

9. "The Flatus Symbol in Chaucer", *Inland II* (Salt Lake City, Spring 1959), 19-20. Although Bowen's article contains some parody of recent Chaucerian pedantics, it is here making valid interpretations.

10. See Robinson's note to this line.

11. *Gentil*, of course, carries also the parodic theme of courtly love; see D. D. Griffith, "On Word-Studies in Chaucer", *Philologica: The Malone Anniversary Studies* (Baltimore, 1949), p. 198.

12. See Robinson's glossary, *brokkinge*; also F. Klaeber, *Das Bild bei Chaucer* (Berlin, 1893), p. 435. The cacaphony of this strange word is intensified by the jingling preparation for it in the equally odd *brocage*, two lines before. Puns and verbal echoes occur frequently throughout in relation to the singing and general noise-making of the characters; cp. the use of *solas* in 3200 and 3335, and see E. T. Donaldson, *loc. cit.*, p. 138.

13. The phrase, in its application, is Muscatine's, *op. cit.*, 228.

14. Robinson, *Romance of the Rose*, lines 3677-80.

15. An irony first noted by Richard Brathwait, *A Comment upon the Two Tales... The Miller's Tale, and the Wife of Bath* (London, 1665), p. 44.

16. See Robinson's note to line 3709. A few lines later there is another sort of ironic echo, presumably meant to be unconscious on the part of the speaker, when Absolon uses the phrase "trewe love"; cp. 3715 with 3692.

17. The parallel with the *Troilus* is noted by N. Coghill, *Geoffrey Chaucer* (London, 1956), p. 47.

18. As Owen has observed, *loc. cit.*, 53.

19. Or, as Muscatine more impressively if more punningly phrased it, *op. cit.*, 228, his "anal-retentive squeamish spotlessness [is] punished with terrible aptness at the end".

20. As J. Y. T. Greig noted, *The Psychology of Laughter and Comedy* (London, 1926), pp. 104-5.

A SKALDIC NOTE

8.

Rognvaldr jarl kali, lv. 4.

Wit and slander are the point of Rognvald's fourth occasional stanza. A groat's worth of wit for a modicum of slander and a brief prose setting constitute the first part of chapter 72 of the *Orkneyinga Saga*.¹ No one has called the lines a *níðvísa* but the slander is there all the same. The slander is in the verse because the verse is with the prose and if the prose seems unclear this is only because the relationship between verse and prose is unclear.

Where an occasional stanza is quoted in a narrative - and aside from the *Snorra Edda* and the grammatical treatises that is where it is quoted - it has one of three relationships to the prose that goes with it: it is supplementary to the narrative, a footnote of authentication; it is integral to the narrative and part and parcel of it; it is purely incidental and peripheral to the story.

The supplementary stanza, the footnote of authentication, repeats information already in the prose text. It, like the helmings of continuous poems, is the footnote to a story testifying to the accuracy of narrative's outline or its detail.

The helmings of continuous poems are almost exclusively supplementary. Rarely do the manuscripts quote a continuous poem as a whole, although the *Flateyjarbók* does quote the *Geisli* as a unit, the *Nórengskonungatal* is similarly recorded and so is the *Höfuðlausn* of *Egill Skallagrímsson*. Nor are these the only ones. But more frequently the helmings of a continuous poem are distributed throughout a prose text as an appeal to the authority of the skald, or, as an intellectual and esthetic ornament, a display of skaldic skill. Which reason predominates is not always evident.

Many an occasional helling too is in the narrative on account of the sheer merit of the lines, lines that were too good to be allowed to disappear. The fourteenth occasional verse of *Eyvindr Finnsson skáldaspillir* with its rhymed wit of *álhimins* and *óss lendingar*, with its ingenious kenning juxtaposition of *sævar orvar* to *Egils gaupna sildr*, must owe its preservation in the saga as much to the brilliance of the verse as to its value as testimony for the facts. There are scores of such stanzas.

Not that all verse was equally good. There was a very considerable tendency in Old Norse to retain every syllable of the traditional material regardless of its merit, and by this token some pretty shabby verse was handed down to posterity. The lines from *Eirikssaga rauða*,²

Eltu seggr,
- allsátt vas þat -
einn einfeting
ofan til strandar.
Enn kynligr maðr
kostaði rásar
hart, ofstopi.
Heyr, Karlsefni!

can only have been kept at the promptings of the scholarly consciences of the men who formulated the saga. The lines have none but the doubtful distinction of being the oldest extant poetic composition of continental North America. But, like all supplementary verse, good or bad, they give a footnote to a narrative incident.

An integrated stanza is an actual part of the narrative. In sagas where the skald is a principal these are particularly frequent. The eighth occasional stanza of *Gisli Súrsson* is his recitation in a *dróttkvætt* stanza of the puzzle: *fǫlu vinar tál-grímr*. The puzzle, and its subsequent solution in the prose text as the name *þorgrímr*, are themselves incidents in the saga narrative, the stanza and its puzzles being *Gisli's* confession of murder. Similarly, the second occasional verse of *Sigvatr Þórðarson*, though not as intimate a part of the story, is no less an integral stanza, for *Sigvat* uses this stanza to ask for a hearing for his *drápa*. Like *Gisli's* stanza, *Sigvat's* is the actual dialogue for the narrative. The peculiar property of the integrated stanza is that its removal would render the story unintelligible, as with *Gisli's*, or make it fragmentary, as with *Sigvat's*.

