
As to withstand the blow
Of overthrow:
Nor shall the seas,
Or OUTRAGES
Of storms orebear
What we up-read,
Tho Kingdoms fal,
This pillar never shall
Decline or waste at all;
But stand for ever by his owne
Firme and well fixt foundation.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Robert Herrick, *The Complete Poetry of Robert Herrick*, ed. Tom Cain and Ruth Connolly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), vol. 1, p. 319.

Chapter 1

Politics and Presence

[...]
for five generations
the trees now stand unpruned and wild

after relocating so many years before the War
the seeds of Jessie have returned

afternoon sunlight on the field
breezes moving grass and leaves
memories with family names wait
within the earth, the mountains,
the valley, the field, the trees¹⁰⁵

1. Contextualising Skaldic Performance

As stated in my Introduction, I shall be dividing my treatment of skaldic performance and its role in Viking Age politics in two parts. In this first part my primary focus shall be on skaldic performativity in its Austinian sense, that is, a performativity which arises out of an understanding of speech as action. In this regard I shall be particularly concerned with the illocutionary characteristics and perlocutionary effects of skaldic ‘speech acts’, that is, in the first place, with the ‘performance of an act *in* saying something’, and in the second place, with the ‘[production of] certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience, or of the speaker, or of other

¹⁰⁵ William Oandasan, “Grandmothers Land,” in *The Sound of Rattles and Clappers: A Collection of New California Indian Writing*, ed. Greg Sarris, Sun Tracks: An American Indian Literary Series 26 (University of Arizona Press, 1994), 51–52.

persons'.¹⁰⁶ I hope, in particular, to demonstrate the ways in which the performance of skaldic poetry is employed by skalds and their patrons in order to create, establish or solidify ruler-presence (its illocutionary function), thereby legitimising the use of power and exercising of authority by that ruler (its perlocutionary effect).

It is towards this end that the current chapter will strive to provide a comprehensive historical contextualisation for the performance of skaldic poetry in a Viking Age political arena – in so far as that contextualisation relates to the legitimisation of power through presence in early medieval Scandinavia. In order to understand the manner in which skaldic verse affects the inter-social relations between rulers and their subjects, it is first necessary to grasp some of the key political concepts that govern societal structures as well as the distributions of rights and powers within those structures. The most important of these political ideas is, perhaps, the concept of *óðal* (which can be briefly described as ‘ancestral property’) which permeates both a later medieval and a skaldic discourse of ruler-legitimacy. The large part of this chapter will, therefore, be devoted to the notion of *óðal* and its conceptual ties to the legitimisation of power.

I shall begin my contextualisation of skaldic performance by considering the nature of the legitimisation of power and the ways in which such legitimacy is bestowed upon those who exercise power in general. I shall then examine

¹⁰⁶ John Langshaw Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, William James Lectures (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), 99, 101.

the importance of the methodological establishment of presence as legitimising action, moving from the general to the particular as I start to consider the concept of *óðal* and its place in Viking Age politics. After establishing the importance of an *óðal*-based presence in the legitimisation of Viking Age rulership I shall analyse the itinerant practices of rulers and their means of mitigating absences, noting such methods as the construction of mounds and halls in the attempt to create a legitimising ‘memoryscape’. Relating the idea of a ‘memoryscape’ to the practice of, not only spatial, but also temporal itinerancy as a means of mitigating the absence of rulers *through time* as well as space, I shall finally consider the importance of ideas surrounding fame and memorialisation and their links to *óðal*-based legitimisations of power. In so doing I hope to lay the foundations for the discussions regarding skaldic poetry and the performance of presence in the following chapter.

2. Presence and the Legitimation of Power

2.1 Power and Legitimacy

To rule is to exercise political power: with regards to the social world in particular, rulers have the ‘ability to produce intended effects upon the world around them, to realise their purposes within it, whatever these purposes happen to be’.¹⁰⁷ Such an ability within the realm of governance is primarily gained through the assumption of certain positions in society that are themselves instilled with power, for example, the ‘king’ or ‘jarl’ whose titles

¹⁰⁷ David Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 2nd ed. Political Analysis (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 43.

name respective positions inhabited by various persons throughout the course of time. The following section aims to investigate one of the most crucial elements of power and its legitimisation, that is, presence. In the first place it is, to some degree at least, self-evident that to be ‘present’ is already to possess the potential for exercising power in so far as presence connotes existence, which is itself required for the exercising of capabilities and of the will. Indeed, it is common for powerful and charismatic leaders to be described as having a (strong) presence,¹⁰⁸ just as it is common in religious contexts to describe the Holy Spirit – which ostensibly empowers those whom He inhabits – as the Presence of God.¹⁰⁹

Presence is, furthermore, an important factor in the legitimisation of power and although power does not need to be legitimate in order to be exercised, legitimacy nevertheless influences its effectiveness, stability and durability by increasing the likelihood of popular obedience and support. According to David Beetham the legitimisation of power is based on three interrelated, principal components:¹¹⁰ the first of these is *legality* or *rule-conformity*. Rulers may, for instance, be deemed legitimate only if they have a certain

¹⁰⁸ See, for example, “The Secret to Having a Commanding Presence”, an article published on *Primer*, an online magazine for young men: “You know him when you see him - he’s the guy everyone notices when he takes his first three steps into a room. A natural leader. Is it witchcraft [...] What does “that” guy have that you don’t? What’s his secret? **Presence**”. <<http://www.primermagazine.com/2010/learn/the-secret-to-having-a-commanding-presence>>, accessed 17 September 2017.

¹⁰⁹ In Acts 1:8 Jesus tells his disciples that they “shall receive the power [dynamis or δύναμις] of the Holy Ghost coming upon [them]”: *The Holy Bible Translated from the Latin Vulgate and Diligently Compared with Other Editions in Divers Languages* (Douay, A.D. 1609; Rheims, A.D. 1582); *Published as Revised and Annotated by Authority; with a Preface by the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster*, translated by Richard Challoner (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1914), New Testament, p. 133.

¹¹⁰ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*.

familial relationship to prior rulers and to the gods. Gro Steinsland, Erin Goeres and Anders Hultgård, to mention but a few, pay particular attention to the ways in which genealogical poems such as Þjóðólfr ór Hvini's *Ynglingatal* (Enumeration of the Ynglingar) or other mythologically-themed skaldic compositions such as Eyvindr skáldaspillir's *Hákonarmál* legitimise power by connecting contemporary rulers to their royal or divine antecedents.¹¹¹ It is for this reason that Ian Beuerman describes Viking Age rulers as 'pagan religiously legitimated rulers'.¹¹² The second element of legitimacy is *normative validity*, where 'the acquisition and exercise of power meet societally accepted standards of rightful authorisation and due performance'.¹¹³ It is, for example, expected in a Viking Age society that rulers should be successful warriors with sufficient martial experience and military prowess who are able to protect their people and to redistribute resources such as weapons gained on expeditions. It is also expected that rulers should be wealthy and possess moveable assets such as gold, silver and silk that, in addition to shields and weapons, they redistribute among the *hirð* or through diplomatic exchanges with other rulers in order to strengthen the retinue as well as make and uphold political alliances.¹¹⁴ Kings and chieftains

¹¹¹ See: Gro Steinsland, "Origin Myths and Rulership. From the Viking Age Ruler to the Ruler of Medieval Historiography: Continuity, Transformations and Innovations in *Ideology and Power*, ed. Steinsland et al., 15–68; Goeres, *The Poetics of Commemoration*; Anders Hultgård, "Óðinn, Valhöll and the Einherjar. Eschatological Myth and Ideology in the Late Viking Period," in *Ideology and Power*, ed. Steinsland et al., 297–328.

¹¹² Ian Beuermann, "The Long Adaptation," 374.

¹¹³ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, xiii.

¹¹⁴ Much of what Lotte Hedeager notes about the political role of gift-giving during the Migration Period in Scandinavia seems to be true for the Viking Age as well: "Asgard Reconstructed? Gudme - a 'Central Place' in the North," in *Topographies of Power in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Mayke De Jong, F. Theuvs, and Carine van Rhijn, Transformation of the Roman World; 6 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 493; See also, Tina L. Thurston, *Landscapes of Power, Landscapes of Conflict: State Formation in the South Scandinavian Iron Age*, Fundamental Issues in Archaeology (New York; London: Kluwer Academic, 2001), 84.

depended on popular support which [they...] secured via gifts and redistribution of resources. Consequently the ‘good ruler’ was generous and extravagant, as by-names such as ‘giver-of-rings’, and ‘distributor-of-gold’ show. Power also found symbolic expressions in rich clothes, weapons, jewellery, gold-rings, horses and their expensive tack, drinking-horn and food-vessels.¹¹⁵

One reason why power is expressed through such material ‘displays of sovereignty’ is because the visible expression of wealth and power contributes directly to the establishment of relations of dependency.¹¹⁶

According to Beetham,

these [relations] derive from a situation of relative powerlessness which leads the weak to seek the protection of the strong, the propertyless to seek service with the propertied, and so on. The awareness of [...] impotence outside the relationship can itself be sufficient to keep the dependent party submissive to the wishes of the superior, without any threats needing to be made. [...] Here an initial inducement can become the basis of a continuous power relationship, through the vulnerability of the dependent party to the withdrawal of the essential resource on which they rely.¹¹⁷

The symbolic expression of power described by Steinsland above, is instrumental in creating the ‘awareness of impotence’, or at least the awareness of relative propertylessness that contributes to the ongoing loyalty of the ruler’s retainers, political allies and other subjects. The habitual redistribution of those resources on which a dependent relies creates a reciprocal bond that can, in turn, be used to establish and exercise power throughout the realm. This is certainly the case with rulers and their band of

¹¹⁵ Gro Steinsland, “Introduction. Ideology and Power in the Viking and Middle Ages: Scandinavia, Iceland, Ireland, Orkney and the Faeroes,” in *Ideology and Power*, ed. Steinsland et al., 7.

¹¹⁶ Olof Sundqvist, “An Arena for Higher Powers,” 192.

¹¹⁷ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, 45.

retainers, who ‘[form] the cornerstone of the state and the basis of all political power in the early Middle Ages’.¹¹⁸ It is furthermore, and with relation to points raised earlier in this chapter, due to this power-through-dependency dynamic in Viking Age political structures that real doubt may be cast on the idea that overt skaldic criticism constitutes libel, since the very nature of their dependence on royal patronage will likely have been enough to prevent skalds from jeopardising their position within the *hirð*. As long as a ruler conforms to the expectations of normative validity – usually based on the ruler’s ability to fulfil their reciprocal role in society – their authority will be perceived as being more legitimate and will therefore contribute to the loyalty and obedience of their dependents. Skaldic criticism is, in fact, a mechanism through which a ruler can be made aware of how his actions impact his legitimacy through the failure of ‘due performance’ in the socio-political arena.

Legality and normative validity alone are not, however, sufficient for the legitimisation of power. A third and final component is necessary – that is,

[appropriate] *actions* on the part of the relevant groups which [...] serve to enhance the legitimacy of power holders through the public recognition or acknowledgement of their position. By the same token, the withdrawal of recognition or acknowledgement through public acts of opposition or disobedience can lead to the delegitimation of the power holder [...].¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, “Kings, Earls and Chieftains. Rulers in Norway, Orkney and Iceland C. 900-1300,” in *Ideology and Power in the Viking and Middle Ages: Scandinavia, Iceland, Ireland, Orkney, and the Faeroes*, ed. Gro Steinsland et al., Northern World ; v. 52 (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 75.

¹¹⁹ Beetham, *The Legitimation of Power*, xiv.

In a Viking Age context such acts of public recognition may take the form of, for example, a retainer accepting a gift from his lord, thereby entering into the reciprocal social contract considered above; the hosting of the ruler or his retinue during a (royal) visit, thus displaying the hospitality which enables one to demonstrate deference; and, perhaps most recognisably, the so-called public ‘taking’ of a king at inauguration ceremonies. Elisabeth Vestergaard, drawing on various historical sources including the Scandinavian laws and the *konungasögur*, notes that although a potential king

had to be a patrilineal member of the royal lineage whose divine origin marked him off from the rest of the population, [...] in order to be accepted as a candidate for the royal office [...] royal descent alone was not sufficient. It needed to be reinforced by the acclamation of free men [...]. In each Scandinavian kingdom the placing or seating of the candidate would [...] be followed by ‘the people’ expressing their approval through clashing arms or raising hands. In some instances the candidate might have been unacceptable. In such a case, he was probably removed from the stone as an act of rejection.¹²⁰

What is perhaps most striking about the ‘appropriate actions’ which legitimise (or delegitimise) a ruler’s authority and power in Viking Age society is the importance of the symbolic language of ritual and ceremony.

Banquets, gift-exchange procedures and inauguration ceremonies alike are procedural and programmatic in nature, communicating a political narrative which is particularly performative in the Austinian sense of the word. It is this performative nature of rituals involving rulers that leads Olof Sundqvist

¹²⁰ Elisabeth Vestergaard, “A Note on Viking Age Inaugurations,” in *Coronations: Medieval and Early Modern Monarchic Ritual*, ed. János M. Bak (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 120; See also, Thurston, *Landscapes of Power, Landscapes of Conflict*, 85.

to state that ‘types of rituals [such as drinking ceremonies] were not simply a public expression of power, they actually established it’.¹²¹ One may further quote Chris Wickham with regards to the role of ritual in the legitimisation of power, who states that ‘rulers everywhere needed to construct awe, and thus consent, [...] through different forms of ritual’, as well as Heinrich Härke who considers ritual to be a powerful means of ‘drawing [participants] into a ritual community, by *engendering action or acceptance* [my italics]’. Härke’s statement in particular strongly reaffirms Beetham’s theoretical framework outlined above.¹²²

2.2 The Role of Presence

How, then, does the notion of presence relate to the legitimisation of power? In the simplest and most self-evident sense the presence of a ruler is clearly necessary in order for legitimising actions to be performed: one cannot crown a king without the prospective king. This need for presence is also patently symbolised within legitimising rituals so that a Viking Age king must, for example, be led to and seated upon a stone (in Denmark and Sweden) or a high-seat on a constructed mound (in Norway) during his inauguration.¹²³ The procedural physical positioning of the king is representative of the presence that the ruler’s body occupies within the ritual space. The nature and details of this placement – its height relative to the other ritual participants or decorative features which set it apart from the ritual

¹²¹ Sundqvist, “An Arena for Higher Powers,” 198.

¹²² Chris Wickham, “Topographies of Power: Introduction,” in *Topographies of Power*, ed. De Jong, Theuws, and van Rhijn, 3; Heinrich Härke, “Cemeteries as Places of Power,” in *Topographies of Power*, ed. De Jong, Theuws, and van Rhijn, 24.

¹²³ Vestergaard, “A Note on Viking Age Inaugurations,” 120.

surroundings – may serve additional ideological ends with regards to defining the way in which a king’s presence should be understood. However, the very act of being present at rituals or ceremonies – in the case of both ruler and subject – may itself be considered an appropriate act of recognition and acknowledgement. The more modern argument regarding whether or not controversial politicians should, for example, be ‘given a platform’ at public debates or in the media is, in addition to the desire to limit undesirable political messages, linked to the notion that to allow a politician to be present (or to attend the event at which they are speaking) is to acknowledge their legitimacy. Presence is also significant in the context of religious legitimisation and it is an important feature of almost all religions that they find a means of representing their god(s) in a physical form within a sacred space. Sacred offerings as legitimising actions are made to ‘present’ gods and it is significant that one of the prevalent concerns of iconoclasts is the fear that the ‘real’ god may be mistaken for the idol of that god. This fear clearly reflects the legitimising power that the presence of the physical, tangible symbol holds. Both the archaeological and literary records reveal that Viking Age Scandinavians certainly had no aniconic compunctions and Adam of Bremen’s eleventh-century history, the *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, contains a particularly colourful reference to pagan ritual practices in the temple of Uppsala in which *statuas trium deorum veneratur populus, ita ut potentissimus eorum Thor in medio solium habeat triclinio; hinc et inde locum possident Wodan et Fricco* (the people worship the statues of three gods in such wise that the mightiest of them, Thor, occupies a throne

in the middle of the chamber; Wotan and Frikko have places on either side).¹²⁴

Yet, as might already have become clear, it is not only within the arena of ‘appropriate action’ that presence serves a legitimising function. Since all of Beetham’s components of legitimacy are interrelated, presence pervades other aspects of legitimacy also.¹²⁵ The normative expectation, for instance, that a ruler be a successful warrior in order to be valid is coupled to the expectation that the ruler will be present in battle, commanding those over whom he has authority; it is required that a ruler be present at those feasts and banquets where the expected resources of food, mead, and gifts will be redistributed. The presence of the ruler itself becomes a resource that can be shared and dispensed in an equally considered and calculated manner to gold or weaponry. The extraordinary value of a ruler’s presence in the legitimisation of their power can be seen, furthermore, in the patrilineal laws

¹²⁴ Adam von Bremen, *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, Monumenta Germaniae historica (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2010), bk. IV, ch. 31, p. 258, l. 1-3; Translation taken from Adam von Bremen, *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, trans. Francis Joseph Tschann, Records of Civilization ; No. 53 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 207. Adam notes too that libations, those sacrifices which simultaneously invoke the presence of the gods while legitimising their power to intervene in human affairs, are poured to the idols directly. This may, however, be due to the fact that Adam, as a Christian, views the false deities of the Swedes as being constituted by the idols themselves. It is clear from the quote above that for him, the pagans are worshipping *the statues*. Conversely, the practise of pouring libations to statues may have contributed to Adam’s view. See *GHEP*, bk. IV, ch. 27, p. 259, l. 5-6.

¹²⁵ Vestergaard touches on this issue when she states that “three main approaches can be distinguished in the study of Scandinavian kingship: some focus on war kingship (*Heerkönigtum*), others on folk kingship, yet others on sacred kingship”. These “three approaches” seem to me to reflect the three aspects of legitimisation outlined by Beetham: the war king is the king who is legitimised through normative validity; the folk king through appropriate actions; and the sacred king through rule conformity as well as normative validity. In this respect I would agree with Vestergaard that “in order to gain proper understanding of Scandinavian rulership, these three characteristics should not be regarded as different types of monarchy but rather as interdependent; together they constituted the institution of kingship”. See “A Note on Viking Age Inaugurations,” 119–20.

of succession that, through the acceptance of agnatic relations, essentially require rulers to embody the presence of those kin-based monarchs or chieftains that preceded them.¹²⁶ It is important to note however, that the patrilineal law of succession does not impede those acts of communal legitimisation so clearly entrenched in the processes of inauguration during the Viking Age because it does not, until the later adoption of Christianity, automatically signify primogeniture.¹²⁷ Rather, the law invests a potential legal legitimacy on *any* male member of the kin-group. In the words of the historian-philosopher Fritz Kern, ‘the whole dynasty, not merely the individual, was called to the throne’.¹²⁸ As late as 1074 this ideology informed the actions of the Zealand assembly in Denmark as is evident from the rejection of Sveinn Ástríðarson’s appointed heir, the future Knútr helgi (The Holy) Sveinsson, in favour of his elder living son, Haraldr hein (Whetstone) Sveinsson.¹²⁹ This detail is important, not only when we consider the practical implications of ‘folk’-based processes of

¹²⁶ For more information on patrilineal laws of inheritance and succession in Viking Age and medieval Scandinavia, see Elisabeth Vestergaard, “Kinship and Marriage: The Family, Its Relationships and Renewal,” in *Scandinavians from the Vendel Period to the Tenth Century: An Ethnographic Perspective*, ed. Judith Jesch, Studies in Historical Archaeoethnology (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2012), 60–63.

¹²⁷ This is not due to an inherent advancement of primogeniture in Christian doctrine itself, but rather, to the evolution of Germanic kin-rights into primogeniture in continental European contexts. Those continental kingships who subsequently (or concurrently) embrace Christianity happily adapt Theocratic doctrine to suit Germanic ideas of inheritance and succession so that, by the time this continental Christianity is advocated and adopted in Scandinavia, the notion of primogeniture is entrenched in the ideology of Christian kingship. See especially, Fritz Kern, *Kingship and Law in the Middle Ages: Studies*, trans. S.B. Chrimes, Studies in Medieval History (New Jersey: Lawbook Exchange, Limited, 2005), 12–26.

¹²⁸ Kern, *Kingship and Law*, 13; Even after primogeniture is accepted as the law of succession the early laws seem to allow for flexibility and diplomacy in the case of an inappropriate heir. A king may be taken “in accordance with the judgement” of appointed men (usually bishops) who decide whether he is fit or worthy (till fallenn): See the Gulapingslög in Rudolph Keyser et al., eds., *Norges gamle love indtil 1387*, vol. 1 (Christiania: Trykt hos CGröndahl, 1846), vol. 1, p.3.

¹²⁹ Thurston, *Landscapes of Power, Landscapes of Conflict*, 85.

legitimation, but particularly in light of Kern's legal analysis of Germanic kin-rights:

The origin of this mingling of hereditary right with elective right [...] seems to derive from old religious beliefs no less than from sound political insight. For a special virtue, a mysterious 'manna' was inherent in the lord of a primitive people, a magic which brought him close to God, as a priest, a hero, or even as a divine being. But the Germanic peoples normally attached this inviolable sanctity not to a single lord but to his whole kindred; it was an inheritable commodity. The kin might trace its genealogical tree back to the gods, or might be qualified only by the ancestral merit and divine grace to reign on a plane partly human and partly superhuman; but the special claim to lordship possessed by the noblest kin among the folk always rested upon some distinctive inner virtue – a virtue which could be seen in the beaming eye of a prince of royal blood. It was the virtues of their blood that lifted the sons of Woden, the Astings, the Amals, and so on, out of the ranks of the folk, though without bestowing upon any individual prince a right to the throne independent of popular will.¹³⁰

Kern's slightly romanticised articulation of the royal kin's 'special virtue' nevertheless illustrates the notion of a charisma or presence that is ostensibly inherent in the royal bloodline and which stems, I would argue, from the idea that the body of any dynastic member embodies, through the common blood of the kin, the presence of preceding rulers and even of the gods themselves. In the context of sociolinguistics this lineal significance is, in addition to the physical sign of the ruler's body which represents the body of the kin-group, also reflected in naming practices and this is something I shall explore in greater detail in my next chapter. The aforementioned Sveinn Ástríðarson again provides an appropriate example of the crucial role that kin rights play in the process of claiming succession. In this instance it is Sveinn's matronymic that serves to illustrate what vital importance the succession

¹³⁰ Kern, *Kingship and Law*, 13–14.

rights of kin-groups have in the legitimisation of rulership: it is very likely that, because Sveinn's mother Ástríðr Sveinsdóttir (powerful in her own right) is the close relation of two formidable Danish kings, her father, Sveinn tjúguskegg (Forkbeard) and later her brother, Knútr inn ríki (The Great) Sveinsson, her son chooses, against the more standard practice of claiming agnatic inheritance, to connect *her* name and hence, her bloodline, to his own through the adoption of a matronymic. By symbolically stressing that his body represents his mother's lineage and therefore expresses the royal presence of that lineage, Sveinn is able to lay claim to the Danish throne as a legitimate heir.

3. *Óðal*-Rights and Kingship

3.1 Belonging to the Land

Having now established that presence serves an important role in the exercising and legitimisation of power, it is the aim of the following section to examine one key concept in Viking Age Scandinavian societies which seems to encapsulate the cultural centrality that the power of presence occupies and, in particular, the crucial role that presence plays in the establishment and maintenance of rulership. The concept is that of *óðal* – a term which one encounters in, and may examine through, the eddic-type poem *Rígsþula* which deals, allegorically, with the formation of the royal court as a mythological germination of a specific social order. Though the dating of *Rígsþula* is highly disputed, I am inclined to agree with Frederic Amory, who provides a comprehensive overview of the literature on this

subject of *Rígsþula*'s dating, that 'the temporal indicators of archaeology, history, and literature lean preponderantly to the [later] Viking Age rather than the High Middle Ages'.¹³¹ The poem relates the journey of the god Heimdallr (or perhaps Óðinn) who, under the guise of Rígr, visits three generations of couples whom he, through a three-nightly cohabitation, leaves with child. In each instance the male child, when grown and united with a female counterpart of the same status, brings forth a lineage belonging to a particular social class. In this way the child given to Ái and Edda (Great-grandfather and Great-grandmother) is named Þræll (Thrall), the father of slaves; the child given to Afi and Amma (Grandfather and Grandmother) is named Karl (Common Man), the father of farmers and landowners; and the child given to Faðir and Móðir (Father and Mother) is named Jarl (Noble Man), the father of chieftains and kings. It is with Jarl that I shall be primarily concerned for the present moment:

<p>34. Kom þar ór runni Rígr gangandi, Rígr gangandi, rúnar kenndi; sitt gaf heiti, son kvezk eiga; þann bað hann eignask óðalvöllu, óðalvöllu, aldnar byggðir.</p>	<p>Thither, out of the grove, came Rígr walking, Rígr walking, taught runes; gave him [Jarl] a name, claimed him as son; then bade him obtain óðal-fields óðal-fields, settled of old.</p>
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¹³¹ Frederic Amory, "The Historical Worth of *Rígsþula*," *Alvíssmál* 10 (2001): 9. For more on the dating of and societal reflections in *Rígsþula*, see also Ursula Dronke, "Sem jarlar forðum: The Influence of *Rígsþula* on Two Saga-Episodes." In *Speculum Norroenum: Norse Studies in Memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre*, ed. Ursula Dronke et al., (Odense: Odense Univ. Press, 1981), 56–72, Thomas Hill, "Rígsþula: Some Medieval Christian Analogues." *Speculum* 61, no. 1 (1986): 79–89, and John Hines, "Myth and Reality: the Contribution of Archaeology," in *Old Norse myths, literature and society*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross, Viking collection ; v. 14 (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2003), 19–39.

<p>35. Reið hann meirr þaðan myrkvan við, hélug fjöll, unz at hǫllu kom; skapt nam at dýja, skelfði lind, hesti hleypði ok hjörvi brá; víg nam at vekja, völl nam at rjóða, val nam at fella, vá til landa.</p>	<p>After that he [Jarl] rode thence [towards] the dark forest, the frosty mountain, until he came to a hall; shook his spear, brandished his shield, made his horse rush forth, and drew his sword; wakened war, reddened field, felled the fallen, won land.¹³²</p>
<p>36. Réð hann einn at þat átján búum, auð nam skipta, öllum veita meiðmar ok mǫsma, mara svangrifja, hringum hreytti, hjó sundr baug.¹³³</p>	<p>So he alone ruled eighteen estates, began to share riches, gave all treasure upon treasure, bare-ribbed steeds, scattered rings, broke armlets asunder.</p>

These three strophes from *Rígsþula* clearly demonstrate those aspects of the legitimisation of power outlined and discussed above in the context of Viking Age ideologies of rulership. Although Jarl is ostensibly born into his position as chieftain and named appropriately, *Rígsþula* illustrates that birth alone is not enough to sustain a position of power. In addition to taking up hereditary, predestined duties pertaining to governance, Jarl must establish his legitimacy and secure loyalty by performing his role as ruler, both through the demonstration of his capabilities as warrior and through publically visible displays of generosity. What is significant about the text, for the purposes of this chapter, is its insistence on the central importance of land-possession in

¹³² On the translation of *vega land* (to gain land through fighting) as ‘to win land’, see discussions on *vega* in Chapter Two, p. 137 and 152-4 respectively.

¹³³ *Edda* I, 455.

the performance of rulership, and in particular, its focus on the obtainment of *óðal* property.

The value of presence in the establishment of power is clearly discernible in the concept of *óðal* that patrilineal laws of succession (discussed in the previous section) are consistent with and likely based on. In a strictly legal sense *óðal* is ‘land vested in families which [cannot] be divided or sold to outsiders without the consent of the whole male kin-group’.¹³⁴ Some scholars have, however, argued convincingly that *óðal* signifies far more than inherited familial property and that the concept should, additionally, be viewed as a mentality encompassing the idea of ‘belonging to a family, of legitimacy and maintenance, of guarding and caring for one’s ancestors and of the mutual connection with one’s landed property’.¹³⁵ What is particularly significant about *óðal* is the attainment of certain rights that accompany a combined familial presence on the particular land in question (varying between three and five generations in the Norwegian laws), not only by those who come to own the land, but by those members of the kin-group who have any agnatic claims to the land as well.¹³⁶ The sustained inhabitancy of land by one particular family bestows upon them the right to claim the estate’s

¹³⁴ Eric Christiansen, *The Norsemen in the Viking Age*, Peoples of Europe (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 48.

¹³⁵ Torun Zachrisson, “The Odal and Its Manifestation in the Landscape,” *Current Swedish Archaeology* 2 (1994): 235; See also, Aron Īakovlevich Gurevich, *Categories of Medieval Culture* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), especially 45-48.

¹³⁶ Vestergaard, “Kinship and Marriage: The Family, Its Relationships and Renewal,” 62–63; Like those rules of succession outlined in Kern’s legal review above, “the significance of family ownership lay in the fact that the title to land was conceived as remaining not wholly with the individual owner, but with the kindred to which the owner belonged”: Laurence Marcellus Larson, *The Earliest Norwegian Laws: Being the Gulathing Law and the Frostathing Law*, Records of Civilization, Sources and Studies ; No. 20 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935), 424.

high-seat – a symbolic as much as a physical position – from which the power of familial governing may be yielded. The continued presence of the family therefore legitimises the use of power by one who represents the closest and most fitting continuation of the kin-group and bestows an inherent right to claim, or make appeals to, that power upon the kin-group as a whole. In this respect, Jarl’s position within the temporal dimensions of *Rígsþula* is an important element in his perceived ‘inborn’ right to claim and rule *óðal* land. Although the poem seems to portray the god Rígr’s journey through a spatial landscape in which the respective homes of Ái and Edda, Afi and Amma, as well as Faðir and Móðir are situated, the names of these characters suggest, instead, a journey undertaken through time. Table 1.1 represents one possible interpretation of the relations between the various strata of characters in *Rígsþula*.

The stratified arrangement of peoples in *Rígsþula* has most often been understood – and not erroneously so – as reflecting a conceptualisation of the divisions between races or social classes. An argument could be made, however, that these societal divisions are also representative of consecutive generations spanning, specifically, from those who work the land, to those who possess the land and, finally, to those who rule over the land.¹³⁷ If we tentatively accept the model proposed in the table above, in which *the same*

¹³⁷ Both Fritzner and Zoëga note that *ætt*, the term used to signify “race” or “family” in various translations of *Rísþula*, can also mean “generation”: Johan Fritzner, *Ordbog over Det Gamle Norske Sprog* (Feilberg & Landmark, 1867), 797; Geir Tómasson Zoëga, “A Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic,” *A Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic*, 1910, 525, <http://norse.ulver.com/dct/zoega/>, accessed 3 April 2017. See also *DONP* which translates *ætt* as ‘*slægt*’ which can also mean both family and generation: accessed 17 September 2017.

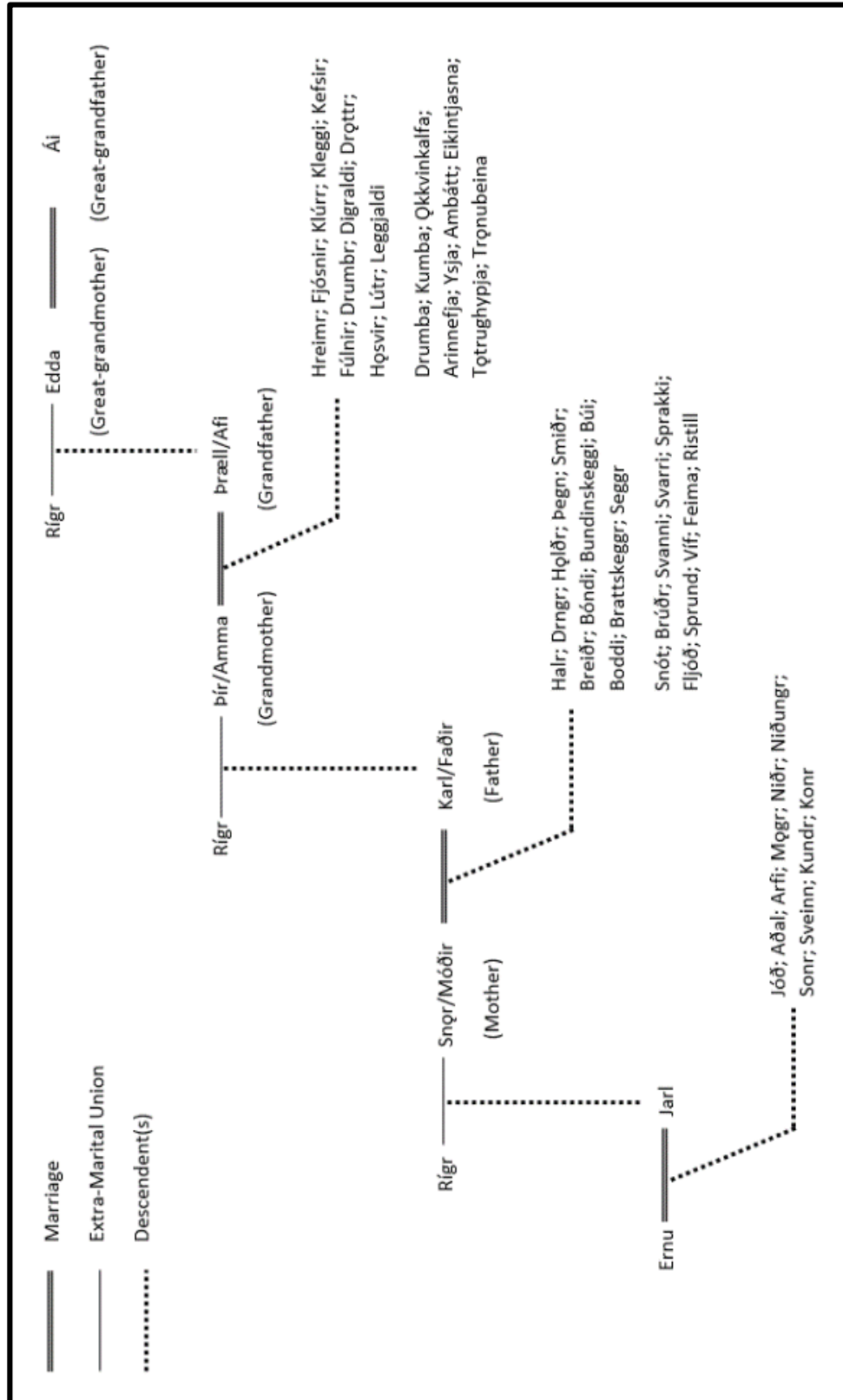


Table 1.1

settlement is visited by the god Rígr over the course of three generations, then Jarl's claim to power through the obtainment of *óðal* properties is also consistent with the claiming of *óðal* rights over certain properties due to a sustained familial presence in the landscape.¹³⁸ It is worth noting that, in the model above, Jarl is of the same generation as Faðir and Móðir's other descendants, some of whom are not only landowners, such as Bóndi (farmer) and Þegn (thane), but may also be *óðalmenn* (*óðal*-men) such as Hǫlðr ('the owner of allodial land').¹³⁹ The difference in class or state between Hǫlðr and Jarl is not related to their ability to claim *óðal*-rights, but rather, to the type and extent of properties over which such rights may be claimed and exercised. As the offspring of the god Rígr, Jarl is bestowed with an inborn charisma which allows him, as warrior and generous lord, to lay a far larger claim over multiple estates. It is striking that the 'beaming eye' which Kern refers to in his consideration of what 'lift[s] the sons of Woden, the Astings, the Amals, and so on, out of the ranks of the folk' is reflected so clearly in *Rígsþula* which describes an infant Jarl as having *ǫtul [...] augu sem yrmlingi* (piercing eyes like a little serpent).¹⁴⁰

An understanding of Jarl's position in society as an outcome of generational ascent does not necessarily imply that *Rígsþula* promotes positive ideas about social mobility – indeed societal progress in the poem seems to require the

¹³⁸ The Frostathing Law notably required the enumeration of only three generations in order for *óðal*-rights to be claimed: Larson, *The Earliest Norwegian Laws*.

¹³⁹ Cleasby and Vigfússon stress that the term *bóndi*, "always involved the sense of ownership, and included all owners of land": *CV*, 74, 309, 732; the *DONP* defines *bóndi* as a 'farmer, a man of fixed abode' though it also notes that this may include tenant-farmers, accessed 16 September 2017. See also "THEGN" in, K. Holman, *Historical Dictionary of the Vikings*, Historical Dictionaries of Ancient Civilizations and Historical Eras (Scarecrow Press, 2003), 265.

¹⁴⁰ Kern, *Kingship and Law*, 13–14; *Edda* I, 455.

direct supernatural involvement by a god in the procreation of a new social class – but the poem does reflect an idea that the persistence of familial presence over time directly contributes to, or affects, the relative power and influence that one has within given societal power structures. Familial presence which ideologically connects an individual to the societal network of a chiefdom, kingdom or (later) state, may even be seen as legitimising not only the enactment of a man’s power over his estate, but also the enactment of personal power as a free man.¹⁴¹ This notion is borne out by the association between the possession of *óðal* and the possession of personal rights and freedoms in texts such as *Heimskringla*. The equation of *óðal* with freedom (as an expression of personal power) is evident at least as early as the thirteenth century in the context of *Heimskringla*, and its view may not be too far removed from that of the tenth-century history it relates in the saga of King Hákon inn góði (The Good) Haraldsson. According to *Heimskringla*, King Hákon gains the favour of the people of Þrándheimr by promising to grant all *búendr* (husbandmen) their *óðal* rights. News quickly spreads that Hákon has been taken as king and that he seems in every way to be like Haraldr hárfagri (Fair-Hair) Hálfðanarson,

nema þat skilði, at Haraldr hafði allan lýð í landi þrælkat ok áþját, en þessi Hákon vildi hverjum manni gott ok bauð aptr at gefa bóndum óðql sín, þau er Haraldr konungr hafði af þeim tekit.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Although I do not believe the idea to be quite as absurd as in the opinion of Thomas Hill who states that “[t]he notion of social progress, of ascent from one class to another, was alien (and indeed probably repugnant) to the poet”. See Hill, “*Rígsþula*,” 80. Indeed, if one accepts that some version of the poem might have existed in the Viking Age, as Amory does, then one must also acknowledge that “the ties between freemen of different stations in life were tighter”. See, Amory, “Historical Worth,” 6.

¹⁴² *Hkr* I, 151. See also, *Ólafs saga helga* in which King Óláfr chastises Erlingr Skjálǫgsson with regard to his treatment of those under his dominion: “Svá er mér sagt frá ríki þínu, Erlingr, at engi sé sá maðr norðan frá Sognsæ til Líðandisness, er frelsi sínu haldi fyrir þér. Eru þar margir þeir menn, er óðalbornir þættisk til vera at hafa réttendi af jafnbörnum

save for the difference that Haraldr had all the people in the land enslaved or oppressed, but this Hákon wished every man well and offered, moreover, to give the husbandmen their *óðul* which King Haraldr had taken from them.

To be a *bóndi* is to possess the land on which one farms; to be an *óðal-bóndi* or an *óðalmaðr*, in the words of Aron Gurevich, is not only to possess, but to be *possessed by* the farmstead.¹⁴³ Instead of ‘possess’ it may be more accurate still to say as Torun Zacchrisson does, that the *óðalmaðr* ‘belongs’ to the land.¹⁴⁴ This sense of belonging is clear in the concept of *óðal*, particularly in terms of a person being ‘connected with in various relations; [...] to be a member of a family, society, or nation, to be an adherent or dependent of, to be a native or inhabitant of a place’ and to ‘be properly or appropriately placed, situated’.¹⁴⁵

The concept of belonging to a country through sustained personal or familial presence is still relevant today and one may claim citizenship in a state from which one’s parents or grandparents originate without having lived there oneself. On the other hand, in order to gain citizenship or residency as a foreigner – to gain those personal freedoms and rights pertaining to movement, voting, work and settlement – one must usually reside in one’s country of immigration for an extended period of time if no familial relations

mǫnnum sér.” (So it is told to me about your dominion, Erlingr, that no man north of Sognsær to Líðandisnes can keep his freedom in your presence. There are many of these men who consider themselves as *óðal*-born to have the [same] rights as men born equal to themselves.). See *Hkr* II, 192-93.

¹⁴³ Gurevich, *Categories of Medieval Culture*, 48.

¹⁴⁴ Zachrisson, “The Odal and Its Manifestation,” 222.

¹⁴⁵ Oxford English Dictionary, “Belong, v.,” *OED Online*, accessed 22 August 2016, [http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/17506?isAdvanced=false&result=2&rskey=SWU8sC&](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/17506?isAdvanced=false&result=2&rskey=SWU8sC&Dictionary.com); Dictionary.com, “Belong,” *Dictionary.com Unabridged* (Random House, Inc), accessed 22 August 2015, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/belong>.

exist. In a more sinister application of the óðal concept it is also significant that fascist nationalist groups such as the Nazi Volksdeutsche and the Afrikaner Boeremag appropriate the óðal rune as an emblem of ethnicity during World War II and Apartheid respectively.

3.2 Land Ownership and Personal Rights

As can be seen in the excerpt from *Heimskringla* the granting of óðal-rights – that is, to be counted amongst those who ‘belong’ – is a granting of freedom in so far as the repealing of óðal-rights is equated with enslavement (*þrælkan*). In Sigvatr Þórðarson’s *Bersöglisvísur* a ruler’s violation of óðal-rights through the appropriation of óðal patrimony is similarly viewed, if not as a form of enslavement, then at least as a form of royal plunder (*rán*) and is clearly connected, also, to what landowners believe to be a repealing of their legal rights: *[h]afa kveðask lög, nema ljúgi landherr, búendr verri* (husbandmen say they have, unless landmen lie, worse laws); these men also say that King Magnús *leggr sína eign á óðol þegna* (appropriates his thanes’ óðal properties).¹⁴⁶

Snorri Sturluson’s definition of *hǫldar* (which seems essentially to be a synonym for *óðalmenn*) as *búendr þeir er gildir eru at ættum ok réttum fullum* (husbandmen who have full status as regards their lineage and their full rights) supports the idea that *óðal* as familial presence in the landscape entails a legitimisation of the enactment of personal will and power.¹⁴⁷ The

¹⁴⁶ *SkP* II, v. 9, p. 20; v. 14, p. 25.

¹⁴⁷ *Skm*, 80.

Anglo-Saxon rune-poem likewise associates the semantically equivalent rune of *æ* or *ēþel* (that is, home, homeland, land of one's birth, hereditary land, ancestral domain) with both a sense of fortune and of justice while conveying the profound cultural value that the concept conveys:¹⁴⁸

(ēþel) byþ oferlēof æghwylcum men,
 gif he mōt ðær rihtes and gerysena on
 brūcan on bolde blēadum ofast.¹⁴⁹

Ancestral property is beyond dear to every man,
 if he can enjoy what is right and fitting
 in his home in continued abundance.

The word employed for ‘abundance’ or ‘prosperity’ (*blæd*), is particularly interesting since it can also refer to ‘breath’, ‘life’ or ‘spirit’ and is therefore associated not only with wealth but with being itself.¹⁵⁰ Belonging to the estate equates perpetual and existential presence, marked most noticeably through the recognition in the law of an *óðalmaðr*’s right to property, but more significantly, to place. The Old Norse term for the *óðalmaðr*’s high-seat (*qndvegi*) demonstrates a very similar conceptualisation to that of the Anglo-Saxon rune-poem – if only coincidentally. The *qnd*-element is derived from the prefix *and-*, meaning ‘opposite’ or ‘against’.¹⁵¹ The spatial quality

¹⁴⁸ Definition from *DOE*, accessed 23 September 2017. See also Joseph Bosworth, “ÉÐEL,” ed. Thomas Northcote Toller Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online* (Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague, December 15, 2013), <http://www.bosworthtoller.com/009765>. For more on the significance of *ēþel*, see Nicholas Howe, “Looking for Home in Anglo-Saxon England,” in *Home and Homelessness in the Medieval and Renaissance World*, ed. Nicholas Howe (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 143–63.

¹⁴⁹ Maureen Halsall, *The Old English Rune Poem: A Critical Edition*, *McMaster Old English Studies and Texts*; 2 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), 71.

¹⁵⁰ Joseph Bosworth, “Blæd,” ed. Thomas Northcote Toller Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online* (Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague, December 15, 2013), <http://www.bosworthtoller.com/004583>. See also *DONP*, accessed 23 September 2017.

¹⁵¹ *CV*, 19.

of this prefix corroborates William Short's statement that the high-seat is 'not a chair or throne, as much as it [is] a place'.¹⁵² It is the central position against which all other visitors to the hall orientate themselves. As the place which is associated with *óðal*-rights it is, moreover, also a seat of *ǫnd* in the sense, like *blæd*, of *ǫnd* as 'breath', 'life' or 'the soul' – albeit through word-play and not through etymological development.¹⁵³

Given the importance of *óðal* as an ideological concept concerning the legitimisation of claiming and exercising personal power, it is not surprising that it should be imported into the arena of ruler-politics. The right to property and place expressed above takes on symbolic dimensions in the ruler's occupation of a position of governance. It is no accident that modern Germanic words referring to the nobility (*ädel* or *adel*) are related to ON *óðal* or to its cognates in other Old Germanic languages. (One may note that in *Rígsþula*, one of Jarl's own sons who, one may assume, has a right to claim his father's chieftaincy, is named Aðal, which in compound nouns means 'chief' or 'head'.) The term *eðli* which is derived from *óðal* can refer specifically to a person's 'origin', 'descent' or 'extraction', frequently co-occurring with notions of kindred (in the formulation: *átt ok...eðli*) and someone who is *eðliborinn* (*eðli*-born) is, notably, 'born with full hereditary rights, legitimate'.¹⁵⁴ I have elsewhere in thesis translated *eðli* as 'óðal-origins' to reflect these connections between lineage and *óðal*-derived

¹⁵² William R Short, *Icelanders in the Viking Age: The People of the Sagas* (McFarland, Incorporated, Publishers, 2010), 92.

¹⁵³ *CV*, 764.

¹⁵⁴ *DONP*, "eðli" and "eðli-borinn", accessed 20 September 2017. See also *CV*, 115 and 762.

legitimacy. It is striking too, that the taking of a high-seat at royal inauguration ceremonies (mentioned earlier) is so clearly based upon the ritual taking of the high-seat upon the inheritance of *óðal* lands described in the oldest law-codes.¹⁵⁵ In *Heimskringla* kings are, furthermore, often said to be *óðalborinn* (*óðal*-born) into their kingdom with the concept of *óðal* clearly being employed as a means of legitimising a ruler's claim to the throne.¹⁵⁶ The term is often employed, for example, in *Óláfs saga helga* from *Heimskringla* (hereafter *ÓHHkr*). It is what spurs Óláfr Haraldsson to return to Norway:

‘far apr til **óðala** þinna, því at þú munt vera konungr yfir Nóregi at eilífu.’ Hann [Óláfr] skilði þann draum til þess, at hann myndi konungr vera yfir landi ok hans ættmenn langa ævi [my emphasis].¹⁵⁷

‘Go back to your **óðul** (plural of *óðal*) for you will be king over Norway for eternity.’ He (Óláfr) understood that dream to mean that he and his descendants would be king over the country for a long time.

According to Snorri, the term frames Óláfr's own conceptualisation of his definitive right to rule Norway:

En yfir þeim eignum sitja útlendir menn, er átti minn faðir ok hans faðir ok hvern eptir annan várara frænda, ok em ek **óðalborinn** til [my emphasis].¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ See Ch. 115 of the Gulapingslög in Keyser et al., *Norges gamle love indtil 1387*, 1846, vol. 1, vol. 1 p. 51: “Nu er maðr dauðr, arve scal i [o]ndvege setiazt” (When a man is dead, his heir shall place himself in the highseat).

¹⁵⁶ In an Anglo-Saxon context too, the phrase “rihtes and gerisena” (or variants thereof) can be found in several Old English texts in which rulership and legitimacy are treated. In the ninth century Old English translation of Felix of Crowland's eighth century *Vita sancti Guthlaci*, for example, the author's address to King Ælfwald as *Orientalium Anglorum rite regimina regenti* ([he] who rules East Anglia by right) is rendered as follows: *Alfwold Eāst-Engla kyning, mid rihte and mid gerisenum rice healdend* [my emphasis] (Ælfwald king of the East-Angles, who rules the kingdom **rightly and fittingly**). See Felix of Crowland, *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*, ed. Bertram Colgrave, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 60, as well as *The Anglo-Saxon Version of the Life of St. Guthlac, Hermit of Crowland*, ed. Charles Wycliffe Goodwin, *Vita Felicis*, (London: J.R. Smith, 1848), 2.

¹⁵⁷ *Hkr* II, 25.

¹⁵⁸ *Hkr* II, 43; See also King Edward's missive in reply to Magnus inn góði's claim to the English throne, in which Edward states his *óðal*-rights over the kingdom. *Hkr* III, 66-67.

And foreigners (lit. outlanders) sit over those properties owned by my father and his father and one after another of our kinsmen and to which I am *óðal-born*.

