

## *Eddu list*: The Emergence of Skaldic Pedagogy in Medieval Iceland

From the mid-twelfth century, when the metrical showpiece *Háttalykill* is said to have been composed, to the mid-fourteenth century, when Codex Wormianus was compiled, literary records enable us to trace the transformation of the oral art of skaldic composition into a literary ars poetica in which the parameters of the art form were progressively defined and described, and the rules of composition systematically set forth.<sup>1</sup> Halfway through this period, Snorri Sturluson composed his own key to metres, *Háttatal*, and wrote a treatise on skaldic diction (*Skáldskaparmál*), followed a generation later by his nephew, Óláfr Þórðarson, who wrote a treatise on rhetoric (the second part of which is known as *Málskrúðsfræði*) which sought to prove the underlying identity of Norse *skáldskapr* with Latin poetics. Together, and in their differences, Snorri's and Óláfr's works illuminate the way the discourse of poetics was being constituted during this dynamic period of Icelandic literary history, and how the pedagogic impulse of Latin textbooks was being taken up within the vernacular tradition.

Little is known about the traditional training of skalds or the theoretical discourse that enabled the cultivation and oral transmission of vernacular poetics. An abundance of vernacular technical terms describing traditional poetry appears to have sprung to the pens of both Snorri and Óláfr when they wrote their treatises, suggesting that the metalanguage of poetics was an established oral discourse. But it is only in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries when skaldic pedagogy moved into the schoolroom and explicit and sustained theorizing about the art of traditional poetry was written down that this lexical heritage surfaced. During the preceding centuries when the corpus of skaldic poetry was orally transmitted, new styles of composition would have been incorporated into the tradition, influenced by various foreign fashions. One example of this is the innovative adaptation of

1. A version of this article was first presented as a paper at the Ninth International Saga Conference in Akureyri in August 1994. In reworking it I have benefitted from suggestions made by Margaret Clunies Ross, Judith Jesch, Thomas Krömmelbein, Vésteinn Ólason, Gísli Sigurðsson, and Stephen Tranter, and I thank them for their generosity.

Continental rhythm in the *hrynhendr háttr* (Foote [1982] 1984, 252), which seems to have taken place during the eleventh century, probably under the influence of hymns and devotional verse (Turville-Petre 1976, xxxiii).

Although it is the aim of both Snorri and Óláfr to promote the vernacular tradition of versification, the influence of Continental learning is fundamental to both their works, more transparently so in Óláfr's work because of his declared dependence on the auctores of Latin scholarship. It was the developed models of learned literate discourse to which the Icelanders turned to theorize about their own vernacular tradition because it was this conceptual framework, instilled by literacy, that enabled the systematic setting out of metrical and rhetorical types and their detailed documentation and explication. In both theorists, however, a tension is evident between the description of oral tradition and the prescription inherent in an *ars poetica*. As they work to make the skaldic art literary, they both find themselves espousing a poetics that is often at odds with the corpus on which they draw for their demonstration of the traditional verbal art form (Ross 1987, 77). This is because the motivation for both Snorri and Óláfr is as much pedagogic as it is antiquarian, as a passage in *Skáldskaparmál*, addressed to young skalds, makes clear:

En þetta er nú at segia vngvum skaldvum, þeim er girnaz at nema mal skaldskapar ok heyja ser orþfiolþa með fornvm heitvm eþa girnaz þeir at kvna skilia þat, er hvlit er qveþit, þa skili hann þesa bok til froþleiks ok skemtvar, en ecki er at gleyma eþa osana sva þesar frasagnir, at taka or skaldskapinvm fornar kenningar, þær at hafvtskald hafa ser lika latit (Jónsson 1931, 86)

[But these things have now to be told to young poets who desire to learn the language of poetry and to furnish themselves with a wide vocabulary using traditional terms; or else they desire to be able to understand what is expressed obscurely. Then let such a one take this book as scholarly inquiry and entertainment. But these stories are not to be consigned to oblivion or demonstrated to be false, so as to deprive poetry of ancient kennings which major poets have been happy to use.] (Faulkes 1987, 64)

Through this statement (and in his elaboration of its theological aspects in the Prologue to the *Edda*), Snorri attempts to set up an intellectual environment for the continuing development of learned vernacular composition drawing on the tradition of skaldic diction, as well as for the continued appreciation of the traditional corpus. Both Snorri and Óláfr appear to have been directly involved in the schooling of Icelanders in this new, literary, *ars poetica*. Óláfr's treatise adapts the pedagogic tradition of Donatus and Priscian to an Icelandic environment, possibly to the school that he himself is mentioned as conducting (Tómasson 1988, 35).

The beginnings of the pedagogic current in skaldic poetics can be apprehended a century earlier in *Háttalykill*, whose name itself is a calque on the Latin *clavis metrica*, a didactic genre of the Latin classroom. A number of the verse-forms demonstrated in *Háttalykill* are modelled on foreign metres rather than on traditional Norse forms (Helgason and Holtsmark 1941, 118), and although the work is a demonstration of the sophistication of the traditional skaldic art, it

attempts to modernize it, and to show how the stylistic finesse of Latin poetry was not incompatible with the vernacular tradition (Holtmark 1961, 243). By the time the commentary to *Háttatal* was written, the process of adapting native poetics to a Latin protocol was significantly advanced, as is evidenced by the insistence on consistency of verseform throughout a stanza, the setting out of rules and licences, and the identification of metrical faults. Although both works champion the indigenous tradition, they also indicate the way in which native experiment went hand in hand with learned acquisition in the formulation of a Norse *ars poetica* (Foote [1982] 1984, 254).

*Háttalykill* (which is only extant in two late paper copies) is believed to have been composed in the 1140s by the Orkney earl Rognvaldr and the Icelandic poet Hallr Þórarinnsson. According to the description in chapter 81 of *Orkneyinga saga*, it was a joint composition and had five verses to demonstrate each metre, but being overlong, was cut down to a pair of verses per metre (though two later post-medieval texts of the saga say three). As the poem survives in later paper manuscripts, only two verses exist to demonstrate each of 41 metres. The matter of the poem, the enumeration of heroes from legendary figures to historic kings, is thoroughly vernacular, as the opening of the poem makes clear: “forn frœði lætk / framm of borin” [I shall present ancient knowledge] (Jónsson 1912–15, B1:487). Nevertheless, in its scheme, and in some of its elaborations, *Háttalykill* was clearly inspired by Latin models. The cultural milieu in which *Háttalykill* was composed appears to have been that of an enterprising and cosmopolitan court (Bibire 1988, 217), with a new aristocratic interest in ancient Norse culture developed in the context of the contemporary intellectual fashions of Continental Europe (Sørensen 1992, 279). It is also evidence of a new literate orientation in skaldic composition (Fidjestøl 1991, 63–69; Sørensen 1993, 35–36), towards a literary formulation of synthesized historical material, which involved abstracting traditional lore and reworking it with a new emphasis on metrical and literary form. The incidental comment in *Orkneyinga saga* “en þá þótti of langt kveðit” (Guðmundsson 1965, 185) is intriguing in this regard. If the poem originally demonstrated 41 metres, perhaps its length of 200 stanzas represented a literary achievement well suited to a literate milieu (in which the Latin centimetrum was an emulated genre), but did not prove conducive to memorization, which must still have been a significant (if not the principal) means of transmitting poetry in Scandinavia in the mid-twelfth century.

Snorri Sturluson would have been familiar with the new intellectual spirit of *Háttalykill* through his upbringing at Oddi, which was an important centre of learning in Iceland and had links with the Orkneys (Fidjestøl 1993, 48; Faulkes 1991, xviii–xix). His metrical tour de force, *Háttatal*, contains 102 stanzas and has been preserved in the four medieval manuscripts of his *Edda* intercalated with prose commentary presenting his theory of Norse versification. It is not clear when the commentary was added to the poem, though it is generally agreed that *Hátta-*

*tal* was the first part of the *Edda* to have been composed. That there is some disjunction between the verseforms and the poetic theory of the commentary is outlined by Faulkes (1991, x). Within the verse itself, there is mention of three praise poems followed by a fourth at stanza 69: “bjó ek kvæði . . . þrenn . . . fram skal in fjórða” [I made . . . three poems . . . Forward shall step the fourth] (Faulkes 1991, 69.1–5; trans. Faulkes 1987, 206), which is reiterated at stanza 95: “fluttak fjögur kvæði” [I delivered four poems] (Faulkes 1991, 95.3; trans. Faulkes 1987, 218). The prose commentary, however, refers to only three poems within *Háttatal* marked at stanza 31: “Nú hefr upp annat kvæði” [Here begins the second poem] (Faulkes 1991, 30.11; trans. Faulkes 1987, 186), and stanza 68: “Nú skal upp hefja it þriðja kvæði” [Now we shall begin the third poem] (Faulkes 1991, 67.14; trans. Faulkes 1987, 205). Although Snorri was almost certainly impressed by the Latin model of the centimetrum in his composition, it is interesting that his learned *tal* consists of three poems of 30, 35, and 37 stanzas respectively, perhaps indicating that this was the appropriate length for the ethnic category of the kvæði in Snorri’s view.

