Dramatic Implications of Echoed Speech in *Skírnismál*[*]

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Skaði kvað:
"Rístu nú, Skírnir,
ok gakk at beiða
okkarn mála mǫg,
ok þess at fregna,
hveim inn fróði sé
ofreiði afi."

Skírnir kvað:
"Illra orða
er mér ón at ykkrum syni,
ef ek geng at mæla við mǫg,
ok þess at fregna,
hveim inn fróði sé
ofreiði afi."[1] (sts 1-2)

'Rise now, Skírnir, and go and bid our son to talk, and ask this: with whom the sagacious one, the male heir, is so furious.' Skírnir said: 'Wicked words I expect from your son, if I go to talk with the boy, and ask this: with whom the sagacious one, the male heir, is so furious.'

Such is the opening to *Skírnismál*, an eddic dialogue poem of mythological scope attested in both the Codex Regius and in AM 748 I 4to (sts 1-27).[2] Since Niedner (1886) and Olsen (1909), much scholarship on *Skírnismál* has focused on the poem's potential origins as a fertility myth centred on a *hieros gamos* between sky and earth, given that the name of Freyr's servant, Skírnir, equates to 'sun beam' or 'brightener', and that, on behalf of Freyr (a god associated elsewhere with fruitfulness), this intermediary ultimately makes a journey to win over a female

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[1] All quotations from Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason's edition (2014), with punctuation occasionally modified; all translations my own, after consultation of Ursula Dronke's edition and translation (1997), and translations by Carolyne Larrington (2014) and Andy Orchard (2011). In the Codex Regius, the first stanza of the poem is prefaced by a prose introduction describing how Njörðr calls on Skírnir to 'get Freyr to talk' (*kveðja Frey máls*), before announcing 'then Skaði said...' (*Þá Skaði kvað*). As Skaði is not elsewhere attested as Freyr's mother, some scholars have questioned the attribution of the first stanza to her. North, Allard and Gillies suggest that in an oral performance Njǫrðr might speak the first verse (2014, 536). Dronke suggests that in a performance context, either Njǫrðr or Skaði might speak the first lines (1997, 404). See also Gunnell (1995, 248-9).

[2] The final stanza of *Skírnismál* (st. 42) is also quoted by Snorri Sturluson in *Gylfaginning* (ed. Faulkes, 1982), ch. 37.

figure called Gerðr (a name which may signify 'field, enclosure').[3] Arguments for the dramatic nature of *Skírnismál* initially grew out of this interpretive tradition. Phillpotts argued for the poem's status as a ritual drama, and Dronke followed in this vein, perceiving a dramatised narrative of the 'sacred marriage between Sky and Earth' (1962, 253). Gunnell has since developed a fuller account of *Skírnismál* as a text well suited to performance by multiple speakers, demonstrating the numerous interpretive difficulties that would arise if the text was mediated through 'solo presentation' by a 'non-dramatic performer' (1995, 247-55; 2006).[4] As part of demonstrating the appropriateness of this text for performance, Dronke (1997, 387) has praised the subtleties of voice and psychologically plausible characterisation of its opening lines. She celebrates how Skaði speaks in 'heightened' and 'archaic' terms, foregrounding Freyr's sacred nature 'as fructifier and progenitor', as if Freyr's parents 'were deliberately maintaining the dignity of their sulking boy'.[5] For Skírnir's part, Dronke ventures that his 'words are not […] meant to be heard by the parents'; he is 'turning away from them, muttering to himself, sarcastically echoing their stilted terms'.

The present chapter is concerned with the potentially 'sarcastic' moment that Dronke detects here, along with several other instances of echoing retorts elsewhere in the poem. Considered against the rest of the *Poetic Edda*, *Skírnismál* features an unusual abundance of utterances repeated by other speakers, in whole or in part, in a manner which merits further examination. The phenomenon of inter-speaker echo in this body of poetry, and particularly *Skírnismál*, can helpfully be contextualised by reference to a variety of cultural and linguistic theories.[6] Bakhtin (1981, 240) saw the speaking of 'another's words' to be central to all dialogic interaction, and argued that 'the speech of another, once enclosed in a context, is – no matter how accurately transmitted – always subject to certain semantic changes'. Through different framing decisions, fundamental shifts in meaning can be brought about; indeed '[a]ny sly and ill-disposed polemicist knows very well what dialogizing backdrop he should bring to bear on the accurately quoted words of his opponent, in order to distort their sense'. Linguists have since analysed the purposes and effects of inter-speaker verbatim repetition in conversational contexts and drawn conclusions across a range of languages, useful for the purpose of considering the meaning of repetitious retorts of the *Edda*; most salient here are Du Bois' theory of 'dialogic syntax' (2014) and Enfield *et al*.'s research into the use of 'echo answers'

[3] See further Turville-Petre (1969), Talbot (1982), and more recently studies by Steinsland (esp. 1991; 2011, 25-6, 57-9). Motz (1981, 123-5) has challenged the idea that the sense of 'fertile earth' or 'cultivated field' is current in the Old Icelandic noun *garðr* and its cognates, arguing that Gerðr's name instead designates her as 'the one enclosed' or 'she, of the enclosure'. North, Allard and Gillies (2014, 535) still date the poem's composition early, to the tenth century. Arguments have nonetheless been made for a later twelfth or thirteenth century date, particularly in light of the poem's depiction of Freyr's lovesickness, consonant with emerging courtly conventions across Europe; see particularly Sävborg (2006), after scholars such as Heinrich (1997). Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason describe the poem as 'ekki mjǫg fornt' ('not very ancient'; 2014, 200), but doubt it was composed as late as 1200.

[4] For instance, Gunnell observes that the audience of a single presenter would likely have difficulty understanding when a new speaker has begun talking, due to the relative absence of clear markers in the strophes themselves; pertinently to the concerns of this chapter, Gunnell remarks that this confusion might partly be mitigated 'by the new speaker semi-repeating the words of the previous strophe' (2014, 248). On the space invoked by *Skírnismál*, see further Gunnell (2006).

[5] Motz has challenged the sense of *fróðr* (st 1 l. 5, 2 l. 5) as 'fertile, thriving', advocating instead 'skillful, valiant'. Larrington (2014) translates 'wise'.