The people of Þrændalög, moreover, tellingly raise Óláfr to power (*hófu þá til ríkis*), not only because he seems to be a fitting candidate, but also because he *óðalborinn var til konungdóms* (was *óðal-born* to the kingdom).¹⁵⁹

3.3 Mitigating Absence

These uses of *óðal* occur in a later medieval text from the early thirteenth century however and, as such, perhaps demonstrate more accurately later medieval concerns regarding the legitimacy of Óláfr's rule. In fact, the ancestral lineage generally attributed to Óláfr and which supposedly traces back to Haraldr hárfagri is possibly a later medieval invention intended, retrospectively, to strengthen Óláfr's claim to the throne.¹⁶⁰ It is, nevertheless, telling that the term (or terms similar to that of *óðal*) occur in contemporary skaldic compositions about Óláfr, as well as Óláfr's half-brother, Haraldr harðráði (Hard-Ruler) Sigurðarson. The reference to *óðal* lands and rights that we find in the skaldic record may also begin to illuminate one of the principal functions of skaldic encomia as an instrument of legitimisation:

From Óttarr svarti's (The Black's) *Höfuðlausn*:

16. [...]

Ungr sóttir þú, Þróttar

þings mágreinnir, hingat,

(máttit jarl) þaus óttuð,

áttlond (fyr því standa).¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ *Hkr* II, 47.

¹⁶⁰ See Claus Krag, "Myten Om Hårfargreættens Odel: Et Svar Til Knut Dørum," *Historisk Tidsskrift (Norway)* 81 (2002), 381–94.

¹⁶¹ *SkP* I, 761.

16. [...]

Young sought you [Óláfr], Þróttr's
assembly's gull-feeder, hither,
(the jarl [Hákon Eiríksson] could not) which you owned,
ancestral lands (stand in the way of that).

Lausavísa by Sigvatr Þórðarson:

22. [...]

Mínumk ek, hvar manna
minn dróttinn lék sinna
opt á óðalstoptum
orðsæll ok vér forðum.¹⁶²

22. [...]

I remember, where
my fame-fortunate lord [Óláfr] played
— often at his people's *óðal* homesteads —
and we [I], formerly.

From *A Poem about Haraldr harðráði* by Valgarðr á Velli:

6. Eik slong und þér, yngvi
ógnblíðr, í haf síðan
— rétt vas yðr of ætlat
óðal — frá Svíþjóðu.
[...]¹⁶³

6. The oak [ship] slung beneath you [Haraldr] then,
terror-friendly prince, into the sea
— rightly intended for you was
óðal — away from Sweden.
[...]

Below, I shall consider how these skaldic examples employ *óðal* as a legitimising concept – a use which substantiates the idea that skaldic poetry serves a legitimising political function. However, in order to understand why skaldic strophes function as vehicles for legitimising verbal actions, it is not enough to note that skalds use a language of legitimisation (in this case the

¹⁶² *SkP* I, 727.

¹⁶³ *SkP* II, 305–6.

language of *óðal*) – one must also investigate the circumstances under which skaldic legitimisation becomes necessary. As such the three *helmingar* quoted above are of especial interest. Once one has established what gives rise to poetry as a legitimising agent, one can further investigate what aspects and attributes of skaldic poetry render it suitable for serving legitimising ends.

The first skaldic example above is taken from Óttarr svarti's *Höfuðlausn* (Head-ransom) in praise of Óláfr Haraldsson, likely composed in the early 1020s following the death of Óttarr svarti's preceding patron, the Swedish King Óláfr skötkonungr (Tributary King) Eiríksson. The carefully constructed *helmingr* follows a depiction of Óláfr's victory at sea over Hákon Eiríksson, one of the powerful Jarls of Hlaðir who had, until Óláfr's arrival in Norway in 1015, ruled over the country alongside his uncle, Einarr þambarskelfir (Paunch-Shaker) Eindriðason. The referencing of the *óðal*-related term of *ættlond* (ancestral lands) in this context is of great significance, given that the strophe concerns Óláfr's supplanting of a ruler who, arguably, had as much, if not more, *óðal*-right to govern Norway – particularly if Claus Krag's theory that Óláfr's genealogical descent from Haraldr hárfagri is fictive, holds true. And although Óláfr's father, Haraldr inn grenski Guðrøðarson, did indeed have some claim to the Vestfold region over which his father, Guðrøðr Björnsson, had ruled prior to his assassination, and had been a powerful ruler in the south-east of the country himself as a petty king of Vingulmörk, Vestfold and Agðir (due to his assistance of the Danish King Haraldr blátönn [Blue-Tooth] Gormsson

against his father's assassin, the Norwegian King Haraldr gráfeldr [Grey-Cloak] Eiríksson), Hákon could boast a lineage springing from the powerful dynastic seat of Þrændalög and Hálogaland. These ancestors had, moreover, not only gained power (primarily in the person of Haraldr harðráði) over vast regions in the country at the behest of that same King Haraldr blátönn following the successful campaign against Haraldr gráfeldr, but had, within living memory, ruled autonomously over the entire country before the arrival of Óláfr Tryggvason. In addition to the above there might, at the time, and even after his accession, have been some concerns about establishing Óláfr's legitimacy as ruler in Norway following his significant absence from the country on numerous Viking expeditions and military campaigns between 1007 and 1015.

If, according to Snorri's historical account at least, Óláfr's accession to the throne was framed by a language of *óðal* as a means of legitimising the young ruler's claim, then it would seem as though this language persisted as a means through which the king's legitimacy could be re-established and emphasised during the course of his reign. In Óttarr's strophe quoted above it is certainly clear that the poet attempts not only to reinforce the idea of the king's *óðal* rights through the stress he lays on Óláfr's ownership of ancestral property – he specifically 'places' Óláfr in his *óðal* through his use of the deictic *hingar* (hither) in *Ungr sóttir þú, / [...] hingar, / [...] þaus óttuð, / áttlönd* (Young you sought, [...] **hither**, [...] the ancestral lands which you owned) – but he also, importantly, disenfranchises Hákon whose lack of access to the realm is punctuated in *máttit jarl fyr því standa, þaus óttuð, áttlönd* (the jarl could

not stand in the way of that, the ancestral lands which you owned) by the internal rhymes present in *máttit* ([he] could not), *óttuð* (owned) and *áttlond* (ancestral lands). Hákon's absence from the realm strips him of his *óðal* rights: he no longer has a foothold. The structure of the final two lines of the *helmingr* confirms this sentiment since the jarl's inability to stand as obstacle between Óláfr and the kingdom (*máttit jarl [...] / fyr því standa*), is broken into segments by the obstacle that Óláfr poses, instead, to the jarl: that is, Óláfr's possession of ancestral lands (*þaus óttuð, / áttlond*). On a structural level then, Óláfr's *óðal* interrupts Hákon's ability to act.

Absence is also very much at the forefront of Sigvatr Þórðarson's mind in the *helmingr* quoted above. Grieving the death of his friend and king, Óláfr Haraldsson, Sigvatr poignantly recalls happier times spent at Óláfr's *óðal* homesteads: *Minumk ek, hvar forðum minn dróttinn ok vér lék, opt á sinna manna óðalstoptum* (I remember, where formerly my lord and I played, often at his people's *óðal*-homesteads). And yet the mention of *óðal* cannot but arouse those ideas surrounding rights and power that the concept usually brings to mind. As such a political note seeps into an otherwise nostalgic reminiscence. One's reading of the verse as a politically relevant text also depends on whether one places Sigvatr's composition before or after Magnús Ólafsson's accession to the throne. I am inclined, like Erin Goeres, to view Sigvatr's *lausavísa* as part of a political narrative in line with the historical context of *Heimskringla* which frames Sigvatr's mournful responses to the death of Óláfr as 'a bridge between the death of King Óláfr and the coronation

of his son Magnús five years later'.¹⁶⁴ If composed during the harsh reign of the Danish King Sveinn Álfífuson (the son of Knútr inn ríki), Sigvatr's reference to former joy in *óðal* homesteads, contrasted with his perception of a landscape now enjoyed by those who have no legal right to it, will likely have resonated with those doubting or opposing the legitimacy of Sveinn's and Ælfgifu's rule in Norway.

There is, however, yet another absence with which Sigvatr's strophe might be concerning itself. This is the absence not of Óláfr as deceased ruler, but of his son and heir, Magnús who, having fled into exile with Óláfr after his father's expulsion from the throne, was fostered by Grand Prince Jaroslavů Volodimirovičů Mōdryi (Yaroslav the Wise) and his Swedish wife, Ingigerōr Óláfsdóttir, in Hólmgarōr (Novgorod). If Sigvatr's motive for composition is at all related to an anticipated return of Magnús to Norway, then his reference to *óðal* lands could serve to strengthen the young ruler's claim to power. That Sigvatr has Magnús's claim to *óðal* rights in mind is possibly indicated by his use of the term *topt* for 'homestead' in *sinna manna óðalstoptum* (your people's *óðal*-homesteads) which can also refer to 'a place marked out for a house [...]'.¹⁶⁵ Special emphasis may, indeed, be placed on the sense of 'a place marked out', with compounds such as *augna-tópt* (eye-socket) seeming to indicate that *topt* could refer to a type of foundation which is meant to be filled or occupied by the substance for which it is intended. This, too, is closer to the sense of *topt* as it is sometimes used in *Heimskringla* (*hann gaf*

¹⁶⁴ Goeres, *The Poetics of Commemoration*, 135.

¹⁶⁵ CV, 636.

mönnum toptir til at göra sér þar hús, that is, ‘he [King Ólafr Tryggvason] gave people ground to build their houses upon’) as well as the *Frostathing Law* (*ef eigi er máli tekinn. þá hafi fært timbr á tupt til [...] húsa*), that is, ‘if he has taken no lease, then he shall bring timber to the site for a house’).¹⁶⁶ Óláfr’s *óðal* lands form just such a foundation – poignantly empty without those who are meant to inhabit them, but marked out, too, for future use. In Magnús’s absence from the realm, Sigvatr prepares for his return: verbally marking out a legitimate space for the young king to occupy. This sense of *óðal* as awaiting, or as being intended for, a ruler is evident in the *helmingr* from Valgarðr á Velli’s *Poem about Haraldr hárfagri* also: *rétt vas yðr of ætlat óðal* (rightly intended for you was *óðal*).¹⁶⁷ Not insignificant is the fact that the mention of *óðal* in this particular *helmingr* complements a description in Valgarðr’s poem of Haraldr harðráði’s return to Norway after a considerable absence from the realm in excess of fifteen years (Haraldr having also gone into exile following the Battle of Stiklestad, spending time in Garðaríki and Constantinople as captain in the army of Grand Prince Jaroslavü Mødryi and as commander of the Byzantine Varangian Guard respectively). Again, the ancestral presence inherent in the concept of *óðal* becomes the means through which a ruler’s prior absence from the realm is mitigated and his legitimacy secured.

At this point I must pause to consider some difficulties or problems in the arguments presented above. In the first place it is worth mentioning, in

¹⁶⁶ *Hkr* I, 274; Rudolph Keyser et al., eds., *Norges gamle love indtil 1387*, vol. 3 (Christiania: Trykt hos C. Grøndahl, 1846), 241.

¹⁶⁷ The sense of *rétt* (rightly) in Valgarðr’s *helmingr* corresponds to that of *riht* (right) in the Anglo-Saxon rune-poem as quoted earlier.

relation to my discussion of Sigvatr's *lausavísa*, that it is hardly novel to express the notion that an *erfidrápa* (commemorative poem) or similar composition might serve as a means of legitimising presently ruling kings or jarls. Erin Goeres for example, whose work I cite throughout my thesis, has thoroughly addressed this aspect of skaldic verse, paying particular attention to the importance of genealogy.¹⁶⁸ What my argument above is attempting to add to Goeres's shrewd observations regarding the legitimising function of *erfidrápur*, however, is the suggestion that these compositions may serve as much as a response to a *current* ruler's absence (past, present and anticipated), as to the absence of the deceased ruler whom the skald is eulogising. In this way I hope to connect the legitimising function of *erfidrápur* with the legitimising function of skaldic encomia in general. One may point out, however, that the examples I've employed above address ruler-absences retrospectively; that both Óttarr svarti's and Valgarðr á Velli's poems in praise of Óláfr Haraldsson and Haraldr harðráði respectively are composed *after* these monarchs already successfully occupy the throne. Indeed, in his introduction to Óttarr's *Hofuðlausn* in *SkP I*, Matthew Townend comments that '[w]hat Óttarr's [*Hofuðlausn*] offers us, then, is a lengthy praise-poem in honour of Óláfr from the time of his most secure rule in Norway', that is, 'the early 1020s'.¹⁶⁹

There are two things to note in response this statement. The first is that, although Óttarr's poem most certainly has '[much to] tell us about Óláfr's

¹⁶⁸ Goeres, *The Poetics of Commemoration*.

¹⁶⁹ *SkP I*, 740.

position, reputation, and self-perception' at the time of its composition, it has also been acknowledged that the poem draws heavily on a similar composition by Óláfr's other court-skald, Sigvatr Þórðarson, which was likely composed at an earlier point in Óláfr's reign and which focusses extensively on Óláfr's expeditions away from home during his youth.¹⁷⁰ This poem, known today as Sigvatr's *Víkingarvísur* (Strophes about Viking Voyages – also composed in praise of Óláfr), is an important poem to which I shall return at a later point. For the present moment, however, it is relevant only to mention that, in the seventh verse from the *Víkingarvísur* dealing specifically with Óláfr's presence in *Úlfkels land* (Úlfkell's land, that is, England), the population of which is referred to as *Ellu kind* (the offspring of Ælla), Sigvatr is careful to define Óláfr himself as *arfvarðr Haralds* (the guardian of the inheritance of Haraldr).¹⁷¹ If this Haraldr refers to Haraldr hárfagri (as opposed to Óláfr's father, Haraldr inn grenski), then this inheritance can, of course, be seen as Norway itself – furnishing a fitting parallel to England as the inheritance of Ælla with Úlfkell snillingr (The Wise) serving as *its* guardian. It could be argued that this language of inheritance and lineage in Sigvatr's encomium, which is associated with the concept of *óðal* as it has been explicated thus far, comes into use within the narrative of Óláfr's early travels at a point in time far closer to that of the king's actual Viking adventures than the composition of Óttarr's *Höfuðlausn*, in which these tropes are subsequently incorporated.

¹⁷⁰ *SkP* I, 740.

¹⁷¹ *SkP* I, v. 7, p. 545.

There is, however, a second and more pertinent point to note in response to Townend's statement above which asserts that Óttarr's *Hofuðlausn* is composed during the 'most secure' point in time of Óláfr's reign in Norway. Retrospectively, this claim is perfectly true with historical accounts corroborating that Óláfr's reign continues until 1028, at least 6 years after the likely date of composition of Óttarr's *drápa*. Yet, there may not have existed such certainty regarding the length of reign and life belonging to any given ruler during the Viking Age itself and it is unlikely, I think, that skaldic encomia were primarily composed and performed in order to reflect the circumstances of court and king as they existed in a stable political vacuum, as opposed to serving a more politicised function within the flux and flow of royal governance. The fluidity of ruler presence is of especial interest in this respect, since it is clear from multiple early medieval accounts pertaining to kings and other powerful figures such as jarls and bishops, that even during those periods when rulers successfully reign or govern over their territories, they are seldom statically situated in a single location. A ruler may rule and live, and yet not be able to sustain a legitimising presence in every crucial domain in which they exercise their power. It is with this aspect of Viking Age rulership that I will next be concerned. In the following section I shall consider certain methods – such as itinerancy and the construction of a publically visual memoryscape – which Viking Age rulers employ to manage absences, thereby retaining and effectively exercising power throughout their territories.

4. Itinerant Rulers and the Landscaping of Presence

4.1 The Ambulating King

In previous sections of this chapter I have taken some time to explore the importance of presence in the legitimisation of power in Viking Age society. I have paid particular attention to the concept of *óðal* and the role that familial presence over time plays in ruler-politics. What I have established, thus far, is that rulers employ the concept of *óðal* in order to legitimise their reign and that their absence from the realm can compromise this legitimacy. Absences therefore often give rise to power vacuums in certain locations within a ruler's domain and present opportunities for annexation by rival chieftains who *are* present and able to perform those duties expected of rulers by their subjects. According to Snorri's account of the life of King Haraldr hárfagri in *Heimskringla*, this is precisely the situation that arises out of Haraldr's extended absence from Vík:

Haraldr konungr kom liði sínu austr í Vík ok lagði inn til Túnsbergs. Þar var þá kaupstaðr. Haraldr konungr **hafði þá verit í Þrándheimi fjóra vetr ok komit ekki á þeiri stundu í Víkina**. Hann spurði þau tíðendi, at Eiríkr Svíakonungr Eymundarson hafði lagt undir sik Vermaland [...], þat kallaði Svíakonungr allt sitt ríki ok tók skatta af. Hann hafði þar sett jarl, er kallaðr var Hrani inn gauzki. [...] Hann var ríkr jarl. [...] Hafði þá um ǫll þessi fylki snúizk til hlyðni við Svíakonung margir hǫfðingjar ok mikit fólk annat. Þetta líkaði stórilla Haraldi konungi, ok stefndi hann þing við bæendr þar á Foldinni. Bar hann þá sakar á hendr þeim bóndum, er hann kenndi landráð við sik. Bæendr kómu þar sumir syn [sic] fyrir sik, sumir guldu fé, sumir sættu refsingum. **Fór hann svá um sumarit of þat fylki** [my emphasis].¹⁷²

King Haraldr brought his army east to Vík and started in to Túnsberg. There was at that time a market town there. King Haraldr **had then been four winters in Þrándheimr and not come in all that time within the Vík**. He heard the news that the king of the Svíar, Eiríkr

¹⁷² *Hkr* I, 108-9.

Eymundarson, had subjugated Vermaland [...]; the Svíar-king claimed it was all his realm and took taxes from it. He had set up a jarl there who was called Hrani the Gautish [...] He was a powerful jarl. Throughout these districts many chieftains and a great many other people had then turned themselves in obedience to the king of the Svíar. This greatly displeased King Haraldr and he summoned an assembly with the landowners there in the Fold. He then brought charges against the farmers to whom he inputed treason. Some farmers denied the charges, some paid fines, some suffered punishments. **Thus he journeyed throughout that district during the summer.**

Although there is, of course, no way in which to confirm the authenticity of Snorri's account of these events in Vík, one must acknowledge that his description of King Eiríkr's subjugation of the region is consistent with the notion that power is legitimised by presence and compromised by absence – an idea which seems at least to find expression in poetic texts from the Viking Age. In order to resume his position of power in the Vík area, Haraldr must spend the remainder of the summer travelling throughout the district, making his presence felt at *þings* as well as banquets.

The importance of travel and movement throughout the realms of both early and late medieval rulers as a means of fostering support and advancing political relationships cannot be underestimated. Travel is, in fact, a crucial element in the promotion and maintenance of power even today, with monarchs attending important ceremonial events and charity functions; religious leaders making appearances at peace talks and global summits; and presidential candidates spending months on campaign trails. The places that rulers visit and the manner in which they do so reveal many facets of their power base and leadership aims, and do so because it is through such travels that power is enacted and legitimised. The legitimisation of power through

itinerancy is of particular importance in the Middle Ages during which, as John Bernhardt states in his seminal study on royal itinerant practices in early medieval Germany:

Whoever exercised any kind of dominion – kings, dukes and counts; popes, bishops and abbots – all found themselves constantly under way to carry out the manifold functions of their office. [...] In such societies, kings or chiefs moved constantly throughout their territories *making their presence felt* and reinforcing the personal bonds of their rulership. They gathered their people around them, took part in solemnities, conferred gifts and honours, pronounced justice, fought enemies and rivals and ensured general security. In this way, the king-in-motion identified, even embodied – the society's centre of power [my italics].¹⁷³

Matthew Innes, also exploring topographical politics in early medieval Germany, perhaps expresses the essence of this itinerant 'centre of power' best in his statement that 'the centre was a locus, not a location, a kind of forcefield bending and warping physical space, as kings wove a giant web around their kingdoms'.¹⁷⁴ This locus is, significantly, a forcefield woven through presence, and it is presence that forms such a crucial element of the power enacted by itinerant kings. Rulers in early medieval Scandinavia, of which the political landscape is certainly not identical to that of the southern Carolingian or Ottonian states examined by Innes and Bernhardt respectively, nonetheless display a similar preoccupation with presence and hence, with movement.

¹⁷³ John William Bernhardt, *Itinerant Kingship and Royal Monasteries in Early Medieval Germany, C. 936-1075* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 45, 46; See also, Matthew Innes, "People, Places and Power in Carolingian Society," in *Topographies of Power*, ed. De Jong, Theuws, and van Rhijn, 428–29, who states that "an itinerant lifestyle was necessary to hold on to scattered estates and to guard diverse interests, whilst visits to court, to kin, to patrons and to favoured monasteries ensured that contacts with backers and brokers were continued."

¹⁷⁴ Mayke de Jong and Frans Theuws, "Topographies of Power: Some conclusions," in *Topographies of Power*, ed. De Jong, Theuws, and van Rhijn, 537.

The *konungasögur* are rich literary sources which depict the itinerancies of Norse (and especially Norwegian) rulers in detail. One might, however, argue that these sagas, composed centuries after the events they recount, possibly record anachronistic ideas about the behaviour of rulers based on the notions of kingship and politics held by their later medieval authors.¹⁷⁵ Other sources evidencing the constant movement of Norse rulers are therefore important corroborators: runestones and skaldic poetry describing military campaigns and travels, as well as, for example, the prevalence of royal ship or human-horse burials illustrating the symbolic importance of transport and journeying, are significant in this respect. Claims regarding the seasonal nature of ruler itinerancy by scholars such as Gro Steinsland and Matthew Innes are, furthermore, corroborated by archaeological finds and other early medieval written records. Innes's statement that '[m]ovement over space had an important temporal element too, determined by, and in turn defining, the political calendar, which was itself shaped by the [...] the seasons' is echoed by Steinsland who discusses the '[development of] a pattern of ritual drinking-banquets' and practices of 'war and plundering [that] were also seasonal activities, mainly limited to the summer months'.¹⁷⁶ The practice of 'overwintering' mentioned with regards to the invading Danes in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is significant in this respect since the archaeological evidence for overwintering sites in places such as Repton in Derbyshire and, especially, Torksey in Lincolnshire confirm the seasonal nature of political

¹⁷⁵ For more on this see Shami Ghosh, *Kings' Sagas and Norwegian History*, 91–96.

¹⁷⁶ Innes, "People, Places and Power in Carolingian Society," 424; Steinsland, "Introduction," 7.

activity during the Viking Age.¹⁷⁷ So too does the archaeological evidence for ruler-participation in seasonal festivities and so-called *blót* sacrifices such as those described by Snorri in *Hákonar saga góða*.¹⁷⁸ Olof Sundqvist speculates that ‘in the pre-Christian period Germanic kings and magnates often seem to have had a specific relation to cult and cultic sites’:¹⁷⁹

The locations of the cultic images found in the late Iron Age halls of the Mälars region suggest that the rulers wanted to remind the cult community in a concrete way that they had a specific relation to Freyr or another god. Several of the gold foil figures of Helgö, for instance, which perhaps represented Freyr and his mythic consort, were related to the assumed high seat in the hall. This seat was intended for the ruler; most likely he was supposed to sit there while offering ceremonial toasts to the gods. At this liminal place he was thus surrounded by divine symbols which provided him with the necessary legitimacy for his pre-eminent role in society.¹⁸⁰

Such cultic practices, occurring throughout the Scandinavian world, will have had particular seasonal associations and will have required kings, jarls and other chieftains to travel to these primary cultic sites in order to perform sacrificial rites if they were not permanently situated near a cultic location (as may have been the case for chieftains of smaller territories).

Snorri’s account of Hákon Aðalsteinsföstri’s expected, and later enforced, participation in cultic rites *til árs ok friðar* (that is, the performance of sacred rituals with the intent of ensuring fertile, productive seasons as well as peace)

¹⁷⁷ See years 873 and 874 in, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition 3; MS A*, edited by Janet M. Bately. vol. 3 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1983), 49, for the Chronicle’s description of overwintering in Torksey and Repton respectively; Samantha Stein, “Understanding Torksey, Lincolnshire: A Geoaerchaeological and Landscape Approach To A Viking Overwintering Camp” (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Sheffield, 2014), provides an in-depth archaeological description of the overwintering site at Torksey.

¹⁷⁸ See especially, *Hkr I*, 171-72.

¹⁷⁹ Sundqvist, “An Arena for Higher Powers,” 181.

¹⁸⁰ Sundqvist, “An Arena for Higher Powers,” 194.

in the Þrándheimr region is, moreover, important for grasping the significance of ruler itinerancy in a landscape defined by *óðal* rights and responsibilities. To claim *óðal* rights over a territory is to accept a sacred relationship with the land – a relationship which Steinsland, like Sundqvist, links to early pagan worship of Freyr in Nordic agricultural societies (later replaced by the worship of Oðinn in a Norwegian context) and which she believes expresses itself in the *hieros gamos* origin myths of Viking Age ruling families.¹⁸¹ Just as the bright-eyed Jarl and his antecedents from *Rígsþula* stem from a figurative union between a temporally itinerant Rígr (whose very presence heralds fertility) and the homestead which he enters, each jarl or king who traces their lineage back to such a union must themselves embrace their ancestral role. It is the will of the people, after all, that King Hákon Haraldsson *blóti til árs þeim ok friðar, svá sem faðir hans gerði* [my emphasis] (should sacrifice for a good year and for peace **as his father had done**).¹⁸² According to Einarr skálaglamm's *Vellekla*, these are crucial actions to undertake for the god-descended ruler if his territories are to endure:

15. Ok herþarfir hverfa
 (Hlakkar móts) til blóta
 (rauðbríkar fremsk rækir
 ríkr) ásmegir (slíku).
 Nú grær jörð sem áðan;
 aptr geirbrúar hapta
 auðýrir lætr óru
 óhryggva vé byggva.

15. And, host-necessary, the sons of the gods
 turn towards the sacrifices (the mighty
 guardian of the red plank of Hlökk's meeting

¹⁸¹ Steinsland, "Origin Myths and Rulership," 34, 57–59.

¹⁸² *Hkr* I, 170.

gains distinction from this).
 Now flourishes the earth as before;
 again the wealth-diminisher
 allows the servants of the spear-bridge
 to inhabit, without grief, the sanctuaries of the gods.

16. Nú liggr allt und jarli
 (ímunborðs) fyr norðan
 (veðrgæðis stendr víða)
 Vík (Hólkunar ríki).

16. Now lies under the jarl
 everything north of the Vík
 (the realm of Hákon, battle-plank's
 storm-increaser, endures far and wide).

17. Engi varð á jorðu
 ættum góðr nema Fróði
 gæti-Njorðr, sás gerði,
 geirbríkar, frið slíkan.¹⁸³

17. No well-descended
 Njorðr of the guarding of the spear-plank,
 save Fróði, lived on earth
 who made such peace.

Hákon jarl Sigurðarson, referred to as a descendant of the gods and, metaphorically, to one of the gods themselves (that is, Njorðr) maintains *friðr* (peace) and 'flourishing' seasons (*nú grær jorð*) through his participation in sacrificial rites.

The persistence of Hákon's realm, due to the fulfilment of his ancestral obligations, is described, moreover, in terms that echo a strophe from Eyvindr skáldaspillir's *Háleygjatal* (Enumeration of the Háleygir) which emphasises the jarl's almost marital union with his ancestral lands:

¹⁸³ *SkP* I, 303–5.

12. Þeims allt austr
 til Egða býs
 brúðr valtyís
 und bægi liggr.¹⁸⁴

12. Under whose arm lies
 the bride of the slaughter-Týr
 all the way east
 to the Egðir's dwelling-place.

This *brúðr valtyís* (bride of slaughter-Týr, that is, Óðinn) is Jǫrð (land or earth) who lies conquered beneath the jarl. The itinerant participation of rulers in rituals, assemblies and warfare establishes a presence that stretches across their domains, legitimising the exercising of their power as descendants of the gods and who live in union with their *óðal* lands. It is the union between that primary supernatural antecedent, Freyr (represented by the boar whose earth-plowing tusks symbolise both strength and fertility), and his consort, Gerðr (land which is ‘fenced in’ – that is, the inhabitable and farmed estate).¹⁸⁵ And this sacred union becomes absolute, of course, upon the burial of the ruler in his allodial land – strengthening the bond between family and *óðal* through a permanent presence in the landscape, visualised and accentuated by surviving descendants who erect memorial monuments.

4.2 Constructing Presence

4.2.1 Memoryscapes

The means through which a ruler's permanent absence is negotiated provides insight into the methods that kings and jarls employ to generate or prolong

¹⁸⁴ *SkP* I, 211–12.

¹⁸⁵ An interesting parallel to the Freyr-Gerðr union exists in Hinduism: the third avatar of the god Vishnu is Varaha who appears in the form of a wild boar. Varaha rescues the earth, appearing as the earth-goddess Bhumidevi, who subsequently becomes his consort.

their ‘presence’ in locations that they are unable to occupy physically, or unable to occupy continuously. Although itinerancy is a valuable mechanism for maintaining a more-or-less constant ‘passage of presence’ throughout a large realm consisting of multiple estates, the royal progress has its limitations. One of these limitations is the fact that each renewed ambulation leaves a rekindled absence in its wake and, in the eventuality that complications such as war, civil unrest and (with somewhat more finality) death arise, the regular pattern that is the hallmark of a successful itinerancy may well be disrupted, prolonging absence in politically fragile domains. A successful ruler and their lineage will, therefore, also seek to construct stationary symbols of power and presence throughout their territories, both as a means of deterring external antagonists and of securing internal loyalties. These stationary symbols compose a ‘mental topography’ through which a ruler’s presence is engendered in the mind of those who encounter and ‘read’ the landscape.¹⁸⁶ The mental topography becomes a site, in fact, for what one may think of as a temporal, as opposed to a spatial, itinerancy.

One of the most recognisable of these symbols for any Viking Age ruler must be that of the hall within which power is so frequently enacted. The hall serves as both ‘geographical and ideological centre of leadership’, one which can be destroyed as a means of ‘suppressing and ruining’ an opponent.¹⁸⁷ The repercussions of such destruction is, however, related to more than the simple removal of a powerful centre in which legitimising rituals can be performed: on a more symbolic level, the destruction of a ruler’s hall equates to an

¹⁸⁶ Härke, “Cemeteries as Places of Power,” 18.

¹⁸⁷ Hedeager, “Asgard Reconstructed? Gudme - a ‘Central Place’ in the North,” 479.

erasure of the totality of their legitimising presence from the landscape. That halls can possess such ‘presence’ seems to be implied by the archaeological evidence which attests large, imposing structures that impress with towering displays of wealth and dominance. According to Olof Sundqvist, who explores the value and significance of Viking Age halls from the Mälars region in Sweden, such halls constitute a ‘display of sovereignty [...] reinforced by their magnificent size and architecture. [...] these buildings were important symbols of power for the elite’:¹⁸⁸

Most of [the halls] were erected at central places in connection with lines of communications, especially waterways. The halls were built on artificially made terraces or in topographic positions expressing loftiness. The hall buildings were thus elevated in the landscape and visible from the public roads.¹⁸⁹

In a southern, Danish context, no structures are more indicative of such ‘sovereign displays’ than the enormous ringforts carbon-dated to the Viking Age and likely constructed under the reign of Haraldr blátǫnn. Even the remnants of Trølleborg in Sjælland remain an impressive sight today and the recently discovered fortress of Borgring in Køge, revealed to have been ‘built right next to the open sea’, must have been constructed, according to archaeologist Nanna Holm, ‘for no other reason than to give the fortress an impressive location. The structure was meant to signal power’.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁸ Sundqvist, “An Arena for Higher Powers,” 192.

¹⁸⁹ Sundqvist, “An Arena for Higher Powers,” 187.

¹⁹⁰ Anja Kjærgaard, “Has One of Harald Bluetooth’s Fortresses Come to Light?,” *Institut for Kultur Og Samfund, Aarhus Universitet*, November 17, 2014, <http://cas.au.dk/en/currently/news/singlenews/artikel/has-one-of-harald-bluetooths-fortresses-come-to-light/>.

When itinerant kings and jarls seasonally depart from central locations in their realm, illustrious structures such as the majestic feast halls in the Mälär region remain in situ as lasting symbols of ruler-presence. This semiotics of presence operates through the strong association between the edifice and the ruler, who not only commissions the hall's construction, but also imbues the location with power through the seasonal performance of rituals and other legitimising actions.¹⁹¹ Through personal and cultural memory, each site brings its respective ruler to mind, just as the legendary Heorot – which *hlīfade hēah ond hornġēap* (towered high and wide-gabled) in a fictional landscape – would likely have brought King Hroðgar to mind for early medieval societies familiar with the tale (or similar accounts) of Hroðgar's hall in *Beowulf*.¹⁹² The fictional representation of the association between hall and ruler in the Old English epic can be said to reflect, moreover, some semblance of a historical experience of pre-Viking Age halls in the landscape or, as Mark Nuttall has proposed in relation to socially 'bounded localities' which people 'imbue with time', the 'memoryscape'.¹⁹³ According to Nuttall, the memoryscape is 'constructed with people's mental images of the environment, with particular emphasis on places as remembered places'.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ Charles Sanders Peirce's concept of Semiosis (correct spelling) as the "action of signs" which encapsulates a "pragmatic notion of meaning" is preferable to Saussure's concept of Semiotics which Peirce views as the "formal science of signs" since it more closely resembles a Bakhtinian conception of literary and linguistic interpretation. Corresponding to Bakhtin's theory of the "chronotope", Semiosis is a "time-bound, context-dependent (situated), interpreter-dependent (dialogic), materially extended (embodied) dynamic process" João Queiroz and Floyd Merrell, "Semiosis and Pragmatism: Toward a Dynamic Concept of Meaning," *Sign Systems Studies* 34, no. 1 (2006): 37, 60.

¹⁹² *Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, ed. R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles, 4. ed. (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2008), ll. 81-2, p. 6.

¹⁹³ Mark Nuttall, *Arctic Homeland: Kinship, Community, and Development in Northwest Greenland* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 39; Paula Pryce, "Keeping the Lakes' Way": Reburial and the Re-Creation of a Moral World Among an Invisible People (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 91.

¹⁹⁴ Nuttall, *Arctic Homeland*, 39. See also Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux de mémoire*, ed. Maurice Agulhon et. al., Bibliothèque illustrée des histoires (Paris: Gallimard, 1984).

If one adjusts this definition to suit our current context of ruler-presence in a localised memoryscape, then one might say that a memoryscape is a mental topography with particular emphasis on certain places, such as halls and fortresses, not only as remembered places, but also as remembered *rulers*. That the Viking Age hall or house might signify a ruler's presence can be gleaned from certain skaldic examples as well. In his *Bersöglisvísur*, Sigvatr Þórðarson warns King Magnús Ólafsson that, unless the king welcomes him appropriately, his loyalty might be at stake:

17. Sighvats *es hugr* hizig
 Hǫrðaknúts í garði,
 mildr nema mjök vel skaldi
 Magnús konungr fagni.¹⁹⁵

17. Sigvatr's mind will be there
 in Hǫrðaknútr's dwelling,
 unless King Magnús, mild,
 welcomes the skald very well.

The dwelling or hall of Hǫrðaknútr, King of England and regent of Denmark, is a metonymous signifier of Hǫrðaknútr himself. For one's mind to be 'in Hǫrðaknútr's dwelling' is for one to be in the presence (and in Sigvatr's case, the service) of Hǫrðaknútr. This very presence is, through Sigvatr's employment of Hǫrðaknútr's name in the strophe, brought into the minds of all those who listen to Sigvatr's recitation and who must, through the necessary process of semiotic signification, momentarily dwell in either an imagined or a remembered mental (re)construction of the Danish regent's

¹⁹⁵ *SkP* II, 29.

hall. This is a crucial aspect of skaldic poetry to which I shall return in the next chapter.

Hroðgar's commissioning of Heorot in *Beowulf* is, moreover, demonstrative of the ideological connection between a ruler's hall and the presence of that ruler himself, in that it attributes the king's desire for the construction of the mead-hall to a desire for fame. Hroðgar's command that a hall be built which *yldo bearn æfre gefrūnon* (the sons of man should ever hear of), reflects the theme of being 'most eager for praise' (*lofgeornost*) that runs throughout the epic and concerns an early-medieval preoccupation with fame.¹⁹⁶ That the desire for personal fame (through praise) may be linked to the extolling of a hall in a Viking Age context is supported by poems such as Úlfr Uggason's *Húsdrápa*, an ekphrastic encomium of Óláfr pái (Peacock) Høskuldsson's hall in Hjarðarholt, Iceland towards the end of the tenth century. Sigvatr Þórðarson's *Austrfararvísur* (Verses on a Journey to the East) also provides an example in which the eulogising of a ruler's hall (in this instance the hall of King Óláfr Haraldsson of Norway) is encompassed within, and is meant to contribute to, the praise of the king himself:

16. Búa hilmis sal hjölmum
 hirðmenn, þeirs svan grenna
 (hér sék) bens, ok brynjum
 (beggja kost á veggjum).
 Því á ungr konungr engi
 — ygglaust es þat — dyggra
 húsbúnaði at hrósa;
 holl es dýr með öllu.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ Klaeber's *Beowulf*, l. 70, p. 5; l. 3182, p. 109.

¹⁹⁷ *SkP* I, 605–6.

16. Retainers, who feed the swan
of the wound, adorn the prince's hall
(here I see) with helmets and mailcoats,
(the good quality of both on the walls)
Because no king as young
— doubtless is that — has worthier
house-hangings to praise;
the hall is valuable in its entirety.

The stanza from *Austrfararvísur* clearly draws on the same ekphrastic tradition within which *Húsdrápa* is composed and the skald seems to describe the hall decorations surrounding him in the present. Also evident is the fact that it is *through* the praising of the hall and its hangings that the king and his *hirðmenn* (retinue) are eulogised: the symbolic connection between hall and ruler-presence in the memoryscape is imported into the skaldic corpus as a means of aiding the stylistic indirectness or circumlocution which so often (through the use of kennings) defines the character of skaldic praise.

4.2.2 Fame and Temporal Itinerancy

The preoccupation with fame – and in particular, with that aspect of fame which emphasises the importance of being remembered – as a means of temporally extending one's presence is an essential factor in the 'landscaping' of ruler legitimacy. David Giles, in considering the 'symbolic immortality' associated with fame, notes that 'there is a long literary tradition of presenting fame as immortality', quoting Virgil, Horace and Petrarch among others.¹⁹⁸ Old Norse, indeed, has its own examples demonstrating this

¹⁹⁸ David Giles, *Illusions of Immortality: A Psychology of Fame and Celebrity* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), 49–50.

connection, one of which is a strophe from the eddic poem, *Hávamál*

(Sayings of the High One):

76. Deyr fé
deyja frændr,
deyr sjálfr it sama;
en orðstírr
deyr aldregi,
hveim er sér góðan getr.¹⁹⁹

76. Cattle die
kinsmen die,
the self must die as well;
but word-renown
never dies,
for the one who is able to get it.

The association between fame and immortality (that is, a sustained presence through time) is related, in Giles's estimation, to 'the reproduction of the self' which the technologies of fame, such as photos and video recordings, facilitate.²⁰⁰ In the case of the medieval landscape such 'self-reproduction' occurs through memory or imagination (related activities which I will explore more in subsequent chapters) which recall or construct, upon the instigation of a 'sign' in the landscape, an image of the ruler in the mind of the observer. These mental images create, I would suggest, a similar effect to the so-called 'photo-effect' discussed by John Ellis in *Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television, Video* (1982). Drawing on the theoretical work of Roland Barthes in particular, Ellis considers the effect of the 'cinematic illusion' on the spectator:

¹⁹⁹ *Edda* I, 337.

²⁰⁰ Giles, *Illusions of Immortality*, 50.

The cinema image is marked by a particular half-magic feat in that it makes present something that is absent. The moment shown on the screen is passed and gone when it is called back into being as illusion. [...] The cinema makes present the absent [...] Cinema is present absence: it says 'This is was.'²⁰¹

Ellis's 'half-magic' echoes the 'magical value' which Walter Benjamin ascribes to early photography: 'the spectator feels an irresistible compulsion to look for the tiny spark of chance, of the here and now, with which reality has, as it were, seared the character in the picture'.²⁰² That this 'spark of chance' of the 'here and now' found in photography reflects exactly that presence and presentness that arises from the spectator's engagement with the mental image is apparent in the tellingly similar feelings of poignant nostalgia or the 'photographic catastrophe' that Barthes articulates in his *Camera Lucida* (1980) and which results from what Tim Dant and Graeme Gilloch have aptly called the 'temporal vertigo' of engaging with the subject 'that-has-been' in full knowledge of the subject's mortality:²⁰³ 'the past is brought forcefully into conjunction with the present so that hindsight can interplay with prophecy; we know the future of the past'.²⁰⁴

Given that certain deliberately constructed geographical features such as halls and fortresses are able, in this way, to imprint a persisting presence of a ruler onto the memoryscape, it is no wonder that the erection of memorial

²⁰¹ John Ellis, *Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television, Video* (London; Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), 58.

²⁰² Walter Benjamin, "A Short History of Photography," *Screen* 13, no. 1 (March 20, 1972): 7.

²⁰³ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (London: Vintage, 1993), 96; Tim Dant and Graeme Gilloch, "Pictures of the Past: Benjamin and Barthes on Photography and History," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 5, no. 1 (February 1, 2002): 20.

²⁰⁴ Dant and Gilloch, "Pictures of the Past," 17–18.

structures and monuments such as burial mounds and runestones plays such a central role in socio-cultural acts of commemoration during the Viking Age. Faced with the permanent absence of death, communities seek the kind of immortality offered by memorial monuments that serve as ‘mnemonic repositories’ and that therefore continuously re-activate ruler-presence.²⁰⁵ The perceived presence or after-life that such monuments represent finds mythological expression in tales about supernatural figures such as mound-dwellers and ghosts – approximating those specimens caught in the auratic ‘web of space and time’ which Benjamin postulates in his assessment of early photographic subjects whose past presence seeps into the *present*.²⁰⁶ These deliberate manifestations of presence in the landscape are, first and foremost, indicative of existential motivations both on the part of those who wish to continue their existence after death, as well as those who wish to sustain the existence of close friends or relatives in processes of mourning. But commemorative monuments may also, as a result of their presence-value, be read politically. In this regard the concept of *óðal* is once again important.

4.2.3 Memoryscapes and *Óðal*-rights

According to Heinrich Härke:

At the societal level, monuments and gravestones provide an ‘ancestral presence’ and an expression of origins, lineages and biographies. They are genealogy in 3-D; a display of descent and family links which is crucial for legitimation.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ Bonnie Effros, “Monuments and Memory: Repossessing Ancient Remains in Early Medieval Gaul,” in *Topographies of Power*, ed. De Jong, Theuws, and van Rhijn, 101.

²⁰⁶ Benjamin, “A Short History of Photography,” 20; See, for example, Helgi’s postmortal occupation of his burial mound in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II: Edda II*, 280.

²⁰⁷ Härke, “Cemeteries as Places of Power,” 12; Härke’s view is echoed by Bonnie Effros who posits that ‘in the case of cemeteries, the presence of ancient monuments may have helped contemporary inhabitants defend claims to the land by means of reference to real or

The view of an overt genealogy in the memoryscape which *re*-presents one's lineage and hence legitimises one's power ties strongly into the connection between burial mounds and *óðal*-rights that Torun Zachrisson points out in his study on 'Odal and its Manifestation in the Landscape' (1994).²⁰⁸ It is striking, for example, that a fourteenth-century amendment to the Norwegian law on *óðal*-inheritance requires a person laying claim to an *óðal* estate to recount a *langfæðga tall, till haughs of till heiðni* [my emphasis] (list of agnate-forefathers, **to the mound** back to heathendom), implying an enumeration of ancestors back to a time of original settlement.²⁰⁹ Similar theories have been posited regarding the raising of runestones by Birgit Sawyer and Stefan Brink who focus, in particular, on the enumeration of five generations of ancestors on various Viking Age runestones – the same number of generations required, according to the *Gulaping Law*, for a man to lay claim to *óðal* property.²¹⁰ The link between the ruler-presence that commemorative monuments are able to embody and the concept of *óðal* is significant, furthermore, when we consider that such structures convey a very real political authority to the memorial site which is often appropriated to serve as a site for the public performance of power at, for example, *þings* and coronations.

fictive ancestors from the region: Effros, "Monuments and Memory: Repossessing Ancient Remains in Early Medieval Gaul," 100.

²⁰⁸ Zachrisson, "The Odal and Its Manifestation."

²⁰⁹ Rudolph Keyser et al., eds., *Norges gamle love indtil 1387*, vol. 3 (Christiania: Tryk hos C. Gröndahl, 1846), 121.

²¹⁰ Birgit Sawyer, *The Viking-Age Rune-Stones: Custom and Commemoration in Early Medieval Scandinavia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Stefan Brink, "Law and Legal Customs in Viking Age Scandinavia," in *The Scandinavians from the Vendel Period to the Tenth Century: An Ethnographic Perspective*, ed. Judith Jesch (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2002), 103–5.

Just as the *óðalmaðr* ascends the high-seat in the hall, so the *óðal*-born king ascends (in a Norwegian context at least) the ancestral mound in order to legitimise his rule and, inversely, relinquishes his rule by breaking his bond with the mound itself in descent. This turning away from ancestral rights and powers through the purposeful descent of a mound is described, for example, in *Ágrip* as well as *Haralds saga hárfagra* from *Heimskringla*, both of which are connected (perhaps through folkloric traditions) to the region of Naumudalr. In *Haralds saga* King Hrollaugr of Naumudalr avoids a confrontation with King Haraldr hárfagri by throwing himself from his high-seat atop the new mound constructed by himself and his brother, Herlaugr (who had, by this point, ensured the familial legitimacy of the mound by enclosing himself within it), and rolling down onto the bench reserved for jarls, thereby rejecting his claim to kingship and embracing a position as jarl under the rule of Haraldr.²¹¹ *Ágrip*, on the other hand, recounts an almost allegorical rendering of the motif in which the narrator attempts to elaborate on the reasons for Jarl Hákon Hákonarson's *lack* of legitimacy as ruler of Norway:

En Hákon jarl réð eigi fyrir því einn fyr Nóregi, at hann ætti eptir þá at taka, er næst hofðu áðr fyrir hönnum konungar verit, nema fyrir styrks sakar ok meginns, ok at hann var vitr maðr, þó at hann snøri viti sínu til ills [...] En hann átti þó ætterni til konungs þess at telja langfeðgum, er Hersir hét. Hann var konungr í Naumudali; hét kona hans Vigða, er enn heitir áin eptir Vigða í Naumudali. En Hersir missti hennar ok vildi týna sér eptir hana, ef dæmi fyndis<k> til, at þat hefði nekkverr konungr fyrri gørt. En dæmi fundusk til, at jarl hefði þat gørt, en eigi, at konungr hefði þat gørt. Ok hann fór þá á haug nekkvern ok veltisk fyrir ofan ok kvaðsk þá hafa velzk ór konungs nafni ok hengði sik síðan í jarls nafni, ok vildi hans afspringr síðan ávallt eigi við konungs nafni taka.²¹²

²¹¹ *Hkr* I, 99-100.

²¹² *Ágr-Fsk*, 18.

But Jarl Hákon did not rule over Norway for the sole reason that he was next in line of descent from those who had, before him, been king, but because of strength and might, and because he was a wise man, though he turned his wisdom to evil [...] He could, however, trace his origins to a king, in the list of his agnate ancestors, who was called Hersir. He had been king in Naumudalr. His wife was called Vigða after whom the river Vigða is still named in Naumudalr. But Hersir suffered her loss and wished to kill himself after her, if a precedent could be found that any king had done this before. Instances were discovered of a jarl who had done that, but not a king. And he went then onto a certain mound and rolled from the top, and said he had rolled from the title of king, and then he hanged himself with the title of jarl, and ever since his offspring would not take the title of a king.

The names belonging to Jarl Hákon's ancestor and his wife are important as they indicate a subtler metanarrative that reinforces the connection between mounds and ruler legitimacy. According to Cleasby and Vigfusson's Icelandic-English Dictionary as well as M.J. Driscoll's edition of *Ágrip*, who draws on Johan Fritzner's late-nineteenth-century Old Norse dictionary and Sølvi Sogner's entry on 'Herse' in the *Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder* (1956), *hersir* 'was the traditional title of a Norwegian chieftain from the earliest times down to about the time of Haraldr hárfagri, when it came to represent a rank below *jarl* [...] and above *hǫlðr*'.²¹³ This is significant if one considers the possibility that the ancestral king Hersir of *Ágrip*, whose progeny he consigns to jarlship, might be at all related to the mythical father of Erna (also named Hersir) in *Rígsþula* who weds his daughter to Jarl and, in so doing, becomes ancestor to the race of the nobility (and, indeed, the race of jarls). In *Rígsþula* it may certainly be said that Hersir, as a land-holding chieftain with a hall, represents the median position

²¹³ M.J. Driscoll, ed., *Ágrip Af Nóregskonungasǫgum*, trans. M.J. Driscoll, 2nd ed., vol. 10, Viking Society for Northern Research Text Series (Viking Society for Northern Research, University College London, 2008), n. 47, p. 92; See also, CV, 259.

between a class of farmers or *óðalmenn* and the high nobility exemplified by his mythological son-in-law.

The fact that the title of *hersir* was heritable might well give credence to the possibility that ancestral mounds played an important role in emphasising and facilitating *hersir*-chieftaincy (although the narrator of *Ágrip* is careful to point out that the mound from which King Hersir descends is arbitrary – the mound is *nekkverr* (any) – perhaps in an attempt to undermine the legitimacy of even a hypothetical *óðal*-right in Jarl Hákon’s ancestry). The likely sacral role of the *hersar* as custodians of the *hof* (temple) in connection with the hereditary nature of the chieftaincy could, furthermore, shed light on the reason why King Hersir must break with the legitimising presence of the ancestral mound when he loses his wife, Vigða, whose name may derive from the past participle of *vígja* (to consecrate or ordain).²¹⁴ The mythical loss of that sacred ordination which legitimises leadership and which, for the *hersar*, may have competed with the increasingly dominant narrative of sacral, ordained kingship during the latter part of the first millennium, is mirrored by the forsaking of the legitimacy provided by a familial presence in the landscape which is represented by the *óðal*-mound.

