KARI ELLEN GADE

Sigurðr – Gǫfuct dýr:
A Note on *Fáfnismál* St. 2

The opening stanzas of *Fáfnismál* consist of a dialogue between Fáfnir and Sigurðr in which the dying serpent inquires about the identity of his slayer (Fm 1) and Sigurðr retorts with the following stanza (Fm 2):[1]

> Gǫfuct dýr ec heiti,   enn ec gengit hefc
>   inn móðurlausi mǫgr;
> fǫður ec ácca   sem fira synir,
>   geng ec æ einn saman.

> "Splendid animal is my name, and I have wandered,
>   the motherless man;
> I have no father like the sons of men,
>   I always travel alone."

According to the prose text Sigurðr concealed his name following an ancient belief that a dying person could inflict fatal injury on his enemy by including the enemy's name in a curse. The superstition connected with naming and the power of the dying is well attested in Scandinavian territory (Sijmons and Gering 1931:185; Gödecke 1881:358), and Norse literature contains several examples of people traveling incognito or hiding their names in verbal paraphrases to avoid falling into somebody else's power (Kjær 1924:55–56). However, the meaning of *gǫfuct dýr* in *Fáfnismál* 2:1 is obscure. Although it is generally believed that the phrase contains a clue to Sigurðr's identity, its meaning clearly eluded Fáfnir who, persisting in his inquiries, finally succeeded in extracting a more exact answer (*Sigurðr ec heiti, Sigmundr hét minn faðir* "Sigurðr is my name, my father was called Sigmundr", Fm 4:4–5), and it has remained a puzzle to Eddic scholars. In the following I shall give a critical survey of the earlier attempts to explain this circumlocution and suggest that *gǫfuct dýr* contained a pun on the name *Sigurðr* that must have been recognized and appreciated by the medieval audience.

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[1] Ed. Neckel (1985). All translations from Old Norse are my own.

Earlier Explanations, I: The Stag Hypothesis

A large number of Eddic translators and editors give a literal translation of
gǫfuct dýr and refrain from further comments.[2] Detter and Heinzel
(1903:409) speculated that the phrase might refer to a specific animal, just as
the lion is called "hit óarga dýr" (the uncowardly animal), but they made no
suggestions about the possible identity of this animal. Jacob and Wilhelm
Grimm (1815:179) translated *gǫfuct dýr* as "Funkelthier". They connected
the adjective *gǫfugr* with *fráneygðr* 'sharp-eyed' that frequently is used to
characterize the members of the Vǫlsung family, and contended that *gǫfuct
dýr* referred to a wild, ferocious animal, perhaps a wolf or lynx. The
Grimms' interpretation was adopted by Bergmann (1879:244–45), who trans-
lated the line "Luchsartig ich heiss" and maintained that Sigurðr compared
himself to a lynx because he had overcome Fáfnir in a cunning and treacher-
ous manner. Wilhelm Jordan (1910:278) went a step further and emended
the line to *gaupa hugðr ec heiti* ("Luchsmut heiβ ich") because *gǫfuct dýr* in
his opinion made no sense in this context.

V.B. Hjort was the first to suggest that *gǫfuct dýr* was a circumlocution for
'stag' ("krondyr"; 1865:203), an interpretation that later has become widely
accepted by scholars.[3] Andreas Heusler (1918–19:173) believed that *gǫfuct
dýr* (stag) might contain a reference to the version of Sigurðr's youth in
chapter 162 of *Þiðriks saga* according to which the orphan Sigurðr is raised
by a hind in the forest.[4] Hugo Gering tentatively agreed with Heusler
(Sijmons and Gering 1931:186). He pointed out that ON *dýr* often denotes a
member of the cervidae family (deer, hart) and drew attention to stanza 38
of *Helgaqviða Hundingsbana II* in which Helgi is likened to a young stag
(*dýrkálfr*):

