

In memoriam Bjarne Fidjestøl  
30 September 1937 – 9 February 1994  
Colleague and Friend

I cannot remember exactly when I first met Bjarne Fidjestøl, but I do remember the first impression he made on me. It was of a man both gentle and charming, and someone whose interests in skaldic poetry were as keen as mine, and probably much more firmly based. I had been reading his scholarly works for a long time before I met him, and in my estimation in the early 1980s (the time when we probably did meet) he was asking the interesting questions about skaldic verse and writing the most interesting articles and books of anyone in the field at that time. I had already read and admired his article on skaldic style (“Kenningsystemet,” *Maal og minne* 1974, 7–50) while I was starting to think about my own approach to skaldic poetics in the late 1970s and early 80s. His work in this article, so obviously informed by linguistic theory and so rigorous in its approach, was very exciting to me and at the same time gave me a basis from which to move towards a position on the nature of skaldic poetics as presented in Snorri’s *Edda*. Then, in 1982, Bjarne published his doctoral dissertation as *Det norrøne fyrstediktet*, an important work in which he addressed a number of vital questions regarding the relationship between kings’ sagas from the perspective of a scholar of the skaldic verse they contain. This I also admired, because it seemed to me that the way forward in skaldic studies was and still is to consider the corpus of skaldic verse as it has come down to us in coherent manuscript and generic groups, to edit it paying attention to these groupings and to their relationships. Bjarne had made a beginning for the kings’ sagas, and I thought this was very much a step in the right direction.

My first definite memory of Bjarne was at the Sixth International Saga Conference at Helsingør in 1985. I was so pleased that he wanted to get together a group of those present who were interested in skaldic poetry to consider re-editing the corpus in order to get over, once and for all, the chicken-and-egg problem posed by the existence of Finnur Jónsson’s edition of *Skjaldedigting* and his re-edition of the *Lexicon poeticum* — how the one feeds into the other and makes it impossible for the scholar to get at the manuscript evidence for the poetry, unless he or she goes to the manuscripts themselves on every occasion. I remember a small group of us met in some underground bunker at LO-skolen to devise a plan for the great new edition and talked a long way into the night. We needed an anchor-man, as they say in the media, someone who could take control of a world-wide operation to re-edit the corpus of skaldic verse. Although Bjarne had proposed the grand plan, with characteristic modesty he did not put himself forward to coordinate it. We needed someone with a computer base (we thought in terms of mainframes in those days), and there really wasn’t anyone of the group able at the time to take on that anchor-man position. So, unfortunately, the grand plan for a re-edition of the skaldic corpus is no nearer fulfilment now than it was in 1985, but it is worth putting on record that the plan was Bjarne’s and that it was typical of him to think big.

Bjarne’s research and writing were characterized by elegant theory, intellectual adventurousness, an interest in methodologies both within and beyond literary boundaries, and a fine literary sensitivity to the texts he wrote and talked about. His edition of *Sólarljóð* (1979) demonstrates all his qualities of philological exactness, intellectual daring, and interpretative sensitivity. The fact that he died giving a lecture is somehow characteristic of him too and shows the intellectual and academic engagement of the man, as well as his intellectual

altruism. One of his last scholarly acts was to post an e-mail message on oldnorsenet on the morning of 9 February, again showing his deep involvement with his subject, his use of new technologies, and his desire to communicate his ideas to all who were interested in Old Norse studies, to senior scholars and beginners alike.

There were many other sides to Bjarne that I was not privileged to know. Odd Einar Haugen evokes some of them in the obituary he wrote for *Bergens Tidende* and *Aftenposten* and posted on oldnorsenet on 22 February 1994. He refers there to the unfinished work Bjarne was preparing on eddic poetry and the new Norwegian literary history which appeared only a few weeks before he died. Among many other things one might mention, it should be placed on record here that Bjarne was a great supporter of *alvíssmál*. All of us who work in Old Norse studies and who knew Bjarne have been both shocked and saddened by his death, but we shall remember him, and his writings and personal influence will keep his memory green.

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