4.2.4 Performing Presence in Runes and Verse

The direct ‘transferral’ of power from an ancestor to a descendant through the ‘presencing’ mechanism of the mound which is, for example, illustrated

²¹⁴ For more on the sacral role of the *hersar* and their continuation with the *goði* in Iceland, see Jenny Jochens, “Late and Peaceful: Iceland’s Conversion Through Arbitration in 1000,” *Speculum* 74, no. 3 (1999): 621–55.

as a literal transferral of ability in *Flateyjarbók's Þáttr Þorleifs Jarlaskálds* – a tale that recounts the transferral of skaldic capabilities from the eponymous Þorleifr to the shepherd Hallbjörn who wishes to compose praise poetry in honour of the deceased poet and spends his nights sleeping on Þorleifr's burial mound – is clearly interrelated with the politicised use of mounds as *þing*-sites.²¹⁵ The 'symbolic power of the dead', as Heinrich Härke puts it, 'can be used to enhance or undermine social power, the power of the living' and, in the case of both coronations and *þings*, burial mounds can be used 'systematically for the representation and negotiation of power' with the living 'extract[ing] via rituals power for themselves from the power of the place and the power of the dead'.²¹⁶

It is important to note of course that the presence or power of the deceased need not belong to immediate antecedents. Ancient howes conveying a general sense of the past, or prominent hills that punctuate the landscape, are often reused for this purpose as well. Place-names such as 'Dingieshowe' in Orkney and 'Thynghowe' in Nottinghamshire stem from *Þing-haugr* (*Þing*-mound), and so provide onomastic evidence for the use of ancient mound-like structures as *Þing*-sites. Significantly, this use of mounds or mound-like locations as assembly places is mirrored both in Anglo-Saxon and, perhaps less expectedly, in Frankish contexts: John Baker and Stuart Brookes have recently discussed the 'mound-like appearance' of so-called 'hanging promontory' hundred court sites. Amongst these sites is Hundred Field in

²¹⁵ C. R. Unger and Guðbrandur Vigfússon, *Flateyjarbok: En samling af norske kongesagaer med indskudte mindre fortællinger om begivenheder i og udenfor Norge samt annaler*, 3 vols. (Christiania: P.T. Malling, 1860-68), vol. 1., 214–15 especially.

²¹⁶ Härke, "Cemeteries as Places of Power," 21, 29.

Botloe's Green. Botloe, as Baker and Brookes point out, seems to derive from *Bōta* (a personal name) and *hlāw* (the Old English term for 'mound'). Motslow Hill in Warwickshire, the meeting place of the *Stanleie* hundred, displays similar topographical and onomastic features with 'an artificial mound [...] still visible as an earthwork lying at the neck of a narrow promontory' and a name which may derive from *(ge)mōt-hlāw* (that is, assembly-mound).²¹⁷ Interestingly, we encounter a similar assembly place in the Odenwald region of Carolingian Frankia. In August of 795 a public meeting was held at a *tumulus* called *Walinehoug* (*houg* is Old High German for 'mound') in order to settle a dispute regarding the boundaries of the important Heppenheim estate. Matthew Innes describes the character of those men helping to 'make' the boundaries as follows:

These men – property-holders of some social distinction [...] were representatives of their localities, leaders of their communities. Their coming together to reach a collective judgement and determine 'right' both mobilised the local knowledge necessary to settle the claims and counter-claims they heard, and underwrote the acceptability and validity of the settlement.²¹⁸

Runestones also utilise the 'symbolic power of the dead' and, in a similar fashion to mounds, come to be used as assembly sites as certain inscriptions explicitly illustrate. Interesting, in the context of ritual processes through which the power of presence may be activated, are the twin inscriptions on runestones U 225 and U 226 which constitute Arkils tingstad in Bällsta, Sweden:

²¹⁷ "Monumentalising the Political Landscape: A Special Class of Anglo-Saxon Assembly Site," *The Antiquaries Journal* 93 (2013): 147–62.

²¹⁸ "People, Places and Power in Carolingian Society," 401.

U 225

Latin Transliteration:

**... uk · arkil · uk · kui · þiR · kariþu · iar · þikstaþunu · iki
mirki · maiRi · uirþa · þan · ulfs · suniR · iftiR · kir... ...iR · suinaR
· at · sin · faþur**

Old Norse Transcription:

[Ulfkell](?) ok Arnkell ok Gýi þeir gerðu hér þingstað ... [M]unu eigi merki meiri verða, en Ulfs synir eptir ger[ðu], [snjall]ir sveinar, at sinn fôður.

English Translation:

Ulfkell (?) and Arnkell and Gýi, they made the Assembly-place here ... No landmarks will be greater, than (the ones) the sons of Ulfr made in memory, eloquent lads, of their father.²¹⁹

U 226

Latin Transliteration:

**ristu · stina · uk · staf · uan · uk · in · mikla · at · iartiknum uk
kuriþi · kas at · uiri · þu mon i krati · kiatit lata kunar ik stin**

Old Norse Transcription:

Reistu steina ok staf unnu(?) ok inn mikla at jarteiknum. Ok Gyriði gatz at veri. Því mun í gráti getit láta. Gunnarr hjó stein.

English Translation:

(They) raised the stones and worked/performed the staff/letter also, the prominent one, as tokens. Also Gyriðr cherished her husband. Therefore will (she) have (him) spoken of in weeping. Gunnarr cut the stone.

The emphasis that this twinned inscription places on the role of the memorial monument, or the runes thereon, as *jarteiknir* (tokens offered as proof or evidence), complements the view of runestones as legitimising monuments.

²¹⁹ All runestone data apart from the English translations are from *Run*.

And, whether one reads *staf unnu* on the second of the two assembly-markers as the ‘working’ or ‘producing’ of some type of ceremonial staff, or whether one considers (as I have suggested in my translation above) that *staf unnu* refers, perhaps, to either the carving or the recitation of the runic inscription, it is clear that both possibilities could reasonably imply a ritual element in the commemorative procedure which activates the presence and hence the power of the deceased.²²⁰ There may, indeed, be an intentional or, at the very least, an inherited ambiguity in the usage of *stafr* in the context of the commemorative inscription which is particularly important for one’s understanding of the means through which the runic monument contributes to a temporal itinerancy of presence in the landscape (and, hence, the legitimising of power practiced in this location).

Whilst it seems apparent, for example, that the planting or raising of a kind of ceremonial staff or post may have played a part in the establishment of runestones as memorial monuments – as inscriptions such as those on runestones Sö 196 in Kolsundet, Husaby (also in connection with the establishment of a *Ding*-site), U 332 in Vreta (in connection with familial inheritance) and Vs 1 from Stora Rytterns church ruin demonstrate – the reference to *stafr* even in these contexts is not always unequivocal (see, for example, Sö 56 from Fyrby). The ambiguity of *stafr* in the U 226 inscription

²²⁰ The *DONP* lists numerous examples of *stafr* used to indicate staffs, poles, runic script and letters, accessed 18 September 2017. See also *CV*, 586-7 which defines *stafr* as a ‘staff’ or ‘post’, and also as a ‘written letter’ or ‘stave’. For alternative interpretations of the texts see *Run*, as well as, “Runic Dictionary: Inscription U 225,” *Runic Dictionary*, 2008, <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/skaldic/db.php?id=15274&if=runic&table=mss> and; “Runic Dictionary: Inscription U 226,” *Runic Dictionary*, 2008, <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/skaldic/db.php?id=15211&if=runic&table=mss>.

is certainly strengthened by the employment of the verb *vinna* (to work or to perform) which, in conjunction with the inscription's strong metrical character, brings recitation to mind, as well as the parallels between the inscription and a verse from the religiously themed and anonymously composed twelfth-century *Leiðarvísan* (Way-Guidance) poem:

26. Tekk til orðs, þars urðu
alfregnar **jartegnir**
— tókn eru sýnd í slíku
sonn — Jórsalamönnum.
Sendi salvörðr grundar
snillifimr af himni
borgar lýð til bjargar
bréf **gollstofum** sollit.²²¹

26. I begin to tell from where
the all-famous **miraculous signs**
— true tokens are shown thus —
befell the people of Jerusalem.
The eloquence-agile warden of the hall of the earth
sent from heaven
to the people of the city as help
a letter swollen with **golden letters**.

[My emphasis]

The strophe illustrates that the miraculous signs from God (*jartegnir*) granted to the inhabitants of Jerusalem constitute a letter illuminated with golden letters (*gollstafir*) – and this sign is clearly intended to legitimise and lend authority to the words of the poet. Of interest is the fact that these miraculous golden staves serve, within the context of the poem which is metaphorically equated with a strong building (*ramtligr hús*), as a foundation (*grundvöllr*) – a foundation upon which a landscape of verbal power can be built.²²²

²²¹ *SkP* VII, 145–46.

²²² *SkP* VII, v. 43, pp. 176–7.

What is of particular importance when considering the parallels in the text above with the earlier inscription on the U 226 runestone, is the relationship of the concept of a *jartegn* with the notion of a temporal itinerancy touched on earlier. It is striking, for example, that many of the references to *jartegnir* in skaldic verse on Christian subjects accompanies a preoccupation with fame or remembrance: one of which, notably, is the description of the *jartegn* in the stanza from *Leiðarvísan* above which identifies the miraculous document as one of many *alfregnar* (all-famous or very renowned) signs. Indeed, as I shall discuss in more detail presently, many of the strophes that reference *jartegnir* state the same intention of propagation – of proliferating the praise of an important figure – that one may discern in skaldic encomia more broadly. This preoccupation is quite clearly present in Einarr Skúlason’s *Geisli* (Light Beam) poem in praise of Saint Óláfr:

34. Satts, at silfri skreytta
 seggjum holtr ok golli
 hér lét Gutthormr gerva
 — grams **hróðr** vas þat — **róðu**.
 Þat hafa menn at **minnum**
 meir; **jartegna** þeira
mark stendr Krists í kirkju
 — konungs **niðr** gaf þat — miðri.²²³

34. It is true that, loyal to men,
 Gutthormr here had made
 — that was the king’s **praise** — a **rood**
 adorned with silver and gold.
 Men have that as **reminder**
 still; the **mark** of those **miraculous signs**
 stands in the middle of the church of Christ
 — the king’s **relative** gave that.

[My emphasis]

²²³ *SkP* VII, 34–35.

It is evident that Einarr views the memorial rood – itself a runestone-like object – as a sort of *jartegn* (rendered *mark* in the poem) of Óláfr’s *jartegnir* (miraculous or holy signs). This monument (provided by an *óðal*-member of Óláfr’s family) is equated, moreover, with *hróðr* (praise) – a connection that is emphasised by the resonant *aðalhending* between *hróðr* and *róðr*. Significantly, the ‘mark of miracles’ which activates memories of the holy Óláfr is, towards the end of *Geisli*, construed not as the rood, but as the poem itself in which Einarr’s telling of *jartegnir* through poetry is seen as constituting a form of memorial praise (*lof*) that men must repeat and ‘carry about’ (*reiða*) in order for the saint to continue eternally (*jafnan*) to exercise his holy power.²²⁴

Whether or not the golden ornamentation on the rood may in any way have been related to letters or runic inscription is uncertain (although there are precedents for such runic roods and crosses in the early Anglo-Saxon and Norse world).²²⁵ What is evident, however, is that there are memorial media relating to *jartegnir* in a religious context that take the form of writing and that such writings are *also* seen as parallels to skaldic verse – and particularly to skaldic verse *as praise*. This is the case for *Máruvísur I*:

26. [...]
 Skrifa liet baugs á **briefi**
 brík **jartegnir** slíkar,
 að Márie meyjar
margfaldi lof aldir.

²²⁴ *SkP* VII, v. 67-68, pp. 61-63.

²²⁵ Compare, for example, with the Ruthwell and Bewcastle crosses now located in Scotland and Cumbria respectively.

26. [...]

The thin plank of the ring [woman] had
such **miraculous signs written in a letter**,
so that people may **multiply**
praise of the Virgin Mary.

29. Nú hefi eg út fyrir ýtum

— *intag svá*, að **minti** —

inta **jartegn** eina

alhróðigs guðs móður.

[...] ²²⁶

29. Now have I told to the end, before men,

— I told it thus, so that it should **be remembered** —

one **miraculous sign** of

the mother of the **all-praised** God.

[...]

[My emphasis]

As with Einarr's composition in praise of Óláfr inn helgi, the *Máruvísur* poet's praise of Mary is, moreover, intended to engender the continued performance of power by the holy figure who will 'grant more mercy' (*veita meiri miskunn*) to those who, ostensibly, take part in propagating this praise.²²⁷ Keeping these connections between memory, written or spoken language as praise, and legitimising signs in mind, I would now like to return to the initial question surrounding the relationship between a runestone as a token or sign (both as a physical marker and as a monument providing evidence of familial relations to the deceased and to the land) which legitimises and empowers, and the runic inscription which seems to activate the memorial landmark's political function.

²²⁶ *SkP* VII, 697, 699–700. I have translated *öld* as "generation" in an attempt to capture the double-meaning of the word as a signifier of either time or age and, in the poetic sense, of men or people. The temporal element is important to stress since the concern with fame is as much about its persistence through time as its proliferation in a spatial context.

²²⁷ *SkP* VII, 697, 699–700.

Why, one may ask, is it necessary to stress the significance of the runic staves themselves in the ritual of memorialisation and the subsequent appropriation of the memorial monument in the legitimisation of power? And what bearing does this have on our understanding of the function of skaldic verse? The answers to these questions relates directly, I would suggest, to the concept of temporal itinerancy introduced earlier: if it is stone which provides the material longevity by means of which time is traversed, then it is the runic inscription etched into the stone that adds the crucial ingredient of *presence* to the recipe for temporal movement and does so through the vital essence invoked through memory or imagination. That runes may be seen as engendering an absent individual's presence seems apparent from inscriptions such as those of runestones Sm 16 in Nöbbele, Sweden and DR 40 in Randbøl, Denmark:

DR 40

tufi ÷ bruti ÷ risþi ÷ stin ÷ þansi ÷ aft ÷ lika ÷ ¶ brutia ÷ þiR ÷ stafaR ÷ munu ÷ ¶ þurkuni ÷ miuk ÷ liki ÷ lifa ÷

Tofi Bryti resþi sten þænsi æft lika brytia. ÞeR stafaR munu Þorgunni miok længi lifa.²²⁸

Tófi Steward raised this stone in memory of the steward's spouse. These staves will live very long for Þorgunnr.

Sm 16

§A rostein · auk · eilifR · aki : auk · hakun : reisþu · þeiR · sueinaR · eftiR sin · ¶ faþur · kubl ¶ keni·likt ·
 §B ftiR · kala · taupan : þy : mun · ko... ... -m kitit · uerþa · meþ · sin · lifiR · auk · stafiR · run

²²⁸ *Run.*

§A Hróðstæinn ok ÆilifR, Aki ok Hakon ræisþu þæiR svæinaR æftiR
sinn faður kumbl kænnilikt

§B æftiR Kala/Kalla dauðan. Þy mun go[ðs manns u]m gætít verða,
meðan stæinn lifiR ok stafiR runa.²²⁹

§A Hróðsteinn and Eilífr (and) Áki and Hákon, these lads raised, in
memory of their father, the recognizable monument,

§B in memory of Kali/Kalli the dead. So the good man will be spoken
about while the stone and the rune-staves live.

These runes serve not only as triggers for memory but, in so doing, become living substitutes for those deceased men and women whom they commemorate. Through memory and imagination they come to embody the vital essence of personal presence even when the referents of their signification are absent – permanently or otherwise.²³⁰ At this point it is necessary to highlight some of the connections between the runestones transcribed above and skaldic poetry in order, finally, to be able to discuss one of the principal political functions of skaldic verse, that is, the legitimisation of a ruler through the presencing of that ruler or of their (usually *óðal*-) relations.

It is, in the first place, noteworthy that the inscriptions of runestones U 225-6, DR 40 and Sm 16 are all metrical. DR 40, for example, forms a half-stanza in *ljóðahátt*r and Sm 16 consists of five lines in *fornyrðislag*.²³¹ Such metrical arrangements may emphasise, through the production of a

²²⁹ *Run.*

²³⁰ I shall return presently to the question of the use of runic monuments in the case of living rulers, such as the Jarlabanke runestones in Täby, Sweden.

²³¹ Niels Åge Nielsen, *Danske runeindskrifter: et udvalg med kommentarer* (Hernov, 1983), 115; “Runic Dictionary: Inscription DR 40,” *Runic Dictionary*, 2008, <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/skaldic/db.php?id=15172&if=runic&table=mss>; “Runic Dictionary: Inscription Sm 16,” *Runic Dictionary*, 2008, <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/skaldic/db.php?id=15244&if=runic&table=mss>.

rhythmical effect, the vitality of words that ‘live’ and this concept of an existential rhythmicity is one that I will explore further in subsequent chapters – particularly with regards to the manner in which the rhythmic qualities of poetry may contribute to the diplomatic use of skaldic verse. What is perhaps more relevant however about the metrical character of the inscriptions within the context of commemoration and the importance, highlighted in runestones U 226 and Sm 16, of being ‘spoken about’ (*getit*) after death, is the fact that a metrical character gives the impression – even if only within one’s inner ear – of ‘spoken-ness’. A metrical ‘spoken-ness’ is, moreover, a memorable speaking which lends itself to a language of commemoration.

The notion of being spoken of or about after death contributes to an understanding of the immortality of fame or renown (*orðstírr*) that *Hávamál* juxtaposes with the finality of the death of self and wealth (as discussed above). Skaldic poetry, as a form of praise which is very much concerned with ‘speaking about’ an individual and which attempts, in part through its complex metrical structure, to be as memorable as possible, may certainly be described as an instrument of fame and functions, in its commemorating capacity, in ways similar to that of many runestones – particularly runestones that stress *óðal* connections and inheritance rights.

It is not surprising, in light of the shared program of commemoration between skaldic *erfidrápur* and runic monuments, to find similar ideas of ‘living words’ repeated in commemorative verse:

3. **Geta** skal máls, þess's mæla
 menn at vápna sennu
 dolga fangs við drengi
 dáðqflgan þor kvóðu:
 þaðat hertryggðar hyggja
 hnekkir sína rekka
 — þess **lifa** þjóðar sessa
próttarorð — á flóttu.²³²

3. **Speak**, one must, **of** the speech addressed
 at the weapon-flyting to warriors
 by the battle-tunics' deed-mighty fir
 which men reported;
 The thwarter of the host's safety
 bid not his army to think
 — the people's bench-mate's
forceful words are **left to live** – of flight.

[My emphasis]

In the strophe from Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld (Poet of Difficulties) Óttarsson's *Erfidrápa Óláfs Tryggvasonar* quoted above the poet stresses that one must speak of (*geta*) the final speech of King Óláfr Tryggvason before his fall in a battle at Svöldr around the year 1000. Indeed, much of the poem is concerned with the theme of speaking about the deeds and fate of the deceased king whether through reports or gossip and for the poet himself, 'it is a famous custom to tell of such a thing' (*frægrs til slíks at segja siðr*) – that thing being the king's combat and death.²³³ The words that 'live on' (*lifa*) – a term which can also mean, significantly, to be 'left' (*lifa*) as if these words are the remaining remnants of the king himself – are as much those belonging to the poet as to the king and *live for* the king after the death as much as the words on runestones live for persons whom they commemorate. Or,

²³² *SkP* I, 405–6.

²³³ *SkP* I, 402–4.

crucially, in the case of both poetry and runestones, for those whom they celebrate.

The power of runic inscriptions to legitimise power by enabling a temporal itinerancy for those rulers who are absent – not only permanently but also temporarily in an itinerant polity which requires regular and seasonal travel – is evident in the runestones raised by one Jarlabanki of Tåby who was likely a local *hersir*. Though there are a number of runestones raised by Jarlabanki ‘for himself while alive’ (U 127, U 164, U 165, U 212 and U 261), U 212 is enlightening since it clearly utilises the runestone and its written formula to establish a þing-site:

U 212

§A × iarlibaki × lit × raisa × stan + þina × a... ..kuan + han × ati
 ain × tabu × alan × -... .. ont hans +
 §B × iarlabaki × lit raisa × stain × þin- at sik kuikuan × auk ×
 þinkstaþ × þina × karþi + auk × ain ati + alt hu-(t)ari × þita +

§A Jarlabanki lét reisa stein þenna a[t sik kvi]kvan. Hann átti einn Tábýr allan. [Guð hjalpi] ônd hans.

§B Jarlabanki lét reisa stein þenn[a] at sik kvikvan, ok þingstað þenna gerði, ok einn átti alt hu[n]dari þetta.²³⁴

§A Jarlabanki had this stone raised for himself while alive. He alone owned all of Tábýr. God help his spirit.

§B Jarlabanki had this stone raised for himself while alive, and made this Assembly-place, and alone owned all of this Hundred.

That Jarlabanki and his family may have needed such a monument in order to maintain legitimacy due to required absences is suggested by a runic monument likely commemorating the *hersir*’s own eventual demise. U 140,

²³⁴ *Run.*

a fragmented runestone, belongs to the so-called Greece Runestones – a group of runestones relating death in, or journeys to the Byzantine Empire by Norsemen – and recounts the fall of either Jarlabanki or a family-member in Grikk-land (Greece), supporting the notion that Jarlabanki may have been absent from Täby for significant amounts of time during his life.²³⁵ Of course, the need for a ‘presencing’ memorial is particularly imperative when the actual body of the deceased is lost and unavailable for burial or other funerary practices. In such instances the runic inscription tangibly substitutes the missing body, becoming a referential body in the landscape. I would like to suggest that skaldic praise, in a similar way, serves as a purposeful means of making present, and hence legitimising, rulers even when such praise is not specifically commemorative: encomia fill the void of itinerant rulers both during and after life.

5. Conclusion

Having established, during the course of this chapter, the importance of an *óðal*-based legitimisation of Viking Age rulership and having paid particular attention to the manner in which rulers mitigate absences that may compromise their legitimacy – noting such methods as the construction of mounds, halls and rune-stones in the attempt to create a legitimising ‘memoryscape’ through which ruler-presence can be established – I shall now turn to the particular role that skaldic poetry plays in the legitimisation of rulership. In the following chapter I hope to demonstrate that skaldic verse

²³⁵ *Run.*

is an important tool used in the crafting of mental itinerancies and memoryscapes, particularly due to its focus on fame and the glorification or memorialisation of persons, places and deeds. In so doing I hope to develop ideas formulated and illustrated in this chapter (especially with regard to the connections between presence, power and memory) that may elucidate our understanding of skaldic performance practices during the Viking Age.

Chapter 2

In the Name of Presence

1. A Poetry of Naming is a Poetry of Presence

*Ton nom gravé d'étapes en étapes conduit droit à son but le voyageur
assez audacieux pour te suivre*²³⁶

The memoryscape of Viking Age Scandinavia is one littered with runic monuments and, as I have discussed in the previous chapter, these monuments serve to establish a legitimising presence for rulers in space and through time. The objective of the current chapter, then, is to examine the ways in which skaldic encomia function in a similar manner to runestones – as political aids to rulers who wish to mitigate necessary absences from territories over which they exercise authority. What I hope to demonstrate is that skaldic praise is able to contribute to political strategies pertaining to both temporal and spatial itinerancies: both memorable and mobile, skaldic praise ‘travels’ through time and space by means of recitation and retention. It propagates the presence of rulers through repetitive, memory- or imagination-inducing referencing that functions within a Viking Age ideolexicon of *óðal* and which expresses itself as a preoccupation with fame and reputation. In this respect the most important feature of skaldic verse,

²³⁶ “Your name engraved from step to step, leads any traveller audacious enough to follow you straight to his goal”: Jules Verne, *Voyage au centre de la terre* (Paris: J. Hetzel & Cie, 1870), 291.

and the most important feature through which one may understand the legitimising function of skaldic encomia, is a shared feature between skaldic poetry and runestones, that is, the central importance of names and naming. If runestones are capable of engendering ruler-presence in the landscape, then the principal ingredients for instilling these stones with their presence are, indeed, the names inscribed upon them. In skaldic poetry too, names are vital (and vitalising) elements. As Matthew Townend states in his study of Old English praise in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, ‘the role and importance of naming in praise-poetry cannot be exaggerated’.²³⁷ What I would like to suggest in the following chapter is that the political dimension of skaldic naming is intimately connected to the concept of *óðal* and that the ability of a name-based poetry to generate ruler presence in a medium which is both distributable and enduring is key to its successfully persistent implementation in the Viking Age political arena.

During the course of the chapter I shall, in the first place, consider the ways in which presence is established through performance of the name – considering, especially, the ways in which names may substitute bodies; act as masks that both protect identities in their capacity to hide ‘real names’, and invest people or objects with personalities in their representative capacity; and serve as ‘handles’ that historicise persons and subordinate identities to graspable entities that can be summoned. I shall then consider the socio-cultural perceptions regarding the relationship between naming and

²³⁷ Matthew Townend, “Pre-Cnut Praise-Poetry in Viking Age England,” *The Review of English Studies* 51, no. 203 (2000): 354.

óðal by analysing the connection between these concepts in the context of Norse mythology. Of particular interest in this respect is the manner in which fame or reputation, represented by the name, intimates judgement, that is, an inherent assessment or valuation of the legitimacy of one's actions. Once I have established a cultural context for the relationship between names and *óðal*-derived powers and rights, I shall examine the incorporation of this conceptual relationship into praise-poetry, focussing, in particular, on the itinerancy of both poets and their poetry. Finally, I shall examine the role of names in skaldic encomia and attempt to demonstrate that skaldic praise might justifiably be described as a poetry of naming and hence, as a poetry of presence.

2. Presence through Names – Bodies, Masks and Handles

It is clear from even a cursory overview of runestones that personal names are the most prevalent words in the corpus of these runic inscriptions. It is not surprising, given that runestones bear the names of those whom they commemorate, that such monuments are said to be 'raised after' (*reisa eptir*) – most often translated as 'raised in memory of' – individuals in a phrasing similar to that of places or landmarks being 'named after' (*heita eptir*) persons. That runestones are perceived as being 'named after' individuals is made evident in a strophe from the twelfth-century *Nóregs konungatal* (Enumeration of the Kings of Norway) which states that the place of Hákon Haraldsson's death is marked with a stone slab *ávallit kennd til Hákon*

(forever named after Hákon).²³⁸ Like places that are named after individuals, runic inscriptions that name the deceased come to represent those persons after their departure from life and come to embody their presence. That one may talk of names on runestones as words that are able to *embody* the deceased is justified, in part, by the cenotaphic nature of runestones which renders a stone or slab a substitute for the absent body in the landscape. That cenotaphs do substitute the bodies of the dead is clear, as Heinrich Härke points out, from the fact that such monuments are often located in cemeteries despite the absence of the physical bodies they commemorate.²³⁹ The bodies that a cenotaph brings to the graveyard, or to any other location in which it may be situated, *are* the names of the dead.

The mechanism through which names come to embody persons may be said to involve those semiotic processes of mental imaging in which names, as signifiers, instigate the memory and imagination (which is, crucially, also a mnemonic process in so far as imagination involves the reconstruction and reorganisation of remembered sounds and images) of the individuals whom they refer to. The important capacity of names – as the referents of persons – to facilitate the memory and imagining of persons, may therefore be understood as a capacity of names to conjure mental images of the people whom they signify, whether recalled or imagined. This conjuring in the mind of sounds and images that make present (in the mind’s eye and ear) individuals whose names are encountered in the landscape and, in a linguistic

²³⁸ *SKP* II, v. 14, p. 770.

²³⁹ Heinrich Härke, “Cemeteries as Places of Power,” 12.

process of verbal association, whose names one connects with those elements of personhood that the nominal word signifies and that are often related to the body – gendered names such as ‘Þorsteinn’ and ‘Guðrún’, as well as descriptive bynames such as blátǫnn (Blue-Tooth) are prime examples of this – is one of the primary ways through which the bond between the name and the body, or the name and personal presence (often reified as the body), is established.

The effectiveness with which a body or presence can be conjured through the name is evidenced by the roles that masking names play in both hiding identity and, conversely, in conveying it. The name as a mask which invokes a character that one can ‘inhabit’ is certainly evident in Old Norse contexts and Óðinn is, perhaps, the most famous figure to don names as masks, invoking characters with their own histories in order to facilitate his ability to wander through the mythical world and interact with its occupants. It is telling that one of Óðinn’s names, that is Grímnir – appearing in the eddic *Grímnismál* (The Sayings of Grímnir) which provides a comprehensive list of Óðinn’s aliases – translates as ‘the masked one’.²⁴⁰

Óðinn’s true identity is concealed through the conjuring of mental images related to the masking names which he temporarily adopts. Character-presences are summoned by, and materialised through, these nominal utterances due, somewhat ironically, to a socio-cultural perception that names are intimately intertwined with those persons or presences whom they

²⁴⁰ *Edda* I, 376-8.

reference. ‘Ironically’ too, because the masking name *may* indeed come to refer to the individual who employs it as a mode of concealment (Grímnir and Hárbardr, for example, combine as Óðinn’s composite name in a ‘genealogical account of social time’).²⁴¹ Though they initially serve as effective aliases, these names are retrospectively (due to the historical association between alias and god) no less the names of Óðinn: by inhabiting and acting within masking names, Óðinn nevertheless contributes to the way in which these name-masks are characterised, so that the recall of the names conjures layered images of which the descriptions are beholden to their own history. This is the social nature and fate of language: the costume itself, once donned, acquires new meaning. As a result there exists a tension between the mask as a mechanism through which another’s face is conjured, and the mask as an eventual referent of the self. (The Sutton Hoo helmet, for example, hides the warrior’s face both physically with layers of iron and by conjuring images of those gods and mythologies pertaining to figures etched upon its exterior; and yet, the helmet worn – whether practically or ceremonially – by a specific warrior, comes to represent that warrior by virtue of accumulated instances of association between helmet and man).

In terms of names this tension can perhaps be best understood with regards to the seemingly opposing functions of the personal name in its capacity to

²⁴¹ Barbara Bodenhorn and Gabriele Vom Bruck, “‘Entangled in Histories’: An Introduction to the Anthropology of Names and Naming,” in *The Anthropology of Names and Naming*, ed. Gabriele Vom Bruck and Barbara Bodenhorn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 26; See also, Michael Ragussis, *Acts of Naming: The Family Plot in Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 10: “The ‘true’ name, then, often functions as a series of names, a composite name, as if, instead of shedding one name after another [...] one must take them all, to have one’s history [...]”.

both socialise (assimilating the individual into a social group), and to individuate (delineating each person *as* an individual). Names that most obviously socialise, such as surnames, patronymics and inherited family names, situate a person in a particular socio-cultural context and might associate that person with a) a particular family; b) a particular social, cultural, gender, racial, religious or political group; or even c) with a particular person (one thinks, for example, of Hákon Haraldsson's alternative patronymic of Aðalsteinsfóstri which connects him, specifically, to the English King Æðelstān). In this way the given name is always a name that already places the self in a set of social and inter-personal relations and complicates existential self-authorship: the mask that conjures these relations constrains and controls the narrative possibilities of the wearer.

Yet a name is more likely to function as a mask, it seems, when it is believed that names ordinarily have an intimate connection to their original (or even its originally fictional) bearer which enables it to conjure a remembered or imagined mental illustration of that bearer when it is read or spoken. The name *does*, practically, distinguish one individual from another and confirms individual personhood, even as it establishes social relationships and reinforces power-structures between individuals through an amalgamation of identities in the name as mask. Judith Butler aptly articulates the ambiguity of the socially-situating name as a site for both 'founding subordination' and for 'agency'. If one construes the socialising 'mask' of the name as the linguistic 'trauma' that Butler speaks of, then one might agree that:

Trauma constitutes a strange kind of resource, and repetition [is] its vexed but promising instrument. After all, to be named by another is traumatic: it is an act that precedes my will, an act that brings me into a linguistic world in which I might then begin to exercise agency at all. A founding subordination, and yet the scene of agency, is repeated in the ongoing interpellations of social life. This is what I have been called. Because I have been called something, I have been entered into linguistic life, refer to myself through the language given by the Other, but perhaps never quite in the same terms that my language mimes. The terms by which we are hailed are rarely the ones we choose [...]; but these terms we never really choose are the occasion for something we might still call agency, the repetition of an originary subordination for another purpose, one whose future is partially open.²⁴²

It is important to remember that the name-mask, when worn (when ‘repeated’, to use Butler’s term), may assume new characteristics and have its parameters redefined through the actions of the mask-wearer to such an extent that the mask is no longer a mask for the current bearer, but becomes, instead, a mask for a future bearer of which the conjuring of the current owner will form an integral part. King Magnús inn góði Ólafsson, ostensibly named after Charlemagne (*Karolus Magnus*), assumes the socio-political mask that the name bestows upon him: that of a great ruler. But this mask is cultivated as a marker of his own identity to such an extent that the royal name of Magnús, when re-issued in the royal line in the persons of Magnús Haraldsson and Magnús berfœttr (Bare-Foot) Ólafsson, recalls Magnús inn góði and his deeds as a great Norse ruler to a far larger extent than the Carolingian emperor.

Name bestowal in Norse culture reflects the mutually inclusive tendencies of the name to socialise and to individuate. It also demonstrates, importantly,

²⁴² *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York ; London: Routledge, 1997), 38.

that in such a naming culture names may often be intimately associated with the life and being of the named referent. That a name may be thought of as constituting a part of an individual's being – a notion that likely stems from a phenomenological understanding of the experience of nominal summoning, that is, the conjuring of an individual's presence through the utterance of their name – seems, at any rate, to be expressed in poems such as *Hárbarðsljóð* (Lay of Hárbarðr) and *Fáfnismál* (Fáfnir's sayings). In a comical exchange with an over-confident Þórr, Óðinn (assuming one of his aliases and donning the mask of the ferryman, Hárbarðr) reveals that he defends *his life* by concealing his name:

Þórr kvað:

9. '[...]
Hins vil ek nú spyrja
hvat þú heitir.'

Þórr said:

9. '[...]
This would I now ask,
what you are called.'

Ferjukarlinn kvað:

10. 'Hárbarðr ek heiti,
hylk um nafn sjaldan.'

The Ferryman said:

10. 'I am called Hárbarðr,
I seldom disguise my name.'

Þórr kvað:

11. 'Hvat skaltu of nafn hylja,
nema þú sakar eigir?'

Þórr said:

11. 'Why should you disguise
your name,
unless you have a case against
you?'

Hárbarðr kvað:

12. 'En þótt ek sakar eiga,
þá mun ek forða fjörvi mínu
fyr slíkum sem þú ert,
nema ek feigr sé.'²⁴³

Hárbarðr said:

12. 'But even if I have no case,
then must I still protect my life
from such as you are,
unless I were fated to die.'

²⁴³ *Edda* I, 390-1.

To reveal one's name is to make oneself vulnerable to the power of others: not only because one's name recalls one's actions and attributes, the knowledge of which may be used against one (hence the reference by Þórr to the likelihood of concealing one's name when in a dispute with someone), but also because the name, in a more fundamental way, is a means through which the person as entity may be reduced to a subject – to a definable and knowable linguistic phenomenon which falls within effable parameters. The name, as John Burrow states in his treatment of the withholding of names in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, is a 'handle – something to get hold of' and this process is described in relation to the configuration of power by Judith Butler as follows:²⁴⁴

A name tends to fix, to freeze, to delimit, to render substantial, indeed, it appears to recall a metaphysics of substance, of discrete and singular kinds of beings; a name is not the same as an undifferentiated temporal process or the complex convergence of relations that go under the rubric of 'a situation.' But power is the name that one attributes to this complexity, a name that substitutes for that complexity, a name that renders manageable what might be otherwise too unwieldy or complex, and what, in its complexity, might defy the limiting and substantializing ontology presupposed by the name.²⁴⁵

The power of naming is the power of being able to avert the powerlessness which resides in the uncertainty of an ever-shifting, unstable and historically transformational entity by means of confining that entity to a word which reduces it to a 'graspable' concept.

²⁴⁴ J. A. Burrow, *A Reading of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965), 59.

²⁴⁵ Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 35.

The name as power, in the words of Butler and Foucault, is a force which ‘arrests the movement of a history’.²⁴⁶ The practice of naming bodies of water such as rivers and lakes, as a practice which seeks to provide conceptual ‘holds’ on ever-flowing and constantly evolving phenomena (and which reveals a desire to define and delimit the boundaries of politically pertinent entities over which power may be exerted through ownership and control of movement), is comparable to the practice of naming the historically fluid entity which is the human person and this too has inherent political implications. We return then to the idea of the mask – a tangible reduction of the mobile human face into those most basic and distinctive features of a given facial expression. As I have discussed above, this aspect of the name is not inherently detrimental to the individual and, as I shall point out in due course, it is the very ability of the name to act as a vehicle of the mental images related to an individual in a form that is both graspable and distributable that renders it such a useful political tool in skaldic praise. However, the fact that the name (which, through its ability to represent the individual even in such basic forms, makes that individual tangibly present to its user) is perceived as a graspable element of the self does mean that it enables the individual to be acted upon *through* their name. This is certainly one understanding that may be reached through the phenomenological perception of the name as a compelling agent. What Barbara Bodenhorn and Gabriele Vom Bruck refer to as the ‘potential tyranny of the name (which forces a response when spoken)’ is related to Althusser’s theory of

²⁴⁶ Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 36.

interpellation and concerns the deeply felt phenomenon arising from the learnt response of answering to the summoning of one's name.²⁴⁷ The response is only possible through the mental invocation of the images of the self, referred to by the name as sign, and it is this invocation which allows for the summoning of, for example, spirits and gods.

In terms strongly resembling that of Butler's, Michael Lambek discusses the role of names in the invocation of spirits:

The constitutive function of names is surely strongest in delineating noumenal beings, creatures who are primarily unembodied or not 'in focus' until they have been named. Names help to *realize* spirits: noumenal beings are brought to sustained human attention and become relatively fixed in their natures [...].²⁴⁸

Important for the purposes of this chapter is the fact that the ability of the name to fix and therefore to 'realise' spirits is seen by Lambek as being intertwined with the ability of the name to make spirits *present* through invocation. In making his point Lambek quotes a passage from Christopher Norris's critical study of Paul de Man which, in turn, serves as a striking reminder of Barthes's concept of the 'photographic catastrophe' mentioned in Chapter One and which can be seen as a sentiment that forges a connection between the mental image of a person brought to mind by their name and the photographic image in which absent persons are brought, devastatingly, into

²⁴⁷ Bodenhorn and Vom Bruck, "Entangled in Histories," 17.

²⁴⁸ Michael Lambek, "What's in a Name? Name Bestowal and the Identity of Spirits in Mayotte and Northwest Madagascar," Michael Lambek, "What's in a Name? Name Bestowal and the Identity of Spirits in Mayotte and Northwest Madagascar," in *Anthropology*, ed. Bodenhorn and Vom Bruck, 118.

the here-and-now. Norris, describing de Man's depiction of the trope of prosopopoeia, identifies this trope as a

figure that summons up an absent, dead, or ghostly personage by means of an act of naming that both evokes their presence and reminds us of the distance that separates them now from any power of living recall.²⁴⁹

There is an intrinsic power in the ability to 'make present' that which is absent and also, importantly, in the ability to solicit a compelling and automatic response from one whose name is used *in* their presence. In the case of certain cultural-specific naming practices the potential abuse of this power to compel and to invoke an individual through their name, or to 'mis-handle' the name through curse or defamation, is often curtailed by naming taboos and avoidances. In Mongolia the ideal, for example, is for one to 'retreat from the name, to end up as so respected and senior a person that one's name is never pronounced in one's presence. In this way one can escape from being compelled by one's name'.²⁵⁰ In many Western cultures there exist similar naming taboos – particularly with regards to the use of first names. In a formal letter it is usually expected, for example, that one address the recipient using their title and surname. A linguistic positioning of the self

²⁴⁹ Christopher Norris, *Paul de Man: Deconstruction and the Critique of Aesthetic Ideology* (New York ; London: Routledge, 1988), xix. In a passage that reminds one ever more of Barthes's consideration of the photographic tragedy, Norris continues (in a similar mode of critique that de Man, one might add, employs in his assessment of Wordsworth in the essay in question): "The main text here is de Man's late essay 'Autobiography as De-Facement,' where this trope becomes a virtual synonym for what de Man calls the 'privative' power of language, its way of apparently giving life and voice to the dead while in fact exposing language to all manner of ghostly possession by forces beyond its living control. The essay concludes with another of those curiously ambivalent passages where de Man's self-denying rigor of style goes along with a kind of muted intensity that suggests, once again, what an effort of repression is here taking place. Death itself, de Man writes, 'is a displaced name for a linguistic predicament, and the restoration of mortality by autobiography (the prosopopeia of the voice and the name) deprives and disfigures to the precise extent that it restores". See Norris, *Paul de Man*, xix.

²⁵⁰ Caroline Humphrey, "On Being Named and Not Named: Authority, Persons, and Their Names in Mongolia," in *Anthropology*, ed. Bodenhorn and Vom Bruck, 173.

in relation to the addressee through the establishment of a respectful and subservient register (older writing tropes do, after all, include the customary valediction comprising ‘your servant’) is most certainly a matter of power and this positioning is established, in large part, through the format and use (or non-use) of the name.

3. Names, Presence and *Óðal* in the *Poetic Edda*

3.1 Patronymic Patricide

In an eddic context we again, ostensibly, encounter name-concealment as a means of ‘shielding’ the self against harm in *Fáfnismál*. It is noteworthy that the poem commences *after* what one would imagine to be the principal action of the tale, that is, the fatal stabbing of the dragon Fáfnir by the young Sigurðr. The sights of the narrative are therefore squarely set on the actions and dialogue of the principal characters subsequent to Fáfnir receiving his mortal wound, which suggests a central focus on Sigurðr’s interaction with Fáfnir and his brother Reginn in the aftermath of the slaying. When Fáfnir asks for the identity of his slayer in the very first stanza of the poem, he does so in a way which clearly attempts to enforce a power-relation between himself and the young warrior, and does so largely by means of the social ‘names’ he applies to Sigurðr which necessarily place him in a larger socio-cultural context in which power-relations are defined and shaped by relevant linguistic appellations:

1. ‘Sveinn ok sveinn,
 hverjum ertu sveini um borinn?
 Hverra ertu manna mōgr,
 er þú á Fáfni rautt
 þinn inn frána mæki?
 Stöndumk til hjarta hjörr.’²⁵¹

1. ‘Boy-lad and boy-servant,
 Of whom were you born, boy?
 Of which man are you the son,
 that you in Fáfni red den
 your gleaming sword?
 In my heart stands the sword.’

The insistent repetition of the term ‘Sveinn’ – denoting both ‘boy’ and ‘servant’ – as a mode of address in Fáfni’s first speech seems to resonate with the pejorative use of the term ‘Boy’ as a derogatory (and often racist) appellation in more recent history.²⁵² Fáfni ‘names’ Sigurðr, defining the parameters of power through the employment of a term denoting a position within a social hierarchy, even whilst apparently asking for the identity of his attacker.

Sigurðr responds with a slippery, riddling answer in which he names himself as an awe-inspiring, parentless *göfugt dýr* (noble beast).²⁵³ According to the prosimetric text preceding Sigurðr’s speech, the young warrior conceals his name *fyrir því at þat var trúa þeira í forneskju at orð feigs manns mætti mikit, ef hann bölvæði óvin sínum með nafni* (because it was believed before in heathen times, that the words of a doomed man could be momentous, if he cursed his foe by name).²⁵⁴ This view of Sigurðr’s motive for avoiding his

²⁵¹ *Edda* II, 303.

²⁵² It is interesting to note that the term is even used in the *Gulapingslög* to refer to slaves: see *DONP*, accessed 20 September 2017.

²⁵³ *Edda* II, 303–4.

²⁵⁴ *Edda* II, 303.

real name is certainly consistent with other, similar name-concealing episodes throughout the eddic corpus and supports, at least from the standpoint of the prose author (whether that be the thirteenth-century compiler of the Codex Regius or a story-teller from an earlier date during which time the prose frame potentially became prosimetrically affixed to the poem), that an abuse of the name provides a means of injuring the person.

Sigurðr's self-naming in *Fáfnismál* serves two primary functions for the protagonist, both of which contribute significantly to one of the central themes of the poem. Sigurðr's overblown and fear-inspiring alias can, in the first instance, be seen as a direct attempt to project a counter-image to the images of 'boy' and 'servant' evoked, and invoked, by Fáfnir in the opening stanza. 'Göfugt dýr' conjures, instead, an inflated image that demands respect and answers Fáfnir's scornful names with terms suggesting ferocity and grandeur. Important too is Sigurðr's emphasis on his parentless state as he strives, firstly, to render his beast-mask more impenetrable and, secondly, disengage himself from the name of his father. This verbal erasure of the patronymic is of crucial importance to shaping an understanding of the theme of perpetuated patricide in the process of self-determination that underlies *Fáfnismál*: 'æ geng ek einn saman' ('ever go I alone') is Sigurðr's motto throughout.²⁵⁵ To begin with, the young warrior who is scathingly challenged by Fáfnir as to the validity of his beastly name of *göfugt dýr*, reveals that his true name as well as the name of his father are unknown:

²⁵⁵ *Edda* II, 303.

4. ‘Ætterni mitt
 kveð ek þér ókunnigt vera
 ok mik sjálfan it sama:
 Sigurðr ek heiti
 – Sigmundr hét minn faðir –
 er hefkr þik vápnum vegit.’²⁵⁶

4. ‘My ancestry
 I proclaim to be unknown to you
 as I am myself;
 Sigurðr is my name,
 Sigmundr was my father,
 I who have weighed you with my weapons.’

Sigurðr’s own name cannot exude the same power and legitimacy as Fáfnir’s name, used to full effect in the dragon’s opening stanza, because it is as yet unknown and therefore incapable of providing the fledgling fighter with a legitimising presence through the power of verbal association. Also significant is the fact that Sigurðr proclaims his father’s name ‘unknown’ and introduces his father’s name explicitly *in relation* to his own. However, even in the admission that he has no fame either in his own capacity or that of his lineage to speak of, Sigurðr attempts to name himself in a byname-like description as the one who has ‘weighed Fáfnir with his weapons’ countering, once more, Fáfnir’s weighing words. I have translated *vega* here as ‘to weigh’ rather than as ‘to fight’ (which is the more usual translation) in an attempt to emphasise the potential consonantal wordplay. The metaphorical sense of *vega* as assessment or evaluation certainly seems to capture the feeling, sensed in this exchange between boy and dragon, of two opponents sizing each other up.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁶ *Edda* II, 304.

²⁵⁷ See CV, 689.

The theme of verbal judgement and assessment in relation to agonistic episodes in poetic narratives will be discussed in greater detail below. It is worth noting, however, that *hefk þik* (translated above as ‘I have...you’) may itself contain a play on words if one considers that *hef* is the first person indicative of *hefja* (to heave, raise or lift) which is synonymous with *vega*.²⁵⁸ The unit may well be translated as, ‘I lift you’, an interpretation which strengthens the impression that *vega* might imply ‘weighing’ in a figurative sense. The notion that *vega* may be related to assessment or judgement is also suggested by the use of the term in skaldic sources when rulers ‘win’ battles.²⁵⁹ The gaining of victory through fighting brings competitive assessment to mind and such victories are also crucial to the construction of fame as favourable judgement to be discussed in greater detail below. The notion of weighing is important, moreover, if one keeps in mind that the antagonistic language of naming and name-calling that pervades Fáfnir and Sigurðr’s dialogue is a struggle to establish legitimacy – particularly with regards to property rights, as I will demonstrate presently.

The language of inheritance pervades *Fáfnismál* and it is a language that allows itself to yield ever more possible readings – particularly with regards to names and naming. In the first place the poem reveals yet again that familial property or patrimony (*feðrmunir*) is associated with freedom (a connection mentioned in Chapter One), as Sigurðr’s misunderstanding of Fáfnir’s remarks regarding his captivity reveal. When Fáfnir states that

²⁵⁸ See CV, 245.

²⁵⁹ Two skalds who employ *vega* in this way are Þjóðólfr Arnórsson: *jöfurr vá sigr* (the ruler gained/won victory’); as well as Sigvatr Þórðarson: *hann vá opt sigr þvísa* (he often gained/won victory because of this). See *SkP* II, v. 1, p. 88, and *SkP* I, v. 12, p. 714.

Sigurðr is a ‘prisoner and captive’ (*haftr ok hernuminn*), Sigurðr assumes that Fáfñir is referring to his fosterage with Reginn and responds defensively:

8. ‘Því bregðr þú nú mér, Fáfñir,
at til fjarri sják
mínum feðrmunum;
eigi em ek haptr,
þótt ek væra hernumi;
þú fannt at ek lauss lífi.’²⁶⁰

8. ‘You upbraid me now, Fáfñir,
because I am far from
my patrimony;
I am not a prisoner,
even if I were a captive;
you found that I live unattached.’

