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Pulur in *Skáldskaparmál*: An Attempt at Skaldic Lexicology

Large systems of synonyms used to supply variation of kennings cannot but draw the attention of scholars investigating skaldic poetry. Where did skalds get all these countless numbers of *heiti*? There can be no doubt that most of these synonyms were created in the skaldic tradition itself, which to suit its own needs was constantly remaking the extensive word-stock placed at its disposal by common language on the one hand and foregoing epic tradition on the other. The skaldic systems of synonyms are either transformed lexical groups within which all the individual differences between words are considered to be irrelevant and instead of them their most general meaning is pushed into the foreground, or sequences of former *nomina propria*, place-names and mythological names transferred from a number of unique beings and objects to those classes they belong to and thus turned into common nouns. Skaldic synonyms are also made as entirely new lexical units. Then some word-building means are used which are active only in poetic language. The reinterpretation of various linguistic material and its conversion into the wholly formalized and interchangeable poetic vocabulary are characteristic features of skaldic tradition.

The main sources of our knowledge of poetic synonyms are skaldic poetry and *pulur*, versified lists of *heiti*, composed in the second half of the 12th or at the beginning of the 13th century and preserved in different versions in several manuscripts of *Snorra Edda*, where the sets of *pulur* are appended to the end of *Skáldskaparmál*. The longest of these versions forms a collection of 59 *pulur* and contains 1370 lines in *fornyrðislag* in which no less than 2573 *heiti* for 55 subjects are enumerated.¹ The average length of a *pula* is three or four stanzas, but there are much longer ones, e.g. a list of *sverða heiti*, containing twelve stanzas, or a list of *skipa heiti* which consists of ten stanzas. On the other hand there are quite short *pulur*, not longer than a stanza or a *helmingr*. As the only contents of a *pula* are poetic synonyms, its length corresponds to a given list of *heiti*. As a rule it is very large: e.g. there are enumerated 59 *heiti* for 'tree', 60 *heiti* for 'fire', 112 *heiti* for 'river', 114 *heiti* for 'bird', 123 *heiti* for 'man', and 170 *heiti* for 'sword'.

¹ See Finnur Jónsson, ed., *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning* (København, 1912–15; rpt. 1967–73), I:A, pp. 653–690, I:B, pp. 658–680 (hereafter abbrev. *Skjd.*).

The relation of these synonymic lists to the poetic practice of skalds is a problem which never seemed to be of importance to the students of skaldic poetry. For a long time it has been taken for granted that *þulur* are catalogues of *heiti*, extracted from skaldic verses, and that their presentation in the form of versified lists could have served only one purpose, namely mnemonic.² However, a comparison of the poetic synonyms which were used and created in skaldic tradition with those enumerated in *þulur*, demonstrates the self-dependence of the latter. In fact, the *þula* proves to be not so much a catalogue of real skaldic lexical stock as a *generator of poetic synonyms*. Moreover, as I'll try to show, in regard to its means of making the *heiti*, the *þula* goes far away from skaldic practice, although at the same time it never exceeds the limits of skaldic tradition.

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The main difficulty for the analysis of the structure of a *heiti*-system is offered by a group of synonyms which can be found only in poetry or in *þulur* (for I insist that it is necessary to distinguish between them) and which are usually treated as “neologisms”, or on the contrary as “archaisms”, or simply as “dark” and “rare” words.³ The possibility to interpret these *heiti* as “neologisms” must be based on the fact that many of them have a clear word-building form (e.g. *holdbori* (þ: raven)⁴ ‘flesh-borer’, *herberi* (þ: sword) ‘battle-killer’, *herbrái* (þ: sword) ‘shining in the battle’, *olgr* (þ: hawk) ‘noise-maker’, *herkir* (fire) ‘tumult-maker’, *vinđuðr* (þ: serpent) ‘winding around’ etc.), and on these grounds it is assumed that such poetic names could have been invented by skalds. On the other hand the possibility of interpreting many of them as “archaisms” proceeds from some other reasons, namely that we know nothing of their origin, or that these *heiti* are rarely used by skalds but more often are recorded only in *þulur*. The standpoints mentioned above do not exclude one another. Skaldic synonymic systems are made out of various lexical layers, and the difficulty lies in the fact that in practice we are not able to distinguish what we suppose to be “neologisms” from what is in our eyes “archaisms” and vice versa, nor can we ascertain the skaldic origin of the former. The very fundamentals of skaldic creative activity which force the skald to draw his synonyms from numerous and diverse sources, making no distinctions between them, permit