The early reception of the work suggests that the poem was regarded as a praise poem in its own right, though as a eulogy for Earl Skúli more so than for King Hákon (Nordal 1992, 62). Óláfr Þórðarson refers to *Háttatal* as a poem which Snorri had composed (Ólsen 1884, 96) as does the Uppsala manuscript: “háta tal er Snorri hevir ozt um hak[on] konung ok flvla hertug[a]” (Grape et al. 1962–77, 2:1). It may be that the introduction into Norse letters of the *clavis metrica* genre by Rognvaldr and Hallr provided Snorri with the initial inspiration to compose such a poem, but that the complex nature of the poetic tradition prompted him in the rest of the *Edda* to a fuller elaboration of its rhythms, diction, and mythological world of reference once it was complete.

It is interesting to note — if the received chronology of the composition of Snorri’s *Edda* is correct — that the first phase of his work on traditional poetry depended entirely on his own compositions, and that the apparent intention of the verse composition of *Háttatal* was that of bravura performance rather than antiquarian documentation. In the writing of the prose commentary there is some inclination to quote others’ compositions but the impulse is weak,<sup>2</sup> in line with the thrust of the work towards renovation of the metrical tradition (and the specific injunction against regarding certain traditional metres as models) and, to some extent, innovation, in the form of new metres (for example, st. 73 — “nýi háttr”). In *Skáldskaparmál*, however, the mode of argumentation is predicated on the citation of traditional poetic expressions, and quotation is the prevailing style.

It appears, then, that the shift in focus from metrical form (*Háttatal*) to diction (*Skáldskaparmál*) involved a significant change in attitude towards tradition

2. Quotation occurs in the enumeration of poetic licences, with brief quotations from the verse of Þórarinn máhliðingr (8.22–3) and Refr (8.34–7), and in the discussion of *alhent* with reference to a verse by Bishop Klœingr (44.15–8). Ascription of metres to their inventors (*skjálfhenda* to Veili 35.11) or to celebrated poets who used them (Ragnarr loðbrók st. 54, Torf-Einarr st. 55, Egill st. 56, Fleinn st. 57, Bragi st. 58, Hqðr st. 79, Bálkr [?] st. 97, Starkaðr st. 98) is also found.

on Snorri's part. The new literary stage on which the skaldic art was being presented seems to have inspired a need to formalize and make consistent its metrical structure, but not to overhaul its mode of expression nor its traditional sphere of semantic reference, which Snorri saw as inscribing the world view of pre-Christian Scandinavian culture (Ross 1987, 174). The diction of skaldic poetry needed classification and interpretation — a kind of systemization that made it intelligible to thirteenth-century Icelanders — but Snorri was insistent that the semantic and cultural value of the ancient poetic diction not be taken away from the skaldic art. If, as I am arguing, an important impact of literacy on the reworkings of traditional verbal art forms was their systemization, we may see in Snorri's work systemization of formal structure on one hand, with the aim of providing prescriptive models in line with foreign literate genres, and, on the other, of semantic reference with the aim of rendering poetic diction intelligible and therefore generative of new compositions. Having begun his *ars poetica* with the dialectic proposition — “Hvat eru hættir skáldskapar? . . . Setning, leyfi, fyrirboðning” [What kinds of verse-form are there in poetry? . . . Those that are in accordance with rule, or licence, or prohibition] (Faulkes 1991, 0.4–7; trans. Faulkes 1987, 165) — Snorri seems to have moved beyond the rigid paradigms of the Latin schoolroom to explore the nature of the vernacular tradition in a more heuristic manner.

In *Skáldskaparmál*, the memorized stock of oral poetry provided Snorri with copious examples to describe and explain the language of skaldic poetry, and he was not moved to censure or prescription in relation to traditional praxis. On the contrary, precedent is of fundamental importance in Snorri's figuring of the skaldic art in *Skáldskaparmál*, with ancient poets accorded authority and more recent poets expected to make judicious use of innovation:

En þessi heiti hafa sva farit sem ænvr ok keningar, at hin yngri skald hafa ort eptir dæmvm hina gomlv skalda, sva sem stoð iþeira qvæþvm, en sett siþan vt i halfor þær, er þeim þotto likar við þat, er fyr var ort, sva sem vatnit er sænvm, en ain vatninv, en lækr ani. Þvi er þat kallat nýgervingar allt, er vt er sett heiti lengra, en fyr finz, ok þickir þat vel allt, er með likindvm ferr ok epli. (Jónsson 1931, 121)

[But it has happened with these terms and kennings as with others, that the more recent poets have composed in imitation of the ancient poets, as things were in their poems, and then extended into areas that they thought similar to what had earlier been included in poetry, as lake is to sea, and river to lake, and stream to river. This is therefore called allegory when terminology is extended further in meaning than there are earlier examples of, and this is all considered acceptable when it is in accordance with probability and the nature of things.] (Faulkes 1987, 95)

When the same rhetorical features are discussed in *Háttatal* (6.9–16), *nýgervingar* are not defined with reference to historical precedent, but formally, in terms of metaphorical consistency within the unit of the stanza. The emphasis is on the identification of rhetorical faults and their proscription rather than on the traditional pattern of kenning formation according to which new poetic expressions may be generated.

Þat eru nýgjörvingar at kalla sverðit orm ok kenna rétt . . . Þá þykkja nýgjörvingar vel kveðnar ef þat mál er upp er tekit haldi of alla vísulengð. En ef sverð er ormr kallaðr, en síðan fiskr eða vöndr eða annan veg breytt, þat kalla menn nykrat, ok þykkir þat spilla. (Faulkes 1991, 6.9–16)

[This is allegory to call a sword a worm and use an appropriate determinant . . . Allegory is held to be well composed if the idea that is taken up is maintained throughout the stanza. But if a sword is called a worm, and then a fish or a wand or varied in some other way, this is called a monstrosity, and it is considered a defect.] (Faulkes 1987, 170)

A similar shift from proscription to description between *Háttatal* and *Skáldskaparmál* is apparent in the treatment of kenning construction. In *Háttatal* Snorri identifies the ninth licence in the new ars poetica as follows:

Níunda er þat at reka til hinnar fimtu kenningar, er ór ættum er ef lengra er rekit; en þótt þat finnisk í fornskálda verka, þá látum vér þat nú ónýtt. (Faulkes 1991, 8.29–31)

[The ninth is extending a kenning to a fifth determinant, but it is out of proportion if it is extended further. Even if it can be found in the works of ancient poets, we no longer tolerate it.] (Faulkes 1987, 172)

In *Háttatal*, Snorri's prescriptions are predominantly concerned with quantity and proportion, and it is in this context that he passes judgement on kenning formation. The degree to which Snorri aimed to formalize the skaldic tradition and fix its limits in *Háttatal* is indicated by his curious definition of number at the beginning of the commentary:

Hvat er tala setningar háttanna?

Þrenn.

Hver?

Sú er ein tala, hversu margir hættir hafa fundizk í kveðskap höfuðskálda. Önnur tala er þat, hversu mörg vísuorð standa í einu eyrindi í hverjum hætti. In þriðia tala er sú, hversu margar samstöfur eru settar í hvert vísuorð í hverjum hætti. (Faulkes 1991, 0.16–22)

[What kinds of number are there in the rule for verse-forms?

Three.

What are they?