It is evident from Sigurðr’s response to Fáfñir that there exists a tacit understanding of the connection between patrimony, or *óðal* property, and personal freedom, which reflects the observations regarding *óðal*-rights made in the previous chapter. In fact, Sigurðr’s reflexive reaction to Fáfñir’s accusations of captivity is to broach his separation from his agnatic property as though these two circumstances must necessarily be related. He defends himself against the perceived verbal chastisement of Fáfñir by continuing the theme of self-determination, and stresses his freedom *despite* being removed from his familial inheritance. The word used by Sigurðr to describe his free or unbound state is significant since ‘lauss’ (free or, as translated above, unattached) also signifies disengagement. In a similar vein to the erasure of his patronymic in the adoption of a fatherless name in his first utterance, as well as his repudiation of any external, pseudo-paternal influence by his foster-father, Reginn, Sigurðr claims his freedom and agency in the self-same

²⁶⁰ *Edda* II, 304-5.

moment that he ‘disengages’ himself from his inheritance and lays claim, instead, to Andvari’s stolen treasure. In this there is a distinct parallel between Sigurðr and Fáfnir who also acquires the golden property through a patricidal severance.

In order to appreciate the central function that names serve in the legitimisation of the possession and management of *óðal*-property in *Fáfnismál* one must explore this parallel between dragon and hero – particularly in the poet’s more metaphorical gesturing at this connection. All of Fáfnir’s warnings about the ill-fated possession of the treasure flow from Sigurðr’s use of his masking name which renders him a ‘noble beast’. It is Sigurðr’s *own* purposeful self-severing from the ‘bosom of his friends’ (*vina brjósti*) through name-based patricide that results in his captivity, not by Reginn but (as Fáfnir makes clear in his reaction to Sigurðr’s response above) by the cursed gold which Reginn and Sigurðr seek.²⁶¹ Fáfnir clearly recognises the parallel between Sigurðr’s and his own act of patricide and his subsequent reference to the ‘mask of awe’ or ‘terror’ (*ægishjalmr*), adopted in his possession of (and possession by) Andvari’s treasure which is effected *through* the murder of his father, comments on the patricidal name-mask that Sigurðr assumes. This ‘mask of terror’, a somewhat vague reference within the context of *Fáfnismál*, refers perhaps to nothing so much as Fáfnir’s symbolic appearance as a dragon (a creature that could well be served by the description, *göfugt dýr*) – an appearance that reflects outwardly the inner changes that occur through processes of social severance and isolation: the

²⁶¹ *Edda*, st. 7.

solitary dragon ‘snorted poison’ (*eitr fnæsta*) as he lay on his murdered father’s inheritance (*fǫður-arfr*) and this poisonous mask is one that should, as Sigurðr also seems to suggest, be understood metaphorically:²⁶²

19. ‘Inn fráni ormr,
þú gørðir fræs mikla
ok gazt harðan hug;
heipt at meiri
verðr hǫlða sonum
at þann hjálm hafi.’²⁶³

19. ‘The gleaming serpent,
you made great hissing
and thereby hardened your own heart;
all the more spite
will befall the sons of men
when they wear that helmet.’²⁶⁴

What Sigurðr seems to miss, however, from his exchange with the dragon is Fáfnir’s warning that it is the possession of the stolen property and the attempt to gain it that brings the mask into being: unlike Sigurðr’s sentiment that man wishes to ‘rule [his] property’ (*fé ráða*) until the end of his days, Fáfnir seems to suggest that it is property which rules the man and determines his fate.²⁶⁵ The *ægishjalmr* is as much a reflection of the terror within, than it is a means of inspiring terror in others – just as Sigurðr’s masking name both projects an awe-inspiring image with the intent of inspiring fear in others

²⁶² *Edda* II, 305-6; Ármann Jakobsson notes the possible figurative use of the helmet in *Fáfnismál*: “Enter the Dragon. Legendary Saga Courage and the Birth of the Hero,” in *Making History: Essays on the Fornaldarsögur*, ed. Martin Arnold and Alison Finlay (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, University College London, 2010), 43. It is also worth mentioning that the concept of ‘snorting poison’ is used figuratively elsewhere in the Poetic Edda: in *Guðrúnarkviða I* the instigator of Sigurðr’s murder, Brynhildr is said to “snort poison” with “fire burning in her eyes” (*brann [...] eldr ór augum, eitri fnæsti*) when she sees Sigurðr’s wound. See, *Edda* II, 333-4.

²⁶³ *Edda* II, 306.

²⁶⁴ It is worth noting that the word chosen for ‘men’ in stanza 19 above, is *hǫlðr* which implies, again, an *óðal* connection - particularly as the phrase ‘sons of men’ suggests familial lineage.

²⁶⁵ *Edda*, st. 10.

and exposes the fear that Sigurðr feels regarding the potential danger inherent in the revelation of his true name. It is when Sigurðr tastes of Fáfnir's hardened heart that he hears the language of the nervous nut-hatches (an ultimate anthropomorphic projection of meaning onto sound, so that what Sigurðr hears in twittering is nothing so much as those suspicious thoughts already in his mind) and it is therefore fear which drives him to commit a secondary patricide through the murder of his foster-father, taking full possession of the gold. With these acts he solidifies the mask of terror which he himself dons through the use of his initial masking name.

3.2 Fame, Judgement and Legitimacy

Fáfnismál issues a warning about the *type* of mask one wears and, in particular, about the masking of one's identity – of one's name – in the pursuit of self-determination at the cost of *óðal*-connections. What is important for the purposes of this chapter is that *Fáfnismál* does so by exploiting the co-occurring themes of 'names' and '*óðal*' as they are employed in poems particularly concerned with the establishment of power and legitimacy. This concern often presents itself in the agonistic speech-exchanges encountered in eddic compositions such as *Hárbarðsljóð* and the Helgi-poems. It is telling, for example, that Þórr does not hide his name in his confrontation with Óðinn in *Hárbarðsljóð*, but attempts to establish his power and right to cross the river instead by *revealing* his name and, importantly, his *óðal*-relations:

9. 'Segja mun ek til nafns míns,
þótt ek sekr sják,
ok til alls øðlis:

Ek em Óðins sonr,
 Meila bróðir,
 en Magna faðir,
 þrúðvaldr goða;
 við Þórr knáttu hér dæma.
 [...]’²⁶⁶

9. ‘I would declare my name,
 even were I an outlaw,
 and, to all, my *óðal*-origins:
 I am Óðinn’s son,
 Meili’s brother,
 and Magni’s father,
 mighty ruler of the gods,
 with Þórr here you do converse.
 [...]’

The word that Þórr chooses for his exchange with the ferryman is significant since *dæma* can also mean ‘to judge’ or to ‘pass sentence’. The use of this word in the context of the name and its associations recalls, furthermore, the use of the related noun, *dómr* (judgement or sentence), in a verse from *Hávamál* when it serves as a parallel to *órðstírr* (word-renown) in the preceding verse:

77. Deyr fé,
 deyja frændr,
 deyr sjálfr it sama;
 ek veit einn
 at aldri deyr,
 dómr um dauðan hvern.²⁶⁷

77. Cattle die
 kinsmen die,
 the self must die as well;
 I know one thing
 which never dies:
 the lasting impression of each departed.

²⁶⁶ *Edda* I, 390.

²⁶⁷ *Edda* I, 337. See also Chapter 1, p. 98 for my earlier treatment of this poem, particularly in my consideration of fame and immortality.

The use of *dómr* as a parallel concept to *órðstírr* brings the use of the Anglo-Saxon cognate, *dōm*, to mind – as various translations of the strophe demonstrate –²⁶⁸ particularly in Old English texts such as *Beowulf* where *dōm* often signifies ‘fame’ or ‘glory’.

One such example, reflecting a similar sentiment to the gnomic expression of *Hávamál* above, is the following utterance spoken by the hero of *Beowulf* himself:

[...] wyrce sē þe mōte
dōmes ær dēaþe; þæt bið drihtguman
unlifǣndum æfter sēlest.²⁶⁹

[...] let he who may, attain
praise before death; that is best for
an un-living retainer after [his death].²⁷⁰

What is important with regards to the relationship between the Old Norse and Anglo-Saxon cognates in the context of a signification that suggests ‘renown’ (a signification which is *not* ascribed to the Norse term in standard Old Norse-Icelandic dictionaries), is that the Anglo-Saxon *dōm* in its reference to

²⁶⁸ See, for example, Carlyne Larrington, *The Poetic Edda* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 23; as well as Henry Adams Bellows, *The Poetic Edda: The Mythological Poems* (Newburyport: Dover Publications Inc., 2004), 44.

²⁶⁹ Fulk, Bjork and Niles, eds., *Klaeber's Beowulf*, ll. 1387-1389, p. 48.

²⁷⁰ In his translation of the text, Howell D. Chickering, Jr. translates *dōm* as “fame”: *Beowulf: A Dual-Language Edition* (New York: Anchor Books, 2006), 129; Andy Orchard translates the word variously as “glory” and “fame” in his *A Critical Companion to Beowulf* (Cambridge: DSBrewer, 2003), 133, 259; Michael Swanton and J.R.R. Tolkien translate *dōm* as “glory” in, Michael Swanton, *Beowulf*, Rev. ed. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 101 and, J. R. R. Tolkien and Christopher Tolkien, *Beowulf: A Translation and Commentary, Together with Sellic Spell* (London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2014), 53; while Michael Alexander translates the term as “renown” in, *Beowulf, Legends from the Ancient North* (London: Penguin Books, 2013), l. 1384.

‘praise’ and ‘glory’ is also, according to the Bosworth-Toller Anglo-Saxon dictionary, specifically related to ‘power, dominion [... and] authority’.²⁷¹ This connection is also emphasised in the *DOE* which notes that the sense of *dōm* as ‘authority’ and ‘power’, ‘merg[es] with [the] senses glory [and] fame’.²⁷² That praise, glory or fame should be associated with, and be seen as equivalent concepts to authority and power, is crucially linked to the idea of *dōm* as judgment in the sense that, as a judgement or a sentence, the establishment and reflection of power through, and in, praise responds directly to a challenging and a questioning of powers and rights.

To judge is to assess the legitimacy of actions and in the case of political power these actions pertain to the legitimacy of rulership and the holding of dominion (related to *óðal*-rights). *Dómr* in Old Norse may be akin to *órðstírr* as ‘fame’ or, according to Carlyne Larrington’s translation, as ‘reputation’ precisely because *dómr* as ‘judgement’ signifies an assessment of one’s right to exercise power and authority by means of an evaluation of one’s actions and attributes, culminating in the formation of something like a ‘lasting impression’ (as in my translation of the text above) or ‘opinion’: this is a culmination of associations which can be summarised in those thoughts connected with one’s name, that is, one’s fame. Indeed, this idea is supported by the *DOE* which in defining *dōm* equates ‘glory’ and ‘fame’ with ‘favourable judgement (especially after death)’.²⁷³ Such fame is, moreover, propagated and enriched through praises that, in their own capacity, confer a

²⁷¹ T. Northcote Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon dictionary, based on the manuscript collections of the late Joseph Bosworth: Supplement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921), 207.

²⁷² *DOE*, ‘*dōm*’, accessed 18 September 2017.

²⁷³ *DOE*, ‘*dōm*’, accessed 18 September 2017.

condoning judgment (recalling the function of ‘endorsement’ that Clunies Ross speaks of in relation to skaldic encomia) upon the actions and attributes they recount.²⁷⁴ When one considers, therefore, that Þórr’s character in *Hárbarðsljóð* describes his exchange with Hárbarðr using the term *dæma*, implying a process of judgment and therefore a challenging of authority and legitimacy, it is significant that Þórr states what may be construed as his ‘reputation-*dómr*’ and that this *dómr* consists of his name and the names of his *óðal*-relations. Indeed, these are the terms with which Óðinn frames his assessment of Þórr’s right to cross the river, declaring that only *góðr* (good) men whom he is able to *kunna* (recognise) will be permitted to use the ferry, whilst implying that such recognition is effected through the revelation of the name: ‘*segðu til nafns þíns, ef þú vill sundit fara*’ (‘state your name if you wish to cross the sound’).²⁷⁵

A similar altercation occurs in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* (Second Lay of Helgi Hundingsbani hereafter *Hhund II*), a poem which forms a triad with two other Helgi-poems in the *Poetic Edda*, both of which also feature a central antagonistic verbal exchange between characters who challenge (and undermine) one another’s authority and power through name-questioning, name-calling and slander. When Helgi Hundingsbani (the half-brother of Sigurðr mentioned above) and his army prepare to attack Hǫðbroddr Granmarsson thereby securing the valkyrie Sigrún (Hǫðbroddr’s betrothed) for Helgi himself, Hǫðbroddr’s brother, Guðmundr Granmarsson, challenges

²⁷⁴ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 23; Clunies Ross, *History*, 40.

²⁷⁵ *Edda* I, 389-90.

these hostile visitors by asking them to reveal their identity. Helgi's brother, Sinfjötli, complies with Guðmundr's demand and declares Helgi's name, attempting at the same time to validate Helgi's campaign and hence his legitimacy by referencing the all-important concept of *óðal*:

25. 'Hér má Høðbroddr
Helga kenna,
flóttu trauðan,
í flota miðjum;
hann hefir eðli
ættar þinnar,
arf Fjorsunga,
und sik þrungit.' ²⁷⁶

25. 'Here may Høðbroddr
recognise Helgi
unwilling to take flight
in the midst of the fleet,
he has the *óðal*-origins
of your family –
inheritance of the Fjorsungs –
under his power.'

Helgi's famous name precedes him and the presence that this name engenders upon recognition is solidified in the descriptive appendage that Sinfjötli attaches to his brother's name: Helgi is *flótti trauðr* (unwilling to take flight), that is, he is one who remains – who stays in place – and who therefore brings ancestral property (even ancestral property belonging to other familial lineages) under his power. Not surprising is Guðmundr's response in which he states that the matter would have to be judged (*dæma*) when Helgi's army arrive at Frekastein. Sinfjötli implies, moreover that this judgement (*dómr*) will, in the style of Sigurðr who 'weighs' Fáfnir with Gramr, be achieved with the sword (*brímir*). Indeed, the creation of a *dómr* in the sense of 'fame',

²⁷⁶ *Edda* II, 276.

represented by the name, may often be the outcome of battles over ancestral properties and such names serve as beacons of acquired legitimacy over *óðal* lands. Helgi Sigmundsson is known, for example, by his byname, Hundingsbani, due to his killing of King Hunding.

The extent to which the famous name brings with it particular associations that engender a ruler's presence and, hence, legitimacy, can be seen in the eddic recounting of Helgi's name in both of the Hundingsbani-narratives. The phrase, *flótti trauðr*, stated in an almost byname-like supplement to the revelation of Helgi's name by Sinfjötli in *Hhund II* occurs in a near exact replication of the passage within *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* (First Lay of Helgi Hundingsbani, hereafter *Hhund I*):

35. Þar mun Høðbroddr
Helga finna,
flugtrauðan gram
í flota miðjum²⁷⁷

35. There will Høðbroddr
find Helgi
flight-loathing prince
in the midst of the fleet

[My emphasis]

The use of such a phrase in relation to the name bears a close resemblance to the what might be construed as a 'praise-name' found in other cultures that employ praise-poetry and this is an element to which I shall return in the final section of this chapter. For the moment, however, I would like to focus on the fact that the 'praising' phrase employed in the Hundingsbani-poems and

²⁷⁷ *Edda* II, 253.

which clearly demonstrates a connection between the name and certain mental associations which have a narrative element to them (an element that one might think of as ‘reputation’), is a microcosmic illustration of the larger narrative association that the Helgi-name so evidently carries with it and which allows for a modern readership to refer to these related eddic texts as the ‘Helgi-poems’.

That the typical Helgi-narrative indicates a nominal association is clear from the fact that the narrative retains a number of consistent features even when a ‘different’ Helgi (that is, a Helgi other than Helgi Hundingsbani) is the protagonist. This is certainly the case in *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar* (Lay of Helgi Hjörvarðsson hereafter *HHj*) which exhibits a parallel flyting episode to those found in *Hhund I* and *Hhund II*, as well as a central romantic relationship between Helgi and a valkyrie – a theme encountered in all of the Helgi-poems, including the lost *Káru ljóð* which, according to the prose-frame of *Hhund II*, depicts the relationship between Helgi Haddingjaskati and the valkyrie, Kára Hálfdanardóttir. It may be said, in fact, that it is *through* the name of Helgi that the poems enter into the Helgi-narrative. This is particularly true of *HHj* and *Hhund II* in which the revelation or recognition of Helgi’s name within the poetry (as opposed to the prosimetrum) directs each narrative away from fairly different beginnings to shared plot scenarios in which Helgi converses with a valkyrie whom he subsequently weds and in which a flyting episode takes place, before the narratives diverge once more to shape alternate endings. Interesting too in this respect is the fact that the introduction of *Hhund II* which, unlike *Hhund I* details Helgi’s actions prior,

and leading up to the killing of Hundingr, confers upon its hero a masking name and costume so that, excepting Helgi's message to Hæmingr Hundingsson in the very first strophe of the poem, those elements of the Helgi-narrative not included in *Hhund I* are enacted by Helgi in the covert guises of Hamall Hagalsson and a nameless bondwoman respectively.

That the narrative associations of the Helgi-name seem to relay the presence of the hero himself is suggested by the prosimetric attempt in both *HHj* and *Hhund II* to understand the character and plot similarities in terms of reincarnation: Helgi and Sváfa/Sigrún/Kára are said to be *endrborinn* (reborn).²⁷⁸ Such reincarnation correlates, at least in the case of Helgi, with the naming of the hero, and the prosimetric introduction of *Hhund II*, for example, explains that Helgi Hundingsbani is named after Helgi Hjørvarðsson. This understanding of Helgi's reincarnation(s) seems to suggest a view of naming as a process of living memorialisation which initiates a continuity of personhood.²⁷⁹ A similar element of establishing kinship relations and social inheritance through the name is certainly presented in the various naming-episodes occurring in the Helgi-poems – most notably through those ideolexical references to *óðal* that accompany naming procedures. *Hhund I* states, for instance, that Helgi Hundingsbani receives from his father, Sigmundr, his name along with his ancestral

²⁷⁸ *Edda* II, 215, 239, 257.

²⁷⁹ For similar views but from a different cultural perspective, see: Barbara Bodenhorn, "Calling into Being: Naming and Speaking Names on Alaska's North Slope," in *The Anthropology of Names and Naming*, ed. Gabriele Vom Bruck and Barbara Bodenhorn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 139–56.

property, as well as, by way of a sword, the means of procuring yet more *óðal* lands:

8. Gaf hann Helga nafn
ok Hringstaði,
Sólfjöll, Snæfjöll
ok Sigarsvöllu,
Hringstöð, Hátún
ok Himinvanga,
blóðorm búinn
bræðr Sinfjötla.²⁸⁰

8. He gave Helgi a name
as well as Hringstaðr,
Sólfjöll, Snæfjöll
and Sigarsvöllr,
Hringstöðr, Hátún
and Himinvangr,
with blood-serpent he endowed
the brother of Sinfjötli.

The prosimetrum of *HHj*, in turn, informs its audience that Helgi is named by Sváfa whilst sitting on a mound (*haugr*) – that crucial *óðal*-site which serves as an ancestral conduit for the transferral of power and property.²⁸¹ In addition to the name which she bestows upon him Sváfa moreover ‘gifts’ Helgi with the location of the sword he specifically employs in his campaign to win back his inheritance, as rightful successor, from Hróðmarr, the killer of Helgi’s maternal grandfather and one who thinks himself in possession of an ‘heirless patrimony’ (*aldauðra arfr*).²⁸² Helgi stresses, furthermore, his legal claim to this property in terms of *óðal*-rights:

²⁸⁰ It is perhaps also telling that Helgi, in contrast to his half-brother who, separated from his patrimony, disavows his name in *Fáfnismál*, is said, after the receipt of his name and *óðal* in *Hhund* I, to “grow up in the bosom of his friends” (*vaxa fyr vina brjósti*): *Edda* II, 248. Compare this with Fáfnir’s statement in *Fáfnismál* v.7: *Edda* II, 304.

²⁸¹ *Edda* II, 260-1.

²⁸² *Edda* II, 262.

12. En Hróðmarr skal
 hringum ráða,
 þeim er áttu
 órir niðjar;
 [...] ²⁸³

12. But Hróðmarr should
 rule rings,
 that which
 our ancestors owned;
 [...]

The name and the sword are important corresponding gifts to an *óðal*-lord: the latter allows a ruler to conquer and regain ancestral lands whilst also, importantly, constructing the reputation that will connect itself to one's name. That this ideology transcends a purely eddic corpus is demonstrated by the thematic incorporation of a 'renown-through-battle' motif in skaldic verse. Two skaldic examples – the first from Glúmr Geirason's tenth-century *Gráfeldardrápa* (*Drápa* about [Haraldr] gráfeldr), and the second from Óttarr svarti's eleventh-century *Knútsdrápa* (*Drápa* about Knútr [inn ríki]) – are particularly illustrative of this point:

From *Gráfeldardrápa*:

6. Austr rauð jofra þrýstir
 orðrakkr fyr bý norðan
 brand, þars bjarmskar kindir,
 brinnanda, sák rinna.
 Gótt hlaut gumna sættir
 (geirveðr) í fgr þeiri
 (qðlingi fekksk ungum)
 orð (á Vínu borði).²⁸⁴

6. In the east the word-courageous
 compeller of princes reddened,
 north of the village, the burning sword,
 where I saw Permian people flee.

²⁸³ *Edda* II, 262.

²⁸⁴ *SkP* I, 255.

The reconciler of men got
in that attack (a spear-storm
was given to the young prince
on Dvina's banks) a good reputation.

From *Knútsdrápa*:

10. [...]

Vátt, en valfall þótti

verðung, jöfurr, sverði,

nær fyr norðan stóru

nafn gnógt Danaskóga.²⁸⁵

10. [...]

You won through battle, and it seemed

a slaughter to the retainers, with

a great sword near the north of

the Forest of Dean, a prolific name.

The name (or name-grouping, if bynames and patronymics are taken into account) with its various associations and narratives, is used in turn as a mechanism for legitimising possession of, and rulership over, *óðal* properties. It is interesting to note, in this regard, that one of the 'names' by which Glúmr describes Haraldr gráfeldr in *Gráfeldardrápa* above is, *qðlingi* (prince) which belongs to the same complex as *óðal*, *aðal* and *eðli* described in Chapter 1. The word may even be translated as 'an allodial owner or possessor of *óðal*' although it is used in poetic contexts simply as a synonym for prince.²⁸⁶ As a receptacle for presence due to the memory and imagination that mental associations evoke, the name serves as an *óðal* marker much as the mound and the runestone (inscribed with presencing names) serve to mark out ruler-presence in the landscape, thereby

²⁸⁵ *SkP* I, 779.

²⁸⁶ *CV*, 762.

legitimising *óðal* claims. It is important to note then, that the name legitimises not only because it is specifically associated with certain ancestral properties (which may well be the case, particularly where those properties themselves bear the names of those who possess them), but also because it generates a mental presence of the named whose power is legitimised through that presence. This is a legitimisation through presence which one clearly sees in the establishment and practice of *óðal*-rights and to which the name, as presencing mechanism, directly contributes. The conjuring of presence through the name in an *óðal* context is, moreover, represented in eddic sources such as *Hervararkviða*. The poem, contained within the thirteenth century *fornaldarsaga*, *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, describes how the spirited Hervor summons her father Angantýr within his burial mound by calling his name along with the names of her other deceased kin in a refrain-like chant. Hervor's reason for doing so does not come as a surprise: she wishes to summon the presence of her ancestor, through the calling of his name, in order to claim as her inheritance the sword, Tyrting.²⁸⁷

The fact that a name can make present its referent and serve as a substitute for the body of that referent is suggested, in the skaldic context above, by the metaphorical language in the verse from *Knútsdrápa*. Óttarr's use of the verb *vega* to denote Knútr inn ríki's winning of fame through battle, for example, brings to mind the use of terms such as *vega* and *dæma* in flyting episodes throughout the *Edda*. If one translates this particular section of the verse not

²⁸⁷ See Guðni Jónsson, *Eddukvæði (Sæmundar edda)*. (Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1954), 541–51.

as ‘you have won a prolific name through battle with a great sword’, but instead as, ‘you have weighed (or fought) a prolific name with a great sword’, the sense of the *helmingr* is no less consistent with the ideolexicon of *óðal* and the role that names play within it. Importantly, *nafn* (name) in this latter translation serves as a metonym for Knútr’s adversary, Eadmund Ironside, and indicates a poetic conceptualisation of the name as a word capable of constituting the individual: to weigh the name *is* to weigh the person. The outcome of such ‘weighing’ or judging through battle and agonistic speech exchanges is a reputation which further helps to engender presence by contributing to the network of associations that personal names bear. This is reflected in the fact that reputations can often become attached to a personal name as a byname (Ironside is an apt example) or, as I shall discuss in more detail presently, a collection of praise-names, so that, like Óðinn, a ruler’s name is really a composite- or list-name that legitimises the possession and exercising of power.

4. Towards an Encomiastic Employment of Names

Poetic name-lists (so-called *pulur*) that catalogue either personal or ancestral names are often concerned with legitimising *óðal*-claims in order to establish the right to rule and possess territories. *Rígsþula*, as I have already mentioned in Chapter One, is such a poem and lists the ancestors of a mythical aristocracy in order to legitimise the right of power that is, due to a conformance to the principles of *óðal*, inherent in those names that are adopted as titles by Viking Age rulers, most notably, ‘Jarl’ and ‘Konungr’.

In the fictional world of the poem this conformance to the principles of *óðal*, which constitutes a persistent ancestral presence in the landscape, is notably engendered – and can only be engendered – by the names of those ancestors listed. The same may be said for *Hyndluljóð* (Lay of Hyndla) which recounts the journey of the Vanir goddess Freyja and her champion, Óttarr ungi, to the giantess Hyndla in the attempt to procure information regarding Óttarr's ancestry which will allow him to successfully claim his inheritance. Worth pointing out too is the fact that Freyja disguises Óttarr as her boar, Hildisvíni (battle-swine) since, through her description of Hildisvíni as a golden glowing boar (*Gullinbursti* is 'Golden Bristle'), Óttarr's appearance recalls Freyr's boar that is so named.²⁸⁸ As discussed in Chapter One, Freyr and his boar symbolise a conquering and cultivation of territory that is closely associated with an *óðal*-based ideology of rulership and the boar-guise Óttarr dons in his quest to claim his inheritance therefore constitutes an important ideolexical reference. So too does the inclusion of Óttarr's pedigree, what Stefan Brink refers to as his *langfeðgatal*, which enumerates five generations of his agnatic forefathers.²⁸⁹

Aron Gurevich connects this listing of ancestors to Norse inheritance litigation noting that,

Óttarr had to know his genealogy to defend his inheritance rights to his paternal estate just as Northmen did when they litigated in the law court on the matter of *óðal* right. It seems permissible to interpret the inclusion of Óttarr's pedigree in the legend [...] as a tendency inherent

²⁸⁸ *Edda* I, 461.

²⁸⁹ Stefan Brink, "Law and Legal Customs in Viking Age Scandinavia," 104.

in the ancient mentality to mythologise and poeticise property relations.²⁹⁰

Brink further strengthens the association between poetic name-lists and the ideology of *óðal*-rights by connecting the enumeration of lineage in poems such as *Hyndluljóð* to the listing of ancestral names on certain runestones which is, of course, the theme with which I begin this chapter. The most important conceptual similarity joining the links that both Brink and Gurevich draw between the poetic listing of names, and the ideolexical theory of naming and *óðal* (also proposed in this chapter), is Gurevich's view on the performative impact of such lists in Norse society:

Enumeration of genealogies and names is an old culture's formalised language in which every name conceals a complex of stories and events, and every name, by necessity, invokes a series of associations and emotions.²⁹¹

What I propose is that this ability of the name to evoke associations and emotions plays a crucial role in the generation of a mental presence of the named, which is *why* names are such powerful legitimising tools in an *óðal* context.

One is now faced with the question of how the theory expounded in this chapter relates to skaldic practice and the purpose of skaldic performance in the political context of the Viking Age court. Though I have employed some skaldic poetry in my illustration of certain points, I have not yet fully explained why these points are important in shaping an understanding of

²⁹⁰ A. Ya. Gurevich, "Hyndluljóð," ed. Phillip Pulsiano and Kirsten Wolf, *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities. Garland Encyclopedias of the Middle Ages ; 1 (New York ; London: Garland, 1993), 309.

²⁹¹ Quoted in Brink, "Law and Legal Customs in Viking Age Scandinavia," 103.

skaldic politics and, specifically, an understanding of its function as a political instrument in the strategies and tactics of the itinerant Viking Age ruler. Those skaldic examples that most resemble poetic *pulur* in both structure and theme – such as the ninth-century *Ynglingatal* composed by Þjóðólfr ór Hvini for Rǫgnvaldr heiðumhár (High with Honours), as well as Eyvindr skáldaspillir's *Háleygjatal*, composed during the tenth century in honour of Hákon Sigurðarson – demonstrate that a model of ancestral enumeration can be adopted in a skaldic context and with similar legitimising consequences to those portrayed in *pulur* from the eddic corpus. Erin Goeres has examined these poems, notably, through the lens of commemorative poetry and drawn similar conclusions regarding the role that enumerative compositions play in the legitimisation of rulership whilst taking care to point out *óðal*-references – especially those pertaining to burial locations.²⁹² However, an understanding of the legitimising implications of enumerative poems that clearly follow listing models does not explain the legitimising function of skaldic encomia in general – nor does it completely account for the *óðal*-value inherent in this type of poetry, since the focus seems, for the most part, to be on references to *óðal*-related concepts and imagery rather than on the establishment of *óðal*-rights through the presence engendered by the language of the poetry itself: in *Ynglingatal* the listing of ancestors and their burial mounds might, rightfully, be seen as significant in a context of royal inheritance and claims to the throne, for example, but this is likely also the case for Þjóðólfr's decision to conclude the poem with a strophe explicitly focusing on Rǫgnvaldr heiðumhár's name and *kenninafn* (byname) as a

²⁹² Goeres, *The Poetics of Commemoration*, especially 19-53.

means of establishing the presence of the ruler in the mind of a courtly audience.

4.1 Itinerant Poets and Poetic Itinerancies

In order to fully comprehend the legitimising role of skaldic poetry, particularly with regards to the role that skaldic verse plays in establishing a spatial and temporal itinerancy for Viking Age rulers, I now turn to yet another poem containing three sets of *þulur* – this time in an Old English context – namely *Widsith* (Extensive Journey). *Widsith*, a poem found only in the Exeter Book, has a *terminus ante quem* of c.990 and parts of the composition, if not the whole, may well have come into being well before this date. Though composed in an Anglo-Saxon milieu, the work’s context nevertheless corresponds to the late Germanic Iron Age and early Viking Age, both of which bear witness to the germination and flourishing of Old Norse skaldic poetry with similar heroic motifs. The reason why *Widsith* is of particular importance to this current study is not limited to the resemblance between its listing of names and Norse *þulur*, nor is it due to the fact that its poetic protagonist has, convincingly, been compared to characters from Norse sagas such as the eponymous hero of *Nornagests þátr* (Story of Norna-Gest).²⁹³ Rather, it is because *Widsith* is, like much skaldic poetry, self-reflexive and therefore concerned with its own poetics: not only does the poem combine so many of those elements pertaining to name-lists and *óðal* that are the staple of those legitimising enumerations discussed above, but it

²⁹³ Margaret Schlauch, “Widsith, Víthförlull, and Some Other Analogues,” *PMLA* 46, no. 4 (1931): 969–87.

also reflects upon the role of the courtly poet as an enumerator. More specifically, it links the act of enumeration to a royal patron's desire for renown and their concurrent attainment of a realm whilst, crucially, connecting the poet's processes of courtly composition and recital to spatial and temporal travel, thereby demonstrating the itinerant potential of a 'name-centred' poetry.

There are two primary 'levels' to the *Widsith* composition: that of Widsith's direct speech, ostensibly quoted by an anonymous poet who frames the quotation with a brief introduction and conclusion, and that of the exegetical framework of the anonymous poet – that is, the poetry of the frame itself.²⁹⁴ This primary frame within which Widsith's words are situated is, I believe, as important as the frame that Widsith as a character-poet employs in his 'own' poetry – particularly if one views the composition in its entirety as a self-reflexive investigation in which poetry as craft and calling is actively scrutinised. In this case Widsith becomes an essentialised projection of all poets and their courtly function – an exemplifying condensation of the role of poetry in courtly politics. This view is consistent with Robert Creed's notion that *Widsith* poses a type of riddle. For him 'the answer to the question "Say what I am called" is not only "Widsith," but also *mærðu, dom, lof*, [...], the singer singing within an oral tradition'.²⁹⁵ Creed's observation that

²⁹⁴ For a more detailed overview of the structure of *Widsið*, see Kemp Malone, *Widsith*, Methuen's Old English Library (London: Methuen, 1936).

²⁹⁵ Robert P. Creed, "Widsith's Journey through Germanic Tradition," in *Anglo-Saxon Poetry: Essays in Appreciation: For John C. McGalliard*, ed. Lewis E. Nicholson and Dolores Warwick Frese (Notre Dame, Ind; London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), 387.

mærdū, *dōm* and *lof* (all of which are mentioned in the text and roughly signify, with varying degrees of emphasis, glory, honour, fame and praise)²⁹⁶ are central and interwoven concepts within the poem is certainly supported by the outer frame of the poem which culminates its assessment of Widsith's speech with the perception that wandering poets find and serve a ruler,

[...]
 3ydda 3leapne, 3eofum unhnearne,
 seþe fore du3uþe pile dōm āræran,
 eorlscipe æfnan, oþ þæt eal scæceð,
 leoht 7 lif somod; lof se 3epyrceð,
 hafað under heofonum heahfæstne dōm.²⁹⁷

[...]
 skilled in poetry, un-stingy with gifts,
 he who wishes, before the multitude, to establish fame,
 to perform bravery, until all is fled,
 light and life together; who obtains praise,
 has steadfast glory under the heavens.

This final section of the poem cannot but remind one of those strophes from *Hávamál* discussed variously during the course of both this and the previous chapter: cattle, kinsmen and the self must die but *orðstírr* (fame or glory) and *dómr* (repute) live on eternally. What makes this culturally shared existential construal of fame so significant, moreover, is the explicit way in which the poet of *Widsith* connects the construction of a ruler's fame with the composition of encomia – a connection also made in skaldic material.

²⁹⁶ See, Joseph Bosworth, "Mærþu," ed. Thomas Northcote Toller Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online* (Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague, December 15, 2013), <http://www.bosworthtoller.com/022195>; Joseph Bosworth, "Dóm," ed. Thomas Northcote Toller Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online* (Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague, December 15, 2013), <http://www.bosworthtoller.com/007799>; and Joseph Bosworth, "Lof," ed. Thomas Northcote Toller Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Online* (Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague, December 15, 2013), <http://www.bosworthtoller.com/021816>.

²⁹⁷ Malone, *Widsith*, ll. 139–143, pp. 96–7.

Not only are rulers, as the willing subjects of skaldic praise, variously described by skalds as being – like the ideal ruler of *Widsith* who, as shown above, ‘wishes to establish fame before the multitude’ (*seþe fore duzuþe pile dōm āræran*) – *frægðar fúss* (eager for fame), *tírargjarn* (eager for renown), *tíreggjaðr* (egged on to glory), a *tírfylgjandi* (renown-follower) and *fremðar gjarn* (eager for honour), but the production of renown is clearly linked to the composition of skaldic praise.²⁹⁸ Such references can be found throughout the skaldic corpus. The tenth-century poet, Einarr skálaglamm, for example, equates his poetry in *Vellekla*, expanded by the great deeds of Hákon Sigurðarson, to the ruler’s attainment of glory. Through two analogous intercalary phrases in a strophe describing the jarl’s success in battle, Einarr explains that the jarl’s actions directly increase the matter for his encomium – ‘growth came to the Vína [river] of the wine-world [vat] of the friend of Loptr [Óðinn]’ (*kom vøxtr í Vínu vínheims vinar Loptis*), that is the Mead of Poetry – while also noting that these actions bring ‘glory to the people’s instructor’ (*snytri þjóðar tírar*).²⁹⁹ Einarr is clearly suggesting that the increase in poetry is directly related to the gaining of glory or fame – a suggestion explicitly stated by later skalds also. One of the kennings Hallar-Steinn employs in his twelfth-century *Rekstefja* (Split-Refrain) renders ‘poetry’ as ‘the dark dwarf-rain of glory [Mead of Poetry]’ (*dimmt dvergregn dýrðar*) which seems also to be ‘strengthened’ as a result of Óláfr Tryggvason’s *dáðar* (deeds),³⁰⁰ while Bjarni byskup Kolbeinsson states that

²⁹⁸ *SkP* I, v. 8, p. 21; *SkP* I, v. 6, p. 398; *SkP* I, v. 1, p. 644; *SkP* I, v. 12, p. 552 and v.14, p. 554.

²⁹⁹ *SkP* I, v. 11, p. 297.

³⁰⁰ *SkP* I, v. 31, p. 933.

the desire for fame constitutes material for poetry in his *Jómsvíkingadrápa* (*Drápa* about the Jómsvíkingar):

11. Enn vildu þá einkum
 öldurmenn, at skyldu
 — slíkt eru yrkisefni —
 ágæta sér leita.
 [...] ³⁰¹

11. Then leaders again especially
 wished that they should
 — such is material for a poem —
 seek fame for themselves.
 [...]

Both the ‘seeking of fame’ and the fame itself constitute material for the skald’s work.

That Old English poems such as *Widsith* might share a culturally-determined poetics concerning fame and praise with Old Norse encomia is not entirely surprising. What is significant however, is the fact that the observation of the relationship between fame and praise in *Widsith* is made in the self-reflexive outer frame which seeks to provide an exegetical contextualisation of the poetry composed by the character, Widsith, cited within – poetry which consists almost entirely of *þulur*. What such an intratextual summary suggests is that, for the poet of *Widsith* at least, fame resides in the remembered name which survives the grave; its means of survival is the praise-poem which is, simultaneously, constituted by the name itself. The remembered names of those rulers catalogued by Widsith provide, by their very existence, evidence of the long-lived fame and glory that named rulers

³⁰¹ *SkP* I, 967.

enjoy even as their names, with associated memories, shape the material out of which the encomium is constructed.

The importance of memory is key, since it is memory and imagination (that is, creatively reconstructed memory) that engender presence and hence, confer legitimacy. The outer frame of *Widsith* is, of course, an exercise in critical memory since it analytically ‘remembers’ the poetry it enfolds. Indeed, the ‘memory’ that *Widsith* (as poem) conveys of Widsith (the poet) flows from Widsith’s name as the very first word of the outer frame: ‘Widsith maðolade’ (Widsith spoke).³⁰² And this memory likewise constitutes and expands Widsith’s own fame. Memory, engendered by the name, is the method of fame – particularly in its temporal trajectory – and as such it is also construed as poetic material within self-reflexive encomia. Óttarr svarti’s *Höfuðlausn*, composed in honour of King Óláfr Haraldsson, is illustrative in this respect:

1. Hlýð, manngöfugr, minni
myrkblás, þvítt kannk yrkja;
finnum yðr ok annan,
allvaldr, konung fallinn.
Þat telk, garms ok Gauta
glaðnistanda misstak,
döglings verk at dýrka,
dýrr þengill, mitt lengi.³⁰³

1. Listen, noble and mighty ruler,
to Dark-Black’s memory, because I can compose;
we meet you and
another worthy king.
I consider that my [duty] (the hound of
Gauti’s glad feeder I’ve lost)
to glorify the work of the prince,
precious ruler, for a long time.

³⁰² Malone, *Widsith*, l. 1 p. 61.

³⁰³ *SkP* I, 741.

Not only is it clear from Óttarr's opening verse that his praise consists of memories, but also that praise-as-recollection is entangled with the process of fame: his praise is meant, after all, to 'glorify for a long time' (*dýrka lengi*).

It is significant that the extensive lists of memory-inducing names in *Widsith* may, moreover, be read within an *óðal* framework as Widsith's introspective account of his life as a poet suggests. This inner gnomic frame situates Widsith's praise quite firmly within the context of *óðal* rulership:

‘Fela ic monna ʒefræʒn mæʒþum pealdan!
 Sceal þeoda ʒehþylc þeapum lifʒan,
 eorl æfter oþrum eðle rædan,
 se þe his þeodenstol ʒeþeon þile.
 [...]’³⁰⁴

‘I have heard of many men who wielded power over nations!
 Every chief should live according to custom,
 one jarl after others should rule over *óðal*-land
 who wishes to obtain his chiefly seat.
 [...]’

When read within an *óðal*-context, Widsith's name-lists acquire a new significance. These names with their presencing potential take on the shape of praise in order to generate a far-reaching (in both spatial and temporal terms), *óðal*-informed legitimacy. If we slightly alter John Niles's observation that 'praise, gifts and land [in *Widsith*] operate as parts of a single social economy', to state that praise, gifts and land operate as parts of an *óðal* economy, presence might well be seen as its currency whilst legitimacy serves as its primary commodity.³⁰⁵ That praise-poetry operates within an

³⁰⁴ Malone, *Widsith*, ll. 10-13, pp. 65-66.

³⁰⁵ John D. Niles, "Widsith and the Anthropology of the Past," *Philological Quarterly* 78, no. 1/2 (1999): 186.

óðal-economy, such as that portrayed in *Widsith*, and that *encomia* seem, moreover, to possess an equal value to *óðal*-property in that economy, is suggested by the language of exchange that defines, for example, Widsith's own attainment of *óðal*-land from Eadgils:

þone ic Eadgylse on æht sealde,
 minum hleodryhtne, þa ic to ham bicpom,
 leofum to leane, þæs þe he me lond forþeaf,
 mines fæder eþel, frea Myrðinza.³⁰⁶

[the torc] I gave Eadgils, my dear lord-protector,
 in remuneration, respecting property,
 when I came home because he, lord of the Myrðingas,
 permitted me land – my father's *óðal*.

The gift with which Widsith repays his lord is a torc (*beag*) bestowed upon the poet by the Gothic Eormanric, presumably as a payment for Widsith's eulogising services. The incredible value of this torc – six hundred sceats of gold – clearly specified by the poet in the lines immediately preceding Widsith's account of his return to Eadgils, serves as a tangible symbol of the worth of praise, on the one hand, and the equal worth of *óðal*-property on the other. Widsith's praise, in bullion terms, carries the same weight as *óðal* possession.

Widsith's exchange of the torc for *óðal* can also be read as a metaphorical representation of the exchange between *óðal* and poetry – one which is entirely consistent with the extended metaphor initiated by the outer frame of the poem: Widsith speaks, and in speaking unlocks his *wordhord* (word-

³⁰⁶ Malone, *Widsith*, ll. 93–96, p. 86.

hoard).³⁰⁷ The idea that words of praise constitute treasures that might be taken from a ‘hoard’ strengthens the notion that the ‘torcs’ Widsith receives and hands out in turn, represent the eulogies Widsith hears of, composes and, likewise, ‘distributes’ on his travels. Certain prose accounts such as that of *Nornagests þátttr* relating the manner in which objects of value (received as payment for poetic services) act as catalysts for tales and poetry, demonstrate that gifts may serve mnemonic – and not purely ekphrastic – purposes in Anglo-Saxon and Norse poetics.

There is something more essential to note regarding the conceptualisation of an exchange economy between *óðal*-lands and praise-poetry than the corresponding ideological worth of these two ‘commodities’. What the ability to ‘pay’ for *óðal* with praise implies is that praise can be employed to attain *óðal* and may, of course, be employed not only by poets but by those who patronise them in the effort to secure ever wider political territory. It is no coincidence that Widsith’s praise of Ealhild extends her fame ‘geond londa fela’ (through many lands), widely establishing her superiority as a most-generous queen.³⁰⁸ Nor is it surprising that Widsith, traveling through *epel Gotena* (the *óðal* of the Goths), should also be present at, and perhaps instrumental in, the Goths’ defence of their *epelstol* (*óðal*-seat) against their enemies.³⁰⁹ If one returns, indeed, to the exegetical outer frame of the poem it is particularly striking to find that the closing lines can be translated in a way which provides a layered signification supporting the relationship not

³⁰⁷ Malone, *Widsith*, l. 1, p. 61.

³⁰⁸ Malone, *Widsith*, l. 99, p. 87.

³⁰⁹ Malone, *Widsith*, l. 109; 122, p. 89; 92.

only between praise and fame, but also between praise and power (and hence, between fame and power):

[...]
 seþe **fore duþe** þile **dōm** āræran,
 eorlscipe æfnan, oþ þæt eal scæceð,
 leoht 7 lif somod; lof se ʒeþyrceð,
 hafað under heofonum heahfæstne **dōm**.³¹⁰

[...]
 he who wishes, **for the sake of power**,³¹¹ to establish **fame**,
 to perform bravery, until all is fled,
 light and life together; who obtains praise,
 has steadfast **authority** under the heavens

[My emphasis] CROSS REFERENCE to previous use + dom discussion.

Power, in the poetically delineated world of *Widsith*, is attained in the form of authority, itself defined and determined by praise-perpetuated fame.

It seems, then, that if one is to understand the ability of poetic praise to extend or to secure *óðal* (a feat that requires the manufacturing of personal presence), one must return to that element of encomia that allows the concurrent ability of praise to extend and develop a ruler's fame. This component is, as I have demonstrated earlier, memory and (memory-like) imagination – mental phenomena initiated, in the case of *þulur*, by the personal name. It is memory that ‘makes present’ the named and which is therefore able to confer legitimacy upon the attainment and exercising of *óðal*-based power. Since memory in a eulogising context works, moreover,

³¹⁰ Malone, *Widsith*, ll. 139–143, p.96-7.

³¹¹ I have here translated *fore duguþe* as “for the sake of power”, rather than “before the multitude” as an alternative interpretation. *Duguþ* can be used both in a singular sense to signify “strength” and “power” as well as in a collective sense to signify a body of people. See *DOE*, “duguþ”, accessed 18 September 20017.

as a method of fame – that is, the property of being widely recognised (spatial) and long remembered (temporal) – the presence that encomiastic memory engenders and contributes towards the *óðal*-economy may be said to be ‘itinerant’, a term which resonates well with the name of the eponymous poet in *Widsith* (Extensive journey).³¹²

Widsith is certainly presented as a seasoned traveller, recounting his visits to courts across Europe and the Middle East, as well as across the ages from the courts of men such as the fourth-century Eormanric, to the sixth-century Beadeca. Yet it is, I would suggest, in the very impossibility of the personal scope of these travels that the true value of *Widsith*’s name lies. It is important to appreciate the crucial value of the physical itinerancy of poets who move constantly between courts – either at the behest of a patron or in search of a new one, bringing about the dissemination of their compositions throughout the realms they traverse and representing, in their capacity as retainers, the presence of the lords they praise. But it is, perhaps, even more important to recognise the journey of the poetry itself beyond the recitation of a single author – a journey that enables, quite demonstrably in the case of *Widsith*, a praise that lives on and is dispensed into the minds, and by the mouths, of others. Itinerant then, is the very presence of the praised ruler which ‘travels’ to its audience, or causes an audience *to travel to it*, by means of the memories inherent in fame.³¹³ This notion is supported, in a skaldic

³¹² David Rollman notably points out that one of the central themes in *Widsith* is the immortalisation of rulers through poetry. See “*Widsith* as an Anglo-Saxon Defense of Poetry,” *Neophilologus* 66, no. 3 (1982): 431–39.

³¹³ For more on *Widsith* as a “travelling poem” see Rollman, “*Widsith* as an Anglo-Saxon,” 433.

context, by the notion that a ruler's name itself may 'travel' as in Arnórr jarlaskáld (Jarls' Poet) Þórðarson's *Haraldsdrápa* (*Drápa* about Haraldr [harðráði]):

14. Víttr fór vǫlsungs heiti;
varð marglofaðr harða,
[...]³¹⁴

14. The name of the ruler fared far and wide
he was most highly praised,
[...]

One could argue, I believe, that Widsith himself suggests a mental itinerancy instigated by the praise-names he recites. This interpretation is supported by the outer frame of *Widsith* and I would like to conclude my analysis of this work by investigating the introductory passage at the very beginning of the poem. It is important to note, in the first place, that the opening lines of *Widsith* as they occur in the Exeter Book are usually emended in editions of the text. Where the manuscript reads *Widsið maðolade word hord onleac seþe mæst mæ̅rþa ofer eorþan folca geond ferde*, editions usually offer, *Widsið maðolade, wordhord onleac, se þe monna mæst mæ̅gþa ofer eorþan, folca geondferde* translated as, 'Widsith spoke, unlocked his word-hoard, he who among men travelled through most nations and peoples over the earth'.³¹⁵ The text as it occurs in the manuscript may be translated instead as 'Widsith spoke, unlocked his word-hoard, he who had journeyed through the most famous deeds of peoples upon the earth'. Widsith is no less a traveller in this latter translation than he is in the translation of the emended text.

³¹⁴ *SkP* II, 276.

³¹⁵ Creed, "Widsith's Journey through Germanic Tradition," 376–77.

However, the nature of his journey is clearly redefined and contributes to the over-arching thematic frame of the poem as a whole by qualifying what the listener or reader might expect from Widsith's word-hoard: what Widsith traverses is not the earth so much as the acts of valour and glory that contribute to the immortalisation, through fame, of the peoples upon it, and such deeds are traversed not on a physical voyage but are moved through, instead, as a series of tales – a treasure-trove of words.