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[2] "Wunderthier" (Simrock 1851:161; von Wolzogen 1876:294); "Wundertier" (Gorsleben:48;
Genzmer 1963:121); "Wonderdier" (de Vries 1952:61); "Edles Thier" (von der Hagen
1814:n.p.); "Freigebiges Thier" (Holtzmann 1875:389); "geschmücktes/ausgezeichnetes Thier"
(Lüning 1859:548, 562); "Herligt Dyr" (Møller 1870:106); "härligt djur" (Brate 1913:155), "et
ædelt dyr" (Horn 1869:168); "Gævt Dyr" (Hansen 1911:174); "Hög-djur" (Afzelius 1818:181;
Sander 1893:211; Cederschiöld 1910:31; Åkerblom 1921:80); "Noble Beast" (Auden and Taylor
1983:78).
[3] "Krondjur" (Gödecke 1881:189; Ljungstedt 1904:139); "Noble deer" (Vigfusson and Powell
1883:35, 470); "der stolze Hirsch" (Gering 1892:202); "der stattliche Hirsch" (Sijmons and
Gering 1931:186); "Högdjur" (of the stag family) (Ohlmarks 1954:105); "Fagerhjort" (Gjessing
1899:183); "Hjort" (Mortensson 1908:98); "The Noble Hart" (Bellows 1957:372); "Stag"
(Hollander 1962:223).
[4] The connection between *Fáfnismál* 2 and *Þiðriks saga* ch. 162 was first suggested by Panzer
(1912:84–85). He believed that the Eddic poem alluded to an old tradition of Sigurðr as an
orphan, a variant of the Bear's Son tale, and he therefore translated *gǫfuct dýr* as 'Bear's son'.

Svá bar Helgi   af hildingom
sem ítrscapaðr   ascr af þyrni,
eða sá dýrkálfr   dǫggo slunginn,
er øfri ferr   ǫllom dýrom,
oc horn glóa   við himin siálfan.

"Helgi surpassed other chieftains
as the shapely ash tree the thorn bush,
or the young stag, wet with dew,
who wanders above all animals,
and whose horns glow against heaven itself."

Gering (ibid.) observed that the same imagery occurs in Guðrún's lament over the dead Sigurðr in *Guðrúnarqviða II* (st. 2):

Svá var Sigurðr   uf sonom Giúca,
sem væri grœnn laucr ór grasi vaxinn,
eða hiortr hábeinn   um hvǫssom dýrom,
eða gull glóðrautt   af grá silfri.

"Sigurðr rose above the sons of Giúci,
as the green leek growing up from the grass,
or the highlegged hart above fierce beasts,
or the redglowing gold above grey silver."

In his opinion the phrase *hiǫrtr hábeinn* "highlegged hart" established a firm connection between Sigurðr and a stag and supported his translation of *gǫfuct dýr*.

Already as early as 1905 Finnur Jónsson declared that the translation 'stag' was unfortunate and ought to have been avoided (Finnur Jónsson 1905:507; 1921:42–43; 1932:293, note 2). According to him, *gǫfuct dýr* contained a veiled expression for 'man': Fáfnir is an ignoble animal (a snake) and Sigurðr is his opposite ("noble animal", i.e., "man"). Finnur's interpretation has not gained much favor, but was tentatively adopted by R. C. Boer (1922:184) and by Guðni Jónsson (1954:101).

The possible connection between *Fáfnismál*, *Guðrúnarqviða II*, and chapter 162 of *Þiðriks saga* was explored further by Otto Höfler (1961, 1978) in his attempts to prove that the story of Sigurðr the Dragonslayer was ultimately derived from a historical account of the Cheruscian Arminius and his victory over Varus at the battle of Teutoburg Forest in 9 A.D.[5] Höfler traced the ethnic name *Cherusci* back to PGmc. **herut-* 'stag' and contended that the stag symbolism surrounding Sigurðr in Norse literature is a relic of his Cheruscian origin. He maintained that the version of Sigurðr's youth in

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[5] For a summary of Höfler's arguments see Höfler (1978:111–19) and Beck (1985).

Þiðriks saga was based on ancient tradition and that both the phrase *gǫfuct dýr* and the subsequent references to Sigurðr as an orphan in *Fáfnismál* 2, as well as the stag metaphor in *Guðrúnarqviða II*, 2, are remnants of that tradition (Höfler 1961:52–54).