One kind of number is how many verse-forms are found in the poetry of major poets. The second is how many lines there are in one stanza in each verse-form. The third is how many syllables are put in each line in each verse-form.] (Faulkes 1987, 165)

The first number, which relates to enumerating historical precedents, is of a very different kind to the latter two, which simply count structural features. It is presumably only after Snorri has devised his own *tal* of Norse metrical forms that the first number can be fixed.

In *Skáldskaparmál*, on the other hand, Snorri's approach is to exemplify the multitude of ways poets have expressed themselves, rather than the limited number of ways in which he asserts rhythm can be correctly composed.

Nv skal lata heyra dæmin, hvernig hæfsvöskaldin hafa latit ser lika at yrkia eptir þesvm heitvm ok keningvm (Jónsson 1931, 88)

[We shall present further examples of how major poets have found it fitting to compose using these kinds of terms and kennings] (Faulkes 1987, 66)

Snorri's positive attitude to tradition and his lack of prescription in *Skáldskaparmál* is underlined by the formulation: "Avllvm þesvm keningvm er marga lvnð breytt" [All these kennings are varied in many ways] (Jónsson 1931, 150, 126; trans. Faulkes 1987, 118, 99). His enthusiasm for traditional diction implies a well-versed interpreter of kennings, one who tolerates, and even enjoys, ambiguity:

Þar koma saman keningar, ok verþr sa at skilia af stoð, er ræðr skaldskapinn, vm hvarn qveþit er konvngin . . . EN sv kening . . . at kalla Krist konvng manna, þa kening ma eiga hverr konvng. (Jónsson 1931, 160)

[Here kennings become ambiguous, and the person interpreting the poetry has to distinguish from the context which king is being referred to . . . And the kenning . . . calling Christ king of men, this kenning can be applied to any king.] (Faulkes 1987, 127–28)

It is the ambiguous and recondite nature of skaldic diction that will sound discordantly for clerical poets of the next century, who, as we shall see, followed the vogue for metrical rules that Snorri promoted, but moved away from the tradition of skaldic circumlocution in their own praxis.

If we read between the lines of Snorri's *Edda*, we might paraphrase his poetic manifesto thus: to practise the skaldic art a poet needed to have an extensive repertoire of poetic circumlocutions and an understanding of the myths they referred to as well as a knowledge of dróttkvætt and its approved variants, to be employed in the standardized versions set out in the first part of *Háttatal* and with regard to the list of licences enumerated there. Metrical competence, then, depended on mastering a prescribed pattern and its modulations, whereas lexical competence required the assimilation of an extensive store of kenningar, heiti, and the mythic narratives that gave rise to them. Knowledge of the rhythms and verseforms used in previous compositions was a strand in the new skaldic syllabus, but Snorri explicitly marks the sixty types which may be followed as models: "ok eru þessir hættir allir vel fallnir til at yrkja kvæði eptir ef vill" [and all these verse-forms are very suitable for composing poems in if desired] (Faulkes 1991, 67.12–13; trans. Faulkes 1987, 205), and specifies those that must not be: "ok má eigi yrkja eptir því þó at þat þykki eigi spilla í fornkvæðum" [and this ought not to be imitated though it is not considered a fault in early poems] (Faulkes 1991, 58.15–16; trans. Faulkes 1987, 200).

To those who knew old poetry by heart, verseform and diction would have been inseparable, and both aspects of the tradition would have been transmitted in tandem. To the skald of the thirteenth-century classroom, who may have depended on book-learning to a greater extent for a knowledge of poetic diction, the systematic collection of lists of kenningar and heiti according to referent would necessarily have diminished the rhythmic variation inherent in the poetic tradition. Within *Skáldskaparmál* kennings are grouped together in answer to the question "Hvernig skal kenna X" [How shall X be referred to?], and while quotation of

verse examples is copious, many kennings are instantiated only in prosified lists. The latter manner of documentation also accounts for many of the heiti listed in *Skáldskaparmál*. Snorri was mindful of the potential of an academic written tradition to generate its own stock of diction in isolation from the corpus of ancient skaldic poetry, and at one point attempts to establish the precedence of orally transmitted instances over written examples by invoking a canon of “major poets” against whose diction new phrasings should be measured.

Þessi nöfn himins eru ritvð, en eigi höfvm vær fvndit iqvæðvm æll þessi heiti; en þessi skaldskapar heiti sem avnvr þicki mer oskylt at hafa iskaldskap, nema aðr finni hann iverka hæfvtskalda þvilik heiti (Jónsson 1931, 166)

[The following names for the heavens are written down, but we have not found all these terms in poems. But these poetical terms like others seem to me not proper to include in poetry unless one finds similar terms already in the work of major poets] (Faulkes 1987, 133)

No such principle is at work in *Háttatal*, however, unless “þvilik” is interpreted very broadly to include echoes of rhythms in lines of old poems that Snorri takes up and turns into metres used consistently throughout a stanza. In *Háttatal* Snorri is more concerned with formulating his own hierarchy of forms than he is with justifying forms by establishing historical precedents. A comparison of the organization of *Háttatal* with its predecessor, *Háttalykill* makes this particularly clear. In its extant form, the commentary of *Háttalykill* consists only of the names of verseforms added as headings before each pair of verses. Whereas *Háttalykill* begins in ljóðahátt, the metre characteristic of eddic didactic poems, and proceeds through a variety of metrical forms with no apparent system, Snorri’s poem is a model of systematic categorization and hierarchical order, beginning with dróttkvætt and its variants, followed by the verseforms “er fornskáld hafa kveðit” [which early poets have used in composition] (stanzas 54–67) and finally, verses composed “eptir inum smærum háttum” [in the lesser verse-forms] (stanzas 68–102), with ljóðahátt coming in third from last. While many of the names of verseforms are common to both works, many of the correspondences between verse types are only approximate (Faulkes 1991, xvii), and in the case of *rekit* the name denotes completely different forms (Helgason and Holtsmark 1941, 65). In addition, Snorri’s systemic account appears to generate new terms according to his hierarchical scheme: “in mestu refhvörf” (sts. 17–19), “in minni refhvörf” (st. 20), “in minztu refhvörf” (st. 22), “refhvarfa bróður” (st. 23), “meiri stúfr” (st. 50), “hinn mesti stúfr” (st. 51), “minni runhenda” (st. 81), “minzta runhenda” (st. 82), and the use of these same terms (*minni* and *minztr*) within five separate subclasses of runhent (sts. 83–93). As Stephen Tranter has pointed out (1993), such a practice of subdivision is likely to have been derived from patterns set by Latin authors in grammatical and metrical tracts.

Although the ostensible subject of Snorri’s treatise is “hættir skáldskapar,” it is apparent from the prose commentary that his focus is on “lofkvæði” (67.15) and



both the hierarchy of verseforms and the judgements voiced in his commentary make clear his view of dróttkvætt as the pre-eminent form of skáldskapr:

Þetta er dróttkvæðr hátttr. Með þeima hætti er flest ort þat er vandat er. Þessi er upphaf allra háttta sem málrúnar eru fyrir qðrum rúnum. (Faulkes 1991, 1.41–43)

[This is *dróttkvætt* form. This is the form most often used for elaborate poetry. This is the foundation of all verse-forms just as speech-runes are the principal sort of runes.] (Faulkes 1987, 167)

Snorri's definition of the acceptable forms of dróttkvætt is strict and prescriptive, and it is informed by a principle of metrical consistency that is not at the heart of much of the native poetic tradition, even within the encomium genre. The poetic theory articulated in the prose commentary to *Háttatal* therefore strikes out on a new path — acknowledging the aesthetic of the past, but remaking it according to contemporary notions of literary refinement, without what he terms the metrical faults of earlier compositions.

en þótt þat finnisk í fornskálða verka, þá látum vér þat nú ónýtt. (Faulkes 1991, 8.30–31)

[Even if it can be found in the works of ancient poets, we no longer tolerate it.] (Faulkes 1987, 172)

Nú skal rita þá háttu er fornskáld hafa kveðit ok eru nú settir saman, þótt þeir hafi ort sumt með háttafollum, ok eru þessir hættir dróttkvæðir kallaðir í fornum kvæðum, en sumir finnask í lausum vísum (Faulkes 1991, 53.11–14)

[Now shall be exemplified those variations of form which early poets have used in composition and which are now made into consistent verse-forms, though these poets have in some cases composed with metrical inconsistencies, and these variations in early poems are called *dróttkvætt*, and some of them are found in single-stanza poems] (Faulkes 1987, 198)