[6] See previously Soper (2020), with reference to *Hárbarðsljóð* and *Lokasenna*.

(2019). The implications of the poem's echoed utterances, once placed within these wider contexts, are then considerable for the functioning of the text as a drama. As is implicit in Dronke's interpretation of Skírnir's 'muttering' and sarcastic tone, repeated language in modern contexts often involves significant intonational differentiation on the part of the second speaker. Through varying auditory effects such as volume and timbre, contemporary performers of *Skírnismál* may similarly have been able to signal differences of attitude, even (or especially) when words and phrases remained identical or very similar.

The most sustained studies of dialogic repetition in the *Poetic Edda* have previously been studies of 'flyting', a broad genre subdivisible into the modes of of *senna* (sequenced provocations) and *mannjafnaðr* ('man-equalling', or sequenced boasts).[7] Marcel Bax and Tineke Padmos have explored 'strategies of mirroring and surpassing' as 'normal procedures in flyting matches', primarily with reference to Þórr and Óðinn's exchange in *Hárbarðsljóð*, but noting also the presence of such tactics in *Lokasenna* (1983, 153). They draw comparisons with William Labov's research into 'sounding' or 'playing the dozens' ('the game of exchanging ritualised insults') among groups of inner-city African-American teenagers in the 1960s and 1970s. Indeed, Labov discusses how replies to a sound may adopt either the 'substance' or 'the same surface form' of the prior utterance, such that optimally successful sounds will enact 'striking semantic shifts with minimal changes of form' (1972, 344-9). Elsewhere (2020), I have argued for the benefits of situating the both cross-speaker repetition of *Hárbarðsljóð* and *Lokasenna,* and the close verbal parallelism of sounding which Labov observes, within a much wider linguistic landscape of replicated words and structures in dialogic exchange. Rather than a discrete phenomenon exclusively suited to stylised antagonistic exchange and competitive in purpose, speech which echoes has the capacity to communicate a range of complex attitudes, even at the same time as it fulfils antagonistic and competitive aims. Echoed speech in eddic dialogue, including *Hárbarðsljóð* and *Lokasenna,* may ultimately be appreciated as a more versatile set of verbal strategies than has previously been acknowledged, and comparison with the temporally and culturally remote context of sounding need not be relied upon exclusively as a parallel phenomenon (see previously, on this, Arnovick 2000).

Skírnismál differs from *Hárbarðsljóð* and *Lokasenna* in that it contains no exchanges clearly identifiable as *sennur* or flyting; Skírnir threatens Gerðr over the course of twelve stanzas (25-36), but she does not reply, simply registering her capitulation in stanza 37. The speech acts demonstrated in the poems, nonetheless, are not wholly different in kind; *Hárbarðsljóð*, after all, opens with a request from Þórr that the disguised Óðinn ferry him across the fjord, accompanied by an offer of gifts (food from Þórr's basket, st. 3). Dronke has compared *Skírnismál* favourably with *Hárbarðsljóð* and *Lokasenna*, arguing that the humour of the latter two, 'satiric or burlesque, is abrupt, antagonistic, depending upon the swift scoring of rival points, not on an evolving discourse', while *Skírnismál*'s humour 'is one of persuasion, where the brain of the persuader must be continually studying his "adversary" in order to gain

[7] The use of devices of repetition and parallelism in the Eddic corpus as a whole is 'restrained', but nonetheless recurrent, forming refrains as well as shorter anaphoric or epistrophic motifs (Meletinsky 1998, 17); see further Schorn (2016, 281). Meletinsky has noted in passing a tendency for repetition to occur in question and answer contexts (1998, 245), and H. R. Ellis Davidson has more broadly observed shared territory between riddle and insult exchanges (1983).

his point' (1997, 387). It is nonetheless apparent in Dronke's formulation that adversarial and competitive currents do run through the exchanges of *Skírnismál*. As such, the repetitive machinations of the dialogue are not wholly separable from those of texts received as flytings. In this vein, I propose that *Skírnismál*'s techniques of cross-speaker repetition should be considered as not fundamentally different from those of *Hárbarðsljóð* and *Lokasenna*, but rather as points on a shared nexus. The less easy-to-categorise discourse of *Skírnismál* furthermore highlights the diverse range of opportunities presented by repetitive speech, and, in particular, echo answers, beyond proving superior verbal skill in an antagonistic exchange.

The semantic ambiguity of echoes in *Skírnismál* seems partly to spring from the location of these echoing responses within the text: as seen already in the poem's opening lines, they tend to follow requests and commands. The poem's editors, Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason, note that '[v]íða er sama orðalag endurtekið með eða án tilbrigða í svari við spurningu' ('[i]n many places, the same wording is repeated with or without variations in response to a question') (2014, 187). Usually, the entreated individual uses the device to offer some level of resistance, but the desired result of the first speaker is ultimately achieved, with the exception of Gerðr's request to know Skírnir's origins (sts 17-18). These echoes thus interact in complex ways with wider thematic interests of the poem in processes of persuasion, coercion and domination, as previously observed by a range of scholars. Lönnroth and Mitchell have focused on the poem's interest in inter-group marriage as a way of managing potential social conflict, with such marriages standing in complex relation to the volition of the individual couple (Lönnroth 1997; Mitchell 1983), while Motz (1981) and Larrington have interrogated the text's presentation of gendered conflict (1992).[8] As will be seen, echo is used by the poem's speakers as a way of working out such 'problems of differentiation' (Mitchell 1983, 113). Nonetheless, as is often the case when speakers replicate elements of each other's speech in contemporary speech contexts, *Skírnismál*'s echoing responses harbour a wealth of possible implications, from simple confirmation to outright hostility. If this poem is understood as a drama, such options for implicature would be are available to be selected and accentuated by any individual performer.