² This view is expressed in every scholarly work dealing with *þulur*. See, for instance, S. Bugge. “Biskop Bjarne Kolbeinsson og Snorres Edda”, *Aarbøger for Nordisk Oldkyndighed og Historie* (1875), 209–246; Finnur Jónsson, “Um Þulur og Gátur”, *Germanistische Abhandlungen zum LXX. Geburtstag Konrad von Maurers* (Göttingen, 1893), 489–520.

³ See classifications of skaldic synonyms in Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Ístenzkar bókmennir í fornöld* (Reykjavík, 1962), pp. 143–144, and Halldór Halldórsson, “Old Icelandic *heiti* in Modern Icelandic”, *University of Iceland Publications in Linguistics*, 3 (Reykjavík, 1975), pp. 17–21.

⁴ Every *heiti* listed in *þulur* but never found elsewhere is marked with (þ).

us to assume that some of these *heiti* (e.g. those of animals) might originally be euphemisms or isolated names of some other kind, once used beyond the bounds of skaldic tradition.⁵ At the same time it may as well be assumed that skalds could create their own synonyms and in order to do that use a number of active means of derivation.

The apparent difficulties one comes across while studying these *heiti* will become even more complicated if we accept the widespread view on *pulur* as a glossary to skaldic poems. But if we put aside the opinion that each *heiti* in *pulur* was drawn out of either preserved or lost skaldic verses,⁶ we will have to take into consideration the following facts. First of all, only fifteen per cent of these *heiti* were used in skaldic verses and even these no more than once or twice, whereas the remaining eightyfive per cent of them are known only from *pulur*.⁷ Secondly, if we analyze the use in poetry of the former, comparatively small group of synonyms, it becomes obvious that a part of them (to be precise, three per cent of the total amount of the *heiti* under investigation) can be found besides *pulur* only in late skaldic poetry, i.e. mainly in verses composed in the 14th century. According to the above evidence it is apparent that this restricted group of synonyms, which could have been drawn out of skaldic verses by the unknown compiler of *pulur*, is even smaller than it seemed to be at the beginning. The existence of the *heiti* which first appeared in *pulur* and after that only much later were used by younger skalds, provides us with evidence that such synonyms were taken directly from these learned sources, and maybe that could have been the practice of those poets who were making their verses at the time of the decline of skaldic tradition.

As we could see, these *heiti*, although they occupy a significant place in *pulur*, are scarcely used by skalds. This fact needs explanation and probably has to do with the nature of their meaning. Even the few examples given above are enough to show the main features of this group of synonyms, and first of all the most important one, which is as follows. These poetic words as such are not able to point at their referents but are supposed to acquire this

⁵ Cp., for example, *heiti* for sea (*djúp* and the like) which are recorded among the sea-names used on Shetland no later than at the end of the 19th Century. (See Axel Olrik's review of Jakob Jakobsen's "Det norrøne sprog på Shetland" in *Nordisk tidskrift för vetenskap, konst och industri* (1897), 339–344.) On the other hand, typological resemblance of such *heiti* and the neologisms found in argot may be stated. Cp., for instance, the words used by German tramps (*Schmalfuß* 'cat', *Beller* 'dog', *Knacker* 'firewood') which are cited by Rudolf Meissner in "Die Sprache der Götter, Riesen und Zwerge in der Alfvissmál", *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur*, 61 (1924), p. 132.