Víða er þat í fornskálða verka er í einni vísu eru ymsir hættir eða háttaföll, ok má eigi yrkja eptir því þó at þat þykki eigi spilla í fornkvæðum. (Faulkes 1991, 58.14–16)

[It often happens in the work of early poets that there are several variations or metrical inconsistencies in a single stanza, and this ought not be imitated though it is not considered a fault in early poems.] (Faulkes 1987, 200)

In his survey of the verseforms in *Háttatal* and the extant corpus of skaldic poetry, Anthony Faulkes has found that there are clear precedents for just over thirty of Snorri's metres — just over thirty have no precedents at all except in some cases in *Háttalykill* — and the rest have “partial precedents, that is to say the features of the verse-forms are found in individual lines of earlier verse, but not used consistently throughout a stanza or poem” (1991, xviii). The foreign fashion that most influenced the metrical inventiveness of *Háttalykill* and *Háttatal* was rhyme. Both works acknowledge the prestige of rhyme (both internal rhyme and end-rhyme) in their names for verseforms: “draughtent” (*Háttalykill* 4 and *Háttatal* 65), “náhent” (*Háttalykill* 15 — where it is written “háhent” — and *Háttatal* 75), “hrynhenda” (*Háttalykill* 16 — where it is written “rynhent” — and *Háttatal* 62–64), “detthendr” (*Háttalykill* 18 and *Háttatal* 29), “runhenda” (*Háttalykill* 24

and *Háttatal* 80–92), “dunhent” (*Háttalykill* 33 and *Háttatal* 24) and “skjálfhenda” (*Háttalykill* 41 and *Háttatal* 35). In addition, *Háttatal* 36 preserves the term *þríhent* for a verseform also found in *Háttalykill* 6, and adds the term *hnugghent* (*Háttatal* 76) which clearly expresses the positive valuation of hendingar. This point is underscored by the term *háttlausá* (*Háttalykill* 26 and *Háttatal* 67) which in fact denotes verse composed without hendingar rather than without any other constituent of rhythmic form such as alliteration.

In *Háttatal*, Snorri composes 80 stanzas that involve internal rhyme, a further fourteen with end-rhyme, and only eight without a consistent rhyme scheme at all. Of the 41 verseforms of *Háttalykill*, five are without hendingar, though one of these, *greppaminni*, is required to have hendingar according to Snorri’s ars metrica (Ólason 1969, 198). Snorri describes the form *alhent*, which has two aðalhendingar in each line, as the finest of metres if used well:

Þessi þykkir vera fegrstr ok vandastr, ef vel er ortr, þeira háttá er kvæði eru ort eptir  
(Faulkes 1991, 44.9–10)

[This is considered to be the most beautiful and choicest, if it is composed well, of the verse-forms that poems are composed in] (Faulkes 1987, 192)

He distinguishes his own demonstration of the metre (described as “full alhending”) from an earlier example by Bishop Klœingr where *at*, *ek*, and *en* were used without being part of the rhyme scheme.<sup>3</sup> As with many other verseforms he demonstrates, Snorri’s model is stricter and without internal variation compared to such earlier examples as may be found in the extant corpus (Kuhn 1983, 305–6).

The preservation of the skaldic corpus is clearly not the object of the verses or the commentary of *Háttatal*, which, as a whole, is directed to promoting Snorri’s own ars metrica and recommending it as a guide to praxis for contemporary skalds. As Snorri makes his metrical century, his masterly performance is not without its moments of swagger:

Hvar viti áðr orta  
með æðra hætti  
mærd of menglötud  
maðr und himins skautum?  
(Faulkes 1991, 95.5–8)

[Where does one know of praise previously composed with more splendid verse-forms about a necklace-destroyer (giver of jewels) beneath the sky’s expanse?] (Faulkes 1987, 218)

Earlier, Snorri makes clear his role as innovator:

Mitt er of möeti  
mart lag bragar

3. The opposition between syllables marked by rhyme, alliteration and prosodic length and unmarked syllables (see Gade 1989) is probably another aspect of traditional dróttkvætt composition that Snorri is consciously aiming to systematize in his theory of poetics.

áðr ókveðit  
 oddbraks spakan  
 (Faulkes 1991, 70.1–4)

[Many a poetic metre of mine has never before been composed in about a wise point-clash meeter (warrior).] (Faulkes 1987, 207)

Snorri calls the verseform of stanza 70 *hagmælt* ‘skilfully spoken’, a term not elsewhere attested, which may well be an expression of his self-conscious play both with metrical variation and with poetic nomenclature. In elaborating skaldic metrics in *Háttatal*, Snorri’s sights are set on the prestigious count of a hundred verseforms and the glory of his achievement, perhaps to the point of overshadowing the ostensible focus of a praise poem, its addressee. Bjarne Fidjestøl (1982, 255) described *Háttatal* as a “metadikting som er i ferd med å bli rein form,” a consequence, perhaps, of his judgement of it as “eit skrivebordsdikt” (246), in which the exigencies of political interaction between skald and patron begin to give way to literary experimentation at some remove in time and place from its occasion.

In medieval sources, Snorri is attributed with two other praise poems for Earl Skúli, one of which was a *drápa* with a *klofastef* featuring *alhendr*.<sup>4</sup> The identification of *aðalhendingar* as the quintessential attribute of Norse poetry is expressed elsewhere in Snorri’s work. In chapter 6 of *Ynglinga saga*, Snorri describes the speech of the god Óðinn in the following way: “Mælti hann allt hendingum, svá sem nú er þat kveðit, er skáldskapr heitir” [He always spoke with rhyme, in the manner of composition that is now called poetry] (Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51, 1:17). None of Óðinn’s poetry is quoted by Snorri in *Ynglinga saga* though when the god is quoted in *Gylfaginning*<sup>5</sup> he speaks in *ljóðahátt* or *fornyrðislag* rhythm without *hendingar*.<sup>6</sup>

It is clear from his poetic theory, his attribution of *hendingar*-composition to Óðinn, the god of poetry, as well as his own practices as a poet, that Snorri viewed *dróttkvætt* praise poetry as the pre-eminent form of traditional Norse versification, and that in his writings, he aimed to promote this view. In *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* chap. 91, for instance, he represents King Harald declaiming a verse in simple eddic measure as he goes burnie-less into his final battle, only to

4. *Íslendinga saga* chap. 38: “Snorri hafði ort um jarl tvau kvæði. Alhend váru klofastef í drápunni: Harðmúlaðr vas Skúli . . .” (Jóhannesson, Finnbogason, and Eldjárn 1946, 1:278).

5. For example “svá sem hér er sagt at Óðinn mæltir sjálfir við þann Ás er Loki heitir: ‘Örr ertu Loki / ok ørviti, / hví ne legskapu, Loki? / Ørlög Frigg / hygg ek at qll viti / þótt hon sjálfgi segi’” [as it says here that Odin himself spoke to the As called Loki: “Mad you are Loki, and out of your wits; why will you not be silent, Loki? All fates I believe Frigg knows, though she herself does not pronounce”] and “ok enn hefir hann [Óðinn] nefnzk á fleiri vega þá er hann var kominn til Geirrøðar konungs: ‘Heitumsk Grímr / ok Ganglari, / Herjan, Hjalmbéri, / Þekkr, Þriði’” [and he called himself by various other names on his visit to King Geirrod: “I call myself Grim and Ganglari, Herian, Hialmbéri, Thekk, Third”] (Faulkes 1982, 21; trans. Faulkes 1987, 21).

6. All of the 32 stanzas of poetry Snorri quotes in *Ynglinga saga* are by historical skalds, and only one, by Bragi inn gamli, uses *hendingar* as a structuring principle of the verseform. He quotes 28 stanzas by Þjóðólfr inn hvinverski from *Ynglingatal* and three from *Háleygjatal* by Eyvindr skáldaspillir.

pull himself up in a moment of poetic quality-assurance to better commemorate the occasion with a dróttkvætt composition.