This chapter will now provide a brief survey of linguistic research which offers some relevant contexts for the cross-speaker echoes of the *Skírnismál*, for all that its poetic discourse and that of conversational exchange are firmly distinct from each other. This research consists primarily of John W. Du Bois' theory of 'dialogic syntax' in conversation, and studies of 'echo answers' and 'echo questions' in a variety of speech contexts.[9] I will then survey the echoing retorts of *Skírnismál*, observing how the insights of conversational pragmatics illuminate the poem's echoing retorts. Amid this discussion, it will be posited that the text itself foregrounds physical processes of replication and resonance, in a way which offers a framework for interpreting the workings of its verbal strategies. Ultimately, this chapter aims to demonstrate the breadth, variety and power of replicated patterns of sound and speech across conversational turns in *Skírnismál*.

[8] For a concise overview of these and other related approaches in the scholarly reception of *Skírnismál*, see Larrington's introduction to Harris's chapter in Acker and Larrington (2016).
[9] For a fuller account, see Soper (2020).

Dialogic Syntax and Echo Answers

A fresh context for the cross-speaker repetitions of *Skírnismál* and other dialogues in the *Edda* may be found in the theories of Du Bois (2014), who gives the name 'dialogic syntax' to a widespread phenomenon which shapes conversational speech exchange. This consists of 'the linguistic, cognitive, and interactional processes involved when speakers selectively reproduce aspects of prior utterances, and when recipients recognize the resulting parallelisms and draw inferences from them' (Du Bois 2014, 366). 'Diagraph' is advanced as a term for counterpart structures which are shared across utterances, as in the following example:

JOANNE;	it	's	kind of	like	^you	Ken	.
KEN;	that	's	not at ^all	like	me	Joanne	.[10]

The second speaker here opts to formulate his diametrically opposed claim by selectively reproducing features of the first speaker's utterance, including the copular predicative construction, use of pronouns, proper names, adverbial modifiers, co-reference, and morphologically identical units (*like*: *like*, *'s*: *'s*). Different inferences are nonetheless to be drawn from Ken's statement, and this is particularly clear in his parallel use of the vocative: Joanne's use of Ken's name is required to specify whom she is addressing, but Ken's use of Joanne's name performs no such function. It 'takes cover as tit for tat, while actually dripping with irony' (Du Bois 2014, 363).

In many ways the use of repetition in poetry is, of course, not the same phenomenon as its use in everyday speech, especially given the crucial sonic, phonetic and rhythmic role played by repetition in poetic contexts.[11] Refrains, as Schorn notes, are particularly common in *ljóðaháttr*, the metre in which most of *Skírnismál* is composed (2016, 281). Nonetheless, it does not necessarily follow that the kind of structural repetitions which make a statement forceful in conversational contexts are wholly separate from the structural and formal repetitions that can be found in dialogue poetry. Against Ken's reply to Joanne's utterance, seemingly 'tit for tat' but potentially deeply ironic, one might compare Skírnir's reproduction of Skaði's epithets for Freyr (*mǫg, fróði, afi*), not at all necessary for identification (a simple pronoun would have served equally well) but serving a different kind of purpose. Du Bois uses the term 'stance' to describe such divergences of meaning between speakers producing dialogic syntax: a second speaker's stance may be 'parallel, opposed, or even orthogonal' to the first (Du Bois 2014, 360; 2007). As seen when Dronke infers sarcasm from Skírnir's verbatim repetition, implications for stance can be felt by modern readers as very pronounced, even in highly formally patterned poetic contexts. The inclusion of several such moments of echoed speech in the poem may be understood as part of its dramatic mode – rich opportunities for different kinds of intonation and delivery are presented here.

[10] Modified from Du Bois (2014, 362) by omitting the numbering. On Du Bois' theory, and this example, discussed in a context of multimedial parallelism in ritual performance, see Frog (2017, 585).

[11] See, for instance, Easthope on poetic discourse (2003, 16): 'line organization or metre takes place mainly – though not exclusively – on the basis of phonetic parallelism [...]. This repetition must promote other kinds of repetition in poetry, phonetic, syntactic and semantic'.

Du Bois' conventions for setting out diagraphs are designed to highlight the prosodic similarities and differences between different utterances, and thereby to capture 'the voices heard' (2014, 396). Syntactic and verbal parallelism are understood by Du Bois as closely connected with meaningful intonational variation, signalling different kinds of attitude. It is, of course, not possible to say with any certainty how *Skírnismál*'s opportunities for voicing might have been actualised in Old Norse-speaking performance contexts. Daniel Hirst and Albert Di Cristo survey twenty languages (1998, 6) and identify intonation as a pluriparametric phenomenon, involving most centrally 'fundamental frequency, intensity, duration, and spectral characteristics'; these map onto to the auditory experiences of 'pitch, loudness, length and timbre', and among these, fundamental frequency (heard as pitch) is widely recognised as the primary parameter.[12] Rhythm (or 'aspects of temporal organisation') also plays an important role (Hirst and Di Cristo 1998, 4; after Crystal, 1969). It is sometimes postulated that Old Norse was a pitch (or tonal) accent language, in which case comparisons might be made with modern pitch accent languages like Norwegian or Swedish.[13] In specific contexts of Old Norse-Icelandic poetic recitation, scholars have considered pitch when contemplating what metrics of intonation might have 'set off' parenthetic clauses from the rest of a stanza of skaldic poetry (Gade 1995, 189). Hollander suggests such constructions might have been distinguished by 'a pause before and after', rather than a 'different pitch' (1965, 636). Of course, the precise details of contemporary performances of these texts are irrecoverable, and it is difficult to imagine scholarly consensus being reached on the roles of pitch and rhythm in the voicing of Old Norse-Icelandic texts. In what follows, I posit only that paralleled constructions across the utterances of different speakers in the Edda may have created opportunities for meaningful intonational choices during performance, and, indeed, that these opportunities remain latent in the texts and can be resuscitated in modern performance.