Höfler's enumeration of stag symbols in the Norse Sigurðr literature seems at first sight quite impressive, but a closer look reveals that many of his deductions are untenable. First of all, there is no evidence of an early Scandinavian tradition of the orphan Sigurðr growing up in the wild (cf. *Grípisspá*; *Reginsmál*; *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*:356–60; *Vǫlsungasaga*, chs. 14–16). According to Norse sources, Sigurðr was born and raised at the court of King Hiálprecr, who had captured and subsequently married Sigurðr's mother, Hiǫrdís, after the death of Sigmundr. In *Fáfnismál* 2 Sigurðr refers to himself as "the motherless man" and claims that he "had no father like the sons of men". Höfler (1961:52) takes this as an allusion to Sigurðr's youth as an orphan in the forest. However, in the fourth stanza of *Fáfnismál* Sigurðr not only reveals his own name, but also that of his father (*Sigmundr hét minn faðir*), and he is clearly familiar with his paternal ancestry. Furthermore, the subsequent stanzas refer explicitly to Sigurðr's status as a captive at King Hiálprecr's court. Consider the following verbal exchange between Fáfnir and Sigurðr (Fm 7:4–5; 8:4–6): *nú ertu haptr oc hernuminn* "now you are chained and a captive"; *eigi em ec haptr, þótt ec væra hernumi; þú fannt, at ec lauss lifi* "I am not chained, though I be a captive; you felt that I live unfettered". It seems then that Sigurðr's referring to himself as an orphan is merely a blind motif: he refuses to reveal the names of his parents for fear that he might furnish Fáfnir with the necessary clue to his identity.

The story of Sigurðr's youth in the wild first occurs in the thirteenth-century *Þiðriks saga*. It is modeled on a folktale known variously as the Constance, Cressentia, or Genevieve story, and bears all the marks of being a late addition, perhaps inspired by the misfortunes of Hiǫrdís in the Norse tradition (Andersson 1980:137–38). *Fáfnismál* is generally considered to be among the earlier Eddic poems (Finnur Jónsson 1894:276–77) and there are no reasons to believe that the poet was familiar with a version of Sigurðr's youth corresponding to the one recorded in *Þiðriks saga*.

Several scholars have used the stag imagery in *Guðrúnarqviða II*, 2, to support their translation of *gǫfuct dýr* as 'stag' (cf. Sijmons and Gering 1931:186; Höfler 1961:50–51; 1978:52). In his polemics against Höfler, Klaus von See (1966:65; 1971:40–41) showed that such metaphors of comparison are quite common in medieval literature.[6] Not only does this imagery occur

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[6] Von See (1971:40–41) gives a list of similar metaphors from Continental literature. For his other arguments against Höfler's identification Sigurðr-Arminius see Beck (1985) and von See (1966, 1971).

in *Guðrúnarqviða II*, 2, and *Helgaqviða Hundingsbana II*, 38, but also in *Guðrúnarqviða I*, 18, in the latter case without the stag symbolism:

> Svá var minn Sigurðr   hiá sonom Giúca,
> sem væri geirlaucr   ór grasi vaxinn,
> eða væri biartr steinn   á band dreginn,
> iarcnasteinn   yfir ǫðlingom.

> "Compared to the sons of Giúci, my Sigurðr was
> like the garlic growing up from the grass,
> like the bright stone set on a string,
> a jewel among chieftains."

Von See (1966:65) concluded that it is methodologically inadmissible to extricate one single element from a stereotyped string of metaphors and imbue it with a special meaning. The phrase *hiǫrtr hábeinn* in *Guðrúnarqviða II*, 2, as well as the other metaphors of comparison in the *Edda* (HH II, 38; Gðr I, 18) are consistent with the imagery of medieval ecclesiastic literature, and it is unlikely that any of them was consciously chosen to emphasize an actual characteristic of the eulogized person (Sigurðr, Helgi).

Earlier Explanations, II: The *ofljóst* Hypothesis

From the discussion above it emerges that there are no compelling reasons to connect Sigurðr in the Eddic cycle with a stag and, consequently, no reasons to translate *gǫfuct dýr* as 'stag'. The encounter between two adversaries and the ensuing dialogue consisting of a sequence of questions and answers and an exchange of names is an Eddic commonplace. Consider the following stereotyped responses to the question about identity:

Vm 8:1	*Gagnráðr ec heiti*
Hrbl 10:1	*Hárbarðr ec heiti*
HHv 15:1	*Atli ec heiti*
Alv 3:1	*Alvíss ec heiti.*

Sometimes the answers provide more substantial information:

Alv 6:1, 3	*Vingþórr ec heiti . . . sonr em ec Síðgrana*
HHv 17:1–2	*Hrímgerðr ec heiti, Hati hét minn faðir*
Rm 2:1–2	*Andvari ec heiti, Óinn hét minn faðir*
Grp 3:5–8	*Sigurðr ec heiti, borinn Sigmundi,*
	enn Hiǫrdís er hilmis móðir.