Þá mælti Haraldr konungr Sigurðarson: “Þetta er illa kveðit, ok mun verða at gera aðra vísu betri.” Þá kvað hann þetta (Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51, 3:188)

[Then King Harald Sigurdson said: “That verse is badly composed and I will need to make another better one.” Then he composed this]

As Roberta Frank has observed, by making Harald recite a dróttkvætt stanza to replace his eddic verse, “thirteenth-century literary criticism . . . touted the superiority of what was difficult, their own *trobar clus*” (1978, 28).

That Snorri’s views on poetry were not just academic, and that he took dróttkvætt composition very seriously indeed, is apparent from his nephew’s account in *Íslendinga saga*. Far from being an ornamental commentary on contemporary Icelandic events, the composition of dróttkvætt verse could sometimes be a political act of great significance (Nordal 1992). Sturla also reports in chapters 38–39 of his saga that Snorri’s praise poetry (which must have been orally transmitted and recited far and wide) was scorned and parodied in the south of Iceland. The parody hinges on the description of Skúli as hard-nosed (“harðmúlaðr es Skúli”) but turns harshly against Snorri as both politician and poet:

Oss lízk illr at kyssa  
jarl, sás ræðr fyr hjarli,  
vörr es til hvöss á harra,  
harðmúlaðr es Skúli.  
Hefr fyr horska jöfra  
hrægammis komit sævar,  
— þjóð finnr löst á ljóðum —,  
leir aldrigi meira.

(Jóhannesson, Finnbogason, and Eldjárn 1946, 1:278–79)

[We think ill of kissing the jarl who rules over the land, the lip of the lord is too sharp, hard-snouted is Skúli. Never has there been more mud of the carrion-sea vulture — people find fault with the verse — brought before noble princes.]

The defamatory words of the poem no doubt found their mark. The kenning “hræsævar gammis leir” refers to the mythic narrative in which Óðinn, disguised as an eagle, obtains the mead of poetry from the giant Suttungr and delivers it to the gods, which Snorri tells in chapter 6 of *Skáldskaparmál*.<sup>7</sup> Ousted from the company of those skilled in the art of poetry, Snorri is ranked among those who were not recipients of Óðinn’s gift but who took for themselves a portion of eagle-shit. In the learned, literate sphere, Snorri is able to make pronouncements as self-appointed arbiter of poetic quality and self-made auctor in the new syllabus of

7. “þa spytti hann vpp miþinvm ikerin, en honvm var þa sva nær komit, at Svttvngv mrvndi na honvm, at hann sendi aptr svman miopinn, ok var þes ecki gætt; hafþi þat hverr, er vildi, ok kqllvm ver þat skaldifla lvt. En Svttvnga-mioð gaf Opin asvnm ok þeim monnm, er yrkia kvnv” [he spat out the mead into the containers, but it was such a close thing for him that Suttung might have caught him that he sent

skáldskapr. In the everyday world of the living oral tradition Snorri is more open to challenge. While the literate tradition was championing lofkvæði and the composition of poetry to please an aristocratic social order, the oral tradition continued to celebrate its age-old practice of defamation of character.

As well as the composition of three praise poems for Earl Skúli, Sturla Þórðarson mentions that Snorri also composed poems for King Sverrir and Earl Hákon galinn. While we know that letters were frequently used as the mode of communication in Icelandic/Norwegian diplomatic exchange, it is not stated how Snorri delivered his poetic tributes. Whether it first existed as document or not, the verses of *Háttatal* are likely to have been orally transmitted along with other praise poetry within the charged debate about Icelandic sovereignty in relation to the Norwegian crown, as well as within the less dramatic but culturally significant debate about the parameters of traditional versification in relation to Continental conventions. As prosimetrum, *Háttatal* gives voice to two contemporary, but dissimilar, traditions: the oral tradition of virtuoso skaldic composition, in which innovation was an inherent form of display which Snorri clearly delights in practising, and the written tradition of pedagogy, in which the definition and naming of types was paramount. Within the verses, Snorri is mindful of the mnemonics necessary for teaching: in stanza 67 he refers to the sixty metres he has composed: “Ortak . . . með sex tögum hátta” [I have composed . . . with sixty verse-forms], and in stanza 100 he refers to the tally again: “svá er tírætt hundrað talit” [so that ten tens are told]. The lesson is reiterated in Snorri’s prose. After having initially established the pattern of didactic dialogue between magister and discipulus that was a convention of Continental pedagogy (Krömmelbein 1992, 118), Snorri continually refers to numbers in his systematic analysis of types: “Sjá hátt er nú skal rita er hinn fjórði þeira er breyttir eru, en hinn fimti at háttatali” [The verse-form that will be written next is the fourth of those that have variation, but the fifth in the number of verse-types] (Faulkes 1991, 11.9–10; trans. Faulkes 1987, 175); “Þessi er hinn tíundi hátttr” [Next is the tenth verse-form] (Faulkes 1991, 16.11; trans. Faulkes 1987, 177); “Tólpta [leyfi] er” [The twelfth (licence) is] (Faulkes 1991, 8.40; trans. Faulkes 1987, 173).

Written only a generation later, Óláfr Þórðarson’s treatise is evidence of the rising tide of learned Latin scholarship that would carry the new skaldic pedagogy into the next century. The degree to which Snorri’s metrical treatise is a singular presentation of traditional poetry according to particular aesthetic and cultural values can be assessed by comparing it to Óláfr’s treatment of traditional Norse poetics within his grammatical treatise. Óláfr’s frame of reference is quite different from Snorri’s, determined as it is by the theoretical orientation and procedures of Continental rhetorical scholarship. Óláfr follows Snorri’s argument in the

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some of the mead out backwards, and this was disregarded. Anyone took it that wanted it, and it is what we call the rhymester’s share. But Odin gave Suttung’s mead to the Æsir and to those people who are skilled at composing poetry] (Jónsson 1931, 85; trans. Faulkes 1987, 64).

Prologue to his *Edda* in predicating Norse poetry as a branch of the same ancient poetics practised around the Mediterranean and brought north to Scandinavia:

öll ær æin listin skalld skapr sa, ær romverskir spækingar namv iathænis borg a griklandi ok snerv siþan i latinu mal, ok sa lioða hátt æða skalldskapr, ær oðinn ok aðrir asia menn flvttv norðr higat i norðr halfv heimsins (Ólsen 1884, 60)

[the art of speech which the Roman orators learnt in Athens in Greece and then transferred into the Latin language is the same as the metre or poetry which Odin and other men of Asia brought northwards when they settled the northern hemisphere] (Collings 1967, 74)

While Óláfr is overt in his general adherence to the procedures of Continental rhetorical scholarship, throughout his treatise he maintains a clear distinction between “diktvöð vers ritin í latinu skalldskap” (Ólsen 1884, 51) and “norrænn skalldskapr” noting when particular formations are “litt geymt” [little observed] in Norse poetry or a classical figure “finz sialldan” [is seldom found] in traditional verse (Ólsen 1884, 52, 93).<sup>8</sup> Nor does he suppress the need to discourse at some length about the particularities of Norse poetry when it is significantly different from classical forms. Snorri’s emphasis on the role of hendingar in dróttkvætt and its variations takes for granted the fundamental structural role of alliteration.<sup>9</sup> In his consideration of paronomasia Óláfr echoes Snorri’s judgement, and refers explicitly to *Háttatal*, to Snorri’s detailed demonstration of the manner in which internal rhyme can be varied in dróttkvætt composition.

þetta kóllvm ver aðalhendingar iskálldskap, ok taka af þessi figvrv vpphaf þeir hættir, ær með hendingvm ærv saman sættir, ok breytiz þat amarga vega, sæm finnaz man ihatta tali þvi, ær snorri hæfir ort. (Ólsen 1884, 96)

[We call that *aðalhending* (“full internal rhyme”) in poetry, and this figure is the origin of all those metres which are composed with rhyme, and whose many variants may be found in the *Háttatal* which Snorri composed.] (Collings 1967, 97)

But as he moves to the next category of schema lexeos, paranomeon, the divergence between Óláfr’s focus and Snorri’s becomes plain. Once vernacular poetry is considered in the context of Latin poetics, where alliteration serves only an ornamental role, the fundamental nature of alliteration in the Norse tradition needs to be brought to the fore:

Þæssi figvra ær miok hófð i mals snilldar list, ær rethorica hættir, oc ær hon vphaf til kvæðanndi þeirrar, ær saman helldr norænvu skalldskap, sva sæm naglar hallda skipi

8. In other places the distinction is expressed simply by the opposition *vers* and *skálldskap* (Ólsen 1884, 89). Note too the clarification “ok ær sv figvra [elipsis] miok i versvm, ænn ækci finnvu ver hana inorænvu skálldskap” [This figure frequently occurs in (Latin) verses, but we do not find it in Norse poetry] (Ólsen 1884, 90; trans. Collings 1967, 94).