Given the specific placement of the echoes in *Skírnismál* – often following a question or demand – a further field of speech pragmatics may be relevant: research into 'echo answers'. Enfield *et al*. have recently surveyed answers to polar (yes-no) questions across fourteen languages, and observed that echoing ('repetition-type') answers may be more appropriate than 'interjection-type' answers for contexts in which the answerer wishes 'not only to confirm the proposition that has just been put on the table by the questioner, but to claim a degree of thematic agency, or independent interest over that proposition' (2019, 292), possibly due to it falling into a 'special realm of knowledge' (2019, 286, 292; after Heritage and Raymond 2002, 2012). These findings align well with previous research into the parallel phenomenon of 'echo questions', in which a speaker formulates a question by repeating all or part of a previous speaker's utterance. Linguists have found this strategy to have complex implications and effects. Rather than simply signalling 'confirmation', such questions 'may also draw attention to the absurdity of an underlying proposition' (Channon, Foulkes and Walker 2018, 158, after

[12] Cruttenden (1997, 2, 7) identifies the three primary prosodic features as 'pitch, length and loudness', and defines 'intonation' as involving 'the occurrence of recurring pitch patterns'. Crystal (1969, 5-6) similarly identifies prosody with the psychological attributes of 'pitch, loudness and duration', which have a primary relationship with 'fundamental frequency, amplitude, and time', then defines intonation as a 'conflation of different prosodic systems of pitch contrasts', and stress as 'variations in the loudness parameter'.

[13] Raschellà (2007, 356) has recently concluded that 'the presence of distinctive tonal accents in medieval Icelandic appears theoretically possible and tenable but not safely demonstrable'. See also, e.g., Bruce and Hermans (1999, 605-606). For an account of focalising emphasis in Swedish, see Gårding (1998 122-23).

Blakemore 1994). The potential problems caused by this implication of 'absurdity' or fault have been explored in contexts such as Language Analysis for the Determination of Origin (LADO) interviews with asylum seekers, where 'echoes may also be treated as repair indicators indicating a problem with the content of prior talk' (Channon, Foulkes and Walker 2018, 162). Both repetitious answers and questions therefore seem to have the capacity to go beyond communicating confirmation, instead coding 'an assertion', in the terms of Enfield *et al*. (2019, 289), with potentially disruptive or challenging effects.

In light of the general ambiguity and wide-ranging implications of echo responses, as understood across these various fields of study, *Skírnismál*'s cross-speaker repetitions may be understood as potentially functioning on multiple levels. They may signal confirmation, unsettle, and/or provoke. Given the characters' tendency to overtly challenge the good sense or propriety of demands made upon them, repetitions may in particular serve to disconcert and seed doubt. Any given performer could choose how to deliver each echo-response, inflecting their delivery through intonation, gesture and physical stance, in order to signal a certain kind of attitude.

Forms of Cross-Speaker Repetition in *Skírnismál*

The importance of repetition in *Skírnismál* has previously been appreciated. Much analysis has focused on the recurrence of key words, specifically *munr* ('desire', 'longing', 'pleasure'). Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason observe that 'Sömu orð koma aftur og aftur og verða eins konar leiðarminni' ('[t]he same words come up again and again and become a kind of leitmotif') (2014, 187), pointing to *munr* in stanzas 4, 5, 20, 24, 26, 35 and 40. Larrington has dwelt at length on the way that *munr* forms a site of contestation in the poem, used with reference to Freyr, Gerðr and Skírnir and implicating highly charged issues of gendered desire (1992, 7; see also Motz 1981, 128-9). These dynamics of desire are foregrounded particularly strongly in Skírnir's articulation of his *munr* colliding with Gerðr's in the penultimate stanza of his curse-like diatribe across sts 25-36 (see Orton 1989; Harris 2002). His use of the noun here is couched in close verbal and syntactic self-repetition, as he declares Gerðr will be given only goat's urine to drink:

> œðri drykkju
> fá þú aldregi,
> mær, at þínum munum,
> mær, at minum munom.
>
> [...] you will never get a better drink,
> girl, to your desire,
> girl, to my desire.

Like the rest of Skírnir's 'curse', this stanza is composed in *galdralag* ('incantation metre', according to Snorri Sturluson), which tends to modify *ljóðaháttr* such that the third line of a stanza 'is duplicated nearly exactly by an additional line', which 'repeats the preceding line in

structure and vocabulary' (Youngberg 1967, 29; see also Fulk, 2016, 261).[14] This metre facilitates Skírnir's sequence of 'horrid repetitions' (Dronke 1997, 396), which include 'kranga kosta laus,/ kranga kosta vǫn' ('stagger with no choice/ stagger lacking choice', st. 30 ll. 6-7), 'gambantein at geta/ gambantein ek gat*'* ('a wand of power to get / a wand of power I got', st. 32 ll. 3-4), and, in a doubly repetitious stanza:

> […] hvé ek fyrirbýð,
> hvé ek fyrirbanna
> manna glaum mani,
> manna nyt mani.
>
> […] how I forbid, how I deny, the pleasure of men to the girl, the use of men to the girl.

Finally, Skírnir closes his long monologue with a statement of linguistic power wielded absolutely, in his reference to runes:

> […] svá ek þat af ríst
> sem ek þat á reist,
> ef gørask þarfar þess.
>
> So I can hack that away,
> the same that I hack in,
> if a cause presents itself.

Before he reaches this point, Skírnir has already laid the groundwork for this ultimate assertion of total inscriptive control. Over the course of the poem so far, he has insistently demonstrated his skill in returning to and revising his own declarations. Skírnir's repetitious tirade is therefore all the more striking for its situation amid the delicate arrangement of cross-speaker repetitions which have preceded the episode and which follow it. In his monologue, he creates a a kind of discursive echo chamber, monopolising the reproduction of his own language. Before and after his rant, however, interpersonal tensions are signalled through identical language shared across conversational turns. Skírnir's extended monologue breaks this pattern, and, as will be seen, when echoing replies return, they are not quite the same.