⁶ See, for example, Finnur Jónsson, *Den oldnorske og oldislandske litteraturs historie*, Bd. 2 (2nd ed.; København, 1923), pp. 179–180.

⁷ In all these calculations we do not take into account ten *pulur* containing only *nomina propria*, i.e. *Sækonunga heiti*, *Jöna heiti* (I, II), *Tröllkvenna heiti*, *Pórs heiti*, *Ása heiti* (I, II), *Ásynja heiti*, *Dverga heiti*, *Óðins nöfn*.

ability in accordance with their inner motivation while playing the role of *heiti*. For example, the two *heiti* of fire, *harkr* (þ) ‘noise-maker’ and *hrapi* (þ) ‘hurrying’, can not denote, but what they are really capable of is to describe. They are formed in the same way as nicknames or names of mythological beings, which also characterize their bearers according to those features they are notable for (cp. the name of Óðinn’s wolf, *Freki* ‘greedy’, or that of a mythological river, *Vegsvinn* ‘swift on its way’). The degree of concretization of such characteristics may be different. The *heiti* of horse, *glitnir* (þ) ‘glittering’, or the *heiti* of fire given above are names which themselves (that is unrelated to their referents) are not able to point to a strictly definite object, while the *heiti* of serpent, *eitrungr* (þ) ‘poisonous’, or the *heiti* of fire, *tandr* ‘lit’, probably can do this. Characterizing *heiti* (from now on we will call them so, according to the nature of their meaning) of the first type are nevertheless met in *þulur* much more often than *heiti* whose motivation allows them to refer directly to their definite objects.

If we suppose (taking into consideration the given facts) that characterizing *heiti* are mostly skaldic innovations created by skalds from time to time, we will approach the problem of their identification with their referents. Really, words having the meaning of ‘noise-maker’, ‘hurrying’ or ‘glittering’ are in no way tightly connected with such objects as horse or fire and can be applied to various referents. A necessary condition to establish a unique tie between such names and their referents is their frequent use as *heiti*, and as a result of this their gradual loss of actuality of inner form up to the conversion of such *heiti* into unmotivated denotations. Probably, this is the case with comparatively few characterizing *heiti*, which are often used in skaldic verses during several centuries (e.g. *heiti* for ‘sea’, *græðir* ‘rising’, to *græða*, or *víðir* ‘broadly stretching’, to *víðr*). If the inner form of these *heiti* is no more essential, then the inner form of a neologism itself, that is of a *heiti* created by a skald for the nonce and never adopted by tradition (though carefully put into a *þula*-list), is by all means relevant, and accordingly the problem of its identification with its referent must be important. One can suppose that the referential meaning of such a *heiti* must be suggested either by the context of a *vísa* (first of all in case of its independent use in verses) or by the context of a kenning. In practice it is usually like this.

Here are some examples. In the fifth stanza of *Þórfinnsdrápa* Arnórr uses the word *skelkvingr* (‘frightening’) in a context which shows that it is the *heiti* of a sword, *Hilmir rauð í hjalma / hreggi skelkvings eggjar* ‘The ruler reddened in the storm of helmets (i.e. in the battle) the edges of his sword.’⁸ This is the only place where the *heiti* is recorded. Those cases when characterizing *heiti* are used in kennings deserve special attention. In the tenth

⁸ *Skjd.* I B, 316, 5, 5.

lausavísa by Kormákr the *heiti hyltingr* 'forest-dweller' as a part of the kenning for 'man', *þöll hyltinga vallar*, is most likely to indicate a serpent ('the fir-tree of the field of the serpent, i.e. of gold'),⁹ and in his fifteenth *lausavísa* the word *herkir* 'noise-maker' in a kenning for 'woman', *sunds herkis Gunnr*, can denote only fire ('Gunnr of the fire of the strait, i.e. of gold').¹⁰ In the last case the possibility of reference of this *heiti* is provided by its use in the *tvíkennt*, because the kenning *sunds herkir* itself, when the meaning of the base word is not clear, cannot denote gold, for the modifiers of this kind are typical for kennings of 'ship' as well. But to correlate a kenning as a whole with its referent it is not always obligatory to know the exact meaning of one of its components. So, we can only guess that the *heiti ófr* 'threatening' (?) used by Sturla Þórðarson as part of a kenning for 'man', *ófs dynviðr* 'the roaring tree of . . .',¹¹ denotes a sword. The modifiers in this kenning are usually names of various weapons or armour.