The poet of *Widsith* does, indeed, bolster his metaphor of a poetic itinerancy by elaborating on the composition of Widsith's word-hoard as follows: *oft he flette gepah mynelicne maþpum* (often he profited from desirable treasure in the hall).³¹⁶ The choice of adjective – *mynelicne*, that is, desirable – to describe the treasure Widsith receives is of particular importance since the word is derived from *myne*, meaning 'mind', 'memory' or 'memorial'. I would, therefore, suggest that this treasure that Widsith gains in the hall and with which he stocks his word-hoard, is not merely desirable, but it is also 'mind-based', 'memory-based' or 'memorial-like'. Widsith's poetic journey through the famous deeds of people is located nowhere so much as in the mind with its recollections and musings that make present the named. And this journey itself therefore often serves as a memorial for the dead or absent whose presences are conjured by those memories prompted by their names. If one relates these ideas back to the attainment and expansion of power within the ideolexicon of *óðal*, it is also clear that a poetry which is able to fulfil the functions of a temporal and spatial itinerancy on behalf of the named

³¹⁶ Malone, *Widsith*, ll. 3–4, p. 63.

can directly contribute to the legitimisation of power through presence that most of what I have explored so far has been concerned with. Understanding the political relevance of such praise is crucial if we are to understand the legitimising function of skaldic verse.

4.2 Skaldic Poetry as a Poetry of Naming

Having established, during the course of this chapter, that names have a central place in the language of encomia, and having suggested that the incorporation of names into praise poetry – which seeks to increase a ruler’s fame – may be due to the ability of names to engender the presence of the named and hence, to legitimise both the use of, and claims to, *óðal*-derived power, I now wish to examine the particular employment of names in skaldic praise. As with the Anglo-Saxon encomiastic tradition described in *Widsith*, skaldic verse can be regarded as a verbal conduit which acts as a vehicle for names – a vehicle which is capable of traversing both space (through the mobility of reciters) and time (through the memory of reciters). These itinerant names, in turn, stimulate mental journeys in listeners or readers through memory and imagination which make present those persons and places identified in any given encomium (whether publically at court or privately in recollection).

The mental journey by means of the name is methodologically employed by Sigvatr Þórðarson after receiving news of Óláfr Haraldsson’s death:

18. Stóðk á Mont, ok minntumk,
mǫrg hvar sundr fló targa

breið ok brynjur síðar
 borgum nær, of morgin.
 Munða ek, þanns unnði
 (ǫndverðan brum) lǫndum,
 (faðir minn vas þar þenna
 Þórrøðr) konung, forðum.³¹⁷

18. I stood in the Alps one morning,
 and recalled where many
 a broad shield flew asunder,
 as well as long mail-coats, near cities.
 I remembered the king
 who formerly cherished his lands –
 in that early time
 my father, Þórðr, was there.

Sigvatr, himself ostensibly absent from the realm and returning from a pilgrimage to Rome, sculpts a deeply nostalgic composition which reflects his longing for both departed king and distant country. The means through which this nostalgia is effected is the particular use of recollection which creates, as with the viewing of Barthes's photos of the deceased, a poignant moment in which the dead are made tragically present. What is particularly striking about the strophe above is the mental journey which Sigvatr embarks on, and prompts, by means of the name of his father which takes the recipient not only to a specific place as one imagines Þórðr *þar* (there), but also to a more general time of fathers – a *then* in which fathers were living and enjoying both *land* (land) and an *ǫndverðr brumr* (translated above as 'early period', but which can also mean 'spirit-, ' or 'breath-worthy period', that is, a 'time of living' or perhaps in an even more dejected tone, a 'time in which it was worth living'). The placement of the king in this nostalgic 'time of Þórðr' is emphasised by the connection that Sigvatr effects between the

³¹⁷ *SkP* I, 722.

king's title and Þórðr's name in the final line of the strophe which subtly suggests that the king had, formerly, been like the skald's own father. There is also a political reminder perhaps that the king *had been* a father and that his son, Magnús, must now take on the *óðal*-responsibilities of the kingdom as one who is heir to a father's cherished lands. The audience is reminded of the *óðal* claim that Magnús might make to the throne through Sigvatr's mental presencing of King Óláfr in his lands.

The extent to which the kind of mental travelling employed by Sigvatr may have been experienced and 'felt' by an audience of praise-poetry in a warrior culture – that is, the extent to which a reiteration of presence (where the subject of praise attends its performance), or an establishment of presence (where the subject of praise is absent) *affects* performance-recipients – and the political dimensions of such affect in the construction and maintenance of power, is intimated by a fifth-century account of Hunnish encomia presented during a ceremonial banquet. According to the Roman diplomat, Priscus of Panium, who visited the court of Attila the Hun on a diplomatic mission in 448 and who attended a banquet held by that ruler whose own name remained so persistently ingrained in Scandinavian and Germanic legendary traditions,

two barbarians came in and stood before Attila and chanted songs which they had composed, telling of his victories and his deeds of courage in war [...] The guests fixed their eyes on the singers: some took pleasure in the verses, others recalling the wars became excited, while others, whose bodies were enfeebled by age and whose spirits were compelled to rest, were reduced to tears.³¹⁸

³¹⁸ Cited in, Walter Pohl, "The Regia and the Hring - Barbarian Places of Power," in *Topographies of Power*, ed. De Jong, Theuws, and van Rhijn, 458.

The emotional display elicited by the memories evoked – by the mental journeys undertaken – likely formed part of a carefully considered symbolic display of power and authority for the benefit of the ambassadorial witnesses who duly relayed details of the episode back to Byzantium. Within ‘barbarian’ communities who will have been more familiar with each other’s languages and cultural practices, envoys may well have left not only with details regarding performances, but also with the poems themselves. This certainly seems to be the case in a later, Viking Age Scandinavian context in which not only *encomia*, but also the affect produced in encomiastic reception – those feelings relating to the presence of the named – is disseminated across Norse memoryscapes.

What I hope to demonstrate in the following section of this chapter, is the extent to which names – as special presencing mechanisms – permeate the skaldic corpus, thereby giving credence to the idea that the fame which Viking Age rulers seek as a means of mitigating absence within power structures that are underpinned by ruler-presence, is realised through the propagation of the name in the medium of skaldic verse.

4.2.1 Holding onto Names in the Flow of Verse

Much of the second part of my thesis will be concerned with complexities and nuances of skaldic performance (or *Performance* as defined in my Introduction), and particularly with the continuation of *Performance* in the mind of a recipient through recollection and, indeed, upon the instigation of

subsequent hearings or readings of the same poetry which, when repeated, may yield multiple significations. However, when considering initial and more superficial (or at least less reflective) receptions of skaldic encomia (particularly in the context of oral delivery), it is worth noting that in the inexorable flow of poetic recitation there is limited time for interpretation and although this does not preclude deeper understandings – particularly for the well-practiced mind – a first hearing may well focus the attention of the listener on some of the more palpable features of the verse. One of these palpable features is the extensive employment of personal and place names. These names are certainly ‘tangible’ in the metaphoric sense if the earlier depiction of personal names as ‘handles’ is also accepted. In the particularly complex and convoluted lexis of Norse verse – complexity and convolution both desired for interpretative purposes (which I shall consider in more detail in Chapter Four) and necessitated by the demands of the metrical form – names serve as anchors that audiences can ‘hold on’ to as the poem flows past.

As easily comprehensible entities that protrude like landmarks from the current of the verse, the proper nouns of skaldic poetry serve as key signifiers that allow audiences to infer information and even glean emotional cues from the text that they may not be able to follow from the surrounding verbal material during a primary recitation. Stefan Brink, who cites Aron Gurevich’s analysis of *Hyndluljóð* in which the author remarks that ‘every name [in the enumeration of genealogies] conceals a complex of stories and events [...invoking] a series of associations and emotions’, connects the

cypher-like language of names to name-lists appearing on runestones, noting that such lists may impart an ‘underlying message to the listener’.³¹⁹ These sentiments are particularly relevant in a skaldic context which necessitates the careful selection of every word and which actively encourages the coding of meaning through practices such as *ofljóst* (word-play). Just as ‘Hiroshima’ and ‘Versailles’ spur mental narratives in modern readers that operate without the aid of additional discourse, and just as ‘Fitjar’ and ‘Stiklestad’ bring the respective deaths of Hákon inn góði and Óláfr Haraldsson to mind for Norse scholars, so the names of significant people and locations relevant to the contemporary audiences of skaldic encomia serve not only to provide mnemonic support for each composition, but also to shape the mental journeys that performance recipients undertake.³²⁰

The names of kings, their fathers, their gods and the locations of important battles and victories all constitute the primary material of skaldic praise and constitute meanings of their own. From a thematic perspective the grouping of such names is also, therefore, significant and the placement of names may

³¹⁹ Aron Gurevich and Stefan Brink in, “Law and Legal Customs in Viking Age Scandinavia,” 103.

³²⁰ For a comparative analysis of modern songs that employ name-lists in a meaningful way, see Bertie Neethling, “Names in Songs: A Comparative Analysis of Billy Joel’s *We Didn’t Start The Fire* and Christopher Torr’s *Hot Gates*,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Names and Naming*, ed. Carole Hough, First edition., Oxford Handbooks in Linguistics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 310–29. It is interesting that both of the songs analysed by Neethling are inherently political in nature: Billy Joel’s “We Didn’t Start the Fire” leads its audience on a chronological journey from Truman, McCarthy, the Rosenbergs and Eisenhower in the 1950s to Reagan, Sally Ride and AIDS in the 1970s and 80s, whilst the arrangement of toponyms in Christopher Torr’s “Hot Gates” is more thematic, with listeners being lead from the capitals of London, Paris, Rome and Berlin along to the ironic grouping of Jerusalem, Jericho and Waco Waco (with a specific pun on the latter as ‘wake oh’ leading into Bethlehem), to the paired names of Hiroshima and Rubicon, all within the first verse: Neethling, “Names in Songs,” 327–29.

be used by skalds to great effect.³²¹ Such is the case in Þjóðólfr Arnórsson's *Sexstefja* (Six-Refrains) composed in honour of Haraldr harðráði with a *terminus post quem* of 1066 which is the date of the king's fatal fall at the Battle of Stamford Bridge:

28. Lét hræteina hveiti
hrynja gramr ór brynju;
vill, at vexti belli
valbygg, Haraldr, Yggjar.³²²

28. The ruler caused the wheat
of carrion-rods to flow out of the mailcoat;
Haraldr wants Yggr's falcon-barley
to display growth.

Þjóðólfr's placement of the names Haraldr and Yggr (that is, Óðinn) in direct succession at the end of the strophe sculpts a significant referential unit within the *helmingr*, particularly since the kenning of which Yggr forms a part – that is, *Yggjar valbygg* (the barley [carrion] of the falcon [raven] of Yggr [Óðinn]) – does not explicitly require Yggr as a determinant for the kenning to be meaningful in its most apparent reference to blood or carrion as the rewards of battle.³²³ It is therefore possible to read 'Yggr's Haraldr' as a combined subject and to draw a (possibly mytho-religious) connection between Haraldr as king and Óðinn as a god to whom the king 'belongs'. Such a relationship speaks to a tradition in skaldic composition, epitomised

³²¹ To use another modern analogy: the grouping of "Kennedy and Eisenhower" has a different implication than that of, say, "Kennedy and Monroe" or "Kennedy and Onassis".

³²² *SkP* II, 143.

³²³ Although the incorporation of Yggr into the kenning *is* necessary if this blood is to be self-reflexively understood as the Mead of Poetry – a reading which is supported by the extended metaphor of which this strophe forms a part. Haraldr is said to generously "sow" gold to his followers and to Þjóðólfr in particular for his poem. The late king is then described, in agricultural terms, as reaping his rewards in battle. These rewards are twice described as the harvest of Óðinn's ravens in particular however, suggesting that the reward for Haraldr's investment in the skald is *Sexstefja*. See *SkP* II, 139–45.

by poems such as *Ynglingatal*, which seeks to emphasise religiously legitimised rule through the crafting of genealogical relations between rulers and gods as ancestors. That Þjóðólfr intends his verse to contribute to the legitimisation of the rule of Haraldr's sons in the political turmoil following Haraldr's defeat at Stamford Bridge, is evidenced by the final strophe of *Sexstefja* which states the skald's explicit wish that Haraldr should *leifa sonum arf ok óðaltorfu* (leave his sons his inheritance and *óðal*-turf).³²⁴ Once more the ideolexicon of *óðal* pervades the discourse of legitimacy. In this sense the pairing of Yggr and Haraldr is an important legitimising mechanism also, in that the specific association of Yggr with the more terror-inspiring face of Óðinn serves, in turn, to illustrate, remind and emphasise the terror of Haraldr's 'hard ruling', so insistently portrayed throughout *Sexstefja*.³²⁵ Here the terrible presence of Haraldr is powerfully brought forth in the mind of the recipient by means of the nominal unit. It occurs, moreover, within an extended metaphorical context that imagines Haraldr taking his place on 'the land' which he cultivates through the sowing of gold and the reaping of victory.³²⁶

4.2.2 Kennings as Names

Names are more pervasive in the skaldic corpus still, if one considers those kennings (as well as certain descriptive titles and *heiti*) that refer to specific personages as 'praise-names' – a term adopted and developed by Jeff Opland

³²⁴ *SkP* II, 147.

³²⁵ *LP* translates *yggr* as *frygtelig* (terrible or fearful), 632.

³²⁶ *SkP* II, vv. 26-30, pp. 139–45.

in his study of Xhosa oral poetry.³²⁷ I do not wish, in this regard, to draw any direct analogies between Xhosa and Norse encomia, but rather to appropriate a particular concept that is itself based on Opland's considerations of Anglo-Saxon and Norse poetry, and which might prove useful in thinking about the value of certain kennings as names in skaldic verse. Opland's formulation of praise-names or simply 'praises' as phrases that are 'commemorative of a significant deed or striking characteristic' that can 'be used as salutations' or as 'alternative names' is, at any rate, similar to an understanding of Norse bynames that, like patronymics, are often kenning-like in their being indirectly referential and periphrastically descriptive: *vandræðaskáld* (Poet-of-Difficulties) and *skáldaspillir* (Destroyer-of-Poets) are two apt examples of such circumlocutory bynames.³²⁸ Kennings that substitute proper nouns might be seen, then, as alternative descriptive or associative names within the body of a poem, and they are *praise-names* in so far as that they generally strive to extoll. That skalds attempt to either manufacture or propagate bynames, or kennings-as-names, is clear from poems such as Þjóðólfr ór Hvini's *Ynglingatal* and *Poem about Haraldr hárfagri* in which the poet stresses the value of the ruler's byname (in the former) and change of byname (in the latter).³²⁹

³²⁷ See Jeff Opland, *Xhosa Oral Poetry: Aspects Of A Black South African Tradition*, Cambridge Studies in Oral and Literate Culture 7 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

³²⁸ Opland, *Xhosa Oral Poetry*, 5, 12. See also Daniel P. Kunene, *Heroic Poetry of the Basotho*, Oxford Library of African Literature (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 5, on the concept of "eulogues." There is certainly a structural similarity between the descriptive praise-names employed in Xhosa poetry and the praising kennings in Norse poetry: consider, for example, praise-names such as "Weapon and axe of the place of Nomtshwaka" and "Breakerdown of the Cattle Kraal of Mkinwana" which, given some substitutions of toponyms and other minor cultural adjustments, would be perfectly at ease within a skaldic discourse of praise. See Opland, *Xhosa Oral Poetry*, 13, 35.

³²⁹ *SkP* I, v. 27, p. 58; *SkP* I, vv. 4–5, pp. 62–63.

If kennings are accepted as praise-names within the context of skaldic poetry, then certain skaldic strophes consist primarily of names. The strophes cited below are clearly demonstrative of this and it is interesting, moreover, that they are both thematically concerned with fame. *Óláfs drápa Tryggvasonar* stresses the fact that *öllum heimsbyggð hugði vel* (all the peopled world thought well) of king Óláfr, whilst Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld notes that the same king is *tírargjarn* (glory-eager):

From the anonymously composed *Óláfs drápa Tryggvasonar*:

3. Nefndr vas, ungr sás efndi,
ýta vörðr, í Gørðum,
æski-Baldr, við aldir,
Óleifr fyr mér, **stála.**
Eldstökkvir sásk ekki
 (öllum hugði vel snjóllum)
hafs nema **hilmi jöfra**
 (heimsbyggð **syni Tryggva**).³³⁰

3. Named to me as **Óláfr** was,
guardian of men, the **desiring-Baldr**
of weapons who, young,
 completed deeds against men in **Garðar.**
The fire-dispenser of the sea
 feared nothing save the **ruler of princes;**
 all the peopled world thought well
 of the resourceful **son of Tryggvi.**

[My emphasis]

From Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld's *Óláfsdrápa* (*Drápa* about Óláfr
 [Tryggvason]):

6. Gerði **seims** (með sverði)

³³⁰ *SkP* I, 1035. Names are marked in bold.

sverðleik í **Man skerðir**

(eyddi **ulfa greddir**

ógnblíðr Skotum víða).

Ýdrógar lét **ægir**

eyverskan her deyja

— **Týr** vas **tjörva dýrra**

túrgjarn — ok Íra.³³¹

6. The diminisher of gold made sword-sport in **Man**; with the sword **the battle-happy feeder of wolves** destroyed the **Scots** widely.

The terrifier of the bowstring

caused the army from the Isles

to die, as well as the **Irish**;

the Týr of dear spears was glory-eager.

[My emphasis]

As names, kennings serve two seemingly contradictory purposes. In their most general manifestations, engaging oft-used formulas – such as *yta vǫrðr* (guardian of men), *skerðir seims* (diminisher of gold), *inn ungi jǫfra kundr* (the young descendant of princes) and *skjaldar linna runnr* (tree of the serpents of the shield) – kennings are not unlike the masking names discussed earlier in this chapter and arguments made in favour of the origins of kennings as noa-expressions may contribute to such an estimation.³³² As masking names that identify rulers in such general terms as ‘guardian of men’ or ‘diminisher of gold’, kennings actively take part in the socialising project of names and, in the context of skaldic verse, socialise kings and jarls *into rulership*. By employing a discourse that is generally employed in the description of rulers, a king, jarl or (later) saint may be perceived as

³³¹ *SkP* I, 398. Names are marked in bold.

³³² *SkP* I, v. 1, p. 535; *SkP* I, v. 3, p. 1035; *SkP* I, v. 1, p. 897; For a discussion on kennings and noa-expressions see Ladislao Mittner, *Wurd; das Sakrale in der altgermanischen Epik*, Bibliotheca Germanica: Handbücher, Texte und Monographien aus dem Gebiete der germanischen Philologie ; 6 (Bern: Francke, 1955), and; Kari Ellen Gade, “The diction of skaldic poetry” in “General Introduction,” in *SkP* I, lxxxv.

belonging to a social group for which the kenning-saturated language of praise is consequently deemed appropriate. These names may therefore be seen as legitimising *because* they repeat traditional and accepted modes of discourse.

Where kennings are more unique in either formula or in formulaic variation however, their descriptive and associative power may work not only to individuate a ruler, but to make that ruler's presence forcefully felt. The praise-names that Guthormr sindri (Spark) utilises in his *Hákonardrápa* (likely composed in honour of King Hákon Haraldsson between 950 and 961)³³³ are illustrative of more intricate variations of kenning-formulas (and even include a particularly evocative kenning for a place-name):

2. Almdrósar fór **eisu**
élrunnr mörum sunnan
trjónu tingls á **grœna**
 tveim einum **selmeina**,
 þás ellifu allar
allreiðr Dana skeiðar
Valsendir hrauð **vandar**
 víðfrægr at þat síðan.³³⁴

2. The storm-bush of the fire
of the bow-lady fared from the south
 with only two steeds of the prow-board
 on to **the green snout of the seal-wounds** [Zealand]
 when **the all-enraged Valr-sender of the mast**
 cleared all eleven ships of the **Danes**;
 widely famed for that ever since.

[My emphasis]

Guthormr's stormy descriptions of Hákon render the king an element of the sea on which he is said to fare. His clearing of the Danes from their ships

³³³ That is, prior to Hákon's death in c. 961, but after his expedition to Denmark and Gautland in c. 950. See *SkP* I, 156.

³³⁴ *SkP* I, 159.

may almost be imagined as a wave-like force that sweeps over the Danish crews with extinguishing power. Zealand itself is depicted in a manner which brings a mossy, cold, dampness to mind and the conjuring of these sensory experiences makes the ruler's presence ever more tangible, and so, ever more distributable: Hákon's name is indeed *víðfrægr* (widely famed). The fact that the *drápa* as a whole seems to express an ongoing rivalry with the Danes and the Gautar over the possession of Viken may indicate, furthermore, that attempts to propagate Hákon's names by means of skaldic performance are politically motivated. Through the summoning of Hákon's presence in performance, and through the mental journeys in which recipients of Guthormr's verse imagine the king within the very landscapes he must control, the legitimacy of that control is established.

5. Conclusion

Like runestones that establish ruler-presence in a politically crafted memoryscape, skaldic verse seeks to facilitate the presence, and hence legitimise the power, of rulers they name. These names are transported in a medium which, like stone, is able to preserve their memory through time but which, unlike stone, is also able to proliferate and to extend throughout and even beyond the realm of a particular ruler. The propagation of the name as a means of attaining fame becomes, through skaldic performance, a means of establishing and maintaining authority. During the course of this chapter I considered the ways in which presence is established through performance of the name which, as mask and handle, is able to act as a descriptive body

that is able, through the instigation of memory and imagination, to substitute absent referents. I also sought to establish a cultural context for the relationship between names and *óðal*-derived powers and rights in order to understand the incorporation of this conceptual relationship into praise-poetry. In doing so I explored the ability of skaldic performance, given its generic preoccupation with fame and its overt structural and thematic focus on names and naming, to facilitate mental itinerancies through which ruler-presence is persistently established through both time and space, serving to legitimise the exercising of political power.

In the following two chapters I shall shift my focus from the performative to the Performative, focusing on the political value of skaldic poetry as a form of representational artifice. I hope, however, that the political function of skaldic performance explored in Part 1 may be kept in mind even as I attempt to approach skaldic material from a different perspective in Part 2, since it is useful to note that these poetic entities are complex and versatile enough to be employed in a variety of ways and, significantly, may serve more than one purpose simultaneously.

Part 2

The Politics of Skaldic *Performance*

*Dis Poem**[...]**dis poem is watchin u tryin to make sense from dis poem**dis poem is messin up your brains**makin u want to stop listenin to dis poem**but u shall not stop listenin to dis poem**u need to know what will be said next in dis poem**dis poem shall disappoint u**because**dis poem is to be continued in your mind in your mind**in your mind in your mind*³³⁵

³³⁵ Mutabaruka, "Dis Poem," in *Mutabaruka: The Next Poems/ The First Poems* (Jamaica: Paul Issa Publications, 2005), 11.

Chapter 3

Skaldic Poetry and Performance

1. Performance: Definitions and Characteristics

*IF A MAN HACKING IN FURY AT A BLOCK OF WOOD, Stephen continued, MAKE THERE AN IMAGE OF A COW, IS THAT IMAGE A WORK OF ART? IF NOT, WHY NOT?*³³⁶

In the first part of my investigation into the political function of skaldic poetry I was primarily occupied with those features contributing to what I outlined in my Introduction as an Austinian ‘performativity’: that is, a performativity which arises out of an understanding of speech as action. I was particularly concerned, in this regard, with the illocutionary and perlocutionary effects of skaldic utterances, focussing on the expression of names as a means of simulating presence and, hence, as a means of establishing legitimacy in a Viking Age political context. In this second part of my thesis I shall now turn my attention to skaldic Performativity in its representational sense since this aspect of skaldic composition, recitation, recording and reception provides an additional perspective on the political function of skaldic material. An understanding of skaldic Performance is especially important when one considers the role (recorded in both historical and literary sources) that skalds seem to play in the shaping of a Viking Age

³³⁶ James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (New York: Penguin, 2016), 198.

discourse of diplomacy: that is to say, the central place that skalds and their poetry occupy in the construction and execution of a Viking Age approach to the establishment and maintenance of diplomatic networks between, and also within, various Norse realms.

I shall pay particular attention to the relationship between skaldic poetry and Viking Age diplomatic praxes in Chapter Four. However, in order to do so, I must first investigate the fundamental characteristics inherent in skaldic Performance since these will inform any consideration of the employment of skaldic poetry as diplomatic method. The present chapter will therefore attempt to determine whether or not the creation and reception of skaldic poetry constitute processes which satisfy an adherence to the working definition of Performance provided in the Introduction as ‘a self-conscious engagement with artifice’. In so doing the chapter will also establish the core properties of such Performativity, demonstrating the relevance that these features bear to skaldic material whilst providing supporting examples from the skaldic corpus. These explications on the characteristics of skaldic Performance will then serve, in the following chapter, to elucidate the ways in which skalds, through their politico-poetic practice, contribute to the exercising of diplomacy within Norse political structures.

Before embarking on this exposition of skaldic Performativity, however, it is perhaps prudent to explain why an in-depth analysis of the Performative nature of skaldic versification should be at all necessary when the often-held presumption regarding a supposedly ‘original’ context for the presentation of

skaldic poetry – a perception limited by the dearth of relevant descriptive material in the Icelandic and kings’ sagas – usually assumes a public recitation (in which a ruler and their court constitute an audience) of artistic language (overtly symbolic verbal utterances) within the framing chronotope of what may be called a culturally determined ‘Performance situation’ (in, for example, a hall and during a festive or politically significant occasion). This imagined paradigm of the oral recitation at court presents a situation akin to what one may classify, almost intuitively, as a Performance in its theatrical or ‘stage’ (and hence its representational) sense. In the face of such seemingly self-evident Performativity, any further investigation into the nature of skaldic Performance may, indeed, appear superfluous. However, various difficulties arise when one limits one’s understanding of skaldic Performance to a view that allows only for an overtly oral manifestation of the poetic text in which an imagined historical authenticity ostensibly presides.

Restricting the site of Performance to the oral recitation of skaldic verse risks, in the first place, that erroneous conflation of orality and Performativity problematised in my Introduction.³³⁷ The critical treatment of written occurrences of skaldic verse is consequently limited by the disavowal of approaches that would apply Performance-related theories *beyond* purely imagined oral recitations such as those few ‘Performances’ described or alluded to in saga accounts.³³⁸ Crucially, one is not able, under such

³³⁷ See, especially, pp. 13-19 of the Introduction.

³³⁸ That is, beyond the imagined Performance that takes place in the mind’s eye and ear when the reader mentally generates a visualisation and auralisation of a Performance which

conditions, to effectively utilise the information that a literary expression of skaldic poetry may provide in relation to Performativity. Nor is one, given the context of my present preoccupation with diplomacy, able to then apply any insights regarding the diplomatic function of skaldic Performance to skaldic strophes occurring in a written form. These difficulties are nowhere more pronounced than in the analyses of runic inscriptions that feature skaldic material since these ‘written’ renderings almost certainly occupy a space between orality and literature, possibly serving as recordings of oral utterances or as ‘scores’ intended for oral expression and aural reception.

Another difficulty that arises out of an understanding which equates skaldic Performance with oral recitation relates to the function of skaldic diplomacy specifically: since the site of Performance is, according to this perspective, restricted to oral utterances, one’s view of where the diplomatic ‘work’ of the skald takes place must likewise be limited to that which falls within the ambit of oral recitation. This limitation hinders a full understanding of the skald’s poetic diplomacy since it ignores some of the primary ways in which skaldic Performativity functions (to be discussed in more detail presently) and, therefore, the ways in which skaldic Performance contributes to a diplomatic practice. If one accepts, instead, that the primary site of Performance is in the mind of the recipient, then one is free to imagine the more internalised mechanisms of diplomacy also. If I recapitulate, in brief, the

is described on the page. For a collection and analysis of some examples of skaldic performance see, Bjarne Fidjestøl, “‘Have You Heard a Poem Worth More?’: A Note on the Economic Background of Early Skaldic Praise-poetry”, in his *Selected Papers*, ed. Odd Einar Haugen and Else Mundal, trans. Peter Foote. Viking Collection, 9 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1997), 117-32.

conceptualisation of Performance outlined in my Introduction, as a *type of action pertaining to representation*, then such a relocation to the mind is, in any event, necessary if one is to avoid yet another problematic view in which texts (whether spoken or written) are themselves understood as Performances.³³⁹

Since texts (as artefacts) are unable to incorporate that purposeful, agency-led and temporally continuous action the concept of Performance demands, a relocation of the site of Performance to the mind (in which the interpretative processes inherent in the consideration of representational material occur) is essential. Even writing or speaking in Performance-related actions (such as writing a novel or speaking in a play) – both of which are, as actions, able to constitute modes of Performance – can only be said to be Performative when there occurs a self-conscious consideration of how language (including all symbolic gestures of communication) is employed in the representation of an artistic image beyond the commonplace communicative associations that the language conveys in a non-Performative context. Writing, speaking and all other actions that might pertain to Performances are only Performative, in short, when there exists a self-aware employment of, and engagement with, artifice. The child who reactively cries ‘Spider!’ when they see an arachnid is not Performing. The same child who, in the absence of such a creature, cries ‘Spider!’ in order to frighten their parent is Performing but not because they are uttering a cry. Nor can the cry (as text) itself be said to constitute a Performance, although it is certainly evidence that a Performance is taking,

³³⁹ See pp. 20-44 of the Introduction in which I discuss the ‘How of Performance’.

or has taken, place and may engender a Performance of audience-recipienty in one who recognises the cry as a Performative utterance. The child is Performing, instead, because they are self-consciously employing the word ‘spider’ to construct an artefact of representational meaning, the interpretative response to which they have already imagined before (or at least whilst) uttering the cry. It is through a self-conscious interpretative participation in listening or reading that speech acts, whether spoken or written, become art acts. In the words of Bakhtin, ‘artistic representation’ is differentiated from ‘everyday speech’ through an active ‘[recognition of] images lying behind the isolated utterances of social language’ and these images are likened to the ‘hewn and carved’ products of a ‘sculptor’s chisel’.³⁴⁰ His words support a concluding, if broad, definition of Performance as a *self-conscious engagement with artifice*. Having re-established a working definition for Performance I can now list those key characteristics that one may recognise in Performative acts and which I shall try to locate in skaldic Performance specifically throughout the remainder of this chapter.

The first of these characteristics concerns the condition of Performance as a phenomenon which gives rise to, or arises from, texts that can be shown to be crafted (as a form of artistic portrayal): that is, texts that can be shown to be *artificed*. Such artifice functions as the symbolic representation of the Bakhtinian ‘images’ described above. Importantly, artifice employs symbols in a way which sets the artistic utterance apart from a quotidian one, so that

³⁴⁰ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 355–58.

a potential audience can distinguish the imparted utterance as a *created* artefact – that is, agency-led and artificial as opposed to ‘naturally’ occurring.

William Rickert’s observations regarding the formal implications of the employment of rhyme as a mode of artifice are interesting in this regard:

The reader is aware that rhyme is an intentionally artificial, conventional device. His response, then ‘involves to some degree the appeal of form as form.’ The language becomes significant as an aesthetic object worthy of attention and not merely a vehicle for the conveyance of a message. Thus, rhyme sets the poem apart from ordinary conversation; it frames the poetic language, isolating it from ‘dailiness’; and it signals ‘that language is going to be used in an unusual, often serious and memorable, way.’³⁴¹

It is no accident that Ovid’s Daedalus, turning his mind to art in the very expression of personal will with which he rebels against Minos’s rule of land, is said to ‘alter Nature’ (*naturamque novat*).³⁴² Even though a gardener may employ the same materials (flowers, trees, grass, pools etc.) that innately occur in, for example, a meadow or forest, the wilful and artificial arrangement and treatment of these materials, often within an enclosed space which literally cordons the creation off from the naturally occurring world, forms an artistic image which may represent any number of things within a given ideolexical structure. Even the more organic gardening ‘genres’ such as the English Landscape Garden or the Chinese Scholar’s Garden which often represent nothing so much as the image of Nature itself, nevertheless do so within the framework of creative artistry and human agency. Nature can, of course, also be seen as a work of art, but only, crucially, when it is

³⁴¹ “Structural Functions of Rhyme and the Performance of Poetry,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 62, no. 3 (October 1, 1976): 251.

³⁴² *[I]gnotas animum dimittit in artes/ naturamque novat* (He turns his mind to unknown arts/ and alters Nature’: 43 B. C.-17 A. D. or 18 A. D. Ovid, *Metamorphoses. Book VIII*, Re-issued with corrections., Oxford Scholarly editions Online [Oxford: Clarendon, 1983], ll. 188–89, p. 7.

imagined as a synthetic arrangement of materials by a supposed ‘creator’ who sculpts nature into a garden-like realm – deliberately ordering a terrain in relation, and in contrast, to the chaos that exists beyond its parameter. The Performative utterance can, in accordance with this analogy, be described as a type of verbal gardening which employs language creatively in order to manufacture an image within a constructed framework that both separates the utterance from its normative surroundings (in which those same words arranged and ordered in the Performative utterance are used more-or-less ‘naturally’), *and* points inwards to the utterance itself in order to alert a recipient to its craftedness.

As a form of communicative representation Performance must, secondly, be *dialogic* in nature since Performance is founded on the relationship between performer and audience-recipient, even if that performer or recipient is internal and imagined. More discernibly than any other utterance, Performance assumes reception: the cry of ‘Spider!’ which a child utters in Performance is Performative because the child imagines that their parent will respond through attention, interpretation, and/or reaction. This is the case even if the child only imagines their parent to be present and therefore receptive to their call. By contrast, a tune whistled alone and subconsciously whilst cleaning is not Performative because not even the self is imagined as recipient. Since Performance always assumes a response — which may in the case of reading, for example, be one’s own response, where the ‘intention’ of the Performer towards oneself is then imagined — a dialogic relationship between various perspectives of symbolic utterance and

interpretative understanding arises. The ‘dynamic quality of Performance that allows each expressive event to be shaped by the interactions between Performers and audiences’ is known as emergence and is related to a chronotopic understanding of language and discourse.³⁴³ Each Performance must be unique and inimitable since the conditions of a particular Performance event, emerging out of an interactive process between Performer and recipient within the inexorable flow of space-time which ensures variation between all agents in any given event, can never be exactly replicated. And it is this time-space conditioning of the Performance context which leads then, to the final characteristic of Performance with which I am concerned, that is, its incessant ‘presentness’.

As a type of action, Performance naturally denotes a temporal process and is forever situated in an ongoing ‘here-and-now’ — that is, in the present continuous.³⁴⁴ As such, Performances (unlike the textual artefacts they produce) must exhibit *temporal movement*. This is not to say that Performance-texts somehow exist outside of time, but rather that Performances, unlike the texts from which they arise and give rise to, only exist when they *traverse* time so that they continuously occupy the ‘present’ space between discrete moments. Any attempt to suspend a Performance must result in its extinction with a new text arising in its stead: at the instant that one suspends the gardener in their act of tending to the grounds, the diachronic act of gardening ceases and one is left observing the synchronic

³⁴³ Korom, “The Anthropology of Performance,” 2; See also Bauman, “Verbal Art as Performance,” 302.

³⁴⁴ Finnegan, “The How of Literature,” 176.

product of the garden as it comes to be within the deictically specified moment (of which the gardener may, or may not, be apart). It is, indeed, to this garden that I shall now turn in an analysis of the poetic text as a witness of skaldic artifice.

2. Skaldic Artifice

The first question I must address in order to establish the Performativity of skaldic poetry relates to the craftedness of skaldic texts. If skaldic verse can be shown to be artficed, then the creative processes that both contribute to and derive from the texts can be said to fulfil the first criterion of Performance listed above. Given that so many of the potential ways in which artifice manifests itself in oral contexts are forever inaccessible to the scholar of skaldic verse, finding evidence of artifice within the written remnants of the skaldic corpus preserved in manuscript format is particularly important. It is impossible to know – since written (and especially pseudo-historical) sources do not record or describe skaldic recitation at court in any great detail – whether the recitation of these poems was, for example, accompanied by convention-driven postures or hand gestures; whether poems were delivered in a distinctive vocal register and tone; or whether skalds occupied a specified physical position in the royal hall whilst delivering their poetic material.³⁴⁵

As such there are certain details regarding the manner in which visual and

³⁴⁵ Stefanie Würth aptly describes the inconclusive nature of the imagined Performance context when she states that “what [skaldic] performance actually looked like remains open”: “Skaldic Poetry and Performance,” in *Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World: Essays in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross*, ed. Quinn, Judy, Heslop, Kate, and Wills, Tarrin (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 266.

auditory elements of artifice may have influenced and contributed to the sense and quality of skaldic Performances that must always be subject to speculation.³⁴⁶ Those Performance details that one *is* able to determine from extant written sources are therefore crucial to shaping any understanding of skaldic Performativity.

It is certainly clear from the textual evidence available to the modern reader that the perception of skaldic verse as artficed is already, more or less overtly, demonstrated by skalds and medieval grammarians concerned with skaldic poetry. This perception is expressed in the self-reflexive language of the poetry as well as the terminology employed in later medieval treatises on poetic subjects that actively draw on the vocabulary of craftsmanship (particularly relating to metal- and wood-work).³⁴⁷ Certain skalds, for example, refer to their compositional process as a ‘forging’ (*smíðandi*) or a ‘building’ (*hlaðandi*) of praise: King Haraldr harðráði boasts in his eleventh-century poem, *Gamanvísur* (Jesting Verses), that he can ‘forge Yggr’s [Oðinn’s] drink [that is, poetry]’ (*fetk at smíða líð Yggs*);³⁴⁸ Hallar-Stein repeats this metaphor in his twelfth-century composition, *Rekstefja*, stating that he will ‘forge praise’ (*lof smíða*);³⁴⁹ while the tenth-century skald, Egill Skallagrímsson, reflects that he has ‘built a praise-pile’ (*hlóð lofkos*) in the final stanza of his *Arinbjarnarkviða* (Kviða for Arinbjörn).³⁵⁰ Later medieval

³⁴⁶ For an overview of various scholarly speculations in this regard see, Kari Ellen Gade, *The Structure of Old Norse Dróttkvætt Poetry*, *Islandica*; 49 (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1995), 24–25.

³⁴⁷ For a detailed account of this semantic transferral see especially, Clunies Ross, *History*, 84–91.

³⁴⁸ *SKP* II, v. 4, p. 39.

³⁴⁹ *SKP* I, v. 1, p. 897.

³⁵⁰ *Eg*, 267.

scholars exploring the compositional intricacies of skaldic poetry also employ a vocabulary derived from various forms of craftsmanship and Snorri, for example, employs an illustrative term derived from metal-work – that is, *stál* (steel) – in *Háttatal* (Enumeration of Metres) to denote the inlay of intercalary clauses within skaldic stanzas.³⁵¹ *Stál*, as an abstract metaphor, not only aptly describes the interweaving verbal structure that is fashioned through the insertion of intercalary sentences into the primary body of the skaldic stanza, but also remains consistent to the craft-based analogy of ‘forging’ used by skalds in the self-reflexive conceptualisation of their poetry.

What, then, are those knowable features of skaldic verse that lead medieval scholars and skalds themselves – and which may lead modern recipients of skaldic texts in turn – to consider skaldic poems as crafted artefacts? To answer this question one must consider those elements of the poetry that clearly indicate a use of linguistic material (the rocks, plants and water-features that constitute the natural world of language) that is distinct from a quotidian use of such material in the purely comprehension-driven utterances of everyday speech. This distinct employment of language results in a semiotic openness, expanding the symbolic potential of raw linguistic material. Clay in the landscape represents clay itself, whilst clay shaped and moulded by the artist into pottery may represent any number of things depending on the artist’s execution and the recipient’s interpretation. In the following paragraphs I examine differentiating manifestations of artifice in

³⁵¹ *Ht*, 10.

skaldic verse which may be broadly subdivided into two principal categories, that is, a) semantic and b) formal.

2.1 Semantic Artifice

The semantic artifice of skaldic poetry relates to the authored *recontextualisation* of verbal material which serves to invest linguistic signs with new signifying potential. Marcel Duchamp's 'Fountain' (1917), which recontextualises a urinal by placing the object in an art-gallery, is an apt visual example of the employment of such semantic artifice. The recontextualisation of a sign is achieved through one of two primary mechanisms, these being, a) a change in situation and b) a shift in perspective. It is important that the recontextualisation of signs not be confused with the rearrangement of signs (to be discussed in my treatment of formal artifice below), since arrangement alone does not always adequately establish artifice where the situation and perspective of the arrangement act to normalise and obfuscate. To clarify this statement it would serve to re-invoke the garden-analogy employed earlier through which one may imagine a row of trees in a plantation or forest that signifies nothing more or less than exactly 'a row of trees' *in* that plantation or forest since it is not, firstly, unusual to find a row of trees in a forest and one may, secondly, be unable even to distinguish the row of trees from its botanical surroundings. If the precise arrangement is uprooted however, and placed at the edge of an estate the 'row of trees' may suddenly also represent a 'border' or 'fence'. Two parallel rows on the same estate that lead up to a mansion entrance may even symbolise more abstract concepts, such as 'approach'. Flattened crops on a farm may

represent nothing more than ‘flattened crops’ to a farmer who approaches his land on ground-level, whilst an aerial view may reveal intricately patterned crop circles invested with symbolic potential. The latter, like the various prehistoric hill figures of the English countryside or the ancient Peruvian Nazca lines, are all the more significant for demonstrating an entirely imagined change in perspective which renders each arrangement meaningful.

2.1.1 *Heiti*

The mechanisms of recontextualisation employed by skalds in their fashioning of semantic artifice pertain specifically to a skald’s ability to invest the language of every composition with new signifying potential. What this means, more specifically, is that words are employed in such a way so as to elicit audience interpretation, which is required in order to understand what meanings lie beneath the surface denotations of words when divorced from their quotidian context. The first of these skaldic mechanisms of recontextualisation relates directly to the process of resituating verbal signifiers since it is the very placement of the given word within the context of the skaldic poem which invests it with (new) meaning. These words are called, in modern literary theory surrounding skaldic poetics, *heiti* – though it should be noted that the meaning of the term is itself, rather fittingly, contingent on its context. In Snorri’s poetics, for example, *heiti* (literally, ‘name’ or ‘denomination’) fulfils, at times, a much broader function as an umbrella term for either simple nouns or stylistic forms of noun substitution that serve to signify directly (common names), descriptively (poetic names),

deictically (*fornofn*), or metaphorically (kennings).³⁵² In modern Norse scholarship, however, *heiti* refers more specifically to a ‘poetic simplex or synonym’.³⁵³ For the purposes of a contemporary discussion on skaldic artifice *heiti* can, therefore, be understood as a term referring to synonyms that are either exclusively employed in poetic contexts – that is, words that do not occur in everyday speech – or everyday words that come to serve as synonyms when employed in poetic contexts. Examples of the former circumstance (being strictly non-quotidian *heiti*) include poetic neologisms such as *þengill* (king or prince) and *svipaljótr* (sword), as well as words befitting a poetic register such as *Viðrir* (Óðinn) with its mythological associations. Everyday words, on the other hand, that become synonyms within poetic contexts include, for example, *seimr* which, in its quotidian sense, means ‘wire’, but which acquires the new meaning of ‘gold’ or ‘riches’ when used in skaldic verse.³⁵⁴

As mechanisms of semantic artifice, *heiti* are significant in that most of them signify indirectly by means of association or description. Some *heiti* may serve only to signal a poetic register – for example, *jór* which without the aid of description, metonymy or metaphor functions simply as a poetic alternative for ‘horse’, much in the same way as the Modern English equivalent, ‘steed’ – and some *heiti* may, through extended and repeated use, become direct referents as a result of their prolonged role as signifiers for a particular concept: one no longer needs to interpret ‘Sunday best’, for

³⁵² *CV*, 253. See also: *Skm*, 5, 107 and *Ht*, 4-6.

³⁵³ Kari Ellen Gade, “The diction of skaldic poetry”, lxxxvii.

³⁵⁴ *LP*, 483, 554, 615, 638.

example, as a phrase referring to the type of attire appropriate for church attendance in order to understand that it signifies ‘one’s best clothing’. This referential development from indirect to direct can be assumed for oft-used *heiti* such as *þengill* (mentioned above), which likely originated as an indirect, descriptive neologism meaning, ‘captain of a *þing*’, but which, in time, developed a more direct referential relationship to the concepts of ‘king’ or ‘prince’ by functioning independently of intermediary semiotic processes involving the associations initiated by the etymological foundation.³⁵⁵ Yet most *heiti*, unlike the examples of *jór* and *þengill*, are *not* immediately transparent and require some degree of interpretation, however brief, if one is to understand their description (as in the case of *svipaljótr* which signifies ‘sword’ by describing it as ‘swoopung-ugly’) or metonymy (as in the case of *seimr* which signifies ‘gold’ or ‘riches’ through its evocation of an association with the material property of metal wire and, indeed, with the socio-economic significance of possessing such wire).

Heiti are predominantly words that, like other forms of semantic artifice in skaldic poetry, are representational and this representational quality is achieved through recontextualisation: a ‘swift tooth’ in the context of the strictly literal denotations of everyday speech is nonsensical (or at the very least a little bizarre), but poetic speech with its required symbolic signification renders the phrase meaningful. With regards to *svipaljótr* this would be particularly true if the poetic motif were to involve war-themed tropes and so situate the referent within the context of martial representation

³⁵⁵ CV, 734.

specifically, eliciting images of weaponry and hence, in the case of *svipaljótr*, a sword.³⁵⁶ The language of the quotidian utterance gives way, within its poetic recontextualisation, to the represented image. The poetic situation – like that famously framed perspective which prompts George Emmerson’s existential question mark in E.M. Forster’s *A Room with a View* – initiates the interrogation of language in pursuit of alternative referential meaning. The skaldic poem places, in short, a question mark above each quotidian sign which, like George Emmerson’s ‘enormous note of interrogation’, acquires (new) meaning through this instigation of interpretative processes.³⁵⁷

In those cases where *heiti* comprise words that do not appear exclusively in the poetic corpus but that exist, also, as alternative signifiers in the context of everyday language-use it is, of course, entirely possible for such words to signify variously when they *are* employed poetically – that is, *heiti* may have multiple potential referents should the poetic context be flexible enough to accommodate multiple meanings. It is important to note, moreover, that the employment of polysemic words in skaldic verse is not limited to poetic synonyms, but includes the use of all words that are able to signify multiple referents – even those that are able to *suggest* alternative verbal associations, such as homophones. Snorri, for example, compares *lið* (‘host’, or as an accusative of *liðr*, ‘joint’), *líð* (ale), *hlið* (gateway) and *hlíð* (slope) in *Skáldskaparmál* (Language of Poetry) when discussing the phenomenon of *ofljóst* (wordplay) in skaldic composition.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁶ Such a situation must remain hypothetical, however, since the only extant source for the word is within a list of *heiti* for ‘sword’ in Snorri’s *Skáldskaparmál*: *Skm*, 119.

³⁵⁷ E. M. Forster, *A Room with a View* (Courier Corporation, 2012), 11.

³⁵⁸ *Skm*, 109.

2.1.2 *Ofljóst*

The term *ofljóst* is itself *heiti*-like in that it connotes descriptively (if ironically): the signifiers of wordplay are thus (literally translated) ‘over-clear’, a phrase which perhaps more accurately indicates a sense of being ‘*more-than-clear*’. It is striking that the terminology here reflects that key Bakhtinian impulse pertaining to artifice which seeks to find images behind apparently transparent utterances. In the case of *ofljóst*, excess negates so that to be over-clear is, in fact, to be equivocal and a myriad of images unfold as these paronomastic referents facilitate perpetual shifts in perspective – an idea to which I shall return in due course. The following *helmingr* from *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, in which the saga’s eponymous hero relates his violent encounter with the farmers of Mýrar, presents a prime example of the semantic impact that wordplay can have on a skaldic composition:

49. ‘Hæg munat, hirði-Sága
hornflœðar, nú grœða
stór, þótt steypðusk fleiri,
Steinólfs hofuðskeina;
[...]³⁵⁹

49. ‘Not easily now, tending-goddess of
the horn-flood, will heal,
though more are cast down,
Steinólfr’s great head-graze;
[...]

Grettir’s *helmingr* boasts a great deal of wordplay and can be read in multiple ways: *hirði* can mean both ‘tending’ or ‘concealing’,³⁶⁰ *Sága* is a goddess who drinks with Óðinn and whose name possibly means ‘Seeress’,

³⁵⁹ Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar: Bandamanna saga; Odds þátr Ófeiggssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit; 7. bd (Reykjavík: hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1936), 197–98.

³⁶⁰ CV, 264.

etymologically derived from *sjá* (to see);³⁶¹ *hornflæðr* (horn-flood) refers to mead which in turn can be understood as representing the mythical Mead of Poetry; *græða* can mean both ‘to heal’ and ‘to increase’;³⁶² *þótt* which can mean both ‘although’ or, as an accusative form of *þóttir*, ‘thought’; and *steypast* in its reflexive form signifies ‘tumbling’ or ‘falling down’ but in the current context may well refer to the ‘pouring out’ of liquid.³⁶³ Given these ambiguities the *helmingr* produces various alternative readings of several verbal units that contribute layers of signification to the poem. The poetic material itself then expands as a semiotic palimpsest takes shape through processes of interpretation.

There is, in the first place, a paradoxical dissonance (which is self-reflexively concerned with the poetic process) to be found in the image of a ‘concealing-Seeress of (poetic) mead’: Sága is a goddess who not only tends to men through the serving of mead, but who conceals (through the provision of poetry) narrative material that is, conversely, meant to be revealed (in the Seeress’ revelatory capacity as a prophetess who sees what is hidden). The greatest significance of this wordplay with regards to my consideration of *ofljóst* here is the poet’s apparent display of a self-reflexive awareness pertaining to the distinction between surface and implied signification. The poet is aware that he, like Sága, is participating in the act of concealing meanings and he does so by means of the verbal dexterity exemplified in his employment of *ofljóst*. The poet is aware, moreover, that the multiple

³⁶¹ Andy Orchard, *Cassell Dictionary of Norse Myth and Legend* (London: Cassell, 1997), 136.

³⁶² CV, 218.