All these responses are structured according to the formula *X ec heiti*, in which *X* is a personal name. The same formula occurs in *Fáfnismál* 4:1–2 (*Sigurðr ec heiti, Sigmundr hét minn faðir*) and in *Fáfnismál* 2:1 (*Gǫfuct dýr*

ec heiti). Hence we should expect that the *X* element in *Fáfnismál* 2:1, *gǫfuct dýr*, should be synonymous with a personal name, a paraphrase of the name *Sigurðr*. It is clear that the person Sigurðr can be likened to a stag, a lynx, or any other "noble animal" for that matter, but his name is not "stag". Likewise, Sigurðr is a man, but he does not go by the name "man". This circumstance has been pointed out by a small group of scholars who have tried to explain *gǫfuct dýr* as a skaldic *ofljóst* construction, that is, as a pun on the name *Sigurðr* (Magnusen 1821–23:30, note 3, Kjær 1924; Olsen 1952; Ólafur M. Ólafsson 1970). Two of these suggestions are based on the Modern Icelandic form *Sigurður* (*Sigurdýr*, Magnusen 1821–23:30, note 3; *Sig-urð-úrr*, Ólafur M. Ólafsson 1970) and can be dismissed as phonological-ly impossible: *Fáfnismál* belongs to the older group of Eddic lays and the desyllabification of final *-r* did not take place until the fourteenth century (Jóhannes L. L. Jóhannsson 1924:73–74).[7] Magnus Olsen (1952) believed that *gǫfuct dýr* contained a pun on the pet name *Siggi*, the short form of *Sigurðr*. In Olsen's opinion, the solution to the riddle *Siggi = gǫfuct dýr* lies in the Norwegian dialectal word for 'pig's skin' or 'hard skin', *sigg* (n.), which is attested twice in Old Norse literature (Olsen 1952:32–33). He suggested that there could have existed a derivative weak masculine noun **siggi* "the *sigg*-animal" or "the one with *sigg*", that is, "boar" (*gǫfuct dýr*).

Olsen's solution is clever, but conjectural. The poet of *Fáfnismál could* have had the pet name *Siggi* in mind, there *could* have existed an Old Norse noun **siggi*, and this noun *could* have meant 'boar'. However, such a construction is not consistent with what we know about onomastic play in Norse poetry. Skaldic stanzas contain numerous examples of such circumlo-cutions, and they almost always involve puns on the two elements of a compound name, not on a monosyllabic name or a short name form.[8] For instance, when Egill Skallagrímsson concealed the name of his beloved, *Ásgerðr*, in the verbal texture of a *lausavísa* (lv 14:5–7), he paraphrased it as *faldr Bergóneris foldar* "the headdress of the giant's land" in which *faldr* 'headdress' is synonymous with *gerða* 'headdress' and *Bergóneris foldar* "of the giant's land, i.e., of the mountain" equals *áss* 'hill, mountain'. Roberta Frank (1970) has shown that the poetry of Kormákr Ǫgmundarsson abounds in onomastic puns on the two elements of the name *Stein-gerðr* ('stone' and 'goddess' or 'headdress') and it emerges from her discussion that such verbal play must have been much more common than is recognized by the modern reader.

[7] Aside from its phonological problems, Ólafur M. Ólafsson's suggestion that the three parts of the name *Sig-urð-ur* echo the first three lines of *Fáfnismál* 2 (*sig* 'wood' = *askr* 'ash tree' and the mythological figure *Askr* = "inn móður-lausi mǫgr"; *urð* 'gravel' = "enn ec gengit hefc"; *ur* = *úrr* 'aurochs' = "gǫfuct dýr") is too far fetched to merit consideration.
[8] The two examples given by Olsen (1952:32), *híðbyggvir* (lair dweller) = *Bersi* (bear) and *iugtanni* (bear) = *Bjarni* (bear) are exceptions rather than the rule (see Meissner 1921:84–86).