The examples mentioned above (it is possible to give more of them) show that the use of characterizing *heiti* is naturally restricted. The possibility of referring such names to their supposed objects depends on the general context or the kenning-structure. The obvious dependence of characterizing *heiti* on the context (either of a *vísa* or that of a kenning) provides us with the evidence that most of such names must be skaldic innovations. Otherwise they would not need the support a skald always searches for for them. Not in all cases is a skald able to introduce into his verses a completely new lexical unit which is in no way connected with the referent he needs to name. This must be the reason of a relatively restricted use of characterizing *heiti* in the preserved verses. Then, how should one account for the fact that, though skalds scarcely resorted to characterizing *heiti*, such designations constitute more than one third of the general amount of *heiti* in *pulur*?

To answer this question will be possible if we analyze the percentage of characterizing *heiti* in *pulur*. It turns out that the highest percentage of characterizing *heiti* in synonymic systems (more than fifty per cent) is found first of all in *pulur* enumerating *heiti* of animals, birds (raven, eagle, hawk) and weapons, i.e. those lists which in the least degree can be formed with the help of the semantic means of creating *heiti*. Vice versa the synonymic systems which can be formed with the help of productive semantic means of creating *heiti*, i.e. by extracting the most general meaning of word (earth, bird, fish, tree etc.), or by transforming a proper name into a common one (island, fjord, river, horse etc.), and also by the use of words belonging to common language or those inherited from the epic tradition (man, king, woman) demonstrate either a considerably lower per cent of

⁹ *Skjd.* I B, 72, 10.

¹⁰ *Skjd.* I B, 73, 15.

¹¹ *Skjd.* II B, 134, 11.

characterizing *heiti* in their stock or a complete absence there. A generally outlined inverse dependence of the amount of characterizing *heiti* in *þula* (or even their presence in it) on the possibility to form its synonymic system at the expense of the units of some other types allows us to suppose that the author of *þulur* resorted to characterizing *heiti* mostly when he was short of *heiti* to name a certain object.¹² This very fact makes us think that characterizing *heiti* were being created in *þulur* and by their author. In this connection one can remember that only fifteen per cent of the general amount of such *heiti* are used in poetry from which twelve per cent are registered in verses created earlier than *þulur* and three per cent are met only in later poetry, mainly that of the 14th century and first of all by two skalds, Einarr Gilsson and Árni Jónsson. These facts might prove that the supposition above is true. As for the main proof of the learned origin of the majority of characterizing *heiti* it should be searched for in the structure of a synonymic list of *þula*.

It is essential that characterizing *heiti* in *þulur* not only are created in keeping with a limited and productive set of derivation means used mainly in skaldic poetry and in mythological nomination but also follow certain semantic types and often form separate semantic systems within a *þula*. We will give here only a few examples of such semantic systems.