³⁶³ CV, 592.

meanings generated by shifts in perspective as hidden references come to light cerebrally affect the poem's audience. He covertly notes – through his employment of *þótt* (thought) in the accusative and *græða* (to increase) in the infinitive – that *græða [...] þótt steypðusk fleiri* (to increase thought, more [men] are cast down).

Just as Steinólfr's head-wound is an injury which, as a narrative event, constitutes the poetic material of the *helmingr*, the wounds of more men might naturally create additional poetic material, thereby increasing the mental processes generated by the interpretation of that material. The additional impressions that an audience-Performer might have of the pouring out of liquid (as *steypa* suggests when used with a dative noun) could amplify the images in the poem of the flowing Mead of Poetry when poured out by Sága and, simultaneously, of the pouring out of thought (likely in the form of blood) from Steinólfr's head-wound. The inability to heal and stem the flow of blood from Steinólfr's wound and the wounds of others who are 'cast down', seems therefore to result in the increased flow of poetic material and in those thoughts that a reader and listener of the skaldic strophe are likely to experience during processes of interpretation.

The sentiment that the unstoppable flow of poetry is likely to increase the flow of thought is even more pertinent when one considers that some *ofljóst* may occur within other forms of semantic artifice, such as kennings, further complicating chains of association and hence, semiotic outcomes. This is the case for the potential wordplay on Sága/*saga* above: the extended kenning

for ‘woman’ is, in this instance, essentially deactivated by the paronomasia which renders ‘Sága of the horn-flood’ [the goddess of the mead => woman], as ‘saga of the horn-flood’ [the tale/story of the poetry]. In the latter phrase only ‘horn-flood’ remains as a kenning for mead, itself a synecdochal signifier for the Mead of Poetry. Key, here, is the fact that wordplay alters the reader’s or listener’s perspective so that an entire phrase or clause must be re-viewed in order to be (re)understood. Various combinations of word-arrangements are possible, but these combinations must sit coherently within the scope of each new perspective if the arrangement is to be considered a feasible interpretation. In the context of the strophe from *Grettis saga* above the prior interpretation of the phrase, *Sága hornflæðar* as the ‘Sága of the horn-flood’ presents, for example, a far better reading of the text, even if the second interpretation when considering the possibility of wordplay is technically possible.

2.1.3 Kennings

If *ofljóst* presents the listener or reader of skaldic verse with various lenses through which to view the composition so that new meanings arise depending on the mental ‘positions’ that a poetic recipient takes in approaching the material, then kennings (circumlocutory figures of noun-substitution) are similar again to *heiti* in achieving recontextualisation through the re-situating of signs. Unlike *heiti* however, kennings establish an internal recontextualisation that is able to function independently of the larger poetic context whilst nevertheless serving as one of the hallmarks of skaldic artifice. To state this in slightly different terms, although kennings, like *heiti*, occur

almost exclusively within poetry (and skaldic poetry in particular), and can therefore be said to be dependent on the poetic context with regards to the appropriateness of its use, the symbolic potential of the kenning lies not in its relationship with its poetic context, but stems from the internal relationships between its constituent parts that follow a self-sustaining logic.

Words, within a kenning, serve as either base-word or determinant, and are resituated in such a manner as to create new conceptual bonds between ordinarily disparate signifiers. *SkP* I follows Rudolf Meissner in defining the kenning as a stylistic figure which ‘replaces a noun of *ordinary discourse*, consists of at least two parts and follows typical circumlocutionary patterns, on the basis of which the actual kennings are formed by variation [my emphasis]’.³⁶⁴ Key here is the replacement of quotidian language (the ‘ordinary discourse’ of the everyday) by a poetic language that is necessarily representational. A kenning is, arguably, the most representational form of noun-substitution in the skaldic corpus since its very mechanism is maintained by the avoidance of direct referencing and works, instead, by means of descriptive and tropic gestures that sculpt the signified image. Kennings are, as the term suggests, epistemologically significant in that they are primarily concerned with how one knows or ‘kens’ a concept. This preoccupation is portrayed by the kenning’s circumlocutionary format that represents its subject or object by constructing a chain of associations in descriptive or tropic terms. In so doing the kenning-form seems to play out a

³⁶⁴ Gade, “The diction of skaldic poetry”, lxx. See also: Rudolf Meissner, *Die Kenningar der Skalden: ein Beitrag zur skaldischen Poetik*, Rheinische Beiträge und Hilfsbücher zur germanischen Philologie und Volkskunde; Bd.1 (Bonn und Leipzig: KSchroeder, 1921).

notion that concepts are identified by their properties (that is, their functions and attributes) as well as by their likenesses (that is, by their similarity to other concepts).³⁶⁵

One might think of kennings as providing theatrical props that furnish a scene in a riddling manner: ‘royalty’ may be presented on stage by supplying that raised platform with a throne, orb and sceptre or, more specifically in the case of kennings, by supplying disparate objects each resembling a key symbol (such as a chair, any small, round object and any staff-like object) all of which, when placed together within a context that forges new conceptual bonds between them (such as a play about a queen), ‘compel’, ‘drive’ or ‘thrust’ the audience (Snorri uses the term *rekit* to describe extended kennings) along a chain of associations towards a fitting, if flexible, referent.³⁶⁶

The following kenning from Guthormr sindri’s tenth-century poem, *Hákonardrápa*, presents a particularly rich example of the periphrastic mechanisms of artifice described above. Guthormr is, indeed, a master of kennings and *Hákonardrápa* is saturated with these circumlocutory figures. In the fifth verse of the encomium in his honour King Hákon Haraldsson is referred to as *sóknhattar svellrjóðr* (the attack-hat’s ice-reddener).³⁶⁷ In the ordinary discourse of everyday language ‘attack’, ‘hat’, ‘ice’ and ‘reddener’

³⁶⁵ For a discussion on the processes of ‘conceptual blending’ that occur in skaldic kennings, see Bergsveinn Birgisson, “Skaldic blends out of joint: Blending theory and aesthetic conventions”, *Metaphor and Symbol* 27, no. 4 (2012): 283–298.

³⁶⁶ *Ht*, 5.

³⁶⁷ *SkP* I, 163.

do not relate to each other in any meaningful way. When they are re-situated within a kenning however, they form new conceptual relationships and mutually elicit a chain of associations that bring the poetic subject to light. The determinants, ‘attack’ and ‘hat’ work together by urging the poetic recipient to amalgamate the respective associations of battle (connoted by *sókn* or ‘attack’) and head-gear (connoted by *hattr* or ‘hat’) to arrive at a meaningful referent which, in this instance, is ‘helmet’. Next the reader or listener must connect the associations of *svell* or ‘ice’ (in this instance likely an icicle rather than the usually implied sheet of ice) to the associations of the newly conceived referent: a cold, sharp and oblong object used against a helmet in battle is a ‘sword’. When is a sword ‘reddened’? When it is covered in blood. The sword’s ‘reddener’ (*rjóðr*) – which is the base-word and therefore the final signifier of this kenning – can therefore reasonably be identified as a warrior. The specific warrior that Guthormr is descriptively referring to, moreover, is King Hákon – a reference that can be inferred from the context of the verse within which the kenning is employed.

2.2 Formal Artifice

Having briefly considered the modes of semantic artifice that are consistently employed by skalds, I may now turn to the formal artifice of skaldic poetry which relates to the authored *arrangement* of verbal material and is usually identified through the recognition of a divergent – and highly rhythmicised – entity within the verbal soundscape of regular speech-acts. It should be pointed out that the rhythmic nature of such formal artifice does not simply comprise those metrical elements relating to poetic pulse (*metre* being a

concept with which rhythm is often conflated). Poetic rhythm must, instead, be understood as a phenomenon shaped by – and experienced through the perception of – the tensions that exist between discreet temporal units within a given verbal utterance. It occupies, as it were, the temporal thread between (and throughout) moments that are connected within an artistic framework. These units may or may not also constitute components that give rise to a distinct poetic pulse and metre: that is to say, such units may, if metrical, be measured, repetitive and predictable. However, although the metre of a poem or musical composition may be more discernibly rhythmical due to the usual establishment in metrical structures of identifiable internal tensions between beats and pulses, metre alone does not determine rhythmicity and may even be present when a speech act is relatively lacking in rhythmicity (that is, where the crucial rhythmical tensions between metrical units are diminished or absent): a monotonous utterance endlessly repeated (such as a daily roll-call for example) may feel distinctly rhythm-less, whether or not the repetitions are measured and regular. Evidence that the perception of connecting tensions between temporal units in the poetic frame – bestowed on the poetic utterance by its rhythmicity – distinguishes the utterance from surrounding quotidian speech acts, as found in Old Norse descriptions of prose and poetry (presented in *Heimskringla* and *Flateyjarbók* respectively) that overtly articulate the difference between these modes of expression in terms of separation and connectivity. In *Heimskringla*, prose is contrasted with poetry through its characterisation as *sundrlaus orð* (non-continuous or unbound speech – literally ‘sundered’ and ‘loose’) whilst poetry is described in *Flateyjarbók* as *samfost orð* (continuous or bound speech –

literally ‘together’ and ‘fast’).³⁶⁸ Such descriptions certainly seem to indicate a phenomenological awareness of the structural implications of rhythmic tensions. The notion of ‘binding (together)’ an entity through rhythmic means will, moreover, be of particular importance in the following chapter.

Aside from metre, certain poetic characteristics such as tone and symbol can also act as ‘rhythmic agents’ – a term employed by Susanne Langer in her consideration of the correlation between form and rhythm in art.³⁶⁹ The Prelude to Richard Wagner’s *Das Rheingold* (1869) is a prime aural example of how a strong rhythmical character can be shaped and sustained by such agents as dynamic variance and orchestral texture as opposed to a strict metrical pulse, whilst Joseph Mallord William Turner’s *Snow Storm - Steam-Boat off a Harbour’s Mouth* (1842) clearly demonstrates how rhythm can be produced even in a seemingly temporally static visual medium such as painting. Langer’s conceptualisation of ‘rhythmic agents’ stems, notably, from her understanding of rhythm as ‘a relation between tensions rather than [the] matter of equal divisions of time’ – a view echoed in the writing of Stuart Grant who approaches the subject of rhythm from a phenomenological perspective:³⁷⁰ Grant describes rhythm as a phenomenon which

shapes, directs, holds and gives forth the actuated events of our movements, to which the actuated events of our movements bear witness, and which, although [...] partially co-constituting reciprocal

³⁶⁸ *Hkr* II, 292; C. R. Unger and Guðbrandur Vigfússon, *Flateyjarbok: En samling af norske kongesagaer med indskudte mindre fortællinger om begivenheder i og udenfor Norge samt annaler*, 3 vols. (Christiania: P.T. Malling, 1860-68), vol. 2., 263. See also Kari Ellen Gade, *Dróttkvætt Poetry*, 22; CV, 605.

³⁶⁹ Susanne K. Langer, *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art Developed from Philosophy in a New Key* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953), 129.

³⁷⁰ Langer, *Feeling and Form*, 129.

relationship[s] with the actuated events of our movements, is not, in its invisible, driving, shaping, directional, irreal substance, the same thing as the actual events of our movements, but rather their condition.³⁷¹

In order to understand the nature of the rhythmic ‘condition’ it is useful to employ an analogy from the world of quantum physics. Rhythm can be understood as a wave-form of time: that is, a waxing and waning flow of temporal connectivity. Beats and pulses, on the other hand, represent disparate (if causally related) temporal particles: that is, Grant’s ‘actuated events’ as observed, measured and static entities to which the rhythmic wave succumbs in the instant of differentiation. ‘Moments’ that are dissected and analysed become, in being so delineated and observed, deprived of their rhythmicity and solidify, instead, into temporal objects plucked out of time’s flow for the sake of referentiality. A rhythmical utterance is situated, therefore, within an undulating flow of time in which each wave of expression relates backwards and forwards in a waxing and waning of tension and release whilst moving inexorably towards ‘the future’ (as this future is conceptualised in the phenomenological experience of time by human subjects).

One can therefore conclude, as Grant does, that the nature of the rhythmic ‘condition’ is one in which respective intensifications and relaxations of sound (and/or light) contribute to a larger ‘temporal structure [...which] is anticipatory, a lived time of expectations [...and hence] a futural essence’.³⁷²

³⁷¹ Stuart Grant, “Some Suggestions for a Phenomenology of Rhythm,” in *Philosophical and Cultural Theories of Music*, ed. Eduardo de la Fuente and Peter Murphy, *Social and Critical Theory*; v. 8 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 153.

³⁷² Grant, “Phenomenology of Rhythm,” 165.

This description of the rhythmic condition is useful when attempting to discern those formal features of skaldic verse that contribute to poetic rhythmicity and, hence, to skaldic artifice. Indeed, Langer provides the criteria for these features in much the same terms as Grant when she states that '[e]verything that prepares a future creates rhythm; everything that begets or intensifies expectation, including the expectation of sheer continuity, prepares the future'.³⁷³ I would suggest, therefore, that those formal elements of skaldic verse that can be shown to 'prepare a future' in a similar anticipatory fashion can be said to contribute to the rhythmic mechanism of skaldic verse, and hence, to its formal artifice. As I shall attempt to demonstrate presently, these features in the context of skaldic poetry are: metre (to which the sub-features of stress, alliteration, rhyme and syllabic length contribute), grammatical structure and framing conventions.

2.2.1 Metre

Metre is the most conspicuous rhythm-contributing element of skaldic verse and can certainly be said, in the words of Mieczyslaw Kolinski, to provide 'a framework for rhythmic design' in skaldic poetry.³⁷⁴ Such a metrical framework is defined by Martin Clayton as one which is 'temporal [...] based on the differentiation between individual pulses [by which Clayton means "regular beats perceived by the listener to fall at equal intervals of time"] in a sequence, in a regular and therefore predictable manner'.³⁷⁵ It is exactly this

³⁷³ Langer, *Feeling and Form*, 129.

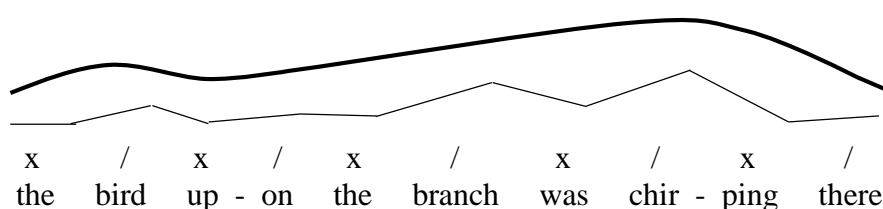
³⁷⁴ Mieczyslaw Kolinski, "A Cross-Cultural Approach to Metro-Rhythmic Patterns," *Ethnomusicology* 17, no. 3 (1973): 499.

³⁷⁵ Martin R. L. Clayton, "Free Rhythm: Ethnomusicology and the Study of Music Without Metre," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 59, no. 2 (1996): 327, 328.

predictability of the metrical unit that, in the context of temporal co-connectivity or co-tension with other such units, provides the recurring anticipations necessary for the experience of rhythm. In those musics and poeties that employ metre these predictable units are often understood as

a repeating pattern of ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ beats – although these terms may be misleading in that this relative strength is not necessarily marked by dynamic accenting or de-accenting, but may be a quality inferred on the basis of perceived structural functions.³⁷⁶

In much poetry such relative strength is based on the natural syllabic or moraic stresses within words and syntactic stresses within sentences that can be arranged to produce distinct metrical pulses. In this way a relatively natural and gestural sentence such as, ‘the bird there was chirping upon the branch’, may produce iambic pentameter when rearranged, with a more-or-less arc-shaped syntactical stress development of intensification and relaxation:



This example, though trite, is indicative of how a quotidian utterance can be transformed into an artefact by means of formal artifice alone. The semantic content of the two arrangements is no different, and yet the formal structure of the latter delineates the utterance at least somewhat and sets it apart from everyday speech – although a single and contextless line of iambic

³⁷⁶ Clayton, “Free Rhythm,” 328.

pentameter is hardly the most artificial example of metrical craft. The more artificial the arrangement, the more discernible the artefact. This is certainly the case with skaldic utterances of which the strict and controlled metrical structures are so artificial that skaldic speaking is not only distinct from everyday speaking, but even requires special skill, instruction and exercise as a prerequisite for being spoken.

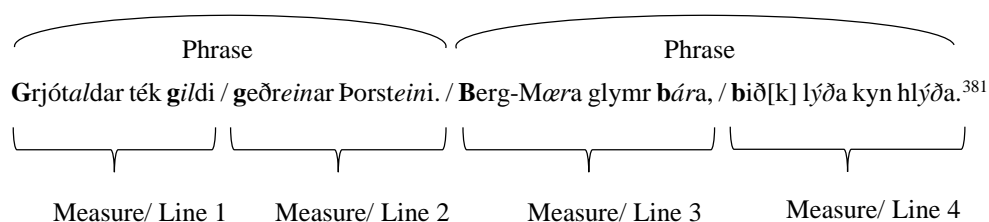
One example of such a tightly controlled metrical framework in skaldic composition is *dróttkvætt* (court metre) which, as its name might suggest, is also the most frequently employed metre in the extant encomiastic corpus.³⁷⁷ Although the current chapter does not occasion a full exposition of the structure of *dróttkvætt* (a subject expertly and extensively treated by such scholars as Hans Kuhn and Kari Ellen Gade), a brief description may serve to illustrate the importance of metre as a mechanism of formal artifice in skaldic texts.³⁷⁸ *Dróttkvætt* is an extended variant of *fornyrðislag*, an ‘old story metre’ commonly employed in the composition of eddic poetry. The use of *dróttkvætt* demands, in the first place, that each strophic line consist of six syllables corresponding to six metrical positions – though I shall temporarily, for the sake of clarity, describe this sound-defined skaldic unit *not* as a ‘line’, but as a ‘measure’ (that is, a *metrically complete segment of time*), since the overt visual conceptualisation of such metrical units as ‘lines’ may hamper the perception and expression of those rhythmic phrases

³⁷⁷ For a comprehensive overview of all metres employed in skaldic poetry, see Diana Whaley, “The Metres of Skaldic Poetry” in “General Introduction”, in *SkP* I, li-lxvii.

³⁷⁸ Hans Kuhn, *Das Dróttkvætt* (C. Winter, 1983); Kari Ellen Gade, “Hans Kuhn’s ‘Das Dróttkvætt’: Some Critical Considerations,” *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 88, no. 1 (1989): 34–53; Gade, *Dróttkvætt Poetry*.

structuring each *ffjórðungr* (quarter strophe).³⁷⁹ Of the six syllables that constitute the *dróttkvætt* measure then, three must be stressed with the final two syllables forming a cadence, that is, a ‘long-stemmed stressed syllable carrying internal rhyme plus a short, enclitic unstressed syllable’.³⁸⁰ Internal rhymes must, in each odd measure, consist of partial internal rhyme (*skothening*) whilst even measures should present full internal rhyme (*aðalhending*). Finally, and arguably most significantly, each *ffjórðungr* must incorporate a specific alliterative arrangement. In accordance with this arrangement each odd measure should carry two alliterating staves (one of which almost always falls on the first cadential pulse in the fifth metrical position), whilst one corresponding alliterative staff should initiate a paired even measure, punctuating the first stressed syllable of that even measure.

The following example from Hofgarða-Refr Gestsson’s eleventh-century *Poem about Þorsteinn* demonstrates the basic metrical features of skaldic *dróttkvætt* to great effect:



I present the feast of the stone-people’s thought-land [feast of the mind of the giants => poetry] to Þorsteinn. The rock-Mærir’s wave [giants’ wave => poetry] clatters; I bid the kindred of people listen.

³⁷⁹ The term, measure, is also more consistent with Snorri Sturluson’s use of the term *vísuorð* (lit. strophe-word) to indicate the metrical ‘line’ since *orð* in this sense represents the smallest linguistically meaningful unit that can be measured in syllables. *Vísuorð* becomes, indeed, a unit for the strophic measurement of syllables. See, *Ht*, 4.

³⁸⁰ Whaley, “The Metres of Skaldic Poetry”, lxi.

³⁸¹ *Skm*, 12, line 16-19,

* I employ the term ‘Phrase’ here not in its grammatical sense, but in its musical sense.

[My emphasis and italics]

What is clearly exemplified by the *helmingr* above is the rhythmic movement generated by the metre of the verse. In this respect the metrical features of alliteration and rhyme complement each other perfectly to create, in the first place, a sense of anticipation – through the structuring and development of expectation – that builds towards the first stressed syllable in each even measure (that is, the centre of each rhythmical phrase or periodic sub-phrase as illustrated in the figure above); and secondly, a sense of anticipation for rhythmic closure in the final cadence of each *ffórðungr*. The feeling of expectation which builds the phrase towards the second measure is achieved, primarily, through the use of alliteration. Due to the listener's anticipation of especially the third alliterative repetition which almost invariably occurs in the same metrical position within every *ffórðungr*, the rhythmic tension increases sharply after the sounding of the second alliterating stave in each odd measure when the audience becomes aware of what sound to expect in the corresponding even measure (that is, in the predictable third alliterative position). The approach of the anticipated moment in which this final alliteration occurs is signalled, moreover, by the manifestation of *skothending* in the penultimate syllable of the odd measure which indicates and emphasises the initial cadence, thus contributing to the rhythmic propulsion which drives one measure into the next.

After the moment of alliterative culmination – that is, the moment in which the listener encounters the first stressed and alliterating syllable of the even measure – the rhythmic tension steadily recedes, and the listener is guided

towards the final cadence of the *fjórðungr* which provides a feeling of ‘closure’ largely due to the occurrence of *aðalhending* and, in the case of the second phrase in Hofgarða-Refr’s *helmingr* above, additional end-rhyme. Although the phrasal length, determined by the consistent and repeated syllable-count of the *dróttkvætt* measure, already generates the listener’s anticipation of each phrase-ending, the *arrival* of this ending is indicated by the full-rhyming cadence, especially since ‘the completion of a rhyme’ in skaldic verse ‘[tends to bring] a structural sequence to a close’.³⁸² This tendency of rhyme to effect a sense of closure can, in the case of skaldic verse, be attributed to the ability of rhyme to ‘arrest the [listener’s] expectation of continuation’, thus bringing the rhythmic flow (which drives, always, towards an anticipated future), to an end.³⁸³ The greater the similarity of the sound repetition in these cadential rhymes, the greater the sense of closure achieved. As can be seen above, a variance in rhyme-strength is employed by Hofgarða-Refr in order to achieve a relatively stronger cadence – compared to the cadence at the end of the first *fjórðungr* – through the use of both full internal, as well as end rhyme in the conclusion of the *helmingr*, thereby providing a greater sense of closure to the final cadence. This construction is similar to that which one would describe, in musical terms, as a ‘period’: that is, a structure comprising two sub-phrases of which the antecedent phrase ends in a weaker, and the consequent phrase in a stronger cadence. By way of example one might think of *Greensleeves*, in which the melody comprises two consecutive musical periods.

³⁸² Rickert, “Structural Functions of Rhyme and the Performance of Poetry,” 253.

³⁸³ Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 71.

The skaldic example by Hofgarða-Refr given above is significant for understanding the relationship between rhythm and metre in skaldic verse, not only as a specimen displaying various metrical features, but also as a self-referential portrayal of skaldic poetry. Of particular interest is the metaphorical image employed as a component of the kenning for ‘poetry’ in the second *fjórðungr* (lines 3-4).³⁸⁴ This image is *bára* (wave), which in the kenning ‘berg-Mœra bára’ (wave of the rock-Mœrir) represents liquid – and more specifically, ale or mead as consumable liquid. In the context of the kenning this mead is, furthermore, mythologically situated as a mead belonging to giants and thus, ultimately, as the ‘Mead of Poetry’. By employing this oceanic image of the wave as a signifier for Óðinn’s poetic mead, Hofgarða-Refr is employing a fairly common trope in skaldic composition and there are a number of similar examples scattered across the skaldic corpus: Arnórr jarlaskáld describes poetry as the roaring *Alföður brim hrosta* (the surf of the malt [=Ale] of Allfather [Óðinn]);³⁸⁵ Rognvaldr jarl Kali Kolsson’s poetry is portrayed as *Gauts gjalfr* (Gautr’s [Óðinn’s] sea-din);³⁸⁶ and Sturla Þórðarson imagines the poetic mead as a *hunangsbára* (honey-wave).³⁸⁷

The trope is itself indicative of the poetic perception of the wave-like nature of rhythmic utterances and articulates the similarities relating to the phenomenological experiences of, on the one hand, rhythmic rise and fall

³⁸⁴ Having now completed the metrical analysis of *dróttkvætt* metre, I shall again reference skaldic ‘lines’ as the more conventional alternative to ‘measures’.

³⁸⁵ *SkP* II, v. 1, p. 231.

³⁸⁶ *SkP* II, v. 11, p. 588.

³⁸⁷ *SkP* II, v. 29, p. 721.

and, on the other, the swelling lift and collapsing drop experienced at sea as a ship moves over the billows. This phenomenological association is fairly common in rhythmic art-forms. In a literary context one might think of Virginia Woolf's treatment of rhythm in *The Waves* (1931) for example, whilst many musicologists employ 'wave'-metaphors in relation to rhythm when analysing compositions, for example in Charles Rosen, *The Romantic Generation*: 'Schumann's radical innovation was a new large sense of rhythm conceived as a series of waves of energy'.³⁸⁸ It is telling that even organically derived terms (that is, terms that stem directly from listener-experience) reflect this association, as is clear in, for example, the case of Electronic Dance Music (EDM). Thus one finds that the moment in which rhythmic tension is released or 'reverses' before the primary rhythmic motive is introduced in EDM – a musical genre that employs one of the most exaggerated forms of rhythmic build and release – is termed a 'drop' whilst the moments preceding this constitute a 'lift'.

The term *bára* as a signifier for the phenomenological experience of rhythm in in Hofgarða-Refr's *Poem about Þorsteinn* is, moreover, interesting in that it usually 'denotes the smaller waves [...] (on the surface of larger billows)' when used in prose contexts.³⁸⁹ If *bára* is understood in this more precise sense, one is not only presented with an image of wave-like rhythmic phrasing, but also with an image of punctuating ripples that move along the

³⁸⁸ Charles Rosen, *The Romantic Generation* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), 110.

³⁸⁹ CV, 54.

surface of a wave – ripples such as those alliterative staves that seem to ‘clatter’ or ‘rattle’ (*glymr*) over the greater rhythmic forces beneath.

2.2.2 Grammatical Structure

One such driving force which often contributes to the formal rhythmic structure of skaldic verse but which can nevertheless function independently of skaldic metre is the grammatical construction of clauses within each poetic stanza. The flexibility in the arrangement of word placement that the complex inflections of Old Norse allows is often exploited by skalds in a manner which is designed to engender rhythmic anticipation. Egill Skallagrímsson’s *Berudrápa* – a *drápa* composed in response to a shield-gift from Þorsteinn Eiríksson – offers a prime example of such grammatical craftsmanship:

1. Heyri fúrs á forsa
 fallhadds vinar stalla,
 hyggi, þegn, til þagnar
 þinn lýðr, konungs, mína.
 Opt skal arnar kjapta
 orð góð of trøð Hqrða,
 hrafnstýrandi hræra
 hregna, mín of fregnask.³⁹⁰

1. (They) should listen to my waterfalls
 of the long-haired friend of the fire-altar [Óðinn’s mead => poetry];
 your people should consider
 in silence, king’s thane.
 Often shall my eagle’s beak’s
 good harvest in the land of the Hqrða –
 raven-steerer of the stirring
 storms – be heard.

³⁹⁰ Eg, 275-6.

In both of the *helmingar* in the strophe above an important sentence-element is delayed until the final line, creating a sense of anticipation for semantic closure. Modern English equivalents for similar tensions caused by grammatical delays can usually be found in the presence of parentheses. One might consider the following sentence as mimicking the feeling of anticipation effected in *Berudrápa*: ‘shining in the sky – that blue dome over the earth which brightens with each dawn – is the sun’. Here ‘the sun’, as the subject of the main clause, is delayed until the end of the sentence both as a result of the employment of the passive voice and the interpolation of the descriptive parenthesis. After the initial introduction of the verb, ‘shining’, tension is created which is resolved, finally, upon the arrival of the subject.

In the first *helmingr* of Egill’s *Berudrápa* the clausal subject, *lyðr* (people), which is qualified by the possessive adjective *þinn* (your), is similarly delayed until the final line of the *helmingr*. What makes the delay particularly effective, however, is the fact that *lyðr* is the subject of two verbs, both of which are introduced in the lines before – the first being the initial word of the strophe, that is, *heyra* (to hear). The thematic content of the strophe – the call for silence and attention – is emphasised on the level of structural artifice. The rhythmic tension initiated by the first verb of the primary independent clause of the compound-complex sentence, *heyra* (to hear), is extended by the introduction of a second verb, *hyggja* (to think or consider), belonging to the second independent clause. Having now arrested the recipient’s attention, the suspense is released when the subject of both verbs is finally revealed as *þinn lyðr*. The possessive adjectives, *konungs* (the king’s) and *mina* (mine), are likewise delayed until the very end of the *helmingr*, and also contribute

to the rhythmic artifice of the strophe to great political effect – a topic to which I shall return in the following chapter.

The method of grammatical tension in the second *helmingr* of the strophe reverses the pattern of delay found in the first, and it is now the main verb, *fregna* (to hear), as opposed to the clausal subject, which is postponed until the end of the strophe. The anticipation for the main verb, which is reflexive and serves therefore as a sort of passive participle within a verbal catena, is spurred by the introduction of the modal verb *skal* (shall) in the first line of the *helmingr*. The incomplete nature of the verb generates the rhythmic tension that is only resolved in the very final moment of the verse. The anticipatory effect is otherwise prolonged by the employment of a parenthetical form of address directed towards Þorsteinn as an intercalary kenning, that is, *hrafnstýrandi hræra hregna* [the raven-steerer of the stirring storms => a warrior (steerer) who directs a bird of prey (raven) as a scavenger of battle (stirring storms) => Þorsteinn].

I should note that my translation of *hrafnstýrandi hræra hregna* as ‘raven-steerer of the stirring storms’ is tentative. Finnur Jónsson describes the element ‘*hræra hregna*’ as *verderbten* (corrupt) and Bjarni Einarsson notes that the phrase ‘has not been satisfactorily explained’.³⁹¹ Both editors interpret the kenning as one that refers to a ‘man’ or, more specifically, to a sailor: that is, one who steers the Raven (a name for a horse) of the sea

³⁹¹ Finnur Jónsson, ed., *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar: nebst den grösseren Gedichten Egils*, 2nd ed. *Altnordische Saga-Bibliothek*; 3 (Halle: M Niemeyer, 1924), n. Str. 58, p. 269; Bjarni Einarsson, ed., *Egils Saga* (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2003), n. St. 56, p. 167.

(signified by *hræra hregna*). Einarsson suggests ‘movable mountains’ as a metaphor for ‘waves’ with *hræra* serving as an adjective (movable) and *hregna* as the equally corrupt genitive plural of, presumably, *hryggr* (ridge or mountain). Although this reading would certainly tie in well with my discussion on formal rhythmicity, the translation is less than ideal. *Hræra* ought to be in the genitive plural form also, which might suggest the plural form of *hræ* (corpse). However, this would require an emendation of *hræra* to *hræva*, an alteration that would disturb the line’s *skothending*. ‘Storms of corpses’ as a kenning for battle would also be slightly unusual: one would expect something more along the lines of ‘storms of the corpse-serpent’ – or a similar kenning for sword – which resembles the battle-kennings found in Sigvatr Þórðarson’s *Nesjavísur* and Hallar-Steinn’s *Rekstefja* respectively.³⁹² *Hræra* cannot be translated as a verb (to stir) since it does not correspond with *hrafnstýrandi* (raven-steerer) which is in the nominative singular. I have therefore opted to translate *hræra hregna* as ‘of the stirring storms’, serving as a descriptive metaphor for battle, so that the resultant ‘raven of battle’ may be understood as an eagle and its ‘steerer’ as the warrior who provides carrion.

This kenning parallels the descriptive kenning, *konungs þegn* (king’s thane), in the first *helmingr* which also serves as a form of direct address and of which the base-word (*þegn*) is also used as a means of interruption. What is significant about the parenthetical delay in the second *helmingr*, is that it is phrasal rather than clausal, ensuring that there is no verb which can muddy,

³⁹² *SkP* I, v. 14, p. 575; *SkP* I, v. 5, p. 902.

as it were, the rhythmic waters. After arresting the audience's attention so effectively in the first *helmingr* the poet subsequently guides the listener and reader with assured expertise to what he has determined, through his poetic arrangement, shall 'be heard'. What one 'hears' by the end therefore completes, very neatly, the frame that begins with an instruction 'to listen'.

2.2.3 Framing Conventions

As a mode of formal artifice, the Frame is, arguably, the most important structural element in any Performance. It marks the encounter of a Performance-recipient with a Performance in that the recognition of a frame instantaneously generates a mental shift in perception and assessment which instigates the recipient's conceptualisation of the specified semantic material *as* representational. In this sense there is important overlap between framing as a mode of formal artifice, and the processes of recontextualisation inherent in semantic artifice described earlier in this chapter – particularly with regards to the determination of *perspective*. However, if the primary preoccupation of semantic recontextualisation concerns the choice of context, the choice of signs and the resituating of signs within a chosen context in a manner which alters the relationship between the signs themselves as well as their relationship to their context, then framing is concerned with the provision and delineation of the context itself. If one were to return to the example of Duchamp's *Fountain*, now incorporating the idea of the formal frame, then one might construe the recontextualisation of the famous urinal as: the semantic resituating of a urinal from 'the everyday' to the special framework of the art-gallery as a spatially- and temporally-

defined construct that imbues the objects within it with new signifying potential. Framing cordons off the rhythmic experience that serves as the connective tissue of a Performance-form, so that the Performance may be distinguished as a discrete entity, thus differentiated from its quotidian surroundings. The frame itself activates rhythmic movement since it is the primary instigator of the expectation of ‘meaning’ relating to that which lies within its bounds.

In the context of skaldic poetry, one of the most common framing mechanisms is the skald’s call for an attentive silence into which poetry can be spoken – although it should be noted that the framing positions in which these strophes occur are based on the assumptions and speculations of scholars who reconstruct these verses and who may frame poems with strophes that they deem to be suitable according to modern ideas regarding modern framing tropes. There is, therefore, some danger for circular argument here. However, it might be useful, given the lack of evidence, to accept that certain assumptions regarding Performance framing are not wholly unwarranted given cross-cultural and cross-temporal Performance tendencies, and particularly when these assumptions are given credence by examples such as the introduction to *Berudrápa* in *Egils saga* which clearly indicates that the poem, at least according to the saga author, begins with its attention-seeking strophe (*ok er þetta upphaf at* or ‘and this is how it begins’). If one allows oneself to speculate that strophes which call for attention are likely to be opening strophes, then one may examine the manner in which such strophes act as poetic frameworks.

The presumed opening strophes of longer *drápur* in which the call for attention is employed as a potential framing device are usually explicitly self-referential and state the skald's intention to Perform their own (or in the case of recitation, possibly another skald's) verse. The plea for a listening audience serves two functions. As a highly self-referential act which necessarily informs the Performance-recipient that 'poetry is being made' or that 'poetry is to follow', it very effectively separates the poetic utterance from the quotidian realm beyond its borders. The announcement serves, first and foremost, to demarcate the skaldic composition as a special utterance and, since the announcement is itself made in skaldic verse, at once also defines the nature of the special utterance as poetic. The second function of the announcement which is simultaneously a request for silence and attentiveness is the initiation of the rhythmic experience inherent in skaldic Performance precisely because it is concerned with 'preparing a future' and even generates an anticipatory silence that launches the rhythmic tension. One might imagine an orchestral conductor raising their hands and gesturing up to an entire measure in silence to prepare the instrumentalists for the opening measures of a symphony. At this point the Performance has already commenced and the rhythmic tension is palpable, even before the sounding of a note.

It is telling that the self-referential frameworks of skaldic compositions often incorporate imagery relating to rhythmicity, such as the aforementioned wave-trope which imagines poetry in terms of the rhythmic movement of, and within, various bodies of water – a conceptualisation which is

metonymically consistent with the liquid nature of the Mead of Poetry. The *helmingr* from Hofgarða-Refr's *Poem about Þorsteinn*, mentioned earlier in this chapter with particular reference to the skald's comparison of his poetry to a clashing wave, is no exception. It, too, frames its poetic content with a skaldic plea for attention: *Berg-Mæra glymr bára, / bið[k] lýða kyn hlýða* (The rock-Mærir's wave [giants' wave => poetry] clatters; I bid the kindred of people listen).³⁹³ Nowhere in the skaldic corpus is the wave-trope more fully developed as a means of establishing a formal framework than in Einarr skálaglamm's tenth-century encomium, *Vellekla*, composed in praise of the powerful Hákon Sigurðarson. Over the course of five (and arguably six) strophes, Einarr develops the metaphor of a poetic wave which swells, surges and crashes over the jarl's retinue in roaring cadences, all the while appealing to the court's attentive listening.

Einarr's prologue presents the image of a rhythmic wave growing as the Mead of Poetry within the mythical vat Boðn (one of the three containers into which the dwarves Fjalarr and Gjalarr pour the poetic mead): *Nús, þats Boðnar bára / [...] tér vaxa* (Now, the wave of Boðn waxes).³⁹⁴ It then draws audibly closer to the audience as the simmering contents of the kettle Óðrærir (another of the dwarves' mead-filled containers): *Eisar vágr fyr vísa / [...] Rognis [...]; / þýtr Óðræris alda / öldrhafs við fles galdra* (Rognir's wave [Óðinn's wave => the Mead of Poetry] rushes before the ruler; the wave of Óðrærir thunders against the skerry of chants).³⁹⁵ *Ofljóst* is potentially

³⁹³ *Skm*, 12, line 18-19.

³⁹⁴ *SkP* I, v. 2, p. 284.

³⁹⁵ *SkP* I, v. 3, p. 285.

effected by the word *vísa* (the accusative form of *vísi*, meaning ‘ruler’) which can also refer to a poetic ‘strophe’ when used in the nominative, and this wordplay may well indicate that the Einarr’s verse is itself rushing forth like the swelling surf, thus solidifying the metaphoric likening of poetry and wave. The narrative rhythm, based on the listener’s rising anticipation regarding the fate of the metaphorical wave, builds towards, and culminates in, the image of the billow breaking over the ruler and his retinue: *gengr of alla / asksogn [...] // bergs grynniló dverga* (the shoal-wave of the dwarves of the rock reaches over the entire host of the ship).³⁹⁶ The term used for ‘host’ (*sogn*) can also, notably, signify ‘tale’, reinforcing the idea that Einarr’s poetic wave extends over the skaldic narrative.³⁹⁷

The rhythmic tension then recedes with the aid of humour as the doused skald begins to bail out the poetic mead from the flooded ship: *Hljóta munk [...] at ausa austr vín-Gnóðar* (It will be my lot to bail out the bilge-water of the wine-Gnóð [the bilge-water of the ship of wine => the liquid of the vat => the Mead of Poetry]).³⁹⁸ However, the poet will not long endure his audience taunting him with regards to this task (*né hlítik frýju of þat*) since he must now, having gained the full attention of the court, commence the praise of Jarl Hákon. In this respect I would tentatively agree with Finnur Jónsson’s placement in *Den Norsk-Islandske Skjaldedigtning* of the strophe beginning, *Þvítt fjölkostigr flestu...* (For many-virtued much...), in immediate succession

³⁹⁶ *SkP* I, v. 4, p. 287.

³⁹⁷ *CV*, 620.

³⁹⁸ *SkP* I, v. 5, p. 289.

to the strophe (just mentioned) beginning, *Hljóta munk, né hlítik...* (Will fall, not endure...):³⁹⁹

37. Þvítfjöldkostigr flestu
flestr ræðr við son Bestlu
— tekit hefk morðs til mærdar —
mæringr an þú færa.⁴⁰⁰

37. Because most many-virtued famous men
control with the son of Bestla
— I have begun to praise the battle —
much less than you.

The strophe above is incorporated, almost reluctantly, into the *slæmr* (that is, the concluding section) of *Vellekla* as it is arranged in *SkP* I due to perceived thematic incongruities. The strophe may, however, serve as a fitting bridge between the introduction and the main body of the *drápa* if the employment of the familial kenning for Óðinn, that is, *Bestlu sonr* (the son of Bestla), is understood as an intertextual reference to a strophe from *Hávamál* in which Óðinn learns ‘mighty songs’ (*fimbulljóð*) from his maternal uncle (that is, Bestla’s brother).⁴⁰¹ In this particular strophe from *Hávamál*, Óðinn, as Bestla’s implied son, is said to have *drykk of gat ins dýra mjaðar* (got drink of the treasured mead) which is subsequently poured over the god in a baptism-like manner so that he is *ausinn Óðreri* (bedoused from *Óðrærir*).⁴⁰² It is striking that Einarr, himself metaphorically soaked with poetic mead, employs the same verb (*ausa*) which describes Óðinn’s state in *Hávamál*, to illustrate the bailing out of the ship’s bilge-water. This allows him to

³⁹⁹ Finnur Jónsson, *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning AI* (København og Kristiania: Gyldendal, Nordisk forlag, 1912), 123.

⁴⁰⁰ *SkP* I, v. 37, p. 329.

⁴⁰¹ *Edda* I, 350-51.

⁴⁰² *Edda* I, 350-51.

conclude his introduction by daringly drawing a parallel between himself and the god of poetry with the sentiment that he, along *við son Bestlu* (with the son of Bestla) – and one may take this as meaning ‘like the son of Bestla’ – has *tekit til mærdar morðs* (begun to praise the battle).⁴⁰³

One final element of the introduction to *Vellekla* merits discussion in relation to the formal rhythmicity of skaldic framing. This feature is the metaphorical equation of the poetic wave which engulfs the framing strophes, and blood – a comparison which is most obviously presented in the assumed opening strophe of the *drápa* which likely, therefore, serves as a framing device for the introduction itself:

1. Hugstóran biðk heyra
 – heyr, jarl, Kvasis dreyra –
 foldar vqrð á fyrða
 fjarðleggjar brim dreggjar.⁴⁰⁴

1. I bid the lofty-minded listen,
 – listen, Jarl, to Kvasir’s blood –
 earth-warden, to the warriors
 of the firth-bone’s yeast-surf.

The blood of Kvasir – a figure epitomising wisdom and knowledge and whose blood constitutes the principal ingredient of the Mead of Poetry – is likened to waves in fermenting liquid. Both *Kvasis dreyri* (Kvasir’s blood) and *brim dreggjar fyrða fjarðleggjar* (the yeast-surf of the men/warriors of the firth-bone [the mead of the dwarves]) are mythological kennings for the Mead of Poetry as illustrated by Snorri in *Skáldskaparmál*.⁴⁰⁵ Both kennings

⁴⁰³ *SkP* I, v. 37, p. 329.

⁴⁰⁴ *SkP* I, 238.

⁴⁰⁵ *Skm*, 11.

are, furthermore, connected aurally and thematically through the similar-sounding *dreyri* (blood) and *dregg* (yeast): just as blood animates man, yeast as a living substance animates man's nourishment, causing dough to rise and expand and ale to breathe and froth. *Kvasis dreyri* therefore reflects a metaphorical parallel between leaven and blood as poetic mead. This parallel seems even more likely if one considers the potential wordplay of *fjarðleggr* (firth-bone) and *fjaðr-leggr* (spear-shaft), since the sonically emphasised unit of *fjaðr-leggjar brim dreggjar* (the yeast-surf of the spear-shaft) could be interpreted as a kenning for blood so that the waves of the surf (*brim*) not only metaphorically, but also metonymically represent Kvasir's blood.⁴⁰⁶

What is particularly striking about the parallels drawn between the poetic wave and the substance of blood is Einarr's emphasis on the aural perception involved in the comparison. Einarr enhances the generic call for attention through repetition and rhyme: not only do *heyra* (listen) and *heyr* (hear) follow each other in immediate succession, contributing to the insistence of the skald's bidding, but the internal and end rhymes between *heyra*, *heyr* and *dreyra* create a highly memorable and repeatable entity within the *helmingr* which entices the listener into attendance. What might a poetic recipient hear, then, when listening (with their mind's ear) to blood, as the poet stresses they do? The most perceptible sound of blood is, of course, its pulse – particularly apparent in the pounding of a heart or the pounding of blood in one's ears after physical exertion. It is here that the skald consciously portrays the

⁴⁰⁶ *Fjarðr* can be understood as representing a feather-shaped spear-blade, while *leggjar* can signify a spear-shaft: CV, 158, 380. The powerful aural connection between *dreggjar* and *leggjar* resulting from internal rhyme is also of note.

rhythmical nature of the poetic wave which, likewise, pulses throughout the skaldic composition. The sound-scape evoked – of pulsing blood (*dreyri*) and lapping waves (*brim*) – is one of swell and recession and serves as a metaphorical expression of the audience’s engagement with poetic rhythm so that Jarl Hákon, commanded to ‘listen!’ through the vocative *Jarl* and the imperative *heyr*, is drawn into the action of the skaldic Performance through nothing so much as an emerging, and engineered, awareness of the strophe’s rhythmicity. The rhythmic framing refocuses the view of the poetic utterance as a Performative utterance by self-consciously drawing attention to its formal artifice.⁴⁰⁷ Blood runs with its own pulse through the body and it is blood’s rhythm that gives life to the individual within whom it flows; the poetic wave, in turn, rushes through the mind with its own rhythmic essence in order to sustain the art-body that it generates and holds together.

3. Skaldic Dialogue

The high artifice of skaldic craftsmanship may well be said to be its key attribute. That it is recognised as such is significant in and of itself: the large extent to which the artifice of skaldic verse may be seen as a central component of skaldic practice is, for example, clearly demonstrated by the self-referentiality (or self-recognition) of this encomiastic poetry – a mode of speaking that is intended, at least on the surface, to serve an object of praise,

⁴⁰⁷ Clare Finburg notices a similar phenomenon in the plays of Jean Genet which she aptly describes as “rhythmical micro-systems [which] crystallise into self-conscious essences of artifice”. See: Clare Finburgh, “Facets of Artifice: Rhythms in the Theater of Jean Genet, and the Painting, Drawing, and Sculpture of Alberto Giacometti,” *French Forum* 27, no. 3 (October 1, 2002): 88.

be it a present or past ruler, a beloved or (as in later applications) a deity – which often transforms the eulogising fabric of the verse into a self-consciously inward gesture that highlights, instead, the processes inherent in composition and recitation as primary topical foci. This ‘obviousness’ of skaldic artifice, so easily perceived by the audience of skaldic verse must necessarily affect its reception and a response to the poetic Performance *as artefact* can equal or even outweigh the significance of the informational content (that is the verbal message) conveyed by the Performance.⁴⁰⁸ One might compare this with the predominantly sensory reception of an opera goer who is affected by an operatic Performance without being able to understand the language of the libretto. In such a case the sensory experience engendered by the musical artifice – its rhythms and harmonies – conveys a message which is independent of, and need not support, the philological content. Under such circumstances the communicative act of the poetic utterance ceases to operate in a purely functional semantic (that is, quotidian) way: instead, in becoming aware of the constructedness or craftedness of the communication, a Performance emerges through the self-conscious realisation that the language is employed representationally.

It is, indeed, the representational quality of an artefact that calls forth its recipient and moreover generates self-awareness within that recipient. This is primarily due to the fact that overtly representative utterances are perceived as having special ‘meaning’ – that is, representative utterances attempt to

⁴⁰⁸ This argument is similar to Marshall McLuhan’s well-known conceptualisation of “the medium [as] the message” in his *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (London: Sphere Books, 1967); See also, in this regard, Würth, “Skaldic Poetry and Performance.”

signify concepts requiring interpretations that supersede the immediacy of quotidian understandings – and such meaning-making implies, in turn, purpose or intent. What the representational artefact establishes in the mind of the recipient is, in essence, a phantom ‘will’ behind the employment of artifice that, even if it exists solely within the mind of the recipient as an imagined directedness, produces an Other voice in relation to which a ‘self’ emerges and is defined. At this point it might serve to recall the words of Émile Benveniste quoted in my Introduction in which he posits that,

[c]onsciousness of self is only possible if it is experienced by contrast. I use *I* only when I am speaking to someone who will be a *you* in my address. It is this condition of dialogue which is constitutive of *person*, for it implies that reciprocally *I* becomes *you* in the address of the one who in his turn designates himself as *I*.⁴⁰⁹

What is particularly noteworthy about Benveniste’s statement is the notion that self-consciousness is conditioned by dialogue. This dialogic condition is certainly a hallmark of skaldic Performance in which the voice of the Other is often brought, self-reflexively, to the fore. The imperative bidding for attention analysed in the discussion on Formal Artifice above very clearly demonstrates a poetry that, even without the physical voicing of a poet or reciter, speaks out and intends towards an audience. It is also a poetry in which the skaldic voice often designates (to use Benveniste’s wording) itself as ‘I’.

The following section will consider the various ways in which skaldic dialogue manifests itself. I shall, in the first place, examine the use of skaldic

⁴⁰⁹ Benveniste, *Problems in General Linguistics*, 224–25.

poetry as character dialogue in prose contexts – a practice which is indicative of the awareness that skaldic verse is a mode of verbalisation that is always directed towards an audience (albeit, at times, the self as audience). I shall then turn to consider the voices that are incorporated by skalds as inter-texts, producing multiple voices that speak through skaldic compositions and engender intradiegetic dialogics. I shall conclude with an examination of the internal dialogic that emerges in the recipient as Performer due to the internalised voicings of alternative perspectives that arise in the process of interpretation.