An integrated occasional helming can be readily enough distinguished. The line in *Hrólfssaga kraka*

aukum enn elda at Áðils húsum

might at first not appear to be integral to the story. But in fact its recitation is a challenge, its composition a boast. Hrólf's invention of an alliterating line under torture demonstrate his heroic stature. So that even though its removal would not create a conspicuous lacuna in the narrative proper it is still obviously integral to the dialogue and to the narrative.

The occasional lines of Rognvald which begin

Taff em ek qrr at effa
íþróttir kann ek nú

could, it is true, be omitted from the saga with no one the wiser. But they too, yielding as they do detail about Rognvald's accomplishments not duplicated in the prose, form enough of the essential material of the *Orkneyingasaga* to be called integrated verse.

An incidental stanza does not authenticate narrated material, neither is it an incident in, nor the dialogue to, the general narrative situation. Like the prose that accompanies it, it is peripheral to the narrative proper of the saga in which it appears. Of course strictly speaking little, if any, skaldic verse is purely peripheral. By its very existence a helming, be it integral, supplementary or incidental, comments if only by inference on the skald who composed it. To the extent of this inference it can be called integral but distinctions obviously can be made beyond this.

Some skaldic verse is essentially incidental. A helming is incidental when the incident that contains the lines could be removed without altering the main narrative. Neither the prose nor the poetry of the incident may be excised from the saga alone, for the prose accompanying the incidental occasional stanza exists solely for the purpose of making the verse intelligible.

Such a stanza is Hallfred's successful extemporaneous response in *dróttkvætt* to Olaf's challenge to introduce eight times into eight intelligible, correct lines the word *sverð*. Such a stanza is Rognvald's spontaneous jest on the woman who comes to the fire from the wintry outdoors, wet, cold, half frozen in fact, her teeth chattering. Challenged to tell what she is saying Rognvald answers with a helming that mocks her frozen stutter,

Dúsið ér, en Ása
- atatata - liggr í vatni,
- hutututu - hvar skal ek sitja,
heldr er mér kalt, við eldinn?

Each of the incidents inclosing the incidental stanzas is irrelevant to the narrative as such, is not a part of the essential dialogue of the saga

proper, does not attest to the reliability of any but the immediately concomitant prose text, if that. The stanza is a piece of wit to which the prose is the exposition. Verse and prose are wholly dependent on each other, in the absence of either the other would be vapid, pointless and incomprehensible. Though the whole of the incident could be omitted no part of it could be.

These distinctions of supplementary, integrated and incidental helmings although clear in themselves are not necessarily so clear in practice. But many an uncertainty about the meaning of a skaldic stanza can be basically resolved only with reference to these distinctions. Rognvald's fourth occasional verse is a case in point. It is an incidental stanza. It, and the first prose paragraph of chapter 72 of the *Orkneyinga Saga*, are readily enough understood when it is recognized that the stanza is incidental verse, verse inherently bound only to the accompanying prose and, typically, that it and the incident are connected with the saga only arbitrarily. The prose is perfectly straightforward. Chapter 72 begins: *Sunnudag hafði Rognvalldr iarl tidir þar i þorpinu, ok stodu þeir uti hia kirkiunni. Þa sa þeir hvar gengu xvi menn slyppir ok kollottir; þeim þottu þeir undarliga bunir. Iarlsmenn ræddu um, hverir vera mundi. Þa kvat iarl visu:*

"Sunday Rognvald jarl went to mass there in the town and he was standing with his men outside near the church. They saw sixteen men go by, unarmed and shorn and it struck them that this was a peculiar way for men to dress; they wondered what they were. Then Rognvald said this stanza:"

Having specifically come to hear mass Rognvald has at least some familiarity with Christian practices. That his men, whatever familiarity they had with Christianity, had not seen monks before is plainly the implication of the saga, but they knew that these were men and not women, for it was their being men, and not women, that made their dress so peculiar. Only women went unarmed, and, moreover, only slaves had their hair short. So what manner of men were they, that was what Rognvald and his men wondered, that went without arms like women and without hair like slaves? Should they be called men at all? It is possible that not only Rognvald is using heavy irony but his men as well, which is to say the author of the saga. The charge of slavery implies indignity and cowardice, the charge of femininity implies that they are perverse: *argr*, the ultimate Old Norse insult.

So with deliberate malice Rognvald simulates ignorance of their sex and says,

Sextán hefik sénar
senn með topp í enni
jarðir, elli firðar,
ormvangs saman ganga.

"I saw a group of women, not so old either, with nothing but a tuft

of hair left on the forehead." The keys to the kenning, *ormvangs jorð*, are reminiscent of male kennings, an allusion that is no accident. The *elli firðar* points out that they are not just bald from age. The helming, pretending to state a puzzle, conveys an insult, an insult that Rognvald in the next helming implies may well apply to the whole island.