1. Raven: 'borer' – *boringi* (þ), *holdbori* (þ);
2. Hawk: 'noise-maker' – *göllungr*, *olgr* (þ), *þrömmungr* (þ), *ymir* (þ);
3. Hawk: 'fooling' – *ginnarr* (þ), *ginnungr*;
4. Horse: 'bright, glittering' – *glitnir* (þ), *bráinn* (þ), *vegbjartr* (þ), *vígglitnir* (þ); cp. the names of mythological horses which are enumerated as *heiti* in the same *þula*: *glær*, *gyllir*, *glaðr*;
5. Serpent: 'glittering' – *bráinn* (þ), *fánn* (þ), *fránn*, *fræningr*, *seimir* (þ);
6. Serpent: 'winding around' – *reimir* (þ), *vinduðr* (þ);
7. Serpent: 'forest-dweller' – *hyllingr*, *viðnir* (þ), *holtskriði* (þ); cp. 'heath-dweller' – *heiðbúi* (þ) and perhaps the name of a mythological serpent *móinn*;
8. Wind: 'noise-maker' – *þjótr* (þ), *óhljóðr* (þ), *gneggjuðr* (þ) ('neighing'); cp. the names for wind in Alv. 20, *hlömmuðr* and *æpir*;
9. Fire: 'noise-maker' – *harkr* (þ) (cp. *herkir* to *hark* 'tumult' which is used only once in poetry and is not listed in the *þula*), *skerkir* (þ), *snæra* (þ), *túsi* (þ), *olgr* (þ), *dunsuðr* (þ), *dusill* (þ), and perhaps *dúni* (þ);
10. Fire: 'hurrying, quick' – *hrapi* (þ), *hripuðr* (which is also in Grm. 1), *hvötuðr* (þ); cp. the name for fire in Alv. 26, *hröðuðr*;
11. Moon: 'hurrying, moving' – *skýðir* (þ), *æki* (þ);

¹² The amount of *heiti* naming a certain object is the most important problem for *þulur*, as these versified lists have no other content. Even the necessity to fill in the space of a stanza could have compelled the author of *þulur* to invent new lexical units. As to the choice of referents to be named (among these there are some that never required any *heiti* in poetry!), it was to a considerable degree determined by the structure and composition of the *þula*-sequence as a whole.

12. Sea: ‘noise-maker’ – *gjalfir*, *gjallr* (þ), *snapi* (þ) ‘snuffling’, and perhaps *gniðr* (þ);
13. River: ‘noise-maker’ – *gilling* (þ), *dún* (þ), *dyn* (þ), *brym* (þ); cp. the names of mythological rivers which are listed as *heiti* in the same *pula*: *gjöll* and *þyn*;
14. River: ‘glittering’ – *glóð*, *glüt* (þ), *bró* (þ); cp. the name of a river *leiptr* in the same *pula*;
15. Sword: ‘noise-maker’ – *gjallr*, *gellir* (þ-?), *gelmingr* (þ), *galmr* (þ), *blær* (þ) ‘bleating’, *skerkir* (þ), *primarr* (þ).

We could give more examples of this phenomenon. Of course these semantic systems do not embrace all the characterizing *heiti* in *pulur*. A great number of lexical units which do not follow the derivation means productive for *pula* or have no clear inner form are beyond their limits. But the very possibility to find such semantic systems is of great importance for the study of *heiti* in *pulur*. The fact that they exist not only makes it evident that characterizing *heiti* could and had to be created in *pulur* but also gives a necessary direction for etymologization of a number of lexical units recorded in *pula*-lists. The point of view that *pulur* are no more than a glossary to skaldic verses containing mostly an archaic layer of poetic vocabulary as a rule is reflected in the etymological research of their lexical stock. We would not go wrong if we state that only *heiti* with an absolutely clear inner form have escaped most complicated explanations in the dictionaries. Such explanations usually make the very assumption that they could ever have been derived from some well-known Icelandic words impossible. On the other hand, if we follow the point of view that *pulur* are a certain generator of poetic synonyms, then the way of their etymological investigation should be different. Only when one is sure that it is impossible to find the nearest derivative or any semantic ties for *heiti* contained in *pulur* should one search for other and more remote etymological correspondences which can throw light on their meaning.