The poem's wider interest in intimidation and the exertion of control is evident in the consistent use of imperatives, employed by Skaði to Skírnir (st. 1), Skírnir to Freyr (sts 3, 8), Skírnir to the herdsman (st. 11), Gerðr to her serving-maid (st. 15), and Freyr to Skírnir (st. 41). Although Skírnir is the first to echo the terms of a request in replying to Skaði, he is only the first of a sequence of characters who adapt the commanding language of a previous speaker. Research into the modern use of echo-patterns in conversation, outlined above, can help here in understanding what may be happening when the selective repetitions occur. As seen, Skírnir initiates the pattern with his retort to Skaði (sts 1-2), replicating her 'heightened' and 'archaic' language about Freyr (Dronke 1997, 387). He can certainly be understood as staking a claim

[14] Snorri Sturluson: *Edda: Háttatal*, ed. Faulkes (1991, 39), trans. by Faulkes (1987), 220.

to ‘independent interest’ over Skaði’s proposition (in the terms of Enfield *et al*.), and simultaneously makes an implicit claim to a superior understanding of the situation, when he observes that following her instructions will lead to ‘[i]llra orða’ (‘hostile words’, st. 2 l. 1) from Freyr, rather than success. Skírnir immediately illustrates his reliance on his own skills of perception, discernment and judgement, not conflating his own agency with those who direct him (see McMahon 2017, 124-5). He takes up an ‘orthogonal’ stance relative to Skaði’s utterance, neither fully dismissive or complicit, but rather negotiating his own middle-path. When he does address Freyr, he follows the spirit rather than the letter of her advice, adopting a softer, more deferential and tentative approach (Dronke, 287), and addressing Freyr as ‘fólkvaldi goða’ (‘leader of the gods’, st. 3 l. 2) and ‘minn dróttinn’ (‘my lord’, st. 3 l. 6).

A micro-negotiation then ensues between Freyr and Skírnir, unfolding delicately through a succession of subtly repetitious and contrastive utterances. Freyr addresses him as ‘seggr enn ungi’ (‘young sir’, st. 4 l. 2), but in the next stanza, Skírnir shrugs off this association with youth (and possibly lower status), stressing ‘ungir saman/ várom’ (‘we were young together’, st. 5.3). He thereby asserts both the past nature of his youth and the consistency between his age and Freyr’s, undermining the distinction Freyr has tried to instate.[15] Skírnir and Freyr’s repetition of the word ‘dagr’ (‘day’) can also be found to signal tension – Skírnir attempts to use it as a point of connection with Freyr (perhaps appropriately, if Skírnir’s potential symbolic identity as a ray of light is salient to this exchange), asking why he sits alone ‘um daga’ (‘in the day’, st. 3.6), and calling him to remember that they were both ‘ungir saman […] í árdaga’ (‘young together the old days’, st. 5 l. 5). In between these stanzas, Freyr protests that while the sun illuminates ‘alla daga’ (st. 4 l. 5), it does not reveal ‘[s]ínom munom’ (‘[his] desire’, st. 4.6), which is, for now, kept hidden from Skírnir. More forcefully, when Freyr then reveals the nature of his longing for Gerðr, he says that she is more to his liking than to any man ‘ungom í ardaga’ (‘young in the old days’, st. 7.3). These are the quietest of echoes, involving single words (or parts of compounds) and phrases some distance apart, but though they are unobtrusive, they nonetheless imply low-level tensions affecting Freyr and Skírnir’s relation to each other and the level of significance they attach to their shared experience. The significance of the shared language might conceivably be highlighted through decisions made by individual performers, exploiting the key variables of intonation (‘fundamental frequency, intensity, duration, and spectral characteristics’; see Hirst and Albert Di Cristo 1998, 6), as well as gesture.

In the immediate wake of these understated tussles over individual words and phrases, Skírnir demands to be given the magical horse and sword, and Freyr indulges in a far more elaborate echo. Copying Skírnir’s elevated language almost exactly, Freyr replies with a five-line reiteration of the items and their properties, but replaces Skírnir’s final line, which originally described the sword fighting ‘við iǫtna ætt’ (‘against the giant’s kind’, st. 8 l. 6):

Freyr kvað:
“Mar ek þér þann gef,
er þik um myrkvan berr

[15] Brian McMahon has previously noticed Skírnir’s dismissal of Freyr’s effort at distinction here (2017, 127). Skírnir later transposes this adjective onto Gerðr, describing her as ‘unga mans’ (‘young girl’, 11 l. 5).

vísan vafrloga,
ok þat sverð,
er sjálft mun vegask,
ef sá er horskr, er hefir.” (st. 9)

> Freyr said: ‘I’ll give you that horse which will bear you through the dark, directing, flickering flame, and that sword which will fight by itself, if he who wields it is wise.’

McMahon has helpfully suggested a comparison here with the call-and-response structure of legally binding declarations in saga contexts, and further notes that Freyr’s conditional reframing of Skírnir’s speech (‘[...] if he who wields it is wise’) seems to continue their ‘subtextual power dynamic — ostensibly unequal, but in fact seeking self-advancement from the other’ (McMahon 2017, 127). Freyr can be understood as teasing or rebuking Skírnir for the confidence he has placed in the sword. He locates the responsibility for success with Skírnir, not with the weapon, and his utterance can be understood as a gentle checking of confidence, a bolstering of resolve, or an outright challenge. Again, the text permits a variety of possible interpretations in performance, and furthermore, selective repetition again seems to accompany the implicit assertion from the second speaker of a new, independent claim over what is being discussed, based on personal knowledge or understanding.

So far, both of the extended echoes in the poem have followed a request or command, and both make a claim about an anticipated future, which the echoing speaker suggests they understand more fully than the initial speaker. Skírnir challenges the wisdom of Skaði’s plan, in a manner which suggests his superior ability to predict Freyr’s response, implicitly based on his more developed understanding of Freyr. Freyr asserts a superior understanding of the sword’s abilities, and simultaneously indicates the uncertain nature of Skírnir’s wisdom. Realms start to emerge as crucial in this poem not only in the sense of physical domains of influence and socio-political entities (like *Iötunheima*, the ‘Giant Realms’, in st. 40 ll. 4-5), but as individual domains of understanding, in the sense of the ‘special realm[s] of knowledge’ which Enfield *et al*. see as often implied by use of selective repetition in conversation.

These patterns continue when Skírnir lands in his destination and demands that a herdsman, sitting on a mound, tell him how he may ‘come to have words’ (‘at annspilli/ komumk’ st. 11 ll. 4-5) with the young woman past ‘greyjum Gymis (‘the dogs of Gymir’, st. 11 l. 6). In response the herdsman partially adopts Skírnir’s lexis: ‘anspillis vanr/ þú skalt æ vera’ (‘you will never have hope of words’, st. 12 ll. 4-5) with the ‘meyiar Gymis’ (‘daughter of Gymir’, st. 12 l .5). Selective repetition is again used to signal a claim to superior knowledge, specifically to a more accurate understanding of future events. As becomes clear in this instance, though, such claims do not always turn out to be true. Skírnir does indeed come to have words with Gerðr. When he does, cross-speaker echo continues to play a crucial role in the negotiation of requests and commands, while rival expectations about the future reach a new pitch of intensity and discord.