3.1 Character Dialogue

In the *Íslendingasögur* (Sagas of the Icelanders) most skaldic strophes are uttered in the form of situational dialogue: that is, each strophe is spoken or recited as the direct speech of a particular character, and usually *to* one or more intradiegetic characters. In these novelistic sagas skaldic poetry is therefore nearly always presented as voiced speech.⁴¹⁰ This is not to say that the *lausavísur* (detached strophes) quoted in the sagas are incorporated into what the author believes to be their ‘actual’ or ‘authentic’ Performance contexts – since the incorporation of skaldic poetry into the sagas often gives rise to fictional impromptu speaking situations created in order to facilitate

⁴¹⁰ For more on the novelistic nature of the sagas and the incorporation of verse into saga prose see Torfi H. Tulinius, *The Matter of the North: The Rise of Literary Fiction in Thirteenth-Century Iceland*, Viking Collection, v. 13 (Odense: Odense University Press, 2002); Torfi H. Tulinius, “The Prosimetrum Form 2: Verses as an Influence in Saga Composition and Interpretation,” in *Skaldsagas: Text, Vocation, and Desire in the Icelandic Sagas of Poets*, ed. Russell Gilbert Poole, *Ergänzungsbände Zum Reallexikon Der Germanischen Altertumskunde* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2001), 191–217; Siân E. Grønlie, *The Saint and the Saga Hero: Hagiography and Early Icelandic Literature* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, forthcoming in 2017).

contextual congruity – but it is clear from the *Íslendingasögur* that such narrative situations are usually deemed to be contextually suitable if they are dialogic within the intradiegetic realm of the saga.⁴¹¹ It is also clear that dialogue is the preferred framing device for skaldic poetry in the *konungasögur*, although the Performance of strophes in these ‘historicised’ narratives does not always take place before an intradiegetic audience. Much of the poetry from the *konungasögur*, quoted as a form of authoritative substantiation intended to support the information presented in each saga narrative, is situated, instead, before the listener or reader of the saga-text as a primary, if extra-diegetic, audience-recipient. This mode of dialogue is achieved through the method of citation employed by the saga author which introduces the poetry as the direct speech not of a saga character, but of a skaldic source ‘speaking’ to a saga-audience in the present tense (that is, in the present Performance of the saga telling): a frequent introductory formula employed by saga authors, for example, is the phrase *svá segir X* (so says X, where X represents the name of a skald).⁴¹²

The vocalising application of skaldic poetry can, of course, be attributed to the nature of the verse’s verbal content which often necessitates a transferral of voice from the third person in which the saga is narrated to the first- or

⁴¹¹ Strophes that approximate an imagined authenticity are those that are situated within intradiegetic Performance contexts in which the recitation of poetry is framed as Performance within the narrative. The most prominent examples of this are the verses that skaldic characters are said to Perform before kings, such as Egill Skallagrímsson’s *Höfuðlausn* (Head-ransom) which the skald Performs, as *Egils saga* recounts, before King Eiríkr blóðox (Blood-Axe) Haraldsson in order to save his life. *Eg*, 183-92.

⁴¹² *Svá sagði X* (so said X) is, however, used at times and it is not always clear from manuscript abbreviations (for example, ‘sva s.’) whether past or present tense is intended. For more on the introduction of verse quotation in saga texts and the way in which such introductions affect the ‘voice’ of the saga narrator, see Judy Quinn, “‘Ok er þetta upphaf’: First Stanza Quotation in Old Norse Prosimetrum”, *Alvíssmál* no. 7 (1997): 61-80.

second-person in which skaldic verse is usually composed. From an entirely pragmatic perspective dialogue is the most appropriate medium through which to accommodate this formal aspect of skaldic poetry. Pragmatic considerations do not, however, entirely account for the employment of encomia as structural dialogue and it certainly does not account for the ‘presencing’ of authenticating strophes in historical sagas. A greater motivation for the formal dialogising of these strophes is, I would suggest, the attempt by saga authors to express the inherently dialogic character of skaldic verse on a structural level: these are poems that must, in some way, be situated in a manner which allows them to be directed towards an audience – whether that audience is intra- or extradiegetic.

Even those instances in which skaldic poetry is *not* introduced as either the direct speech of a specific saga character (Performing to other saga characters as primary audience-recipients), or the direct speech of a skaldic source (Performing to saga-listeners or readers as primary audience-recipients), represent moments in which the narrative frame of the saga becomes most porous. Here the voice of the narrator curiously seeps through the saga’s retrospective language, intruding (as with the *svá segir* formula) via a transferal from the past tense to the present indicative. One example of this may be found in the narrative introduction to *Berudrápa* in *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* (analysed earlier in this chapter).⁴¹³

Eptir um vetrinn orti Egill drápu um skjaldargjöfina er kǫlluð er Berudrápa, **ok er þetta upphaf at [...]** [my emphasis]⁴¹⁴

⁴¹³ See pp. 222-6.

⁴¹⁴ *Eg*, 275.

The following winter Egill composed a drápa about the shield-gift and called it ‘Bera’s drápa’ **and this is how it begins** [...]

Such instances often occur when the strophe in question is not suitable for use as situational dialogue. The insertion is then realised by presenting the poetry in the ‘here-and-now’ of the narrative telling with a shift in tense creating the impression that the verse must be ‘presently’ Performed – if not by a character, then by the narrator themselves. The dialogue that emerges therefore takes place directly between narrator and saga-audience.

3.2 Intertextual Dialogue

Another level of dialogue that can be located in skaldic poetry stems from an awareness that skalds themselves have of the dialogic potential of skaldic verse. The exploitation of this potential manifests itself as the employment of intertextual referencing which allows skalds to incorporate multiple voices that speak through their verse. These voices enter into dialogue not only with the audience-recipient of the skaldic composition but with other intertextual voices as well as inherently present framing voices (arising by means of representational artifice) also. What results is a continuously evolving palimpsest of meaning to which ever more layers are added, compelling an audience into re-evaluations and reconsiderations of the skaldic content. This is certainly the case for the strophe from *Vellekla* mentioned earlier in which Óðinn’s baptism-like dousing in the Mead of Poetry is potentially referenced by Einarr as a means of comparison to his own mead-soaked state as one who, like Óðinn, dispenses poetic mead:

37. Því t fjolkostigr flestu
 flestr ræðr við son Bestlu
 — tekit hefkr morðs til mærdar —
 mæringr an þú færa.⁴¹⁵

37. Because most very splendid famous men
 rule, with Bestla's son,
 — I have begun to praise the battle —
 much less than you.

As the *SkP* edition demonstrates, a reading of the text that does not take the intertextual reference to the eddic strophe into account results in a somewhat different interpretation regarding the placement and significance of the phrase, *við son Bestlu* [with Bestla's son => with Óðinn]. Such a reading understands *við son Bestlu* as referring to the object of Einarr's praise, that is, Jarl Hákon. With the support of Óðinn whose assistance takes the form of either praise poetry or divine assistance in battle (as is metonymically implied by the context of *Vellekla* as a whole), the jarl rules over far more than other famous men. If a possible intertextual reference is read into the strophe, then this interpretation is supplemented by another perspective which also contributes a voice – a humorous voice – that speaks of two rather soggy, yet nevertheless god-like, poetic figures.

Intertextually derived voices may take more substantial forms – as is the case with longer, direct quotations through which one might 'hear' the voice of another poet (or poem) – or more subtle, nuanced forms – as is the case with encomia in which themes and structures of skaldic sources are alluded to. An example of the former may be found in the final strophe of *Eyvindr*

⁴¹⁵ *SkP* I, 329.

skáldaspillir's tenth-century panegyric, *Hákonarmál*, in which the skald cites gnomic lines from an eddic source.⁴¹⁶ The strophe's opening lines, *deyr fé, deyja frændr* (wealth passes, kinsmen perish), occur in *Hávamál* and, apart from contributing to the apocalyptic scenery of the final strophes of Eyvindr's poem, may have been incorporated by the poet for the purpose of injecting an 'authentically' eddic voice into a skaldic composition that strives to emulate an eddic style. Edith Marold has also suggested that this intertextual reference may have spurred an audience familiar with the gnomic strophe in *Hávamál* to mentally complete the eddic strophe and overlay, as a result, the concluding sentiment that fame, unlike transitory wealth and kinsmen, *does* live on, onto the final lines of the *Hákonarmál*.⁴¹⁷ Such a mental completion of the gnomic statement can, notably, be achieved through listening to the poetic utterance stored in one's memory and this internal voicing joins the dialogic relationship already established between the voice of the poem and the voice of the attending self.

A subtler employment of intertextuality relates to processes of structural or thematic allusions. Such is the intertextuality found in the just-mentioned Eyvindr's *Háleygjatal*, which responds in form and theme to Þjóðólfr ór Hvini's *Ynglingatal* or Óttarr svarti's *Höfuðlausn* (composed in praise of King Óláfr Haraldsson between 1015 and 1030) which draws on Sigvatr

⁴¹⁶ Although it should be noted that the particular eddic source, that is *Hávamál*, through which a modern audience knows these gnomic lines may not have been the sole source at Eyvindr's disposal. These lines may well have existed as folk-wisdom or may even have been incorporated into Eyvindr's other poetic template for *Hákonarmál*, that is, the anonymously composed *Eiríksmál* (c. 954) of which the entirety does not survive in extant manuscripts. See *SkP* I, 1003-13.

⁴¹⁷ Edith Marold, "Das Walhallbild in Den Eiríksmál Und Den Hákonarmál," *Medieval Scandinavia* 5 (1972): 24.

Þórðarson's *Víkingarvísur*. A meaningful dialogue between the voices of poets past and the poetic voices that they are brought into contact with by means of this more elusive intertextuality often relies heavily on an audience's familiarity with the prior-existing material. An audience that is aware, however, may place such poems in juxtaposition with their predecessors and regard the dialogic relationships between entire compositions that speak to one another across time.

3.3 Internalised Dialogue

The final mode of skaldic dialogue is one that occurs on a microcosmic level and relies on the internal vocalisations of perspectives inherent in processes of interpretation. This internalised dialogic is crucial to skaldic 'meaning-making' which often requires a Performance-recipient to accommodate multiple signifying potentialities simultaneously. This is the result of the cryptic and riddling nature of skaldic poetry in general which intentionally complicates the representational outcome of its artifice. Nowhere is the skaldic impulse towards the cryptic more evident than in the application of its semantic artifice (outlined earlier in this chapter), and particularly in the application of *ofljóst*, as the following passage from Snorri's *Prose Edda* illustrates:

Þvílík orðtök hafa menn mjök **til þess at yrkja fóðgit** ok er þat kallat mjök ofljóst. [...] Þessar greinir má setja svá í skáldskap at gera ofljóst at vant er at skilja ef aðra skal hafa greinina en áðr þykki til horfa in fyrri vísuorð. Slíkt sama eru ok önnur mörg nöfn þau er saman eigu heitit margir hlutir [my emphasis].⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁸ *Skm*, 109.

Such modes of expression are often used by people **in order to compose with concealment** and are usually called ofljóst [...] These branch-words can be inserted into skaldic poetry in order to create ofljóst which is difficult to distinguish if one meaning shall disagree from what, until then, had seemed to be the meaning of the line before. There are, similarly, also many other instances where one term names various things.

The Performative dialogue of the skaldic audience as recipients — and of the narrator, the scribe and the skald as mutual recipients — is a result of the inherently shifting nature of the semiotic process when the ‘sign’ of the poetic utterance under interpretation is intentionally equivocal. If a recipient becomes aware that multiple interpretations are possible, they become conscious of their active participation in the process of constructing meaning. This Performance is dialogic since a different or contrary understanding of any text requires one to exercise the mental embodiment of an Other voice.

This voice is a linguistic position that is framed, in turn, by one’s own contextual inhabitancy of that position. Using the language of praise in the wake of failure, for example, will convey a meaning quite different from the apparent signification of the words employed, even if the tone used in delivery is sincere. If an excited cry of ‘Spring!’ represents a linguistic image of enthusiasm and happiness during a specific season, the mimicry of that same excited cry on a cold and rainy day in April presents a view of the linguistic image which carries a different meaning. This process most evidently occurs in exercises of mockery and ridicule, and it is significant that for Bakhtin, criticism, parody and satire are focal points in his discussion of dialogue and polyglossia in the novel:

[Parodic-travesty forms] freed consciousness from the power of the direct word, destroyed the thick walls that had imprisoned consciousness within its own discourse, within its own language. [...] A new mode developed for working creatively with language: the creating artist began to look at language from the outside, with another's eyes, from the point of view of a potentially different language and style.⁴¹⁹

One may take Bakhtin's statement still further. It is not only parodic-travesty forms, but all literary forms which represent linguistic images from multiple, dialogic view-points, that are able to free an imprisoned consciousness. And this consciousness is freed, through interpretation, into Performance. Skaldic verse, which calls for (and calls forth) the accommodation of various layers of meaning and invites active, constructive analysis through kennings and wordplay, is just such a dialogic form.

There may well be a substantial amount of mental strain that can be phenomenologically 'felt' when attempting to simultaneously accommodate the multiple layers of meaning engendered by wordplay that tax, and are *meant* to tax, interpretative faculties. The 'feeling' of the effects of crypticism is, in fact, demonstrative of the location of Performance in the mind of the interpreter (as stated in the introductory passages of the current chapter). This mental Performance can also be described as being rhythmical – inhabiting a lived interpretative experience *between* possible meanings and encapsulating a wave-like movement that internally escalates towards and recedes from various points of cognitive arrival. This dialogic rhythmicity is not precisely that rhythmicity inherent in the formal artifice of skaldic verse, though it shares its principal characteristics with all rhythmic phenomena. Rather, it is

⁴¹⁹ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 60.

a rhythmicity that arises from internalised dialogic processes. One might compare the experience of such rhythmicity to that felt in the contemplation of the rabbit-duck illusion (employed with regards to a consideration on the nature of perception in Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Considerations*) which elicits a perpetual suspension (and hence a perpetual state of 'suspense' which anticipates resolution) of the conceptualisation of the image.⁴²⁰ The state of rhythmical suspension is also clearly illustrated in Morton Feldman's opera *Neither* which arrests its listener in unresolved and un-resolving musical tensions. The libretto to the opera, written by Samuel Beckett, depicts quite exactly the 'neither-ness' – the irresolution of conceptual 'arrival' – that generates the rhythmic mental pacing between the voice of the self and the voice of the Other:

to and fro in shadow from inner to outer shadow

from impenetrable self to impenetrable unself
by way of neither

as between two lit refuges whose doors once
neared gently close, once away turned from
gently part again

beckoned back and forth and turned away

heedless of the way, intent on the one gleam
or the other

unheard footfalls only sound

till at last halt for good, absent for good
from self and other

then no sound

⁴²⁰ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. [Electronic Resource]. (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2009), 204, <https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/login?url=http://oxford.eblib.com/patron/FullRecord.aspx?p=514408>.

then gently light unfading on that unheeded
neither

unspeakable home ⁴²¹

In the following chapter I shall be particularly concerned with the political outcomes of the internalised dialogic rhythmicity activated in the contemplation of skaldic poetry.

4. Skaldic Events

In this final section of the current chapter I wish to consider the final Performance-element outlined in the introduction, that is, the temporal continuity of skaldic Performance. As may already have become evident, the traversing of time in all modes of Performative engagement with skaldic texts – from composition to contemplation – seems to be a given, particularly when one considers the inherent rhythmicity of these engagements (as outlined above) since rhythm is impossible in temporal stasis. In order to comprehensively address the political significance of skaldic poetry's incessant presentness in the following chapter, it might serve to consider the conceptualisation of skaldic poetry as 'event', a conceptualisation that is particularly present in the Norse sagas. Even if these sagas post-date the court-culture in which skaldic poetry was politically employed on a regular basis, the manner in which they incorporate skaldic poetry into the saga

⁴²¹ Samuel Beckett and Morton Feldman, *Neither*, recorded by Radio Sinfonie-Orchester Frankfurt (Basel: Hat Hut Records, 2011).

narrative may well reflect inherited understandings of skaldic Performativity about which one may, subsequently, make inferences.

4.1 Tidings

Essential to the recognition and comprehensive appreciation of skaldic verse-making as Performance is the particularly fertile concept encapsulated by the word *tíðindi*. As with the English cognate ‘tiding’, *tíðindi* has two particular uses that are intimately related to one another.⁴²² Deriving from *tíð* (time), *tíðindi* signifies, in the first place, ‘events’ and it is significant that this linguistic development reflects so precisely the deeply ingrained conceptual relationship between an event and the dimension of time in which it occurs. This relationship is, moreover, the fundamental basis of narrative itself, with narrative understood as the communication or account of a series of events. Events or *tíðindi* can be understood as the constituent units out of which narrative time is constructed. The second – and in English the less archaic – signification of *tíðindi* or tidings is ‘news’. To bring tidings is to bring an account or a report, a narration, of one or multiple events: happenings understood through, and correspondingly shaping, the chronological structure of their verbal transmission. It is no accident that one modern example of such quotidian accounts of events, in the form of a daily newspaper, is named *The Times*. ‘Times’ here refers to events occurring in time and, significantly, also to *the account* of those events.⁴²³

⁴²² CV, 633. The alternative spelling, *tíðendi*, occurs frequently.

⁴²³ As ‘the times we live in’ it also refers to time itself (in the sense of an interval or era).

The literary evidence demonstrates that *tíðindi* is employed in both senses by saga narrators, and that its use is, at best, ambiguous. The following example is taken from *Haralds saga hárfagra*:

Tíðendi þau spurðusk sunnan ór landi, at Hǫrðar ok Rygir, Egðir ok Þilir sǫmnuðusk saman ok gerðu uppreist bæði at skipum ok vápnum ok fjölmenni; [...] En er Haraldr konungr varð þessa **tíðenda** vísst, þá dró hann her saman ok skaut skipum á vatn, bjósk síðan með liðit ok ferr með landi suðr ok hafði mart manna ór hverju fylki.⁴²⁴

That **news** was reported from the south of the country that the Hǫrðar and Rygir, Egðir and Þilir had gathered together and were preparing an uprising both with ships and weapons as well as many men; [...]. And when King Haraldr came to know of these **events**, he drew together troops and quickly pushed ships into the water, after which he prepared with the host and fared south along the land and gathered many men from each district.

The translation above makes a subtle distinction between *tíðindi* as ‘news’ and *tíðindi* as ‘events’, based primarily on a more common employment of these terms in English. However, I might well have translated the two respective clauses instead as a) ‘*those events* were reported’ and b) ‘when King Haraldr came to know of *this news*’.

There are, furthermore, instances in which the phrase, *til tíðinda*, in conjunction with verbs such as *verða* (to become, come to pass), means ‘happens’. This is demonstrated by an example from *Hákonar saga góða*:

Þá er Hákon konungr Aðalsteinsfóstri hafði verit konungr í Nóregi sex vetr ok tuttugu, síðan er Eiríkr, bróðir hans, fór ór landi, þá varð þat **til tíðenda**, at Hákon konungr var staddr á Hǫrðalandi ok tók veizlu í Storð á Fitjum [my emphasis].⁴²⁵

⁴²⁴ *Hkr* I, 114-15.

⁴²⁵ *Hkr* I, 182.

When King Hákon Aðalsteinsfóstri had been king in Norway for twenty-six years after Eiríkr, his brother, went from the country, then it **happened** that King Hákon was present in Hǫrðaland and received a banquet on Storð at Fitjar.

Tíðindi is not an unequivocal signifier and, as the more ambivalent uses of the term by saga authors demonstrate, there are no clear boundaries of signification between *tíðindi* as events and *tíðindi* as relation(s) of events.

When one therefore considers the conceptual relationship between skaldic verse and *tíðindi*, which seems to resist rigid demarcation and can be qualified only through context (if at all), one needs to take into account the significance of such denotative complexities. That there is a connection between the employment of skaldic verse and the employment of *tíðindi* in sagas is, at any rate, patently evident, regardless of any particular hermeneutic value to which this connection may attest. Skaldic *vísur* in the *konungasögur* are, for example, consistently employed as narrative devices that are meant to verify, due to their informational content, the ‘historical’ account of events by saga authors. *Vísur* are, moreover, often represented as vehicles for conveying news in the Icelandic sagas. The infamous skald, Egill Skallagrímsson, often speaks a verse when asked to recount events:

[Þórólfr] stóð hann upp ok gekk til fundar við Egil ok spurði, með hverjum hætti hann hefði undan komizk ok hvat **til tíðinda hefði** orðit í fjr hans. Þá kvað Egill vísu [...] ⁴²⁶

Þórólfr stood up and went to meet Egill and ask him how he had escaped and what **had happened** on his journey. Then Egill spoke a verse [...]

⁴²⁶ *Eg*, 113.

This example serves to illuminate the first element of association between skaldic verse as Performance and *tíðindi*: that is, dialogism.

In a literary context skaldic poetry is, as I have demonstrated above, often employed as a mode of intradiegetic character dialogue or as the direct speech of both narrator and cited skald in an extradiegetic dialogue with a saga-audience.⁴²⁷ These portrayals stem from the attempt to portray the rhythmic embodiment in time which characterises skaldic Performance. As such, skaldic *vísur* are almost always implicated in a communicative relationship between two or more dialogic agents. *Tíðindi* are, in a similar fashion, almost always entangled in an interplay of call and response between those seeking to receive news and those acting to distribute it: tidings are asked for with listening anticipation or, alternatively, purposefully issued in order to achieve a response. As such it is not surprising that skaldic dialogue is seen as an appropriate form through which to speak tidings into a saga-narrative. Yet the utilisation of verse as a conveyer of essential news and events is certainly not due to any capacity of skaldic poetry to communicate information more efficiently than ordinary dialogue – though it may be argued that its mnemonic potential, to which skaldic ambiguity and absurdity contribute, renders this poetry an ideal vehicle for the retention of whatever information

⁴²⁷ For more on the use of skaldic verse as dialogue in sagas, see Heather O’Donoghue, *Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), particularly p. 12. Although O’Donoghue makes a more explicit distinction between authenticating or “documentary” verses and verses employed as character dialogue, her comments regarding the way in which dialogic *vísur* contribute to a text’s *littéarité*, “which relates to artistic or literary method and style”, are particularly enlightening.

it does convey.⁴²⁸ Skaldic Performance is, as shown above, also dialogic as a result of its complex ambiguity.

It is striking then, that in an example from *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* below, Grettir's *tíðindi* is itself described in ambiguous terms, depending on how one interprets *ok* (and) in the introductory passage.

Þar var bóndadóttir úti ok spurði at **tíðendum**. Grettir sagði af it ljósasta ok kvað vísu:

The farmer's daughter was outside and asked for **news**. Grettir told her most clearly of it and spoke this verse:

49. 'Hæg munat, hirði-Sága
hornflœðar, nú grœða
stór, þótt steypðusk fleiri,
Steinólfs höfuðskeina;
[...]⁴²⁹

49. 'Not easily now, tending-goddess of
the horn-flood, will heal,
though more are cast down,
Steinólfr's great head-graze;
[...]

[My emphasis]

One possibility is that Grettir's *vísa* is spoken only after he conveys his news clearly — *ljósasta* (most clear) — therefore highlighting the contrasting, unclear nature of the verse as news: he tells the farmer's daughter the news

⁴²⁸ See Bergsveinn Birgisson, "Inn I Skaldens Sinn - Kognitive, Estetiske Og Historiske Skatter I Den Norrøne Skaldediktingen" (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Bergen, 2007); as well as Erin Michelle Goeres, "The King Is Dead, Long Live the King: Commemoration in Skaldic Verse of the Viking Age" (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 2010), 33. For more on the use of kennings specifically see Bergsveinn Birgisson, "The Old Norse Kenning as a Mnemonic Figure," in *The Making of Memory in the Middle Ages*, ed. Lucie Doležalová, Later Medieval Europe ; v. 4 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 199–214.

⁴²⁹ Guðni Jónsson, ed., *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar: Bandamanna saga; Odds þátrr Ófeigssonar*, Íslenzk fornrit; 7. bd (Reykjavík: hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1936), 197–98.

and then additionally recites his poetry. Another possibility is that the *ok* instead connects the act of recitation with the conveying of news: Grettir tells the farmer's daughter the news *through* his *vísa*. (As complex as the poetry is, the verse does, indeed, recount details of Grettir's actions.) Thus equating the highly ambiguous language of Grettir's poetry with a term for clarity (*ljósasta*) is deeply ironic, and yet recalls that term for skaldic word-play mentioned earlier, that is, *ofljóst*. The connection between *ljósasta* from the saga and *ofljóst* as a term for puns is supported by Grettir's *vísa* itself which, as demonstrated in my discussion of *ofljóst* earlier in this chapter, boasts a great deal of word-play and can be read in multiple ways. Worth noting, again, is the implied thematic trope which draws a parallel between blood and poetry – the blood flowing from Steinólfr's head-wound (an injury which, as a narrative event, also constitutes the poetic material), is likened to poetry increasing as it flows from the mind – and which can also be seen in the example from *Gísla saga* below. Crucially, the correspondence between blood and poetry emphasises the relationship between skaldic Performance and rhythmic embodiment (as pointed out in the analysis on *Vellekla* in the section on Framing above), and therefore the relationship between skaldic Performance and 'being in time'. Also strengthening the temporal complexion of the poetry in the here-and-now is the ambiguous, dialogic word-play which generates a rhythmical engagement with poetic signification and which solidifies, in turn, the relationship between skaldic poetry and the concept of *tíðindi* as a chronotopic phenomenon.

The second conceptual link between *tíðindi* and skaldic *vísur* thus arises from skaldic poetry's relationship to time itself, shaped by the strong rhythmical character of skaldic material. A rhythmic Performance is by its very nature something which occurs in the present-continuous and therefore necessarily comprises a temporal event. In the context of sagas, skaldic *vísur* therefore parallel and exemplify *tíðindi* by becoming happenings in any given saga's narrative timeframe:

Þá spurði Auðr, hvat hann hafði dreymt — ‘nú váru enn eigi svefnfarar góðar’. Gísli kvað vísu:

Then Auðr asked what he had dreamt — ‘now still the dreams were not good’. Gísli spoke this verse:

37. ‘Mér bar hljóms í heimi,
 hǫr-Bil, þás vit skilðumk,
 skekkik dverga drykkju
 dreyra sals fyr eyru.
 Ok hjǫrraddar hlýddi
 heggr rjúpkera tveggja,
 koma mun dals á drengi
 Dǫgg, læmingja hǫggvi’.

37. ‘To me was borne, before ears,
 into the abode of the room,
 Linen-goddess, since we two parted
 – I tilt the dwarves’ drink –
 the sound of blood.
 And the cherry-tree of the sword-voice
 listened to the two ptarmigans’
 – the dale’s dew will come upon the
 worthy man – loon-fight’.

Ok er þetta er tíðenda, heyr þau mannamál, ok er Eyjólfur þar kominn við inn fimmtánda mann, ok hafa áðr komit til húss ok sjá dǫggslóðina sem vísat væri til [my emphasis].⁴³⁰

⁴³⁰ *Vestfirðinga sögur: Gísla saga Súrssonar. Fóstbræðra saga. Þattr Þormóðar. Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings. Auðunar Þattr vestfirzka. Þorvarðar Þattr Krákunefs*, ed. Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, Íslensk fornrit; 6. bd (Reykjavík: Íslenska fornritafélag, 1943), 110–11.

And whilst this is happening they hear men's talk, and Eyjólfur has arrived there with fifteen men and has already been to the house, and they see the dew-trail as if it were pointing to the shelter.

The example from *Gísla saga Súrssonar* above clearly demonstrates the saga author's perception of the skaldic verse as an *event*, as a tiding within the narrative structure of the saga account.⁴³¹ Even though Gísli's poem recollects and recounts events from a dream, it is the verse itself that 'happens', after which subsequent episodes can unfold in the ongoing sequence of the narrative's temporal structure. This reading can, importantly, be applied to almost all skaldic poems in saga contexts. Skaldic Performances are, both on and off the page, skaldic events.

5. Conclusion

The properties of Performance in skaldic poetry demonstrated in this chapter are threefold: a) Performative utterances are crafted or artificed; b) Performative utterances are dialogic; and c) Performative utterances exhibit temporal movement, taking place in the here-and-now of the present-continuous. Engaging, thus, with the entire spectrum of skaldic Performativity is important if one is to try and move beyond an assessment of political poetry in terms of its performativity in the speech-act sense only. The perlocutionary effects of skaldic verse, particularly with regards to the legitimisation of Viking Age rulers through skaldic recitation discussed in

⁴³¹ The example from *Gísla saga* is particularly illustrative of how verse may be utilised for functional rather than anthological reasons, since the poems in *Gísla saga* are unlikely to be contemporary compositions. Kari Ellen Gade suggests that the poems from the saga were composed later than the tenth century but no later than the middle of the eleventh: *Dróttkvætt Poetry*, 264.

Chapters One and Two of this thesis, are often assessed in terms of Austinian performativity whilst Performance-contexts are perceived as providing the necessary conditions within which poetic action can take place. If the Performative condition is itself seen as instrumental in the political function of skaldic utterances however, then a wider array of interpretative possibilities present themselves for further investigation.

Chapter 4

Performing Skaldic Diplomacy

1. Difficult Poetry: Diplomacy through Dialogue

[...]

*and [with] the sound
of the serpent
wrapped around the mountain*

*and the sound
of the sea churning
now left now right*

*the lord
drew out the gods' elixir
that rose slowly in the churning⁴³²*

If one cannot quite say of skaldic verse that its ‘difficulty preserves democracy’ – for although Norse government with its *þings* and legal structures is relatively more democratic than many other political administrations in early Medieval Europe, the foundation of governance is nevertheless monarchical – then one can at least say that its difficulty (its dialogic crypticism and ambiguity) seems to be able to check or moderate the use of authoritative power.⁴³³ This, indeed, shall serve as the premise for my current chapter. Geoffrey Hill, whose notion of democratising complexity I

⁴³² A.K. Ramanujan, *Nammalvar: Hymns for the Drowning* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2005), 5.

⁴³³ Geoffrey Hill, “On Reading Crowds and Power,” text/html, *Poetry Magazine - Poetry Foundation*, (April 23, 2017), <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/detail/49285>.

cite, references Elias Canetti's *Crowds and Power* (1960) and defends 'difficult' poetry against the onslaught of populism, critiquing the reductionist compression of slogan-like poetry in which ideas are tyrannically simplified.⁴³⁴ It is such sloganism that characterises the propaganda programme of the Nazi campaign both before and during the Second World War, and the impact of these easily-repeatable truncations – what the sixth leaflet of the White Rose referred to as a 'choking fog of empty phrases' (*einem Nebel leerer Phrasen zu ersticken*) that sought, specifically, to curtail 'independent thought and self-criticism' (*Selbstdenken und Selbstwerten*) – proved to be wholly catastrophic.⁴³⁵ As suggested in my Introduction, the actualisation of endless repetition without mediation or interpretation is a phenomenon that serves as the foundation for dogma. Dogma, in turn, actively resists and silences Otherness as it does, for example, in Robert Frost's *Mending Wall* (1914) in which a banal platitude eradicates the voice of difference and literally walls the Other out because 'good fences make good neighbours'.⁴³⁶ This resistance of the Other in dogmatic communications is exactly antithetical to that openness towards the Other exemplified in dialogic discourse, and hence to the type of Performance that skaldic versification both generates and partakes in.

This is the principal difference between the mode of propaganda employed by the National Socialists of a 1930-40s Germany and the mode of

⁴³⁴ See: Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power* (London: Phoenix, 2000).

⁴³⁵ "Flugblatt VI Der Weißen Rose," *Bundeszentrale Für Politische Bildung*, April 20, 2005, http://www.bpb.de/themen/JOELCK,0,0,Flugblatt_VI.html.

⁴³⁶ Robert Frost, *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, ed. Edward Connery Lathem (London: Vintage, 2001), 33–34.

propaganda employed by Norse skalds (discussed in Chapters One and Two), for although skaldic propaganda relies, equally, on some form of repetition in the process of dissemination, each repetition nevertheless necessitates interpretation since there is seldom – as I have attempted to demonstrate in Chapter Three – only one, authoritative way in which to understand the skaldic text: its difficulty multiplies its difference. Although the ‘I-text’ remains the same in every Performance of skaldic poetry (and here I refer again to my Introduction), each ‘text-in-the-Performance’ is unique and inimitable.⁴³⁷ In political terms one may posit, then, that the very fabric of skaldic poetry resists authority (the author-ity of dogmatic singularity) through Performance and renders it capable of at least moderating authority on a pragmatic level, lending itself to a praxis of diplomacy. On such a pragmatic or diplomatic level, this resistance of authority usually translates to a resistance of the kind of absolute authority which seeks to eradicate the Other through war, hostility and exploitation (unlike, one *must* note, the exercising of authority in the instigation of war and hostility where such actions are necessitated by a need for self-preservation, the furthering of peace, or in defence of dependent territories). Murder is an absolute ontological closure in which the being of the Other is subjected, totally, to the being of the Self.

Diplomatically relevant also is the dialogic acceptance of Other-ness which allows an engagement with different opinions and beliefs that may lead or contribute to conflict. Because it seeks to interpret and understand difference,

⁴³⁷ See pp. 28-30, 44 of the Introduction.

skaldic poetry can facilitate empathic frameworks of communication. And finally, because the artifice of skaldic poetry – the source of its difficulty and its dialogism – is often based on circumlocution and metaphor, it is also *indirect* and presents skalds with opportunities to address rulers and mention controversial subjects without provocation.⁴³⁸ The periphrastic nature of kennings, for example, lends itself to diplomacy in that it allows a skald to approach their subject in a non-aggressive manner: referents are implied and not overtly stated. If each constituent part of a kenning, moreover, suggests alternative significations through *ofljóst* that must be sought by the recipient in order to be understood, then the potential for diplomacy greatly increases since messages presenting political difficulties, such as criticism or other volatile content, may be delivered more benignly.

The internalisation of skaldic dialogue is integral to the eschewal of violence as a mechanism through which conflict with the Other can be resolved. The embodiment of the Other within the Self as a means of producing empathy; the Othering of the Self as a means of facilitating self-criticism; and a resistance of the hegemony of the Self through the inconclusive nature of dialogic equivocation, are crucial elements of skaldic diplomacy. What I hope to demonstrate during the course of this chapter is that the notion of skaldic diplomacy is not a purely hypothetical possibility, but that there is a tradition of skaldic diplomatic praxis in which poetic Performance plays an active part. I moreover wish to demonstrate that ideas surrounding diplomacy

⁴³⁸ For a similar argument regarding circumlocution and diplomacy, see: Raymond Cohen and Raymond Westbrook, *Amarna Diplomacy: The Beginnings of International Relations* (Baltimore, Md. ; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 193.

This diplomatic ‘management of relations’ should furthermore be understood as the ‘conduct of business between [communities] by peaceful means’, that is, by ‘the application of intelligence and tact’.⁴⁴⁰

Such, then, are the guidelines for locating diplomatic action as it may relate to skaldic Performance within the historical sources available to the modern scholar. To this end I shall examine, in the first place, the mythology surrounding the origins of the Mead of Poetry and the figure of Kvasir in particular; I shall also cite the praising of what one might understand as diplomatic action by skalds themselves – I shall look at the poetry of Jórunn skáldmær and Sigvatr Þórðarson specifically; and I shall, lastly, consider the partly-historical accounts of skaldic diplomacy in *Heimskringla* (and *ÓHHkr* in particular) in which I shall argue not for the historical validity of these accounts, but for the pertinence of the discourse employed in later medieval considerations of skaldic participation in the political arena. In finding textual evidence relating to the practice, or perceived practice, of skaldic diplomacy I hope to provide a basis for the subsequent examination of the nature of that diplomacy.

⁴⁴⁰ Ivor Roberts, *Satow's Diplomatic Practice*, Seventh edition. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 3. I have substituted the term ‘State’ with ‘communities’ as a more appropriate term for the early medieval kingdoms of Scandinavia, as well as the powerful factions within these kingdoms. This point is developed in detail in Edward Keene, *International Political Thought. A Historical Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 10-13.

2.1 Origins of the Mead of Poetry

The perception of poets as agents of mediation and conciliation can be said to be reflected cosmologically in the Norse myth of the origin of poetry. According to the god Bragi in Snorri's *Skáldskaparmál*, a figure named Kvasir is created during a peace-making conference between the two god-tribes of the Æsir and the Vanir respectively. In this account, Kvasir is formed out of the mixture of saliva emitted into a vat by both tribes, becoming a living embodiment of the *griðamark* (peace-token) that the gods wish to preserve.⁴⁴¹ As the living symbol of truce between the gods, Kvasir is noted to be *svá vitr at engi spyrr hann þeira hluta er eigi kann hann órlausn* (so wise that no one could ask him a question that he could not answer) and he shares this wisdom, moreover, on his travels through the world.⁴⁴² This image of the 'wise traveller' is notably consistent with characterisations of Óðinn, the custodian of poetry, in various eddic sources. Bragi continues to relate how the murderous dwarves, Fjallarr and Galarr, remove Kvasir's knowledge from circulation in the world by killing him and decanting his blood into two vats, Són and Boðn – possibly from *sónn* (sound) and *boð* (either 'bidding', 'message' or 'banquet') – as well as the kettle *Óðrærir* (mind- or spirit-stirrer).⁴⁴³ These potential etymologies are significant from a diplomatic perspective since the rhythmic 'stirring' of the mind through a banquet or a commandment of sound which is literally fashioned out of a sign

⁴⁴¹ *Skm*, 3. In an alternative account of events the narrator of *Ynglingasaga* depicts Kvasir as one of the Vanir gods sent as hostage to the Æsir in a peace exchange. Although the account from *Ynglingasaga* differs from that of *Skáldskaparmál*, Kvasir seems, nevertheless, to be a being that arises out of, or in aid of, diplomatic processes. See: *Hkr* I, 12-13.

⁴⁴² *Skm*, 3.

⁴⁴³ *Skm*, 3.

of truce seems, metaphorically, to describe the dialogic rhythmicity (described in Chapter Three) that arises from the contemplation of skaldic poetry. That all poetry might be represented, furthermore, as a transformation of the *griðamark* seems particularly indicative of a potential diplomatic role of poetry and poets.

The *griðamark* goes through another transformation in the hands of the dwarves who mix honey with Kvasir's blood in the three containers and so craft the Mead of Poetry. In order for Kvasir's wisdom – now preserved as a consumable material that can be digested and incorporated into new bodies – to be brought back into circulation, the mead must continue, in a sense, Kvasir's travelling. It is moved, first, to the halls of Suttungr (a *jötunn* [giant] who claims the mead from Fjallarr and Galarr as wergild for the murders of his parents, Gillingr and his wife), and finally, to Ásgarðr after an elaborate rescue mission by Óðinn who, finally, having drunk all of the mead transports the precious liquid to the realm of the Æsir whilst in the shape of an eagle. A portion of the mead 'sent out backwards' in Óðinn's haste to flee Suttungr's pursuit, is reserved for those who are *skáldfíflur* (poet-pretenders).⁴⁴⁴ The majority, however, is poured into containers within Ásgarðr and is consumed by the gods as well as those with poetic talents to whom Óðinn dispenses the mead.

What seems to be implied by the mythology is that poetry stems from, and incorporates, elements of mediation and wisdom that one would, according

⁴⁴⁴ *Skm*, 5.

to the definition of diplomacy provided above, associate with diplomatic processes. Though some have cast doubt on the historical authenticity of the origin-myth presented in *Skáldskaparmál*, there are, I believe, sufficient skaldic and eddic references to elements of the myth, particularly in kennings (even aside from the possible misconstruals discussed by Roberta Frank in her examination of the evidence), to suggest that some sections of the myth, at least, may have presented a phenomenological expression for the experience of poetic Performance that pre-dated, or was contemporaneous with, skaldic practice during the Viking Age.⁴⁴⁵ This being the case, it is telling that such an expression incorporates so many elements of diplomatic symbolism.

2.2 Encomiastic Representations of Skaldic Diplomacy

There are two striking, if by no means unique or isolated, examples of encomiastic compositions representing the diplomatic work done by skalds that I would like to treat in the following section. The first of these is *Sendibítr*, one of the few surviving poems that attest female skaldic practice. The five surviving strophes of the incomplete poem, composed by Jórunn skáldmær and seemingly addressed to Hálfðan svartí (The Black) Haraldsson (although this address may be retrospective rather than contemporaneous),⁴⁴⁶ commemorates the reconciliatory actions of Guthormr sindri, a skald who is said to have secured a truce between the abovementioned Hálfðan and his father Haraldr hárfagri. The reconciliation between father and son is recorded

⁴⁴⁵ See Roberta Frank, “Snorri and the Mead of Poetry,” in *Specvlvm Norroenvm: Norse Studies in Memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre*, ed. Ursula Dronke (Odense: Odense University Press, 1981), 155–70.

⁴⁴⁶ See *SkP* I, 143, for arguments surrounding the dating of *Sendibítr*.

in *Heimskringla* (in which one strophe of *Sendibítr* is cited as a mode of authentication) and in this account Guthormr exacts a rather late reward from each ruler for his encomiastic gifts bestowed upon both Haraldr and Hálfðan respectively at an earlier date, in the form of a mutual agreement to resolve the conflict between them.⁴⁴⁷ Snorri's rendering of the event, if not exactly fictional, certainly seems to be somewhat dramatised. It does however present a notion, not entirely at odds with the commodification of poetry in the exchange-economy of Viking Age courts, that skaldic praise may have exacted promises and favours and so may have played an important role in political negotiation tactics.

This idea is supported by Jórunn's poetic description of Guthormr's intervention which suggests an even more direct involvement of skaldic poetry in the negotiation process:

5. Hróðr vann hringa stríðir
 Haralds framm kveðinn ramman;
 Goðþormr hlaut af gæti
 góð laun kveðins óðar.
 Raunframra brá rimmu
 runnr skjöldunga gunnar;
 áðr bjósk herr til hjörva
 hreggs döglinga tveggja.⁴⁴⁸

5. The enemy of rings worked forth
 the powerful spoken praise of Haraldr;
 Guthormr gained good reward
 from the warder [Haraldr] for the spoken poem.
 The tree of battle broke up
 the clash of the truly successful rulers;
 before the host had prepared for the
 storm of swords [battle] of the two princes.

⁴⁴⁷ *Hkr* I, 141-2.

⁴⁴⁸ *SkP* I, 149.

Although some of the vocabulary in *Sendibítr* suggests a later date for its composition,⁴⁴⁹ it is nevertheless possible that Jórunn may have worked from a varying account of the episode in which the tactical employment of poetry is depicted as playing a crucial role in the attainment of a truce. In such a version of events Guthormr, a member (as Snorri relates) of Hálfðan's retinue, seems to be deployed (or deploys himself) to compose and perform a panegyric for Haraldr as the adversarial ruler and instigator of the battle, in exchange for which he secures a promise of peace.

The active role of the skald as eloquent negotiator and diplomat is epitomised by the figure of Sigvatr Þórðarson, one of the most itinerant members of the Norse skaldic elite during the first half of the eleventh century. Sigvatr is famously known for his facilitation of the reconciliation between the young King Magnús Ólafsson and the farmers of Sogn who had become increasingly dissatisfied with the heavy-handed treatment of the King. What is important about Sigvatr's diplomatic achievement in mediating successfully between the king and the farmers, thereby avoiding seemingly inevitable civil unrest, is that the mediation seems to have been achieved directly as a result of the recitation of his poem, *Bersöglisvísur*, which moves the young king to change his treatment of the farmers.⁴⁵⁰ Even more illustrative of skaldic participation in the diplomatic dealings of Viking Age

⁴⁴⁹ See, again *SkP* I, 143.

⁴⁵⁰ For a discussion of diplomacy in *Bersöglisvísur*, see: Gareth Lloyd Evans, "Diplomacy in Sigvatr Þórðarson's *Bersöglisvísur*," *Saga-Book of the Viking Society for Northern Research*. 38 (2014): 49–60. For the context, see *Magnúss saga ins góða*, in *Hkr* III, 25-31. See also the commentary to *Bersöglisvísur*, in *SkP* II, 11-30.

governance, however, is Sigvatr's *Austrfararvísur*, a collection of strophes in which Sigvatr describes one or possibly multiple diplomatic missions to Eastern courts. Of particular interest is a group of strophes concerning Sigvatr's engagement with Rognvaldr jarl Úlfsson, a powerful Swedish ruler:⁴⁵¹

17. Létk við yðr, es ítran,
Óleifr, hugat mólum
rétt, es ríkan hittak
Rognvald, konungr, haldit.
Deildak mól ins milda,
malma vörðr, í görðum
harða mǫrg; né heyrðak
heiðmanns tǫlur greiðri.⁴⁵²

17. I kept considerately, solemnly,
to the arrangements with you, King Óláfr,
when I met [with] the outstanding,
with the mighty, Rognvald.
I dealt with very many matters
in the courts of the generous one –
guardian of the metal weapons;
I have not heard more loyal
speeches of a tributary.

It is clear from the verse above that Sigvatr had been sent as emissary to Rognvaldr's court at the behest of King Óláfr Haraldsson, and Rognvaldr's identification, here, as a *heiðmaðr* (tributary), along with the comment in a later strophe which mentions the jarl's prior breach of promise or treaty-breaking (*ript*), suggests that Sigvatr may have been dispatched to deal with a cessation in the payment of tribute by the eastern jarl.⁴⁵³

⁴⁵¹ For a discussion on the difficulties of establishing the location of Rognvaldr's court, see: R. D. Fulk ed., "Austrfararvísur," in *SkP* I, 578.

⁴⁵² *SkP* I, 606.

⁴⁵³ *SkP* I, v. 20, 611

What is even more remarkable about this particular section of *Austrfararvísur* is the extent to which the poem approaches what one might construe as a ‘diploma’, that is, an official document or charter which records the agreements, and the circumstances surrounding those agreements, between two or more parties. It notes Rognvaldr’s submission to Óláfr – *Rognvaldr lét þær gefit þér* (Rognvaldr caused those [conflicts] to be conceded to you) – and the receipt of *þétt svör* (watertight replies) regarding *sátta mál* (settlement arrangements);⁴⁵⁴ it notes details of those arrangements, such as the mutually agreed promise of support and hospitality to travellers;⁴⁵⁵ and it also ratifies the agreement by entreating King Óláfr to *halda fast sáttum* (hold fast the settlements) with Rognvaldr with whom a new relationship is confirmed: Rognvaldr is now Óláfr’s *baztr vinr á austrvega allt með grænu salti* (best friend in the east all along the green sea).⁴⁵⁶ The diplomatic function of the poetry itself, not as document, but as encomium, is significant in that the integration of this diplomatic record into a form which praises the leaders and lauds their acceptance of settlement conditions, exerts, through that praise, a subtle pressure on each respective ruler to keep to the arrangement or else endanger their reputation as established by the encomium. As I have hoped to demonstrate in the first part of this thesis, a ruler’s reputation (and a skald’s role in promoting it) is of crucial importance for the legitimisation of power during the Viking Age. This ability invests the skaldic diplomat with a power of their own – one which they are willing to utilise when negotiation is called for.

⁴⁵⁴ *SkP* I, v. 20, 611.

⁴⁵⁵ *SkP* I, v. 18, 608.

⁴⁵⁶ *SkP* I, v. 21, 613.

The mode of skaldic encomium lends itself, furthermore, to the facilitation of dialogue between leaders since messages may be delivered tactfully (indirectly and couched in praise) through the mediation of the skald's telling. *Austrfararvísur* specifically relates, for example, Rognvaldr's plea to Óláfr for the support of *hverr húskarl* (each housecarl) who travels to Norway in return for the same treatment of Óláfr's men in his own domain.⁴⁵⁷ But it *also* subtly reminds the Norwegian king that his power over territory previously controlled by the Jarls of Hlaðir is dependent on the continued military support of Rognvaldr and his kin:

19. Folk réð of sik, fylkir,
flest, es ek kom vestan,
ætt sem áðr of hvatti
Eireks svika þeira.
En, þvít jarla frænda
eins þats tókt af Sveini,
yðr, kveðk jorð es nóðuð,
Ulfs bróður lið stóðusk.⁴⁵⁸

19. Most people deliberated amongst themselves, Chieftain, when I came from the west, as the kinsman of Eiríkr⁴⁵⁹ had earlier urged them to that treason. But I proclaim that you only attained the land which you took from Sveinn, because the troop of the jarl's kinsman, the brother of Úlfr, [Eilífr] supported you.

Both Jórunn and Sigvatr's poems analysed above describe instances of skaldic diplomacy that may very well be indicative of a more generalised diplomatic praxis involving the employment of skaldic craftsmanship. What

⁴⁵⁷ *SkP* I, v. 18, 608.

⁴⁵⁸ *SkP* I, v. 19, 609.

⁴⁵⁹ A political rival, possibly referring to Sveinn, the brother of Eiríkr jarl Hákonarson of Hlaðir. See *SkP* I, 609 n.

now remains, is to establish the reasons for the success of skalds and their poetry in this regard and particularly the reasons for the ability of skaldic Performance to positively influence diplomatic outcomes. In order to understand the mechanisms of skaldic Performance that contribute to Viking Age diplomatic praxes I now turn to consider some retrospective prose descriptions of skaldic diplomacy, the discourse of which may provide some clues as to how skalds employ their craft in hostile environments.⁴⁶⁰

2.3 The Use of *Tíðindi* in Discourse surrounding Diplomacy

In Chapter Three of this thesis, I investigated the temporal nature of skaldic Performance and the rendering of skaldic verse as narrative tidings or *tíðindi* within the prose contexts of the *Íslendingasögur*.⁴⁶¹ I sought to justify a conceptual link between skaldic poetry and *tíðindi* more generally, considering, in particular, the dual nature of *tíðindi* as a term both referring to ‘news’ (specifically) and to ‘happenings’ (broadly). I suggested, in my discussion, that a key element in the structuring of temporal continuity in skaldic Performance is its dialogic rhythmicity – a phenomenon that arises in the interpretation of skaldic material and which is largely engendered by the purposeful crypticism and ambiguity of the skaldic text. Considering the connection between skaldic encomia and *tíðindi* on these terms, it is

⁴⁶⁰ Of interest is Heather O’Donoghue’s observation that Snorri, in his treatment of the *Austrfararvísur* in *Heimskringla*, ‘keeps political history, and the documentary method appropriate to it, quite separate from lively prosimetric travelogue’ and introduces these strophes ‘into the narrative as if Sigvatr were speaking verse impromptu’ in O’Donoghue, *Skaldic Verse*, 67. The diplomatic processes described in the poetry are borne out dialogically within the saga narrative.