As this is no place to dwell upon the problem of the etymologization of this group of synonyms I will mention only one example in order to show that it is the synonymic system of a *pula* that really can help to understand the meaning of a *heiti* otherwise treated as a “dark word”. In *Altnordisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch* de Vries relates the *heiti* of an arrow *fenna* (þ) with the verb *finna* and for this reason assumes that its meaning is ‘die ihr ziel findende’. The next word in the dictionary is the verb *fenna* ‘zusammenwirbeln von schnee’, which at first sight seems to have nothing to do with the *heiti* in question. Explaining thus the *heiti* of an arrow, de Vries apparently proceeds from its functions, although in the same *pula* one can find another *heiti*, *drifa*, that is none other than *drifa* ‘a fall of snow’. According to this it would be natural to relate the *heiti* of an arrow *fenna* to the verb *fenna* which has the same meaning and thus to interpret it as ‘a snow-storm’. Such an interpretation finds support in the traditional image of an arrow, which is

evident from the kennings *bogna hagn*, *alms hagn* and the like.

The above example is typical in every respect, for it can demonstrate not only the usual method of investigating *heiti* listed in *pulur* but also the usual way of inventing them. The *heiti* in *pulur* are often built according to certain patterns even in those cases when nothing indicates that there are some distinct semantic systems within a *pula*. In both cases the process of their creation is the same. A *heiti* of a certain semantic structure becomes a model for other ones, and as for the initial pattern, this can either be established in a *pula* or arise outside it. According to the types of characteristics one can observe in *pulur* it is sometimes even possible to find direct or indirect sources of the *heiti* listed there. As we shall see, they are twofold. First of all, as could have been expected, the author of *pulur*, while extracting poetic synonyms from verses, produced his own ones upon the patterns created by the skalds themselves. This fact is manifested both in the emergence of *heiti* which are semantically identical with those drawn out of poetry (cp. N 2, 5, 7 etc.) and in the structural transformation of the latter, i.e. in the creation of a new derivational form different from the one used by skalds (cp. N 3, 9). A variation of word-building means appears to be, in general, an appropriate technique devised to multiply the synonyms built in *pulur* (cp. *hornglóinn* and *hornglói* (b) *ram* 'with glittering horns', *holdvarinn* and *holdvari* (b) *serpent* 'eager for flesh' etc.). But nevertheless the most important part in the formation of characterizing *heiti* in *pulur* is played by the mythological names which there undergo such changes as have no analogy in skaldic tradition.

The transformation of a mythological name into a *heiti* both in poetry and in *pulur* is attained by means of its conversion into a common noun, a process which can in no way affect the inner form of a proper name. A *heiti* created that way is motivated only by a mythological being, a bearer of the name, but not by its meaning (cp. *Freki* 'greedy', the name of the wolf → *wolf*). However, characterizing *heiti* in *pulur* are often determined by the inner form of those mythological names that are present on the same *pula*-list. As one can assume, the names of the mythological rivers *gjöll* and *þyn* ('noise-maker') entail the appearance of such characterizing *heiti* for river as *dyn* (b), *dún* (b), *þrym* (b) and the like, which is only possible if the inner form of the proper name is treated as relevant. Thus, the position of a mythological name in *pulur* is ambiguous. It becomes a *heiti* when transformed into a common noun, but after that its destiny in *pulur* is linked with that of characterizing *heiti*, for the former mythological names are motivated there again by their inner form and because of this can be used as models for new synonyms created in *pulur*. Moreover, as we will see later, a mythological name transformed into a common noun could itself, when placed in a *pula*, become a characterizing *heiti*.