***Skírnismál*’s Reverberative Mode**

At the same time as these intricate verbal dynamics unfold, the text describes multiple instances of resonating or self-replicating physical influence or force, emanating outwards and impacting others. With the threat of a subjugating act at its centre ('Tamsvendi ek þik drep', 'I hit you with a taming wand', st. 26 l. 1), *Skírnismál* is a text very much concerned with the exertion of physical power, in a manner which overlaps with its representations of verbal power. Both are presented as operating according to a model of resonance – the 'reinforcement or prolongation of sound by reflection or by the synchronous vibration of a surrounding space or a neighbouring object' (OED). Complex dynamics of mediation are implicated throughout, seen not least in the reliance of Freyr on Skírnir as a 'proxy' and intermediary (see McMahon 2017, 121-32), and Gerðr's less developed reliance on her serving-maid, whom she instructs to invite Skírnir inside (st. 16).

The first sustained exploration of the spread of physical influence in the poem can be found, not without some irony, in Freyr's description of Gerðr moving amid her father's courts:

armar lýstu,
en af þaðan
allt lopt ok lǫgr. (st. 6.4-6)

'her arms shone, and from there, all the sky and water.'

Gerðr is here presented as inflecting her surroundings, providing a point of origin for their illumination, although not necessarily consciously.[16] Larrington has stressed that this is not an unmediated representation of Gerðr: what the audience sees here is Freyr's image of her as an 'object of desire' (1992, 9). Nonetheless, it is significant that at this early stage in the poem, the audience is offered a depiction of Gerðr's influence as extending beyond her physical form.

A far more violent kind of physical resonance then accompanies Skírnir's arrival in Gymir's courts. Here, it is Gerðr who mediates the scene:

"Hvat er þat hlym hlymja,
er ek heyri nú til
ossom rǫnnom í?
Jörð bifask,
en allir fyrir
skjálfa garðar Gymis." (st. 14)

'What's that clash of clashes I hear now in our buildings? The earth trembles, and all Gymir's courts shake before it.'

The process of amplification here is distinctly aural in nature. The word 'hlymr' ('clash') is doubled to form a self-repeating genitive noun phrase in the first line. This effect is heightened

[16] Individuals are said to affect their environments in similar ways elsewhere in the *Edda*, including *Brot af* Sigurðarkviðu, st. 10, and *Baldrs draumar*, st. 3 (see Meletinsky 1986, 24). The phrase 'af þaðan' ('from there') is used also to describe the earthquakes which vibrate out from Loki's tortured body in the prose passage at the end of *Lokasenna*.

in the Codex Regius text, where Gerðr even says she hears it 'clashing' ('ek hlymja heyri', st. 14 l. 2), creating a reverberating polyptoton across two lines. The second half of the stanza describes a chain reaction, from shaking earth to shaking buildings, and if the allegorical sense of Gerðr's name is at all active here, she may even be punning on *garðr* and *jörð*. If so, her identity is briefly connected with the land around her, shaken by Skírnir's arrival.

These two passages fall loosely within the category of 'reported circumstances', a dramatic quality noted by Dronke (1997, 395) through which developments are described through direct speech for the benefit of a listening audience.[17] The characters observing these particular reported circumstances seem to experience a heightened sensitivity to the resonant actions of others, whether this rippling realm of influence is visual (Gerðr's) or aggressively aural (Skírnir's). The audience is thereby provided with a framework for interpersonal experiences, by which physical reverberations and reflections issue from a single point of origin, out into the proximate environment. At the same time, a similar kind of logic seems to underpin verbal events in the poem, which can ripple outwards into subsequent utterances.

Fighting over the Future: Gerðr and Skírnir

Upon his arrival, Skírnir turns the full force of his illocutionary power upon Gerðr. Over the course of their exchange, Gerðr both obliges in the game of re-working the language of her interlocutor, and briefly attempts to reject it altogether, prompting Skírnir to embark on his self-repetitious tirade. It is Skírnir who speaks in reactive echoes at first:

Gerðr kvað: "[…]
Hvat er þat álfa
né ása sona
né víssa vana;
Hví þú einn um komt
eikinn fúr yfir
ór salkynni at sjá."

Skírnir kvað:
"Emkat ek álfa
né ása sona
né víssa vana;
þó eke inn um komk
eikinn fúr yfir
yður salkynni at sjá. […]"

Gerðr said '[…] What son of elves is that, or son of Æsir, or wise Vanir? Why have you come alone, across the terrible fire, to see our family?' Skírnir said: 'I am not a son

[17] Gunnell further notes that a great number of 'direct actions and place-settings' are implied by the dialogue of *Skírnismál* (2006, 241).

of elves, nor son of Æsir, nor wise Vanir, though I have come alone, across the terrible fire, to see your family.'

Skírnir gives nothing away. As Dronke notes, 'his formal repetition of Gerðr's words with a negative implies an apotropaic refusal to identify himself' (1999, 391) – his utterance 'points to silence', to borrow the words of Sundararajan, who explores the functioning of 'reflective listening' in therapeutic discourse as a device which suggestively 'points to' what has not been said, 'in other words, silence' (1995, 262). In developing this interpretation, Sundararajan builds on Sallis's theoretical concept of hearing 'echo' as a phenomenon by which 'one then experiences silence, not as the mere opposite of speech or sound but as the open space of the voice' (1990, 5). In this specific manoeuvre by Skírnir, McMahon sees an effort to preserve 'plausible deniability' on behalf of both Freyr and Skírnir, while simultaneously depriving Gerðr of the increase in power which would come with knowing his identity (2017, 128-9). Skírnir introduces no new information to answer Gerðr's 'what' and 'why' questions, clarifying only what Gerðr already knows – that he has come to visit her household – and in doing so activating a range of possible implications from confirmatory to menacing. He does not re-frame her utterance to make any direct claim as to how future events will unfold, in the manner of the previous echoing retorts of the poem, but through his omissions the unspoken purpose of his visit hangs in the air.