9. “Hér er stafasetning sú er hætti ræðr ok kveðandi gerir, þat eru tólf stafir í eyrindi, ok eru þrír settir í hvern fjórðung . . . Sá stafr ræðr kveðandi” [Here there is one aspect of spelling that determines the verse-form and creates the poetical effect, that there are twelve staves (alliterating sounds) in the stanza, and three are put in each quarter-stanza . . . This stave determines the alliteration.] (Faulkes 1991, 1.9–13; trans. Faulkes 1987, 166).

saman, ær smiðr gerir, ok ferr svndrlaust ælla borð fra borði. sva hælldr ok þæssi figvra saman kveðandi iskalldskap með stöfvm þeim ær stvðlar hæita ok hqfvðstafir. hin fyrri figvra gerir fægrð með liods greinvm iskalld skap, sva sæm fælling skips borða. Ænn þo ærv fastir viðir saman, þeir sem negldir ærv, at æigi sæ væl fælldir, sæm kvæðandi hælz i hændingarlavsvm hattvm. (Ólsen 1884, 96–97)

[This figure is much used in the art of eloquence known as *Rhetorica*, and it forms the origin of the alliteration that holds together Norse poetry. Just as the nails hold together a ship made by a builder, in which otherwise the boards would fall asunder, likewise this figure holds together the alliteration of poetry, by means of the letters which are called *stuðlar* (“supporters”) and *hqfuðstafir* (“head staves”). The former figure (*paronomasia*) embellishes poetry by means of a variety of sounds, and can be compared to the joining of the ship’s boards. And yet boards that are nailed together are fast, even though not joined by tongue and groove, just as alliteration is maintained in rhymeless metres.] (Collings 1967, 98)

The structural integrity of Norse poetry — from ljóðaháttur to dróttkvætt — depends on the system of alliteration, and the alliterating staves are described by Óláfr as analogous to the nails that hold the planks of a ship together: without nails the planks fall apart and there is no ship; without alliterating staves the lines fall apart and there is no poem. Hendingar take their place in this structural analogy as perfectly fitted planks — something that makes for a better finish but is not structurally essential. As Óláfr makes clear, *kveðandi*<sup>10</sup> still obtains in metres that are *hendingarlaus*.

Óláfr’s theory of traditional Norse versification is articulated in chapter 15 of his treatise (“de scemalexo”): “Scema ær kqllvð agirzkv ænn skrvð a norenv” [*Schema* is the Greek word and *skruð* (“embellishment”) is the Norse word]. According to Óláfr, schema is widely used “þviat hon þikcir iafnan fegra iskalldskap” [because it is considered to embellish poetry] (Ólsen 1884, 91; trans. Collings 1967, 95). In this chapter, Óláfr ranges freely across the corpus of vernacular poetry in his selection of examples, beginning with a quotation from an otherwise unknown eddic poem about Óðinn’s ravens Huginn and Muninn, and later choosing another pair of lines from the eddic *Grímnismál*. As schema is the category of classical rhetoric that most pertains to poetic structure,<sup>11</sup> it is noteworthy that of the twenty-two poetic quotations Óláfr chooses as illustrations, ten are composed without hendingar. In the treatise as a whole the proportion is less than one-fifth;

10. The word *kveðandi* denotes the sound of poetry, or the general concept of language structured as poetry. In both Snorri’s use and Óláfr’s, it most often refers to alliterative structure, but in certain contexts it can also incorporate hendingar as a constituent of structure (see Faulkes 1991, 123–24).

11. The overlap between Snorri’s work and the final chapter of Óláfr’s treatise, “De tropo et metaphora,” involves *Skáldskaparmál* more than *Háttatal*, though sannkenningar are discussed in both works. Óláfr again draws attention to the greater significance particular figures have for Norse versification: “Með þessi figvr [metaphora] ærv saman settar allar kenningar i norrænv skaldskap, ok hon ær miqk sva vpphaf til skaldskaparmals” [All kennings of Norse poetry are composed of this figure, which is virtually the origin of all poetic diction] (Ólsen 1884, 104; trans. Collings 1967, 104), and the aesthetic importance of sannkenningar “ok þikcir þessi figvra mest pryða skaldskap” [and this figure . . . is considered to be the greatest embellishment of poetry] (Ólsen 1884, 108; trans. Collings 1967, 106–7).

nevertheless Óláfr's selections demonstrate a different sense of the scope of skáldskapr from Snorri's. Neither treatise aims to document the full poetic tradition as it had survived into the thirteenth century, yet within their different projects both authors show knowledge of a vast corpus of orally transmitted verse, and give expression to judgements about how that heritage can be transformed into a literary canon.

It is beyond the scope of Óláfr's treatise to make explicit judgements about the hierarchy of metrical forms, or the pre-eminence of dróttkvætt praise poetry, though his commentary on the figure of ironia is worthy of note: "her er oæiginlig framfæring ok liking, þviat lof ær fyrir háði sætt. Þæssi figvra ær iafnan sætt i skaldskap" [Here there is an improper transfer and comparison, since praise is used for mockery. This figure frequently occurs in poetry] (Ólsen 1884, 113–14; trans. Collings 1967, 110). Óláfr was himself an accomplished poet in the dróttkvætt tradition, having composed poems on King Hákon and Thomas à Becket, *Árónsdrápa*, and a twelve-stanza poem in hrynhent metre (Jónsson 1912–15, A2: 92–98). Mention is also made in *Íslendinga saga* (chapter 121) of a drápa Óláfr composed about Bishop Þórlakr. In all probability, his own poetic praxis accorded fairly well with the ars poetica Snorri articulated in *Háttatal*.

While the ambit of Óláfr's treatise is broader than Snorri's, he nevertheless seems to be mindful of the recently defined prescriptive tradition of dróttkvætt composition outlined by Snorri. In his explanation of antonomasia in chapter 16, Óláfr says: "Þessa figvrv kqllv ver niarðarvqtt i skaldskap, ok ær hon þo æigi með læyfv m talit" [We call that figure *njarðar-vqtt* ("Njörd's glove" = "sponge") in poetry, but it is not numbered among the poetical licences] (Ólsen 1884, 107; trans. Collings 1967, 106) — apparently referring to the licences enumerated by Snorri in *Háttatal* (Collings 1967, 71), though *njarðarvqtt* does not seem to involve a metrical licence.<sup>12</sup> In his discussion of end-rhyme and its analogous role in Latin and Norse poetics, Óláfr first quotes a Latin couplet and then turns to Snorri for a parallel metrical example:

Þessar sqmu hendingar ærv ok settar i norrænv skaldskap i þeim hætti, er ver kqllvm rvnhendv, sem snorri kvað:

Orms ær glatt galla  
með gumna spjalla.  
(Ólsen 1884, 52)

[These same hendingar are positioned in Norse poetry in that verseform we call runhent, as Snorri said:

12. Óláfr only uses the word *leyfi* on one other occasion to explain the appropriateness of schema lexeos in poetry: "ænn þo ær scema miklv meir i læyfi sætt, þviat hon þikcir iafnan fegra iskaldskap" [*Schema* however is used with much more licence because it is considered to embellish poetry] (Ólsen 1884, 91; trans. Collings 1967, 95). Snorri, however, uses it frequently, both in the methodological outline of his work (Faulkes 1991, 0.7) and in his enumeration of twelve metrical licences (Faulkes 1991, 6.22, 8.15, 8.17, 8.18, 8.24, 8.25).



It is a joy to be in the company of the friend of men  
during the snake's harm (winter)]

(verse trans. Faulkes 1987, 213)

The verse he quotes is from *Háttatal* 83, which is there described as composed “með fullri runhending” with all eight lines rhyming on *-alla*. Although there is abundant evidence of end-rhyme used in Norse poetry, there seem to be no examples of *full runhenda* before Snorri's time, and the exact metrical pattern of *Háttatal* 83 is not elsewhere attested.