Already in those few examples of semantic systems which were listed above could we observe a remarkable phenomenon. In various *pulur* one and the same semantic pattern was regularly used in application to different objects. So, a word that means 'noise-maker', as a *heiti* may be applied to a wide range of objects including both birds and weapons. The same can be said about such universal characteristics as 'glittering' or 'bright'. It is no surprise that these words can be used indiscriminately to denote such objects as sword, sea, fire, horse etc., for they are no more than epithets, which are merely characterizing each of these objects according to one of its qualities. However, it is obvious that such a phenomenon can hardly be regarded as a common one. Being epithets in respect to their inner form, characterizing *heiti* are shaped as nouns (mostly as *nomina agentis*) and are synonyms of such ordinary and poetic words as *eldr*, *fúrr* ('fire'), *sverð*, *mækir* ('sword'), *haf*, *sær*, *ægir* ('sea') or *hest*, *vigg* ('horse'). Hence, they ought to acquire, in conformity with their functions (even if these are performed only in *pulur*), that referential meaning which was peculiar to a given set of synonyms. In other words, in *pulur* any lexical unit that means 'noise-maker' is not an epithet, but a denotation of fire, sword etc., and that is why it has to take upon itself the meaning 'fire', 'sword' and the like. Beyond all doubt, these *heiti* are not fit to denote and so, the only way for them to obtain such an ability is to eliminate their inner form, i.e. their meaning as characteristics ('noise-maker' etc.) which motivates their relation to the referent, and as a result of this to turn into unmotivated names. One can see, however, that the application of one and the same type of characteristics to different classes of referents cannot but prevent characterizing *heiti* from establishing close links with any of objects they denote. This, again, can cast doubt on their ability to act as poetic synonyms. All the same, the author of *pulur* apparently was never concerned about the fact, for he developed the principle of universality of the semantic patterns used in his *pula*-lists to its logical end. Different *pulur* contain not only the same semantic patterns for creating *heiti* but also their identical manifestations, i.e. certain lexical units which are at the same time attached to several referents. For example, *olgr* (þ) 'noise-maker' is a *heiti* for hawk, ox, fire and Óðinn, *gellir* (þ) 'noise-maker' ('shouter') is used for ox and sword, *blær* (þ) 'noise-maker' ('bleating') both for ram and sword, *skerkir* (þ) 'noise-maker' for fire and sword, *viðnir* (þ) 'forest-dweller' for hawk, wolf and serpent, *bráinn* (þ) 'glittering' for horse and serpent, *skólkr* (þ) 'threatening' for sword and helmet. One can see that these *heiti* are applied to different objects entirely owing to their inner form as well as to the possibility to characterize various referents in the same manner in conformity with their nature. The described phenomenon may be called *the polysemy of heiti*.

The polysemy of *heiti* differs much from what we are used to in common

language. Within *pulur* it is realized in a number of equal references, absolutely undetermined by one another, of the same word the meaning of which (i.e. its meaning as that of a characteristic) remains invariable. Properly speaking, just the polysemy of *heiti* makes it evident that the meaning of such words as *olgr* or *gellir* is no more than 'noise-maker' and that the meaning 'hawk' or 'ox' or 'sword', which is put over it in *pulur*, is only that of a *pula*-list and can be by no means maintained outside the range of *pulur*.

We see, then, that the correlation of the referential meaning of a word and its conceptual meaning if applied to characterizing *heiti* is far from being usual, for the meaning of a *heiti*, i.e. its denotational meaning, proves to be not only different, but in no way connected with the meaning of lexical units functioning as *heiti*. Of course, while distributing these *heiti* to *pula*-lists or borrowing them from one *pula* into another, the author of *pulur* succeeded in increasing the amount of *heiti* in every synonymic system. Another accomplishment of his was that he displayed the relativity of these *heiti* as denotations of certain referents and thus excluded the very possibility of their use outside the set of *pulur*. Such a development, which is in keeping with the nature of characterizing *heiti*, is the most convincing evidence of their learned origin in *pulur*. Everything points to the fact that their author had no need to trouble about the fate of the *heiti* he created and least of all about their ability to function as real poetic synonyms. The mere presence in a *pula*-list was enough to secure their position as full and equal members of a synonymic system.