Skírnir moves directly on to his offer of 'epli ellilyfs' ('age-healing apples', st. 19 l. 1), which he says he will exchange with Gerðr for 'frið' ('peace', st. 19 l. 4), if she will say Freyr is 'óleiðastan lifa' ('the least loathsome that lives', st. 19 l. 6).[18] Gerðr rejects these terms, and claims she will not accept the apples, 'at mannskis munom' ('at any man's desire', st 20 l. 3). When forming her retort, she quickly fires back a verbatim repetition of the phrase 'epli ellilyfs' (st. 20.1), placing this again in the first line of the strophe, before glossing and re-framing Skírnir's statement in a way which suggests the stakes are higher and more concrete than he is admitting: she and Freyr will not 'byggiom bæði saman' ('both live together', st. 20 l. 6). She thus extrapolates from Skírnir's reference to the more abstract idea of 'frið' ('peace') and his avowed effort to extract a compliment of Freyr. She adopts a similar strategy when Skírnir offers the ring Draupnir:

Skírnir kvað:

"Baug ek þér þá gef,
þann er brenndr var
með ungum Óðins syni;
átta eru jafnhǫfgir,
er af drjúpa
ina níundu hverja nótt."

Gerðr kvað:

"Baug ek þikkak,

[18] Amended from 'epli ellifu' by the editors, following Dronke.

þótt brenndr sé
með ungum Óðins syni;
era mér gulls vant
í gǫrðom Gymis,
at deila fé fǫður.' (sts 21-22)

Skírnir said: 'I'll give you the ring, then, that was burnt with Óðinn's young son: eight are the just-as-heavy ones, which drop from it every ninth night.' Gerðr said: 'I'll not take a ring, though it was burnt with Óðinn's young son: I've no want of gold in Gymir's courts, distributing my father's wealth.'

Gerðr registers the ring's value in the terms Skírnir has used, but again provides a different context, drawing the centre of the discussion back to issues of living arrangements and her place in the household. She uses selective echo to evaluate the gift differently, from her own perspective, making another kind of claim to heightened understanding.

It is at this stage that Skírnir replaces his gifts with a threat:

Skírnir kvað:
"Sér þú þenna mækki, mær,
mjóvan, málfán,
er ek hefi í hendi hér? […]

Skírnir said, 'Do you see this sword, girl, slender, inlaid, that I hold here in my hand? […]'

Gerðr now breaks from the pattern that her conversation with Skírnir has so far followed. Rather than repeating parts of Skírnir's utterance and offering a new interpretation of the rest, she skips this step and begins with the gloss – what Skírnir is doing is *ánauð* ('coercion' or 'oppression').

Gerðr kvað:
"Ánauð þola
ek vil aldregi
at mannskis munom;
þó ek hins get,
ef it Gymir finnisk
vígs ótrauðir,
at ykkr vega tíði."

Gerðr said: 'Endure coercion I never will, to any person's desire – but I guess this: if you and Gymir meet, eager for fighting, carnage will befall you both.'

Gerðr furthermore repeats one of her own previous utterances in this strophe, calling back to her claim that she will not accept age-healing apples 'at mannskis munom' ('at any man's

desire') in st. 20, linking the threat of the sword with the gift of apples, and perhaps signalling that both are *ánauð,* or else that Skírnir has now crossed a line and moved from bartering into more morally suspect territory. Gerðr ends this strophe with a threatening prediction of destruction, in another act of re-framing.

Skírnir now abandons the dance of cross-speaker repetition, and indeed the pattern of conversational turn-taking. He starts to repeat himself extravagantly. He asks again, verbatim, 'Do you see this sword, girl, slender, inlaid, that I hold here in my hand?' (st. 25 ll. 1-3). His catalogue of deprivations and ironic excesses begins. In this, the *galdralag* portion of the poem, he often uses self-repetition to imply an escalation, intensification or totalisation. Gerðr will crawl 'kosta laus' ('choiceless') and, intensified, 'kosta vǫn' ('choice-lacking', 30.6-7). Skírnir pairs intention and implementation when he describes himself going to a wood, 'gambantein at geta,/ gambantein ek gat' ('a wand of power to get, / a wand of power I got, st. 32 ll. 3-4). When he claims he will deny 'manna glaum mani/ manna nyt mani' ('the delight of men to this girl,/ the profit of men to this girl, 34 ll. 7-8), there is a suggestion of development across the two threats, whether 'nyt' signals the profit of children or a more abstract kind of profit. He asserts Gerðr will get no better drink 'mær, at þínom munom,/ mær, at mínom munom'('girl, to your desire/ girl, to my desire', st. 35 ll. 9-10), accentuating the primacy and dominance of his *munr*. In his curse, Skírnir thus demonstrates how repetition can be harnessed to reinforce and, within a kind of closed circuit, complete and fulfil previous utterances.

In response, Gerðr settles into a more muted kind of repetitive mode. She acquiesces to Skírnir's demands through a loose form of parallelism, by adopting a Skírnir's tendency to interject direct address, seen in the threat '[…] ek þik temja mun/ mær, at mínum munum' ('I'll make you tame, girl, to my desire', st. 26 ll. 2-3). Gerðr offers 'Heill ver þú nú heldr, sveinn,/ ok tak við hrímkálki' ('Be welcome now, boy, and take the frosted cup', st. 37 ll. 1-2).[19] Her final speech is repetitious only in the quietest of ways:

> 'Barri heitir,
> er við bæði vitum,
> lundr lognfara;
> en ept nætr níu
> þar mun Njarðar syni
> Gerðr unna gamans.' (st. 39)
>
> 'Barri it's called, which we two both know, a grove becalmed; and after nine nights, there to Niǫrðr's son, Gerðr will grant pleasure.'

