Those who have studied the history of the *Oxford English Dictionary* will remember that its every fascicle was reviewed in journals all over the world, but the reviews were of a somewhat unusual type. Rather than discussing the merits and demerits of the dictionary, scholars summarized the material presented in its pages and expressed their gratitude to and admiration of the editors. Some suggested minor improvements, but the prevailing tone was one of adulation. Such unanimous friendliness is rare in the history of lexicography. Dictionaries are an easy target for criticism, and one notes with sadness that philologists tend to be sparing of praise when it comes to dictionary makers. For example, it is customary to treat Cleasby-Vigfusson’s magnificent volume (*Richard Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson, An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, 2d ed. [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957]) with sophisticated condescension (unreliable forms, fanciful etymologies, odd glosses). One of its first reviewers found only one redeeming quality in the entire work (save for its bulk), namely, that the authors treated *a*, *e*, *i*, and *o* separately from *á*, *é*, *í*, and *ó*. No one likes this dictionary except the public, and that is why it remained in print for more than a century.

To be sure, from time to time one runs into pronouncements like the following. “Sir William is a prince of lexicographers. His material is set out clearly and with great economy of space. The fullness of his illustrations is beyond all praise; rarely does one miss a familiar reference and then one can be pretty sure that the use in question has been illustrated from some other source. It is ungrateful work gleaning where Sir William has shorn” (Bruce Dickins on William A. Craigie’s *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue* in *Modern Language Review* 28 [1933]: 243) or “Such magnanimous praise has already been lavished on earlier editions that it is difficult to say more, yet the ‘new, improved’ *Collins-Robert* is indeed an even better product. Its clarity makes it a pleasure to consult, and the user’s high expectations will rarely be disappointed. It is a thorough and scholarly work, the best of its kind, and deserves to hold its place as the market leader” (C. E. J. Dolamore on the *Collins-Robert French-English, English-French Dictionary* in *Modern Language Review* 89 [1994]: 745). But for each of such statements one can easily find a hundred that are sour, patronizing, or negative. It is my hope that the new *Dictionary of Old Norse Prose* will join the *Oxford English Dictionary* and receive the acclaim it deserves. In order to form an opinion about a dictionary, it has to be used a thousand times, but, as far as one can trust a cursory examination, the *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog* seems to be admirably full and clear.

Volume 1 is accompanied by a booklet entitled *ONP 1: Nøgle // Key* (122 pages). It contains an introduction in Danish and English called *Vejledning* and *User’s Guide* respectively (1–47) and a list of corrigenda and addenda to the sigla and indices published in 1989. Experience made it easy to predict that such a list would be necessary (see my review in *Scandinavian Studies* 63 [1991]: 377–79), but its length (over fifty pages) is surprising. The editors explain in minute detail how they organized their entries. Prospective users of the dictionary may find it worthwhile to familiarize themselves with the table of contents of the *User’s Guide* (28), which will be reproduced here.

I. Lemma
A. The order of the articles
B. Orthographic normalisation
C. The cardinal form
D. Two types of dictionary entry
E. One article or more?
F. The standard headword: main form, complementary form, special form
G. Suffixes
H. Details of inflection
   1. Nouns
   2. Adjectives
   3. Adverbs

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*alvissmál* 7 (1997): 105–8
4. Verbs
   a) Strong verbs
   b) Weak verbs

II. Body
A. Structure
   1. Division according to sense/usage
   2. Syntactical/grammatical division
   3. Syntactical/grammatical division
      indicated by the double bar
   4. Registering of phrases
B. Syntagmas brackets
C. Definitions
   1. Type of definition
   2. The relationship of the English to
      the Danish definition
   3. Introductory remarks
   4. Bynames & common nouns as
      proper nouns
   5. Division introduced by a star
D. Citations
   1. Selection of citations
   2. Rendering of the citations
   3. Individual translations
   4. Editorial comments
   5. Sigla
   6. Additions to the siglum
E. Variants, emendations & (corrective)
   manuscript readings
   1. Variants
      a) Variant that is not the headword
         in the citation
      b) Variant used as headword in the
         citation
   2. Emendations
      a) An emendation that has no influ-
         ence on the citation’s headword
      b) The citation’s headword is the
         non-emending reading
   3. (Corrective) manuscript readings

III. Tail
A. Compounds (Comp.)
B. Glossaries (Gloss.)
C. Secondary literature (Litt.)

Discussion of all these matters (choice
of form, definition, etc.) would certainly be
appropriate here, but it cannot be done with-
out turning a review into a version of the
Key. By way of compensation, I will quote
in full one entry from the Dictionary of Old
Norse Prose, Cleasby-Vigfusson, and Fritz-
ner (Johan Fritzner, Ordbog over det gamle
norske sprog, 2d ed., 3 vols. [1885–96; re-
print, including vol. 4, Rettelser og tillegg,
by Finn Hodnebø, Oslo: Universitetsforlaget,
1972–73 (vol. 4, 1972)]). To save space, I
have chosen a very short (and, consequently,
uncharacteristic) entry without polysemy,
but even this illustration will give some idea
of the format of the new dictionary.