In such a case, Snorri's poetics may be seen as laying the foundations on which Óláfr can subsequently build his theory of commonality between the classical and vernacular traditions. Similarly, Óláfr's identification of homoeoteleuton with the Norse form *nýi hátttr* depends on Snorri for a poetic demonstration (*Háttatal* 73), and it is likely that Snorri is responsible for the innovation of both verseform and terminology, since this metrical name does not occur in *Háttalykill*. In all, Óláfr quotes eight excerpts of poetry by Snorri, six of which are from *Háttatal*.<sup>13</sup> In other instances, Snorri is appealed to not as an authority on particular metrical forms, but as a canonical poet in the native tradition. For example, the second pair of lines from verse 28 of *Háttatal* which exemplifies the metre in which only one syllable separates the alliterating staves in the first line of each pair (termed *tvískelft* by Snorri), is quoted by Óláfr to demonstrate *cacemphaton* — “æf sa ær niðr lags stafr i æinni sǫgn, ær fyrstr ær sættr i því orði, ær eptir kemr” [the juxtaposition of the same letter at the end of one word and at the beginning of the following word] (Ólsen 1884, 79; trans. Collings 1967, 85) — an altogether different phonic phenomenon. Óláfr gives the native term for this stylistic feature *þræskoll* ‘threshold’, a poetic term not elsewhere recorded.<sup>14</sup>

In many cases, Óláfr's terminology accords with Snorri's usage. *Bragarmál* is used in both works to denote the elision of vowels to contract two syllables into one — indicating either a traditional poetic term in common use (though it is not elsewhere recorded) or direct scholarly influence. At the level of lexis, the vagaries of textual transmission and preservation do not permit confident assertions of originality of terminology or water-tight claims of intellectual dependence between earlier and later works. The metrical term *kviðuhátttr*, for instance, occurs in *Háttalykill* 2 and Óláfr's work (Ólsen 1884, 63), but not in *Háttatal*, although the verseform it describes is the final one to be demonstrated by Snorri. In some cases, such as *niarðarvottr*, the mention is unique in the written record. In his understanding of the terms *nýgervingar* ‘new creations’ and *nykrat* ‘monstrous’, Óláfr appears to be following Snorri's distinction (Ross 1987, 76), although Óláfr adds

13. Ólsen 1884, 52 (*Háttatal* 83.5–6), 76 (source not extant), 79 (*Háttatal* 28.3–4), 94 (*Háttatal* 15.7–16.1), 94–95 (*Háttatal* 40.1–4, though Óláfr introduces the quotation simply “sem her”), 98 (*Háttatal* 73.1–4), 107 (*Háttatal* 5.3–6), and 116–17 (see Jónsson 1912–15, A2:78).

14. I am indebted to the Arnamagnæan Dictionary card file for this and other observations on the occurrence of technical terms in medieval prose works.

another native term, *finngálknat* ‘centaur-like’, as an alternative to *nykrat* (Ólsen 1884, 80).

In other cases, *Háttalykill* and *Háttatal* preserve intriguingly different names for the same verseform. What in *Háttalykill* is termed *konungslag* (st. 37) is called *trollshátt* by Snorri (st. 63), perhaps reflecting Snorri’s distaste for metrical excess. The related *hryniandi* verseform, *draughtent* (st. 65), is described by Snorri in terms of the dróttkvætt stanza perceptible within it (“Svá má ok af taka í qðru ok hinu fjórða vísuorði ina sǫmu samstǫfun ok er þá þat dróttkvætt” [Similarly the same syllable can be subtracted in the second and fourth lines and then they are *dróttkvætt*]) and he ends his description with the judgement “ok verðr sumt eigi mjúkt” [and in some ways this is not all that smooth] (Faulkes 1991, 65.12–14; trans. Faulkes 1987, 204). This negative evaluation is expressed in another native term, *flagðahátt* (*flagðalag* at *Háttalykill* 32), which also seems to be conceived by Snorri as dróttkvætt disfigured, with true dróttkvætt perceptible behind it: “er hér aukit bæði samstǫfu ok fullnat orðtak sem framast, ok eptir þá samstǫfun eru þrjár samstǫfur ok er rétt dróttkvætt ef hon er ór tekin” [here there is both a syllable added and the word is extended to the superlative degree, and three syllables come after this extra syllable and it is normal *dróttkvætt* if it is taken out] (Faulkes 1991, 34.9–11; trans. Faulkes 1987, 188). A comparative study of the technical terminology of *Háttalykill*, *Háttatal*, and Óláfr’s *Málskrúðsfræði* reveals a complex pattern of relations: all of the works draw from a rich source of vernacular nomenclature, yet the metrical and stylistic attributes described by some of these terms do not always appear to have been definitively fixed. In the desire to keep abreast of foreign literary fashions and to demonstrate the sophistication of the skaldic art in relation to classical Latin poetry, coinage of vernacular terms must also have played a significant part in the emergent *ars poetica*.

A comment made by Óláfr suggests that he and Snorri were not alone in their consideration of Norse poetics and its relation to Continental models. Óláfr’s discussion of pronunciation and intonation patterns in Latin verse concludes:

Enn með því at þesskonar greinir heyra litt norrænv skaldskap at flestra manna ætlan, þa tala ek þar vm ekki fleira at sinni. (Ólsen 1884, 56)

[But because these kinds of distinctions are hardly relevant to Norse poetry in most people’s opinion, I will deal with it no further at this time.]

Who the other members of this literary circle are is left unsaid, but it is presumably the same group Óláfr has in mind when he says “okþat hyggivm ver fornt mal vera. ænn nv ær þat kallað vindandin forna i skaldskap, þviat þat ær nv ekci haft i norēnv mali” [However we consider that archaic speech, and that practice is now called old *vinðandi* in poetry because it is no longer customary in Norse speech] (Ólsen 1884, 87; trans. Collings 1967, 91). We might also suppose that many of the terms introduced by Óláfr with “ok kǫllum vér þat” were current among members of this community, just as those used by Snorri with the formulation “Þenna hátt kalla menn” in *Háttatal*. While these phrases probably do service as stylistic

clichés in both treatises, they are also likely to reflect an intellectual milieu in which the parameters of poetic innovation and *skrúð* were discussed and assessed, and where a vernacular terminology with which to theorize native poetics within the context of learned Continental rhetoric would have been defined and expanded.

The manuscripts of *Snorra Edda* provide evidence of a continuing industry in poetic nomenclature into the next century. The Codex Regius of *Snorra Edda* preserves a text of *Háttatal* written around the middle of the first half of the fourteenth century. A second, apparently contemporary hand (Jónsson 1892) has added the following technical terms: “mala hátt” (st. 95), “stakarþar lag” (st. 98 — the prose text has “stikkalag”), and “galldra lag” (st. 101). The Utrecht manuscript dubs the verseform of stanza 54 (which in the prose is ascribed to the poet king Ragnarr lóðbrok) “Ragnarshátt” and that of stanza 11 “fjórðungalok.” The latter name is also preserved in the Uppsala manuscript of *Snorra Edda* but not within the text of *Háttatal* itself. *Háttatal*, as we know it from other manuscripts, begins on the verso side of a leaf within the second-last gathering of the manuscript. The recto side of that leaf preserves 22 lines that constitute an enumeration of the names and first lines of verses 1 to 34 and verse 36 of *Háttatal*,<sup>15</sup> and although spaces have been left for headings within the text of the treatise, they have not always been written (see especially p. 99, where generous spaces have been left before verses 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15). Other metrical names in the summary list in the Uppsala manuscript are “bragarhátt” (st. 31) and “langlokum,” the latter term also written into the Regius text by the second hand, and used by the author of the so-called *Fourth Grammatical Treatise* preserved in Codex Wormianus of *Snorra Edda*. It is the pedagogic aspect of Snorri’s work that seems to have been at the forefront of later compilers’ minds, as they assiduously numbered types of verseforms for ease of reference<sup>16</sup> and, in the Uppsala Codex, provided the table of names and first lines of stanzas set out in memorable form.