It is likely therefore that if the poet of *Fáfnismál* wanted to conceal the name *Sigurðr* in an *ofljóst* construction, he would have done so by making puns on the two elements *Sig-* and *-urðr*. However, so far only one attempt has been made to explain the phrase *gǫfuct dýr* in that way. A. Kjær (1924:56) believed that the adjective *gǫfugr* alluded to the first part of the compound (*Sig-*) and that the second part (*-urðr*) contained an expression for 'animal' (*dýr*). But because neither *-urðr* nor the fuller form *-vǫrðr* from the more archaic *Sig-vǫrðr* denoted any kind of animal in Old Norse, he suggested that the poet of *Fáfnismál* must have proceeded from the alternative name form *Sig-røðr* rather than from the more common *Sig-urðr*.[9] The noun *røðr* is listed among the *heiti* for 'boar' in the *Prose Edda* (*Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*:591), hence the name *Sig-røðr* could be paraphrased as "gǫfuct dýr".[10] To support this interpretation Kjær (1924:60) draws attention to the fact that the genitive form of *Sigrøðr* (*sukruþar*, i.e., *Sygrøþar*) occurs in the runic inscription at Ramsundsberg in Sweden (ca. 1050) together with the pictorial description of Sigurðr's fight with Fáfnir, and he maintains that, at least in eleventh-century Sweden, there must have existed a tradition connecting the commemorated person Sigrøðr with Sigurðr fáfnisbani (Kjær 1924:60; see also Brate and Wessén 1924–26:71–73). *Sigrøðr* is also attested as a personal name in tenth-century Norway and, since *Fáfnismál* is usually assumed to have been composed in Norway before the year 1000 (cf. Finnur Jónsson 1894:276), Kjær (1924:58, 60) concludes that the poet could have known the slayer of Fáfnir as Sigrøðr rather than Sigurðr and used that form as the basis for his *ofljóst* construction.

"Gǫfuct dýr" as an Onomastic Pun

Kjær's argumentation for an underlying form *Sig-røðr* and his explanation of the last part of that compound (*-røðr* = 'boar') are convincing, but his translation *Sig-røðr* 'splendid boar' is unacceptable. Old Norse *sig* (n.) meant 'battle' and could never be used synonymously with *gǫfugr* 'splendid' (cf. Sveinbjörn Egilsson:493; Fritzner I:671).[11] The noun occurs frequently in such poetic compounds as *Sig-faðir*, *-fǫðr* (father of battle, i.e., Óðinn); *Sig-freyr*, *-gautr*, *-njǫrðr*, *-týr* (kennings for Óðinn), etc. (Sveinbjörn Egilsson:493–95), and *Sig-røðr* must, accordingly, be translated as 'battle boar'

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[9] Lind (1905–15: cols. 877, 889–99) gives a list of the variant spellings of *Sigurðr/Sigrøðr*. According to him the two names were often confused in Old Norse texts (ibid., col. 877).

[10] For the etymology of *røðr* from PSc. **rēþuʀ* or **wrēþuʀ* see Kjær (1924:57).

[11] Höfler's translation *Sigr-røþr* 'Sieg-Eber' (Höfler 1961:53, note 173) is puzzling and must stem from his confusing the noun *sig* (n.) 'battle' with *sigr* (m. *r*-stem) 'victory' (cf. Sveinbjörn Egilsson:493–94).

and not as 'splendid boar'. The question is then, what is a "battle boar" and how can such a translation be reconciled with the phrase *gǫfuct dýr* in *Fáfnismál* 2? A glance at the corpus of Eddic poetry gives us the solution to this riddle. Consider the following lines from Freyja's speech to Hyndla in *Hyndlolióð* (st. 7:5–10, emphasis added):

> *þar er gǫltr glóar,   gullinbursti,*
> Hildisvíni,   *er mér hagir gǫrðo,*
> *dvergar tveir,   Dáinn oc Nabbi.*

> "where the boar glows, golden bristled,
> *Hildisvíni*, which two clever dwarfs,
> Dáinn and Nabbi, made for me".