She here echoes Skírnir's immediately prior demand to 'know all' of his 'errand' '(Ørindi [...] öll vita', st. 38 l. 2) by referring to a place 'er vit bæði vitum' ('which we both know', st. 39 l. 2). She does not reproduce Skírnir's language of intention ('nær þú á þingi/ munt inum þroska [...]', 'when at a meeting/ you mean to favour [...]'. st. 38 ll. 4-6), instead referring more neutrally to her and Skírnir's (or possibly her and Freyr's) shared geographic knowledge of

[19] Dronke finds options for substantial intonational flexibility here: '[g]ently, a little wearily, ironically perhaps – a player playing her part would have a choice of attitudes – she welcomes Skirnir (1997, 395).

Barri, thereby giving away very little of her personal intentions. A slight negotiation of the power balance is implied, without constituting overt resistance.

In the poem's penultimate stanza, Skírnir's final utterance, he responds to Freyr's demand to know what he has achieved in the Giants' realm, 'þíns eða míns munar' ('to your desire or mine', st. 40 l. 6). He responds purely by replicating Gerðr's final stanza, repeating all five lines of her proposal verbatim. In this regard, his answer is similar to his initial answer to Gerðr; there is no overt re-framing, and instead only maximal replication. This piece of repetition, like others in *Skírnismál*, is mediated through heavy abbreviation in the Codex Regius.[20] The manuscript's omission of the abbreviation 'b.' for 'bæði' or 'báðir' may reflect some anxiety as to which grammatical form should be used, and when editors expand these lines their decision is significant. Gerðr uses a neutral 'bæði', but Neckel and Kuhn, and Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason, select the masculine 'báðir' when the word is in Skírnir's mouth.[21] This compromises the element of direct quotation, as the grove is now one that Skírnir and Freyr both know, as opposed to Gerðr and Skírnir (or Gerðr and Freyr, if she expects her message to be conveyed exactly). Dronke preserves the neuter 'bæði', heightening the sense that Skírnir is deliberately copying Gerðr's speech.[22] In any case, and particularly if Dronke is correct, Skírnir's utterance offers possibilities for mimicry; the difference of gender identity between Gerðr and Skírnir, highlighted in the 'bæði'/ 'báðir' problem, may even introduce an option of outright imitation or parody for Skírnir. Regardless, this stanza makes a final, emphatic claim for the re-orientating and disconcerting potential of echo. An utterance which may been taken as Gerðr's effort to restore 'a certain dignity and decorum' (Dronke 1999, 414) is flourished by Skírnir as a synecdochic sign of his triumph. It is a procured object in itself. Gerðr has at times tried to exert linguistic agency against Skírnir – glossing and re-interpreting his statements, copying his mode of echo-answers and abruptly trying to break the pattern (st. 24) – but ultimately her language is subsumed within Skírnir and Freyr's exchange. At the same time, Skírnir himself uses verbatim verbal repetition in a manner which leaves much unsaid and 'points to silence' – his replication of Gerðr's stanza allows him to avoid Freyr's question about whose *munr* Skírnir has obtained.

Conclusion

Echo responses carry a heavy weight of implicature in *Skírnismál*. On multiple occasions, they are used to subtly signal a claim to superior understanding, without overt assertion of this claim. In this regard, they often point to what is *not* said. They sometimes constitute a kind of tautology, pointing to what remains unclarified — as when Skírnir refuses to specify his identity and simply asserts he is not any of the beings that Gerðr has named (st. 18), quoting her closely.[23] He obliquely gestures to knowledge Gerðr lacks. On other occasions, the nature of the echo-speaker's claim to heightened comprehension of the relevant issue is made rather

[20] See Dronke (1999, 385). This stanza is not preserved in AM 748 I 4to.
[21] Neckel and Kuhn (1962, 77).
[22] Dronke (1999, 385).
[23] I draw again here on Sundararajan's arguments (1981, 259) regarding 'reflective listening' as having the potential 'to function as a therapeutic tautology, as a "negative discourse" which intends to "speak but say nothing".

clearer, as when Skírnir challenges the good sense of Skaði's suggested approach in managing Freyr. He anticipates '[i]llra orða' ('wicked words', st. 2 l. 1) where she fails to, and Skírnir would indeed know all about 'wicked words', directing the full force of these at Gerðr. Outside of Skírnir's curse, echo seems to function as both a subversive and a stabilising device. It can be used to articulate considerable depths of hostility (see, for instance, the herdsman's retort to Skírnir in st. 12), but also leave a great deal unsaid. It creates space for further differentiations of stance and attitude in dramatic performance, through nuances of voice quality, rhythm, pitch, and other aspects of intonation, as well as gesture and movement. It is here that the dramatic suggestiveness of the device lies.

The poet of *Skírnismál* takes particular delight in structuring conversational discourse around echo, in a manner concordant with a broader interest in fraught power dynamics and careful negotiation of social hierarchies, previously noted by many critics. Mitchell (1983) and McMahon (2017, 121-33) have observed how the poem depicts individuals acting both on the part of the communities they represent, and on behalf of their own personal motivations. Conflicts such as these are continually played out in the texture of the exchanges themselves, as selective repetition allows interlocutors to bind themselves together in mutually intelligible terms even as they find points of detachment. In allowing for a variety of utterances which fall on a spectrum between acquiescence and resistance, the device is ideally suited to the interplay of individual, interpersonal and group desires, so pertinent to this narrative of social and personal discord, coercion and union.

All of these aspects come into sharper focus when the cross-speaker echoes are appreciated as a pattern and understood within a wider linguistic landscape. These echoes are also meaningfully contextualised by the reported action of *Skírnismál*, in which individuals intrude upon each other's environments, such as Freyr's halls, the herdsman's mound, the Giants' realm, Gymir's courts, Barri and, according to the prose introduction, *Hliðskjálf*. Attempted intrusion into, and domination of, others' space takes place on a physical level, just as it does on a verbal level, and moments in which characters report reverberating physical influence (sts 6, 14) accentuate this impression.[24] The imagined environment of the poem thus aligns with the speech habits of its characters. Individualsexert influence over those around them, and meet with both compliance and with echoes, discovering that their demands become alien, and potentially non-complicit, when voiced anew.

[24] Relatedly, discussing a wide range of texts with connections to performance, see Frog's theory of multimedial parallelism (2017).

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