While the manuscript evidence of the transmission of *Snorra Edda* in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries indicates a continuing interest in vernacular poetics, the Prologue to the grammatical treatises in Codex Wormianus opens a window onto a rather different picture of poetics from Snorri’s or Óláfr’s time. By the mid-fourteenth century when the writer of the Prologue identifies the contemporary audience for skaldic poetics, it had become a thoroughly literate one. Literary poetics has created “ny skáld” who, along with learned men and especially clerics (“fræði menn, ok æinkannlega klerkarner”), constituted the practitioners of the new skaldic art (Ólsen 1884, 153). While its roots in ancient native tradition are acknowledged, the art of composition is now cultivated in a different intellectual spirit, one informed by an explicit Christian ideology, and an overtly literate

15. See Grape et al. 1962–77 for the facsimile and transcription of p. 93.

16. The numbering system varies between manuscripts. See the textual notes in Faulkes 1991, 41–47.

mind-set. In contrast to Snorri's careful balancing of the value of oral and written sources, recourse is now recommended to books of exemplar rather than memorized poems, with authority vested in the written rather than the spoken word.

The new skaldic art is to be practised according to the tradition of ancient poets “vtan þat fem klerklegar bækr banna, þviat þat er nattvrvligt at menn fe nv fmafmglarí fem fræði bækrnar dreifaz nv viðara” [except where clerical books sanction against it, for it is only natural that men have become more pedantic now that learned books are distributed more widely] (Ólsen 1884, 153). Books have become not only the essential guide to skaldic praxis, but the reason why the traditional oral art is now considered inferior to the new literary one:

þviat vandara var þeim að tala, fem ekki hofðv fyrer ser, enn þeim, fem nv hafa ymifligar fræði bækr (Ólsen 1884, 155)

[because it was more difficult for them to compose, who did not have in front of them the various learned books that (poets) now have]

Throughout the Prologue its writer emphasizes the newness of both the practitioner (“ny fkælld” [Ólsen 1884, 152, 153]) and the art — “epter ny fvndinni letr lift” [according to the newly articulated ars poetica] (Ólsen 1884, 155) — in which the rules for practice, including the new verseforms for poetry, have been set out. Following Snorri's example in his *Edda*, a distinction is encouraged between knowledge of certain aspects of traditional poetics that enable ancient poems to be understood, and proficiency in the rules of the new ars poetica (Ólsen 1884, 153, 155), a theme which is reiterated in a passage of the *Fourth Grammatical Treatise* (Ólsen 1884, 136), a work contemporary with the Prologue which may in fact have been by the same author (Raschellà 1993, 237).

The Prologue writer defines the new ars poetica according to what Snorri permits (Ólsen 1884, 155), and it is clear from references outside scholarly treatises that the *Edda* had become canonized by the fourteenth century as a textbook on native poetics. As a new term in circulation, *eddu list*, makes clear, poetics had come to be defined by the book, and the new ars poetica was conceived in the idiom of Latin learning, as *reglur eddu*. But those using these terms used them disparagingly, to characterize a poetics that clashed with the changing taste of some members of Iceland's literati.

Yfirmeisturum mun Eddu listar  
allstirður sjá hróður virðaz  
þeim er vilja svá grafa ok geyma  
grein klókasta fræðibóka;  
lofi heilagra líz mér hæfa  
ljós ritninga sætra vitni,  
en kenningar auka mǫnnum  
engan styrk en fagnað myrkva.

*Guðmundar drápa* 78 (Jónsson 1912–15, B2:461)

[This praise poem will be considered very rigid by the headmasters of the Eddic art, to those who wish to seek out and pay heed to learned books' esoteric rules; the clear

testimony of sweet writings seems to me fitting for holy men's praise, for kennings increase no man's strength but darken joy.]

Rædda ek lítt við reglur Eddu  
ráðin mín, ok kvað ek sem bráðast  
vísur þær, er vil ek ei hrósa,  
verkinn erat sjá mjúkr i kverkum;  
stirða hefir ek ár til orða,  
ekki má af slíku þekkjaz,  
arnar leir hefig yðr at færa,  
emka ek fróðr hjá skáldum góðum.

*Guðmundar kvæði byskups 2 (Jónsson 1912–15, B2:372)*

[I cared little for the Eddic rules in my design, and as soon as possible I composed my verses, which I do not want to boast about, my poem is not soft in the throat; my oar of words (tongue) is stiff, such a thing won't be pleasing, I have only the eagle's mud to offer you, I'm not clever in the company of good poets.]

varðar mest til allra orða,  
undirstaðan sé réttlígg fundin,  
eigi glögg þóat eddu regla  
undan hljóti at víkja stundum.

Sá, er óðinn skal vandan velja,  
velr svá mǫrg í kvæði at selja  
hulin fornyrðin, at trautt má telja,  
tel ek þenna svá skilning dvelja;  
vel því at hér má skýr orð skilja,  
skili þjóðir minn ljósan vilja,  
tal óbreytiligt veitt af vilja,  
vil ek at kvæðit heiti Lilja.

*Lilja 97–98 (Jónsson 1912–15, B2:415–16)*

[it is most important that the true sense be rightly understood, though the rule of the Edda, quite unclear, might sometimes have been disregarded. Whoever chooses to compose elaborate poetry chooses to present in the poem so many obscure old expressions that may scarcely be counted: I declare this hinders understanding; because one can understand well the plain words here, people will apprehend my clear will — familiar words, given with joy — I wish this poem to be called Lily.]

To the Abbots Árni Jónsson and Arngrímur Brandsson, authors of the two poems in honour of Bishop Guðmundr, and to *Lilja's* poet Eysteinn Ásgrímsson, the ars poetica of the *Edda* is associated with schoolroom learning and the clever display of difficulty. It is regarded as inimical to claritas, the goal of Christian devotional composition, because of its use of kennings. Whereas Snorri delighted in the play of meanings such intricate diction could create, these poets eschew it, relishing instead the modesty topos of referring to themselves as unlearned poets (“emka ek fróðr”) and to their poetry as the dregs of the poetic mead (“arnar leir”) so valued by the skalds of the old tradition. One of Snorri's declared aims in his

*Edda*, to illuminate “þat er hulit var” so that the skaldic tradition would be neither forgotten nor deprived of its rich field of reference, is directly countered by the new ethos of Christian poets. This ethos appears to have stemmed not from the Icelandic milieu of learned antiquarianism but from that of “det norske atlantimperium” to quote Stefán Karlsson’s phrase (1979, 13), from the circle of powerful clerics who held sway in Norway and Iceland in the first half of the fourteenth century (Foote [1982] 1984, 267) and whose Icelandic members may have emulated the tastes of Norway rather than Iceland.

There were some rules of the *Edda*, however, that these poets clearly followed to the letter. They composed in *hrynhent*, the eight-syllable variation of dróttkvætt that centuries earlier had incorporated the trochaic beat of Latin verse, and which Snorri included in his models for composition (st. 64). While espousing a poetics of semantic clarity in stanza 97, Eysteinn flamboyantly displays the metrical sophistication of his verse by composing in *dunhent* (where, in Snorri’s definition, there are the same words at the beginning of the second and fourth lines as are at the end of the first and third) as well as with end-rhyme (Foote [1982] 1984, 266). In so doing, he reveals the line of cleavage between metrical form and diction that had developed in the vernacular tradition once it was conceived in terms of a literary *ars poetica*. The formal division between *mál* and *hættir* that forms the basis for Snorri’s organization of the *Edda* is enunciated in *Skáldskaparmál*:

Þa mælti Bragi: Tven erv kyn þar, er greina skaldskap allan.

Ægir spyrr: Hver tven?

Bragi s(egir): Mál ok hættir. (Jónsson 1931, 85)

[Then spoke Bragi: There are two categories into which all poetry is divided.

Ægir asked: Which two?

Bragi said: Language and verse-forms.] (Faulkes 1987, 64)

During the early centuries of literary production in Iceland, the verseforms of the Norse vernacular tradition remained resilient partly because of their capacity to incorporate influences from Latin poetics and to be turned to new generic purposes, both devotional and antiquarian. The traditional art of poetic circumlocution, however, was so deeply rooted in the culture of pre-Christian myth and so dependent on a taste for word-play that its reception in learned circles was more problematic, particularly considering the influence the Christian church had on schooling and textual production during this period. The fact that Snorri’s *Edda* continued to be copied in the fourteenth century suggests that some members of the scholarly community in Iceland appreciated both the *mál* and *hættir* of traditional poetics, and considered *eddu list* worthy of at least secular canonization.

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