The name of the boar, *Hildisvíni*, means 'battle boar', and consists of the same two elements as *Sig-rǫðr*, namely *hild-* (battle) and *svín-* (boar).[12] *Hildisvíni* is a perfect *ofljóst* paraphrase of *Sig-rǫðr* (*sig* = *hild-*; *rǫðr* = *svín*), and the golden bristled boar certainly deserves to be characterized as a "splendid animal" (*gǫfuct dýr*).

Hildisvíni as the name of a boar is only attested in *Hyndlolióð*. The date and provenance of that poem are in dispute (cf. Finnur Jónsson 1894:201–02; Hollander 1962:129; Klingenberg 1974:30). Because Freyja's attributes in Norse mythology were cats, not a boar (*Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*:176), scholars have contended that the image of the golden bristled boar was borrowed from Freyja's brother Freyr, who possessed the boar *Gullinbursti* (Golden-bristled) that the dwarfs Brokkr and Sindri had made for him (*Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*:342–44; cf. Klingenberg 1974:24). That boar is also known as *Slíðrugtanni* (Sheath-tooth; *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*:176, 264), but never as *Hildisvíni*. However, we cannot conclude *e silentio* that *Hildisvíni* was invented for the occasion by the poet of *Hyndlolióð* and that there did not exist a Norse tradition of a golden bristled boar with that name.

In the *Prose Edda Hildisvín* is the name of the boar-crested helmet that King Aðils of Uppsala won from his opponent King Áli (*Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*:394). According to *Fáfnismál* (sts. 16—19), Fáfnir's most famous attribute was the helmet *ægishiálmr* (helmet of terror) that strengthened the courage of those who wore it and instilled fear into their enemies. In Sigurðr's words (Fm 19):

> *"Inn fráni ormr,   þú gorðir fræs micla*
> *oc gazt harðan hug;*
> *heipt at meiri   verðr hǫlða sonom,*
> *at þann hiálm hafi."*

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[12] A form -*svíni* is otherwise not attested in Old Norse (Sijmons and Gering 1931:372) and the extra syllable could have been added for metrical reasons.

> " 'Fierce serpent, you made great hissing
>   and you have a grim spirit;
> great courage will come to those sons of men
>   who possess that helmet.' "

After the slaying of Fáfnir Sigurðr appropriates the helmet of terror as part of the spoils. It is therefore not unlikely that the association *Sig-rǫðr = Hildi-svín(i)* 'battle boar' (that is, both 'splendid animal' and 'helmet') could have kindled the imagination of an Eddic poet schooled in the intricacies of skaldic diction and prompted him to conceal the name of his protagonist in the obscure phrase *gǫfuct dýr*.

Summary

The earlier attempts to explain *gǫfuct dýr* in *Fáfnismál* 2:1 fall into two main groups. The majority of scholars suggests that the phrase refers to a certain type of animal (more specifically, a stag), while others have tried to explain *gǫfuct dýr* as a skaldic *ofljóst* construction, a pun on the name *Sigurðr*. As it emerged from the discussion above, there are no reasons why Sigurðr should have likened himself to a stag or to any other animal and, moreover, such an interpretation is at cross purposes with similar formulaic lines in Eddic poetry (*X ec heiti*) which always contain a personal name. It seems then that *gǫfuct dýr* is a circumlocution for the name *Sigurðr*, and in keeping with skaldic *ofljóst* constructions we should expect *gǫfuct dýr* to paraphrase the compound *Sig-urðr*. The last part of that compound (*urðr*) did not denote any kind of animal in Old Norse, but if we proceed from the alternative form *Sig-rǫðr*, everything falls into place: *sig* 'battle' is synonymous with *hild-* 'battle' and *rǫðr* 'boar' = *svín* 'boar'. In other words, *Sig-rǫðr* is a circumlocution for *Hildisvíni*, Freyja's golden bristled boar from *Hyndlolióð*. Hence the phrase *gǫfuct dýr* 'splendid animal' (i.e., *Hildi-svíni = Sig-rǫðr*) contains an onomastic pun that may have puzzled the dying Fáfnir, but it would have come as no surprise to a medieval listener familiar with skaldic *ofljóst* constructions.

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