Degnbol et al. 614
ásmundr sb. m. [: -ar] □
“ásmundr” (cf. propr. Ásmundr), et styk-
ke jern (af bestemt størrelse/vægt/værdi) //
piece of iron (of designated size/weight/value):
cc. jarn oc lx. ásmundar DI VII
([1504]: AM 257 II) 75612; lvkazt skve vijjj
vigsbætvjr etper fyrnefndan magnvs. ix stikvr
klædes fyrir c. xij merkvr vax fyrir c. mælis-
kietil fyrir c. iiunnvr maltz fyrir c. jcc oc xx
asmynnda fyrir c. oc svo virda penninga j
hvort c sidan DI VI (*[1480–1494] > AM
238x) 31844; at setia kaup hia utlenksum . . .
ijj asmundar firir fisk DIIX 51836 (y. isl.
1546); xij alnum (skal tundra) reka med vare
(skoel/spade med jernand., cf. Blöndal
varreka sb f. // shovel/spade with cutting-
edge of metal). og sie j iij asmundar Búal2A
22a37; Detta innan gatta . . . saluns åkläde .ij
.x. asmundar .iiij. hardsteinar. ein jarnsleggia.
og sie j iij asmundar Búal2A
22a37; Detta innan gatta . . . saluns åkläde .ij
.x. asmundar .iiij. hardsteinar. ein jarnsleggia.

Comp.: merkr-
Gloss.: Aj; ClVSuppl; Fr4 ósmundar pl.;
NO pl.; ÁBlM; (Bl)
Litt.: Falk 1914 1; SAOBXIIX osmund;
Magnús M. Lárussson 1958 [Skírmir 132]
223; Hannerberg 1968 [KLNM 13] 43–45;

Cleasby and Vigfusson 788
ásnundr, m. a bar of Osmund iron; c. ás-
munda, 1440 Dipl. iv. 616. fjórutía ásmunda,
1475 v. 792; hundrað ásmunda, 1489 vi. 653;
cc. járns og lc. ásmundar, 1504 vii. 742; j c.
ásmundar, 1512 viii. 395.

Fritzner 4:273
‘ósmundar, m.pl. klumper av blästerjern;
skr osmond i eng toll-lister fra 1500-tallet,
jvf DN XIX. Sørli språkminner 27; jvf Falk
W 1.
A Dictionary of Old Norse Prose is incomparably richer than its predecessors, and this is its main virtue, rather than a spectacular increase in the number of words included. Fritzner translated everything into “Dano-Norwegian”; Guðbrandur Vigfusson used English glosses. Except when a word is absolutely straightforward (for instance, akkeri ‘anker // anchor’), the editors followed neither Fritzner nor Guðbrandur. Cf. badferð: Fritzner — ‘Gaaen i Bad’, Cleasby-Vigfusson — ‘time for bathing’, Dictionary of Old Norse Prose — (1) ‘det at gå i bad // the act of bathing’, (2) um baðferðir ‘ved baðetid // at bathing time’; baðkápa: Fritzner — ‘Kaabe, Kappe, som man kaster over the act of bathing’, (2) ved baðferð // at bathing time’; baðkåbe: Vigfusson — ‘baathing-cloak’, In cleasby-ners — ‘Kaabe, Kappe, som man kaster over sit Legeme naar man gaar af Badet’, Cleasby-Vigfusson — ‘Kaabe, Kappe, som man kaster over sit Legeme naar man gaar af Badet’, Cleasby-Vigfusson — ‘bathing-cloak’, Dictionary of Old Norse Prose — ‘bakehåke // bathrobe’; baðstofa: Fritzner — ‘Badstue, hvori man tog Dampbad’, with the following addition at the end of the entry: “Under Navn af baðstue forefindes mangesteds i Norges Landsbygder et afsides fra Gaardens øvrige Bygninger staaende Hus, der anvendes til derpaa at tørre det Korn som skal males, og dels har en saadan Indredning, at det vilde være anvendeligt til Dampbad, dels har, skjønt kaldet Badstue, faaet en anden Indretning, som kun gjør det anvendeligt til Kornstørring.” Cleasby-Vigfusson — ‘a bath-room’, with an explanation of a different type: “The time of bathing, as borne out by many passages in the Sturl. and Bs., was after supper, just before going to bed; a special room, baðstofa (bath-room), is freq. mentioned as belonging to Icel. farms of that time ... The modern sense of baðstofa is sitting-room, probably from its being in modern dwellings placed where the old bathing room used to be. The etymology of Jon Olafsson [sic] (Icel. Dict. MS.), baðstofa = bakstofa, is bad. In old writers baðstofa never occurs in this modern sense, but it is used so in the Dropl. Saga Major: — a closet, room, in writers of the 16th century, Bs. ii. 244, 256, 504, Safn. 77, 92, 95, 96.” Dictionary of Old Norse Prose — (1) ‘badstue (særskilt bygning el. indbygget i gården) // steam bath, sauna (a separate building or a room in a farmhouse)’, (2) spec. offentlig badstue/sauna // spec. public steambath/sauna’, (3) ‘opholdsstue som kan opvarmes // living-room that can be heated’. It is evident that A Dictionary of Old Norse Prose prefers multiplying glosses (baðstofa is given three translations, each supported by examples) to comments of encyclopedic nature. This is its policy throughout, the idea being that a good gloss will make additional explanations superfluous. In Cleasby-Vigfusson, numerous phrases are translated even when they are nonidiomatic; for example, almost every word group occurring at annarr is translated there into English. In the Dictionary of Old Norse Prose, even “öl er annarr maðr,” though marked as a proverb (it is preceded by “þat er satt sem mælt er, at”), is left without a gloss (483.34–35). In this respect, the Dictionary of Old Norse Prose follows Fritzner, which, I think, is regrettable. Who can understand something like ‘öl er annarr maðr’ without some help? Lexicographers should be guided by a piece of conventional German wisdom: “Man kann sich den Leser nie dumm genug vorstellen,” and remember that (Old) Icelandic is a particularly difficult language. Fortunately, the editors are not consistent; thus, “legit hafa mér andvirki nær garði en” [I have had more important things to do then] (461.21–24) and quite a few others have been explained.