þat berum vér vitni,
- vestr - at hér sé flestar -
sjá liggir út við elum
ey - kollóttar meyjjar.

"I can see for myself that here in Westray most women are hairless." This finishes off the insult, for Rognvald is saying in fact that not only the men - by *kollóttar meyjjar* neither he nor his men understood "women" - are dressed like women here but that they are cropped like slaves as well. *Níð* can not go much farther, not even Hjalti Skjeggjason with his calumny of the bishop.

Cleasby-Vigfusson³ under the gloss on *kollóttar*, refers specifically to this helming and says that it speaks "of nuns". This is obviously an error as is Meissner's⁴ statement in passing that "Rognvald sieht 16 orknöische Mädchen," although Meissner later adds, "die Prosa (zu dieser Strophe) ist ganz unklar und ohne die Verse unverständlich," without going on to clarify the relationship between verse and prose.

Sjá liggir vestr út við elum ey is the one clause, its meaning probably a double entendre. Finnur Jónsson has for the clause *sjá ey liggir út við elum*. He takes *vestr* as "her vestrþá" and puts it with the other clause, "er kvinden uden hovedpynt", and this then means "denne ø ligger ud i mot (udsat for) alle byger."

But in chapter 71, which precedes this chapter, the saga locates Rognvald at Westray in the north west of the Orkneys so that *sjá ey liggir vestr út við elum* can hardly fail to be a reference to *Vestrey*, the Old Norse name of the island. This, incidentally, would controvert Taylor's notion that this particular chapter and incident should be with chapter seventy-seven.⁵

The *Sigurðarbólkr* of *Ívarr Ingimundarson* has the construction *helt . . . konungr snekkju vestr í eyjar*, which Finnur Jónsson takes to mean "til Øerne (Orknøerne)". In stanza six of the *Sigurðarbólkr*, *vas . . . vestr í eyjum*, Finnur Jónsson gives "vestrþá i øerne", but it too means "out in the Orkneys". In the preceding chapter of the *Orkneyinga Saga* there is this account of Rognvald's activities: *ok komu fram friadagsaptan i Vestrey i Hofn til Helga*. All of this pretty well establishes the reference in this clause, *sjá ey liggir vestr út við elum*, as a reference to Westray and the Orkneys simultaneously. The structure is syntactic, not morphological, tmesis. *Vestr út* describes the location of the islands, *út* being strictly speaking not west but in the outward-bound direction of the Norway-Iceland passage.

The poetic filler appears in the manuscripts as *við elon* and *við elu*

but there does not seem to be any reasonable alternative to emending them to *við elum*. It cannot be dismissed however with the phrase "poetic convenience" alone. Poetic convenience it may be, but it has to make sense in the stanza. Among the better skalds the demands of meter and of rhyme did not obviate those of intelligibility. Eyvind's line: *mest selda ek mínar*, is intelligible, however feeble. *Við elum* upon examination is in fact more than merely intelligible. It sounds, in precisely the words of Finnur Jónsson, "udsat for alle byger", like a reference to the series of violent storms which, every winter without fail, lash the Orkneys and the Shetlands in their border location between the westerlies and the arctic north-easters. *Út við elum* might well have identified those islands to a Norseman as surely as calling them by name.

This last matter is not just trivia. What to our own century is the product of detailed search, knowledge that, once found, is still only remembered with difficulty was to the Norseman a matter of everyday, even essential, fact. Not just any detail is relevant of course, not every trifle of significance. A detail with no other virtue but abstruseness is merely a curiosity if that; if it is to be cited with propriety it must be relevant in terms of Norse culture. It was the special peculiarity of the Viking poet that he was neither a bad fighter nor a poor sailor - for obvious reasons. Neither was the most of his audience. So the poet could expect a ready comprehension of technical reference to the sea and sailing, knowledge without which few Norsemen lived long enough to be addressed even in prose. A man who had sailed the passage *vestr út* knew the islands and their weather.

The skald did not compose senselessly. But his sense, like that of the men who composed the sagas, is not in terms of our culture but of his: the devices of his language, the forms of his literature, the encyclopedia of his knowledge and the structure of his society. The determination of these is the whole preoccupation of the philologist. His tools are whatever lies to hand, their employment not dictated by linguistic schools, not confined by scholarly traditions, not inhibited by parochial prejudices and not sanctified by erudite display.

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Notes.

1. *Orkneyinga Saga*, Sigurður Nordal ed., vol. 40 of *Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur*, (København, 1913-16).
2. Finnur Jónsson, *Den Norsk-Islandske Skjaldedigtning*, (København, 1912-15) is the source of the stanzas quoted except for this one which is quoted from Ernst Albin Kock, *Den Norsk-Islandske Skjaldedigtningen* (Lund, 1946).
3. Richard Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, 2^o, (Oxford, 1956).
4. Rudolf Meissner, "Ermengarde Vicegräfin von Narbonne und Jarl Rögnvald", in *Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi*, XLI (1925), p. 144.
5. *The Orkneyinga Saga*, translated by Alexander Burt Taylor, (London, 1938), p. 117.