⁴⁶¹ See ch. 3, pp. 247-55.

particularly interesting to note the nature of the discourse surrounding the following two episodes from *ÓHHkr*.

ÓHHkr recounts two incidents in which the term *tíðindi* is employed frequently and alludes to a representational use of language which signifies beyond the ‘isolated utterances of social language’.⁴⁶² The first of these episodes depicts a particular occasion on which King Óláfr Haraldsson’s court skald, the above-mentioned Sigvatr Þórðarson, and the king’s standard-bearer, Þórðr Fólason, need to inform the king that two of his men have been murdered by a now-escaped royal hostage, King Hroerekr of Hedmark. Though Sigvatr and Þórðr agree that the king ought to be told of the event immediately, they are hesitant to wake Óláfr from his sleep with bad tidings. Instead of waking the king personally, Sigvatr asks the bell-ringer of the church to toll for the souls of the murdered men, and the saintly king wakes with the impression that the church-bell is ringing for Matins. Having woken the king in a manner which has immediately put him in mind of Christian duty, the real reason for the bell-toll can be safely related. Sigvatr’s employment of the tolling bell as an ambiguous sign through which his tidings can be related is significant. Sigvatr crafts a communication through the bell-toll which tells of the events through the lens of liturgical time. It is significant that the responsibility for the communication of potentially incendiary tidings seems, in the context of the saga, to fall on a skald – and that a skald should communicate such tidings by means of the same class of

⁴⁶² The episodes respectively mark the densest and second-densest use of the word, *tíðindi*, or one of its declensions in *ÓHHkr: Hkr* II, 122-124; 148-152. On the language of artifice, see Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 356.

ambiguity that results from the employment of semantic artifice in skaldic compositions. That such a mode of communication is, moreover, referred to as *tíðindi* by the saga author suggests that the term, *tíðindi*, may fall within the ambit of a particular mode of discourse which is used in the treatment of political diplomacy.

The second episode from *ÓHHkr* supports this idea and involves a similar approach to diplomacy to that of Sigvatr's above. Diplomatic actions are here undertaken by the lawspeaker, Emundr af Skořum, who travels to Uppsala and confronts the Swedish King Óláfr in the hope of prompting reconciliation between the king and the people of Götaland. The Swedish king, famous for his temper and obstinacy, cannot be confronted in a direct or openly challenging way. Emundr decides to tell the king three *tíðindi* that allegorically represent the king's own unreasonable and illegal behaviour. The overtly parable-like examples of Emundr's tidings communicate a message about the king's actions by means of metaphorical artifice, allowing the king an opportunity to interpret and examine these actions as an audience-recipient. Indeed, the day after their meeting (Emundr having now left Uppsala to allow a safe distance between himself and the king), Óláfr appeals to his advisors for interpretation, rightly suspecting that Emundr's final tiding regarding a legal case hid another, non-apparent, meaning: *Þá mælti konungr: "Segið þat, góðir höfðingjar, hvat vissi sú lagafrétt, er Emundr spurði í gær?"*⁴⁶³ (Then said the king: 'Say, good leaders, what meant this law-case that Emundr asked about yesterday?')

⁴⁶³ *Hkr* II, 152.

It is evident that *tíðindi* here does not signify any real news but suggests, instead, a telling of tales. These examples of verbal artifice are produced by a character who, if not a poet by profession (although his being a skald is not an impossibility – Snorri himself was a lawspeaker), is certainly skald-like: Emundr is said, for example, to be *vitrastr ok orðsnjallastr* (the most wise and eloquent), descriptions that seem to reflect skaldic attributes; and he also seems to fulfil similar diplomatic duties.⁴⁶⁴ His being a skald is not, however, as important as the use of the term *tíðindi* by the saga author to describe Emundr's tactfully ambiguous mode of communication (which makes extensive use of semantic artifice) – a mode usually associated with skaldic poetry.

The import of the two episodes from *ÓHHkr* above is the association between the concept of *tíðindi* (which I have previously connected with the Performance of skaldic poetry) and diplomacy. What this association attests to is the perceived (and perhaps historically *received*) connection between diplomacy and the dialogic rhythmicity effected by an interpretative engagement with skaldic artifice. So ingrained is this association that the term, *tíðindi*, is quite naturally incorporated into a discourse of diplomacy which the saga author employs in his treatment of relevant material. What I now hope to establish in the section following is the fact that the conceptual relationship between diplomacy and dialogic rhythmicity is clearly demonstrated in skaldic sources also.

⁴⁶⁴ *Hkr* II, 148.

3. Skaldic Reflections on Dialogue

3.1 Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld's Dialogic Inlay

As literary characters in the *skáldasögur*, skalds often come to represent the ambiguous nature of their craft, occupying a space between warrior and intellectual. Margaret Clunies Ross suggests that the ambivalent representation of skalds stems, in part, from the equivocal nature of their poetry.⁴⁶⁵ It may also, I would add, reflect the more literal ambiguity of a skald's expected societal (or at least symbolic) function as a warrior who is willing to enter into battle for the king whom he serves and, conversely, as a diplomat or messenger whose purpose it is to facilitate reconciliation.⁴⁶⁶ Like their poetry, skalds themselves are perceived as 'dialogic' entities whose personalities necessarily accommodate Otherness within the constructs of their individual identities: the skaldic persona is a 'decentralised multiplicity of *I* positions [... moving] from the one to the other position, from which different or even contrasting views of the world are possible'⁴⁶⁷; this persona is, in short, a 'multifaceted phenomenon, with other individuals not outside but *in* the self'⁴⁶⁸.

⁴⁶⁵ Clunies Ross, *History*, 93.

⁴⁶⁶ Although certain sagas elaborate on the martial prowess of skaldic warriors, there are also suggestions that this role may have been a more emblematic one: *ÓHHkr*, for example, depicts a scene in which the king commands three skalds (Þormóðr Kolbrúnarskáld, Gizurr gullbrá fóstri Hofgarða-Refs, and Þorfinnr munnr) to watch the battle of Stiklarstaðir from behind a shield wall so that they may compose poetry about the events afterwards (*Hkr* II, 358).

⁴⁶⁷ H. J. M. Hermans and Harry J. G. Kempen, *The Dialogical Self: Meaning as Movement* (San Diego: Academic Press, 1993), 47.

⁴⁶⁸ Hermans and Kempen, *The Dialogical Self*, 39.

Nowhere, perhaps, is this dialogical construction of skaldic identity more evident than in the character of Hallfreðr Óttarsson. As his byname, *vandræðaskáld* ‘poet of difficulties’ suggests, Hallfreðr is a persona who is both difficult to define or categorise by others – he is described as being *margbreytinn*⁴⁶⁹ (fickle or changeable) in *Hallfreðar saga* – and one who struggles, moreover, with difficulties of personal identity. This is especially true with regard to his position as a baptised skald who is expected, within the Christian court of Óláfr Tryggvason, to relinquish the very pagan language from which he constructs his poetry – that skill which defines his identity and position in society. An event which is related to the internalised negotiations of the dialogic self and which seems to encapsulate the perceived function of skaldic ambivalence is Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld’s encounter with Þorleifr inn spaki (The Wise) in *Hallfreðar saga*.

When King Óláfr sends Hallfreðr to Oppland with the instruction to either kill or blind a certain Þorleifr because of his refusal to convert to Christianity, Hallfreðr partially obeys the dogmatic command of the ruler by taking one of Þorleifr’s eyes through violence, yet also partially obeys his own inclinations towards empathy and justice by leaving Þorleifr with his other eye and taking a second, instead, from the malicious Kálfr. In this way Hallfreðr diplomatically serves both Óláfr *and* Þorleifr; both Christianity and paganism; both violence and pacifism. The one-eyed casualties of Hallfreðr’s

⁴⁶⁹ *Vatnsdæla saga. Hallfreðar saga. Kormáks saga. Hrómundar þáttur halta. Hrafnar þáttur Guðrúnarsonar*, ed. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, Íslenzk fornrit; 8. bd (Reykjavík: hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1939 [reprinted 1959]), 141.

expedition can also be seen as allusions to Óðinn, the god of poetry who sacrifices one of his eyes to gain wisdom. Óðinn himself embodies the ambiguity inherent in the skaldic figure both in terms of his character and in terms of his appearance which reflects and represents that character (much like the ‘mask’ that informs one of Óðinn’s most noteworthy aliases, that is *Grímnir* ‘Masked One’.) According to *Ynglinga saga* the original *ljóðasmiðr* ‘songsmith’

var svá fagr ok gøfuligr álitum, þá er hann sat með sínum vinum, at öllum hló hugr við. En þá er hann var í her, þá sýndisk hann grimligr sínum óvinum.⁴⁷⁰

was so fair and noble in appearance when he sat with his friends, that all hearts were uplifted by it. But when he went to war, then he seemed savage to his enemies.

Óðinn’s outer transformations reflect the migrations of his inner self from one position – from one point of view – to another. His wisdom stems, perhaps, from the movement between the two most extreme poles of these states: between vision and blindness; between epistemological ‘light’ in understanding and ‘darkness’ in ignorance. Hallfreðr’s removal of one eye from Þorleifr and Kálfr respectively represents exactly this dualism, for if this act represents in the case of Þorleifr the ‘giving of sight’ through mercy, then the same act in the case of Kálfr represents ‘the taking of sight’ through vengeance. This duality is, I believe, an intrinsic characteristic of Hallfreðr’s court poetry and of his *Erfidrápa Óláfs Tryggvasonar* (likely composed soon after the battle at Svǫldr c. 1000) in particular.⁴⁷¹

⁴⁷⁰ *Hallfreðar saga*, 17.

⁴⁷¹ Hereafter *Erfidrápa*. For the text, see *SkP* I, 400-441.

Erin Goeres, who notably views skaldic commemorative poetry as an especially self-referential genre, believes that *Erfidrápa* functions as an ‘ordering force in the face of political chaos’:⁴⁷²

The community that Hallfreðr describes in [the] final few stanzas can only exist after the poet has re-established order through a definitive declaration of the king’s death. The poet has gained sufficient control over language to turn the conflicting rumours of the masses into an announcement of the king’s fate, and this allows the faceless multitude to become once again a community, one that mourns together the loss of its leader.

The poet’s personal loss has made way for public mourning and commemoration.⁴⁷³

This understanding supports the notion that skaldic poetry serves a curative or restorative political purpose. It is not insignificant therefore, that Goeres also considers Hallfreðr’s *Erfidrápa* to be dialogic in nature:

Hallfreðr’s poem is, to use Deborah Tannen’s term, a ‘constructed dialogue’; such a dialogue is ‘not a “report” at all; rather, it is the recontextualization of words in a current discourse.’ The reconstruction of such a dialogue serves not to represent reality but to express the speaker’s view of that dialogue and of the events narrated therein to his audience. Hallfreðr’s ‘dispatches’ are no less the products of creative recontextualization [...].⁴⁷⁴

This formulation of the concept of dialogue closely resembles that of Bakhtin who observes that with ‘the appropriate methods of framing, one may bring about fundamental changes even in another’s utterance accurately quoted’.⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷² Goeres, *The Poetics of Commemoration*, 84.

⁴⁷³ Goeres, *The Poetics of Commemoration*, 81, 83.

⁴⁷⁴ Goeres, *The Poetics of Commemoration*, 78.

⁴⁷⁵ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 340.

Not only does Hallfreðr enter into a dialogue with the reported news of Óláfr Tryggvason's last battle at Svölðr however, but he also enters into dialogue with existing poetry through sensitive intertextual referencing that contributes layers of depth and meaning to his commemorative *vísur*. Perhaps most significantly, such intertextual dialogue illustrates on a macro scale those same processes of dialogic re-contextualisation and re-interpretation that one is confronted with on a linguistic level through wordplay. I would therefore like to explore the way in which Hallfreðr employs dialogue as a means of metacritically demonstrating the presence and diplomatic purposes of 'the dialogic' in skaldic poetry.

In a juxtaposition of the following two strophes, one from *Erfidrápa* and one from Glúmr Geirason's *Gráfeldardrápa* (composed between 970 and 975 in memory of King Haraldr gráfeldr), one can clearly discern both thematic and terminological parallels:

From *Erfidrápa*:

3. Geta skal máls, þess's mæla
 menn at vápna sennu
 dolga fangs við drengi
 dáðqflgan bqr kvóðu:
baðat hertryggðar hyggja
 hnekkir sína rekka
 — þess lifa **þjóðar** sessa
próttarorð — á **flóttu**.⁴⁷⁶

3. Mention, one must, the **speech** addressed
 at the weapon-flyting to warriors
 by the battle-tunics' deed-mighty fir

⁴⁷⁶ *SKP* I, 405. For my earlier citation of this poem in relation to memorial words, see ch.1 p.116.

which men reported;
 The thwarter of the host's safety
bid not his army to think
 – **the people's** bench-mate's
forceful words are left to live – of **flight**.

[My emphasis.]

From *Gráfeldardrápa*:

8. Mælti mætra hjalta
malm-Oðinn sá, blóði,
þróttarorð, es þorði
þjóðum vǫll at rjóða.
 Víðlendr of **bað** vinda
 verðung Haraldr sverðum
 — frægt þótti þat **flotnum**
 fylkis **orð** — at morði.⁴⁷⁷

8. Spoke the splendid hilt's
metal-Oðinn with **forceful words** –
 who dared with blood
 to redden the field – **to the people**.
 Wide-landed Haraldr **bade** his
 worthy men to turn their swords
 – famous thought those **rowers**
 the king's **speech** – to killing.

[My emphasis.]

Whether or not the two skalds ever met is uncertain (there is no account of their having done so), though Hallfreðr may plausibly have heard Glúmr's poetry recited by others as a young man in Iceland and almost certainly by fellow skalds in Norway. The younger skald was, in any event, evidently familiar with Glúmr's work and the strophe from *Erfidrápa* cited above clearly responds to the strophe from Glúmr's *Gráfeldardrápa* in a dialogue

⁴⁷⁷ *SkP* I, 258.

of language and structure. Hallfreðr is, moreover at pains to invite the recipient of his poetry to consider and realise this.

The word which commences the stanza from *Erfrápa*, that is, *geta* can mean both ‘mention’ and ‘guess’, particularly with regard to riddles, while *mál* can signify both ‘speech’ or, significantly, ‘inlay’, a metal-working feature used on blades and hilts which has strong conceptual links to the construction of skaldic poetry, particularly in the ‘inlay’ of intercalary clauses.⁴⁷⁸ The wordplay results in the creation of multiple readings. In the first place, one may find a bitter observation on the part of Hallfreðr that one must ‘guess’ the speech of the king – possibly because most of the men who would be able to report the events of the battle have perished. Indeed, the death of warriors checked from flight by the words of their leader is something which the rest of the strophe seems to stress as Hallfreðr further notes that king’s ‘forceful words’ ‘live on’, implying that the king and his men do not. This construction is, notably, sometimes found in runic inscriptions on commemoration stones such as the runestone in Nöbbele, Sweden, Sm 16, which reads: [...] *Því mun gó[ðs manns u]m getit verða, meðan steinn lifir ok stafir rúna* (So must a good man be commemorated while the stone and rune-staves live).⁴⁷⁹

Another possibility, however, is that the first three words of Hallfreðr’s *vísa* refer specifically to the inlay: one must ‘guess’ the inlay of phrases and

⁴⁷⁸ For more on this feature of skaldic composition, and especially on the relationship between skaldic craftsmanship and metal- or wood-working, see Clunies Ross, *History*, 84–91.

⁴⁷⁹ *Run*. For my earlier analysis of this runestone and inscription in relation to runic memorialisation, see ch. 1, pp. 113-5.

clauses in this particularly convoluted stanza, *and* one must guess the inlay of another poet's words in the strophe which literally becomes an inter-text. Such an interpretation is given validity by the thematic correspondence between Hallfreðr's and Glúmr's respective strophes since Glúmr too begins his stanza with references to both his king's speech and to metal-work. Although *mætra hjalta malm-Óðinn* (Óðinn of the metal of the splendid hilt => lit. metal-Óðinn of the splendid hilt) may serve as a kenning for the king as sword-wielder (the metal of the hilt is a blade while its Óðinn is the warrior), an Óðinn of metal could also refer – in the god of poetry's creative and poetic capacity – to a worker or forger of metal.⁴⁸⁰ It is also possible that the *fang* (tunic) in Hallfreðr's strophe could signify 'grip' so that 'battle-tunic' becomes 'battle-grip', a potential reference to a sword-hilt. The 'fir of the battle-grip' would then directly parallel Glúmr's kenning, 'the metal-Óðinn of the hilt'.

The possible motive for Hallfreðr's intertextual dialogue with Glúmr's *Gráfeldardrápa*, with which he was clearly very familiar, might lie in the intra-textual dialogue occurring between verses *within* Glúmr's poem. The strophe from *Gráfeldardrápa* quoted earlier corresponds closely to the strophe in which Glúmr speaks, for the first time in the *erfidrápa*, of Haraldr's death:

8. Mælti mætra hjalta
 malm-Óðinn sá, blóði,
 þróttarorð, es þorði
 þjóðum vǫll at rjóða.

⁴⁸⁰ It is striking that this is the only attested use of Óðinn as the base-word of a kenning: see *SkP* I, v. 8, p. 258.

Víðlendr of bað vinda
 verðung Haraldr sverðum
 — frægt þótti þat flotnum
 fylkis orð — at **morði**.⁴⁸¹

8. Spoke the splendid hilt's
 metal-Oðinn with forceful words –
 who dared with blood
 to redden the field – to the people.
Wide-landed Haraldr bade his
 worthy men to turn their swords
 – famous thought those rowers
 the king's speech – to **kill**ing.

11. Varð á víðu borði
 viggjum holtr at liggja
 gætir Glamma sóta
 garðs Eylimafjarðar.
 Sendir fell á sandi
 sævar báls at Halsi;
 olli jøfra spjalli
orðheppinn því **morði**.⁴⁸²

11. On the **wide shore** of Limfjorden,
 loyal to steeds, he had to lie:
 the guardian of the gate
 of Glammi's charger.
 He fell on the sand, the caster
 of sea-fire, at Hals;
 the friend of princes caused,
speech-fortunate, that **kill**ing.

[My emphasis.]

In the strophes above the wide-landed (*viðlendr*) Haraldr from strophe eight (as numbered in the *SkP* edition) comes to lie on a wide beach (*við borð*) in strophe eleven.⁴⁸³ Particularly relevant is the perception that although Haraldr's speech (*orð*) had once turned his men to killing in battle (*morð*),

⁴⁸¹ *SkP* I, 258.

⁴⁸² *SkP* I, 260.

⁴⁸³ Haraldr's fallen fate in the sand recalls Þórðr Særeksson's *vísa* discussed earlier and might well have served as inspiration for Þórðr's use of the image.

his own demise has resulted from the speech of another. This marked link is made plain by the assembly of the final words in both strophes which parallel each other: *orð at morði* (speech to killing) corresponds with *orðheppinn því morði* (speech-fortunate that killing). One might interpret this intra-poetic dialogue as delivering comment on the decidedly un-dialogic language used to incite war. Single-minded and one-sided speech brings death and might as easily cause one's own. Glumr's reflections on the use of words that urge men into battle brings to mind the following *helmingr* from Þorbjörn Hornklofi's *Glymdrápa* (Clangour-*Drápa*) in which there are, strikingly, no words *between* the single-minded men of battle.

4. Ok allsnæfrir jöfrar
 orðalaust at morði
 — endisk rauðra randa
 rødd — dynskotum kvøddusk.⁴⁸⁴

4. And the single-minded kings,
 wordless at the slaughter
 — enough, the red rims'
 voices — in din-shots spoke.

Allsnæfr may be literally translated as 'very tough'. However, *snæfr* can also mean 'tight' or 'narrow', and the metaphoric toughness of the rulers therefore seems to suggest a certain mental rigidity and resoluteness: a single-mindedness that is reflected in their tight-lipped silence. The only voices are those of the clashing and bloodied shields that speak in shots and contribute to the din of battle. The wordless rulers are single-minded not only in their uncompromising resoluteness, however, but also in their non-engagement with the multiple minds of Others – with a multiplicity of other interpretative

⁴⁸⁴ *SkP* I, 83.

positions. The kings are unable, then, to be in Other minds about the course of action that might be taken.

Glúmr's reflection on the use of language in war plays a fundamental role in Hallfreðr's evocation of a commemorative poem likely composed thirty years earlier, subsequent to the fall of Haraldr gráfeldr in his own *Erfidrápa*. One must, he adamantly tells us, mention the king's speech which summoned and compelled men into battle and to their deaths. This speech is one that, crucially, is portrayed by Hallfreðr as a language which 'thwarts safety' through 'not asking the army *to think*' (*baðat rekka sína hyggja*).⁴⁸⁵ The object of the sentence (*baðat rekka sína hyggja [...] á flóttu*), that is, *flótti* (flight), is purposefully delayed until after the insertion of a final intercalary phrase in order to emphasise the implication that the dogmatic language of war and death is without thought – without interpretation. In trying to heal the wound of loss left by such language the poet now asks the recipient of his poetry to engage in a contrary exercise. In Hallfreðr's poetry you must 'guess the inlay' – one must riddle through the dense structure of interwoven phrases in order to make sense of the words and one must furthermore engage with the 'answer' of that riddle to find the inlay of meaning which is not apparent. In short, Hallfreðr asks his audience to enter into Performative dialogue with his poetry and does so with diplomatic aims: a political audience who engages through their self-reflexive, interpretative Performance with dialogic rhythmicity and hence, with internalised portrayals of the Other, is an audience which resists the ego-driven (the Self-driven) single-mindedness of

⁴⁸⁵ *SkP* I, v. 3, p. 405.

war. In a potentially volatile political landscape subsequent to the death of the king, the instigation of such dialogic processes may well serve to check political dissent or factionalisation, and strengthen bonds within the royal court.

4. Bound by Ambiguity: The Political Mechanism of Skaldic Dialogue

4.1 The Power of Rhythmic Anticipation

It is not unusual, in modern review culture, to find accomplished artistic Performances described as ‘powerful’: this is the term used by a *Daily Herald* reviewer to describe an especially well-received Performance by Vivien Leigh in the 1949 British debut of Tennessee William’s play, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and it is the same term employed by Kate Molleson in her 2013 review of a Performance by violinist, James Ehnes.⁴⁸⁶ The ‘power’ that these reviewers refer to is not, or at least not primarily, the power that the Performers invest in their Performances. This power is, crucially, understood as relating to the perceived impact that a Performance has on the reviewer and audience in general as Performance recipients. It is not insignificant that Molleson, for example, characterises Ehnes’s ‘powerful performance’ as being ‘direct’ and ‘engulfing’ – terms that speak to the experience of a power

⁴⁸⁶ “Vivien Leigh Scores as ‘Streetcar’ Star,” *New York Times*, September 29, 1949; Kate Molleson, “BBCSSO/Runnicles/Ehnes – Review,” *The Guardian*, December 13, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2013/dec/13/bbcso-runnicles-ehnes-review>.

emanating from his Performance.⁴⁸⁷ That Ehnes's Performance is said, moreover, to have 'prompted a rare standing ovation' speaks to the audience's subjection to the power of a Performance which is able to elicit attention and direct movement.

A similar perception of the power inherent in skaldic Performance is, to a certain extent, attested by the formal frame (examined in my third chapter) that poets likely employ in what is assumed to be the opening strophes to *drápur* in which a skald requests (often quite forcefully) the attentive listening of their audience. The prevalence of this framing practice provides some degree of proof for the power of the poetically uttered directive to produce the desired silence in a skald's audience. This being the case, it is not entirely surprising that such poetic power may be considered as having political dimensions and that skalds might choose to exploit the political impact of their poetry. Egill Skallagrímsson's *Berudrápa* clearly demonstrates both an awareness of skaldic power and a concomitant utilisation of that power:

1. Heyri fúrs á forsa
fallhadds vinar stalla,
hyggi, þegn, til þagnar
þinn lýðr, konungs, mina ;
opt skal arnar kjapta
qrð góð of trøð Hqrða,
hrafnstýrandi hrøra
hregna, mín of fregnask.⁴⁸⁸

1. (They) should listen to my waterfalls
of the long-haired friend of the fire-altar [Óðinn's mead => poetry];
your people should consider

⁴⁸⁷ Molleson, "BBCSSO/Runnicles/Ehnes – Review."

⁴⁸⁸ *Eg*, 275-6. For my earlier treatment of this poem see ch. 3, pp. 222-6.

in silence, king's thane.
 Often shall my eagle's beak's
 good harvest in the land of the Hǫrða –
 raven-steerer of the stirring
 storms – be heard.

Margaret Clunies Ross has drawn attention to the political nature of Egill's shield-poems within the context of *Egils saga*:

[Egill] receives these gifts from persons who have reason to distrust royalty; the shield that occasions *Berudrápa* is a present given to Egill in gratitude for his helping Þorsteinn Eiríksson deal with the hostility of King Hákon Aðalsteinsfóstri, while the shield he receives from Einarr skálaglamm is a recycled gift Einarr obtained from Earl Hákon Sigurðarson, after he had complained about the Earl's niggardliness and threatened to abandon him for a political rival.⁴⁸⁹

The non-aggressive negotiation of power between a skald and ruler through the act of poetic Performance is evident in *Berudrápa*, although its intimations are suitably subtle. Of particular relevance is the grammatical structure of the first *helmingr* of which I have already said much in Chapter Three. What is significant about the final line of the *helmingr* specifically – that is, *þinn lýðr, konungs, mína* (your people, the king's, mine) – is that the steering power which the skald exercises through his poetry is illustrated in the poetic guidance of the audience's ear (through internal half-rhyme and careful noun-placement) from *þinn lýðr* (your people), to *konungs* (the king's, referring to the thane) to *mína* (mine, referring to the poetry). The audience who are the thane's and therefore the king's become, through poetry, the skald's. During the 'time of the poem', the audience are directed

⁴⁸⁹ Margaret Clunies Ross, "A Tale of Two Poets: Egill Skallagrímsson and Einarr Skálaglamm," *Arkiv För Nordisk Filologi* 120, no. 0 (2005): 80.

not by the king or by the thane, but by the skald who stirs their intellect and spurs them into a dialogic Performance through interpretation.

If the alternative referents suggested by the kenning are, furthermore, taken into account, Egill's construction takes on a self-referential character in which both steerer and storm are flung into the realm of the dialogic and further strengthens the power of the skald. The one who 'steers the raven' could well indicate Óðinn himself – being the god who controls the two ravens Huginn and Muninn – whilst the 'stirring storm' may refer, intra-textually, to the *forsar* (waterfalls) of the first *helmingr* and hence, as is synecdochically implied, to the Mead of Poetry. The potential reference to the poetic mead is strengthened, moreover, through the use of *hræra* (which I have tentatively translated as 'stirring') which brings to mind the aforementioned kettle Óðrærir (mind-, or spirit-stirrer) one of the containers of the poetic mead. Poetry, as the anticipated sustenance of Óðinn's ravens, rhythmically directs and stirs, moreover, the internalised realms of Huginn and Muninn – thought and mind. Through these references the thane, as steerer of the raven of battle (that is, the warrior who provides the eagle with carrion), is thoroughly supplanted: the raven-steerer of the stirring storm – understood now as the 'Óðinn of poetry' – is the skald who orchestrates the audience's anticipations of the poetry to come and the internalised anticipations of meaning-making. The power of poetry *empowers* the skald and this empowerment is politically relevant.

4.2 The Nature and Mechanism of Skaldic Power

4.2.1 Skaldic Magic

The mythological attempt to comprehend and describe the experience of the power inherent in poetic Performance may, in the language of modern scholarship, be categorised as a creative phenomenology of sorts, in that it engages, descriptively, in a non-scientific

study of ‘phenomena’: [the] appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, thus the meanings things have in our experience. Phenomenology studies conscious experience as experienced from the subjective [...] point of view.⁴⁹⁰

The largely metaphorical descriptions of subjective experience found in Norse mythology that seek, through a language of likenesses, to incorporate various phenomena into a Norse world-view, become rich textual sources for the examination of socio-cultural understandings of these phenomena. One such phenomenon is, of course, the subjective experience of poetic power. By investigating the mythological rendering of poetry with regards to its effects upon the world (that is, the manner in which poetic powers are seemingly exercised upon the world, as well as the way in which poetry is felt to affect individual experience of the world), one might approach a more comprehensive understanding of how such powers are expressed within a Norse poetics which habitually furnishes its discourse with the language of mythology.

⁴⁹⁰ Smith, David Woodruff, "Phenomenology", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/phenomenology/>>.

The most apparent manifestation of a Norse phenomenology concerning the power experienced in and through poetic Performance is the mythological rendering of poetry as a form of magic or sorcery. This connection is certainly made apparent in *Hávamál*, an imagined poetic utterance from the god of poetry himself. The spells that Óðinn lists in the final strophes of the poem are, in the first place, referred to as *ljóð* (songs or lays) or (significantly) *fimbulljóð* (**mighty** songs).⁴⁹¹ The term, *ljóð*, can be used to refer to poetry (for example, in the title of *Hyndluljóð*, that is, the ‘Lay of Hyndla’) and the link between spells as *ljóð* and poetry is strengthened, moreover, by Óðinn’s account of the manner in which he acquires spells from his maternal uncle.⁴⁹² When Óðinn learns *fimbulljóð* (mighty spells) from the brother of Bestla, the poetic recipient is told that he drinks of the *dýrr mjǫðr* (treasured mead) and that he is, furthermore, *ausinn Óðrærir* (bedoused from Óðrærir) in what seems to be an almost baptism-like ritual in the transferal of knowledge from one generation to the next.⁴⁹³

Galdr is another term which may refer to both ‘sorcery’ and ‘song’ and Óðinn and the other Æsir are, notably, described as a *galdrasmiðir* (song-smiths) in *Ynglingasaga*.⁴⁹⁴ Óðinn’s depiction here as both god of poetry and god of magical capabilities suggests a received association between sorcery and

⁴⁹¹ *Edda* I, 350-5.

⁴⁹² It is impossible to know for certain whether such poems may always have incorporated musical components also, or whether the term, like that of “lay” may have referred to a poetic genre that had its origins in music form. It is also uncertain whether the same distinctions that modern scholars make between concepts such as “music” and “poetry” were made by Viking Age poets. This conceptual divide is even contentious *in* modern contexts when scholars attempt to apply such terms to, for example, rapping which, though spoken, is generally considered a musical form, or recitative which, though sung, is considered be a form of declamation or speaking in opera contexts.

⁴⁹³ *Edda* I, v. 140, p. 350.

⁴⁹⁴ *Hkr* I, 19.

poetry (at least in so far as those concepts are thought about in relation to historical mythologies) shared by early thirteenth-century readers as Snorri's primary audience. The same connection is borne out in *Egils saga* which recounts the use of poetry by the eponymous skald as a form of rune-magic when Atleyar-Bárðr, a loyal steward of King Eiríkr blóðox (Blood-Axe) Haraldsson, schemes with Queen Gunnhild Gormsdóttir to murder the skald with poisoned ale:

Egill brá þá knífi sínum ok stakk í lófa sér; hann tók við horninu ok reist á rúnar ok reið á blóðinu. Hann kvað:

Egill drew his knife and stabbed the palm of his hand; he then took the horn, carved runes on it and smeared the words with blood. He said:

9. Rístum rún á horni,
rjóðum spjöll í dreyra,
þau vel ek orð til eyrna
óðs dýrs viðar rota ;
drekku veig sem viljum
vel glýjaðra þýja,
vitum, hvé oss of eiri
ól, þats Bárðr signdi.

9. Carve runes on the horn,
redden the word-wound with blood
I choose words for the tree
of the wild animal's ears' roots.
We'll drink the strong brew as abundantly as
we wish, the gleeful bondwomen's;
We'll find out how much it agrees with us,
this ale that Bárðr signed.

Hornit sprakk í sundr, en drykkurinn fór niðr í hálm.⁴⁹⁵

The horn burst asunder and the drink fell down into the straw.

⁴⁹⁵ *Eg*, 109.

Though the sacrificial painting of the runes seems to be an essential ritualistic ingredient in the effecting of Egill's magic, it is once the skaldic words are spoken, becoming a rhythmic utterance capable of traversing time, that the spell takes effect and the horn spills its poisonous contents onto the straw. A crucial aspect of the magical Performance is the dialogical rhythmicity that the Performance recipient of the poem must engage with. The poem demonstrates a self-reflexive awareness of its instigation of internalised rhythmicity which is then presented, at the level of the saga narrative, as a power which, though unseen, acts upon the physical and affects its material surroundings.

The self-reflexive awareness of the poem's ability to affect the mind of the listener is carefully crafted into the kenning for 'horn', that is, *til viðar róta eyrna óðs dýrs* (for the tree of the roots of the ears of the wild animal). Several possibilities for *ofljóst* present themselves. *Eyrna*, apart from being the genitive plural of 'ear' and hence gesturing to the central act of listening, can also serve as the genitive plural of *erendi* which, in the context of the strophe above, could mean either 'speech', 'strophe' or 'breath'.⁴⁹⁶ In a similar fashion the words *óðr* (wild) and *rót* (root) have homonymic significance involving poetry and the embodiment thereof: *óðs* can also serve as the genitive form of *óðr* meaning 'mind' or 'poetry', while *til róta* can signify 'to stir', or to 'throw into disorder'.⁴⁹⁷ The similar sounding *rota* can, moreover, signify 'heavy rain'.⁴⁹⁸ The latter terms recall the 'stirring storm'

⁴⁹⁶ CV, 136, 135-6.

⁴⁹⁷ CV, 471, 503.

⁴⁹⁸ CV, 503.

from *Berudrápa* and, in connection to the corporeal poetics of verbal rhythm – the energetic potency of a visceral anticipation established in and through sound – again bring to mind the stirring, infectious effect of rhythmic utterance. The final instance of wordplay is found in *dýrr* which can also serve as an adjective meaning ‘precious’ and recalls, perhaps, Óðinn’s treasured mead (*dýrr mjǫðr*) which is, as mentioned above, consumed by the god of poetry in his own acquisition of poetic skill and magic powers.⁴⁹⁹

It is tempting to think that the saga’s representation of the drinking-horn ‘bursting asunder’ due to the embodied utterance of the skaldic spell, approaches a metaphysical symbolism in which the material sign ‘in the world’ is supplanted by the cognitive sign ‘in the mind’. It is, indeed, as though the physical material from which the drinking-horn has been fashioned collapses because it is unable to support the weight of meaning and significance denoted by the verse and runic carvings. The mental strain felt as a result of the dialogic rhythmicity engendered by the multiple layers of signification tax, and are meant to tax, interpretative faculties.

4.2.2 Rhythmic Fetters

What now remains to be examined is the mytho-phenomenological rendering of a more specific experience of poetic power as it relates to skaldic diplomacy. How might the dialogic rhythmicity which binds Performance

⁴⁹⁹ CV, 112. See also Siân Grønlie, “Saint’s Life and Saga Narrative,” *Saga-Book of the Viking Society for Northern Research*. 36 (2012): 16, for her comparison of Egil’s runic magic with the ‘power of the Christian supernatural’ epitomised by St Benedict in Gregory’s *Dialogues*. Another text that considers the passage above is, Laurence de Looze, “Poet, Poem and Poetic Process in Egils saga SkallaGrímssonar,” *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 104 (1989): 123–42.

recipients to the process of Performative interpretation be imagined within Norse mythology, if it is imagined at all? I would like to begin by examining the terms and comparative metaphors that *Völuspá* (Prophecy of the Seeress) employs to describe the magical gifts that Óðinn bestows upon the seeress:

29. Valði henni Herföðr
 hringa ok men,
 fekk spjöll spaklig
 ok spá ganda,
 sá hon vítt ok um vítt,
 of veröld hverja.⁵⁰⁰

29. Father-of-Hosts picked for her
 rings and necklaces,
 gave wise wealth-spells
 and spirit-magics of prophecy,
 saw she far and very wide
 over every world.

Óðinn provides, in return for the wisdom he gains from the seeress, *gandar* (spirit-magics) and *spjöll* (spells) both of which may, as offerings from a god whose sorcery is associated with his poetic abilities, be granted in the form of poetry.⁵⁰¹ It is therefore significant that Óðinn's magical gifts seem to mirror, structurally, his gifts of *hringar* (rings) and *men* (necklaces): *hringa ok men* corresponds with *spjöll ok ganda*. These rings and necklaces represent, in a physically tangible form, those intangible gifts of magic that the god bestows upon the wide-seeing *völva*. If so, they represent the nature of the spells that Óðinn gifts and, as rings and torcs, this nature might be understood as being a) circular and b) binding or fettering (in terms of

⁵⁰⁰ *Edda* I, 298.

⁵⁰¹ *Spjall* certainly suggests a more narrative or poetic utterance than a simple chant – more akin perhaps to *tíðindi* than pure formula. For more on the spiritual nature implied by the magical practices of *gandr* see, Eldar Heide, “Spinning Seiðr,” in *Old Norse Religion in Long-Term Perspectives: Origins, Changes, and Interactions* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2006), 164–70.

potential ceremonial signification). The latter signification is suggested, indeed, by the metaphorical descriptions of arm-rings employed by skalds themselves: the somewhat dubiously named Auðunn illskælda (Bad-Poet) refers to arm-rings as *hrammfjotrar* (arm-fetters) whilst Hárekr í Þjóttu speaks, similarly, of *leggfjotrar* (limb-fetters).⁵⁰²

The metaphorical relationship between circular and binding rings or necklaces, and sorcery as binding force finds its greatest expression in the mythological figure of the Miðgarðsormr (World Serpent). As an ouroboros which encapsulates the earth within its encircling grasp it is, tellingly, also known as Jormungandr (Great Gandr). Though the *gandr*-element in this second name is usually understood as signifying a ‘monster’, there is some justification for thinking of the Great Gandr as a powerful binding force or ‘magic’ that fetters the earth. When this force is undone at Ragnarøk, the apocalypse ensues. Justification for imagining the circular, fettering power of the Jormungandr is furthermore provided in skaldic sources: Hallvarðr háreksblesi refers to Jormungandr as *hólmfjoturr* (island-fetter) in his *Knútsdrápa*;⁵⁰³ Eysteinn Valdason describes it as a *brattrar brautar baugr* [ring of the climbing road => that is, a ring of waves];⁵⁰⁴ Úlfr Uggason captures the impression of the world-serpent as an entity which gathers as it binds in a kenning from *Húsdrápa*, that is, *stirðpinull storðar* (stiff net’s edge-rope of the earth);⁵⁰⁵ and Eyvindr skáldaspillir refers to it as a *lyngva*

⁵⁰² *SkP* I, v. 2, 122; in *SkP* I, v.1, p. 808.

⁵⁰³ *Skm*, 86.

⁵⁰⁴ *Skm*, 15.

⁵⁰⁵ *Skm*, 65.

men (necklace of heathers).⁵⁰⁶ Such constructions are strikingly similar to that used in reference to the ocean as binding force in sea-kennings such as *hó[l]mfjöturr* (island-fetter),⁵⁰⁷ *sverrigjörð* (mighty-girdle),⁵⁰⁸ *eybaugr* (island-ring)⁵⁰⁹ and *men Lista* (necklace of Lista – or any other place-name).⁵¹⁰

What is especially relevant is that the binding powers of the ocean (and of the serpent within it) may take on a metaphorical significance as they do in *The Wanderer*, an Old English elegy (likely dating from the tenth century) which shares many thematic concerns with Old Norse poetry. Linguistic evidence such as the use of the Old Norse *hrím* (rime) and *hríð* (storm) may even testify to a more direct Norse influence in the text.⁵¹¹ One of the central themes of the poem concerns the force of spirit and will that the speaker must exercise in order to contain his thoughts and emotions within himself. Time and again the poet states that a wise lord should ‘bind his breast’ (*ferðlocan fæste binde*); that he should ‘fasten his mind with fetters’ (*modsefan [...] feterum sælan*).⁵¹² Significantly, this motif is emphasised by the poet’s figurative use of the ocean as an entity which fetters: its storm-like beating of the rocky cliffs (*stanhleoðu stormas cnyssað*) binds the earth (*hrusan bindað*); the poet also states that he must traverse ‘binding waves’ (*waþema*

⁵⁰⁶ *SkP* I, v. 11, p. 230.

⁵⁰⁷ From a verse by Einarr Skúlason in *Skm*, 38.

⁵⁰⁸ *Skm*, 38.

⁵⁰⁹ *SkP* I, v. 3, p. 333.

⁵¹⁰ *SkP* I, v. 9, p. 596.

⁵¹¹ *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry. An Edition of Exeter Dean and Chapter MS 3501*, 2 vols, ed. Bernard J. Muir, (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1994), vol. 1, ll. 4 and 102, pp. 218, 221.

⁵¹² *The Exeter Anthology*, vol. 1, ll. 13-14 and 19, 21, p. 218.

gebind).⁵¹³ If the Jormungandr is understood, mythologically, as a similar binding force to that of the ocean whose waves already exhibit a poetic rhythmicity within the context of a Norse poetics, then it might also be reasonable to assume that the self-eating serpent represents, in a metaphorical capacity, a fettering of the mind. The Great Gandr is, in its circular devouring of the Self, intrinsically ‘self-reflexive’. And if the rhythmical power within poetry is itself understood as a form of sorcery or *gandr*, then it is striking that skaldic verse partakes of just such a self-devouring self-reflexivity which engenders a self-reflexive dialogism in the recipient as interpreter. Even the most conspicuous feature of skaldic language, that is, the kenning, produces a thinking that necessarily folds or circles back upon itself. There is, indeed, an invisible rhythmical force that binds the elements of a kenning together and holds the form of a poem in place in artificial separation from the language of the everyday (as noted in Chapter Three).

That the fettering power of poetry might be due to the dialogic rhythmicity which is, in turn, engendered by the overt semantic ambiguities in skaldic texts, is suggested by yet another mythological *gandr*. This *gandr* is the *Vánargandr* (Gandr of Expectation), the wolfish brother of Jormungandr who is better known in mythological sources as Fenrisúlfr.⁵¹⁴ Being tied in a position of a constant mental struggle in the expectation and anticipation of cognitive arrival is very much the fate and burden of Fenrir who is bound by the fetter Gleipnir (from *glepja*, meaning, to confuse or to confound one).

⁵¹³ *The Exeter Anthology*, vol. 1, ll. 24, 101-2, pp. 218, 221.

⁵¹⁴ *Skm*, 19.

Like the Mead of Poetry, the ribbon Gleipnir is forged by dwarves and is forged out of six ‘impossible’ elements. Each of these elements – the sound of a cat’s footfall; the beard of a woman; the roots of a mountain; the sinews of a bear; the breath of a fish; and the spittle of a bird – represents the jarring mental phenomenon inherent in the paradoxical expression of ineffability.⁵¹⁵ Like Fenrir, the mind which grapples with the paradox of conceiving that which cannot be conceived, of striving to settle upon that which cannot be conceptually fixed, must circle in upon itself in an ever-tightening epistemological quandary.

From a perspective of skaldic diplomacy which seeks to fetter the Self in a Performative engagement with the Other and with Otherness, a Norse mytho-phenomenology that presents a universe in which cosmic peace is maintained through the binding of Fenrir and the self-binding of the Miðgarðsormr supports the idea that the self-reflexive engagement with internal dialogic processes that is entered into and maintained through a continued participation in skaldic Performance is capable of fettering destructive social forces. Unbound, these *gandar* initiate the onset of Ragnarøk. Bound, however, the rabid wolf is restrained; the writhing serpent that bites its own tail cannot strike.

⁵¹⁵ Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, ed. Anthony Faulkes, (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, University of London, 2011), 28.

Epilogue

This is what gives poetry its governing power. At its greatest moments it would attempt, in Yeats's phrase, to hold in a single thought reality and justice. Yet even then its function is not essentially supplicatory or transitive. Poetry is more a threshold than a path, one constantly approached and constantly departed from, at which reader and writer undergo in their different ways the experience of being at the same time summoned and released.⁵¹⁶

One of the principal personal realisations made during the course of this thesis was the growing recognition that so much of what I attempt to say about skaldic poetry specifically is applicable to poetry, and even to art, in general. It has often been the case that where I have sought particulars I have found universals, and these discoveries have proven both exciting and dismaying in turn – depending on my specific aims. My study of the politics of skaldic performance is therefore, in many ways, a case-study for the politics of *poetic* performance and I hope that it may contribute to the body of similarly-themed scholarship of which the paper by Seamus Heaney, cited above, is but one example.

Some of the core themes examined in this thesis are a) the legitimising function and b) the diplomatic function of skaldic performance. In either case, an important conceptual development of performance away from a thinking that involves the amalgamation of skaldic performance and its

⁵¹⁶ Seamus Heaney, "The Government of the Tongue," in *The Government of the Tongue: The 1986 T.S. Eliot Memorial Lectures and Other Critical Writings*, T.S. Eliot Memorial Lectures (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), 108.

ostensible orality has proved crucial. The subsequent division, also, between performance as action, and Performance as a type of action pertaining to (re)presentation (more exactly defined as the self-conscious engagement with artifice), is one that I hope may influence future approaches to this subject.

In terms of the legitimising function of skaldic performance, this thesis establishes the important connection between skaldic poetry and Viking Age ideologies surrounding the concept of *óðal*. By providing a historical and cultural context for *óðal*-based power structures that require ruler-presence as a primary legitimising mechanism, my first chapter seeks to provide the necessary tools with which to analyse the potential for skaldic verse to establish ruler presence by means of both spatial and temporal itinerancies. My second chapter subsequently posits that, in the linguistic memoryscape of Viking Age Scandinavia, personal names and praise-names are the most important landmarks. The ease with which skaldic strophes, independent of their author and even of their larger poetic contexts, may be distributed between and among communities makes skaldic verse an ideal medium for the propagation of presence. What inscribes these poems with such presence, by means of the visual and aural en-performancing (to use Ruth Finnegan's term once more) inherent in the memory and imagination that these entities instigate, are the personal-, place-, and praise-names that litter the skaldic corpus.

The second part of my thesis shifts the focus from a view of performance as action, to a view of Performance as a dialogic and dynamic mode of artifice.

Demonstrating that skaldic poetry is artficed, that it exhibits temporal movement, and that interpretative engagement with skaldic verse generates dialogic processes on various levels of reception, is the chief objective of my third chapter. Of especial importance are the concepts of formal and dialogic rhythmicity, as well as the Norse concept of *tíðindi* (tidings), which I develop in Chapter Three and employ extensively in Chapter Four. In relocating the primary site for performance to the mind of the interpreter my final chapter is, furthermore, concerned with the phenomenological experience of mental performances that are engendered by processes of interpretation and the ways in which this phenomenological understanding is expressed in mythological sources.

What becomes clear throughout my study of skaldic performance and its functions in Viking Age politics is that these functions are indeed numerous. Due to the flexibility of skaldic meaning-making which allows for, and actively encourages multiple interpretations of a single text, these poetic entities are multivalent and are employed variously by skalds. More important still is that the performance of skaldic poetry may ‘perform’ more than one function *simultaneously* and that one need not limit oneself, in the analysis of skaldic material, to a singular interpretation when contradictions and ambiguities seem to arise. In the end I have only been able, within the scope of the current thesis, to examine two primary political functions of skaldic performance – and yet others certainly remain to be investigated. One such function is the didactic role of skaldic poetry (usually categorised as criticism or ‘blame’). What I hope future studies may illuminate is the way

in which apparent ‘blame’-poetry may also support, and *not undermine*, Viking Age rulership through the employment of both the legitimising and diplomatic tactics discussed in my thesis. There are scholarly precedents for such an approach – most notably in the analysis of Xhosa praise-poetry by Jeff Opland whose seminal work in this field provides a rich methodological foundation for the examination of encomiastic criticism.⁵¹⁷

I also hope that my thesis might spur more nuanced future examinations of skaldic poetry and its relationship to *orature* as defined in my Introduction (largely in an attempt to justify the avoidance of its employment in my study of skaldic performance). Having drawn a clear distinction between an understanding of ‘performance’ and ‘orature’, one might investigate what elements of skaldic poetry *can* be studied within a framework of orality and aurality without resorting to references that necessarily highlight its Performative characteristics. Of particular interest would be those projects that show an interest in the sounding of skaldic poetry, such as a comparative investigation into the sonic effects of a reconstructed Norse as opposed to a modern Icelandic pronunciation of skaldic texts.

I would like to conclude by noting that the importance of a study relating to the political functions of skaldic performance lies not only in its contribution to a more comprehensive understanding of skaldic practices during the Viking Age, but also in recognising those more general attributes and features mentioned at the start of my epilogue, the study of which may also

⁵¹⁷ Opland, *Xhosa Oral Poetry*.

contribute to an understanding of the political functions of poetry even today. From an interdisciplinary perspective, the tactics that skalds employ in their poetry may reflect and illuminate modern approaches to diplomacy and suggest ways, too, in which power may be both bolstered and resisted by art.

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