The authors of some dictionaries do not feel obligated to follow their own glosses. A classic example of such a dictionary is Collins German-English, English-German Dictionary (Collins Deutsch-Englisch, Englisch-Deutsch Großwörterbuch), by Peter Terrell et al., 2d ed. (Glasgow: HarperCollins, 1991). For instance, under rühren (b) we find ‘touch sth’ and ‘touch on sth’; this meaning is illustrated by daran wollen wir nicht rühren ‘let’s not go into it’ and rühret nicht daran! ‘let us not dwell on that’. What is the use of glossing rühren with ‘touch (on)’ if some other variant always appears to be preferable? Would it not have been more logical to gloss rühren with ‘touch, touch on, go into, dwell on’? Other dictionaries give a limited but admittedly sufficient choice of variants in every gloss. The Dictionary of Old Norse Prose belongs to the latter type. Since the line between free word groups and mildly idiomatic phrases is tenuous, occasional last-minute additions are hard to avoid. Thus, the Dictionary of
Old Norse Prose glosses ákefð (1) so: ‘voldsomhed, intensitet, styrke // violence, intensity, strength’, but explains that með ákefð means ‘with emphasis’; an explanation to this effect is embedded in a sentence dealing with rhetoric: “þa ær maðr talar með ákefð (eftertrykk // emphasis) nockvra lvti” (222. 33–37).

It might perhaps be useful to employ a special symbol for idioms. Under ár ‘oar’ we find the phrases draga ár, draga á árum, drepa árum í, falla við/á ár, falla til ára, fara undir ára, and eleven more. Nearly all of them are free groups (drepa árum í ‘put out the oars’ — note that í is an adverb, most conveniently marked with an exclamation point: drepa árum í [!] — etc.), but koma ár sinni fyrir bord með means ‘get under way’, so ‘ply one’s oars’ (figuratively), and róa áru [e-rs] [fyrir e-m] means ‘put (sby’s) case (to sby)’. After the first of these the parenthesis fig. is given, the second is not marked at all (518.49–52, 519.14–18). But both are idioms of the type ‘paddle one’s own canoe’ and ‘put in one’s oar’, and if they were given in boldface italic type (using boldface roman for nonidiomatic expressions), their character would become immediately obvious.

Although A Dictionary of Old Norse Prose lists the scholarly literature pertaining to the headwords (which is wonderful), it makes no mention of their etymology. This was doubtless a correct solution. Guðbrandur Vigfusson and, less regularly, Fritzner comment on the origin of words, but today we have four etymological dictionaries of Icelandic, and scholars interested in derivations and the place of Icelandic in Germanic and Indo-European should turn to these books. Only in very few cases, as a matter of curiosity, a remark on etymology could have enlivened a gloss: cf. what is said in Cleasby-Vigfusson about badstofa < *bakstofa.

Volume 1 of Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog is to be followed by eleven more. If every volume takes about five to six years to complete, even today’s youngest students may not see the end of the project. This is perfectly all right, however: great dictionaries cannot be written fast, but then they stay forever.

Anatoly Liberman