However, the polysemy of *heiti* affects not only synonyms built in *pulur*, but also mythological names. Being converted into *heiti* as a result of a transformation into common nouns such names became motivated again, this time in *pulur*, and due to this do not differ much from characterizing *heiti*. The motivation of a former proper name by its inner form is expressed first of all as stated above in its ability to become a model for *heiti* created in *pulur*, and secondly, what is perhaps much more important, in its ability to be transferred to other referents. The name of a mythological wolf *Geri* ('greedy') from a list of *vargs heiti* where it is one of the synonyms for 'wolf' is transferred to that of 'raven' (b), and the name of the other Óðinn's wolf *Freki* ('greedy') in *pulur* turns into a *heiti* for 'fire' (b). The name of a serpent *Móinn* ('heath-dweller') is transferred to 'horse' (b) and the name of another serpent *Níðhöggr* ('cruel-biter') to 'sword' (b) etc. Sometimes mythological names which have nothing in common with referents behind *pula*-lists are used as *heiti* of quite different objects. So, the name of Freyja's palace *Sessrúmnir* ('multi-seater') becomes in *pulur* a *heiti* for 'ship' (b) and the name of Forseti's home *Glínir* ('glittering') is used for 'horse' (b).

It is evident that the ambiguity of mythological names in *pulur* depends not only on the fact that after their transformation into common nouns they

can behave as characterizing *heiti*, but also on the very attitude expressed towards them by the author of *pulur*. Carefully collecting the old lore concealed in mythological names, the author of *pulur* at the same time “disembodied” the names themselves¹³ as he reduced their position to that of characteristics searching for what might become their suitable referents. It can be maintained, then, that the polysemy of *heiti* when extended to mythological names undermines the very fundamentals of the latter, for mythological nomination normally serves one purpose, namely to distinguish the unique objects and beings or their different incarnations.¹⁴ As for polysemy in the system of characterizing *heiti* itself, it shows that creation of such synonyms never pursued any other aim than that of increasing the number of *heiti* in *pula*-lists.

The process investigated above and called the polysemy of *heiti* is based on their inner motivation. But it may also be realized otherwise, that is irrespective of their inner form, applying one and the same designation to a number of referents which is caused entirely by their mutual relations. For example, the name of a giant *Hræsvelgr* (‘swallowing the carrion’) becomes a *heiti* for an eagle (þ), for this giant is known to have the feathering of an eagle. The name *Grýla*, of an ogre described as a fox with many tails, is used in *pulur* as a *heiti* for both ‘fox’ (þ) and ‘giantess’ (þ). The name of the dwarf *Andvari* becomes a *heiti* for ‘fish’ (þ), because this dwarf, as it is told, turned into a fish and swam in the water. The inner motivation of any of these names is irrelevant and their presence in several *pulur* at one and the same time is either the result of “splitting” the referent itself or due to the structure of the given set of *pulur*, consisting of closely related synonymic systems (cp. *göll*, applied to ‘battle’ (þ) and ‘valkyrie’ (þ), *ffjörðr* listed as a *heiti* for ‘fjord’ and ‘sea’, or *mæringr* for ‘man’ and ‘king’, etc.).

As long as the polysemy of *heiti* in *pulur* is twofold (i.e. depends either on the inner motivation of a *heiti* or on its referential meaning), the usual way of stating the question about some identical names of gods and animals listed in *pulur* has to be altered. As a rule, the use of the same names both for gods and animals finds explanations of one sort only, namely that such facts must have reflected the practices of gods’ shape-changing or, on the contrary, those when the beasts took over the names of gods they were consecrated to.¹⁵ However, only in a few instances can we be firmly convinced that this

¹³ The term was used in this sense by Alan H. Gardiner in *The Theory of Proper Names. A Controversial Essay* (Oxford Un. Pr., 1940), pp. 13–15.

¹⁴ On the mythological nomination see especially Jurij M. Lotman, Boris A. Uspenskij, “Myf – imja – kul’tura” [“Myth – Name – Culture”], *Trudy po znakovym sistemam*, 6 (Tartu, 1973), p. 300.

¹⁵ See especially Finnur Jónsson, “Gudenavne – dyrenavne”, *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 31 (1919), pp. 312–314. For the discussion of this problem see J. de Vries, “Die «Tierverehrung in Gallien»”, *Saga och Sed* (1958), p. 50; and Gunter Müller, “Germanische Tiersymbolik und Namengebung”, *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, 2 (1968), p. 214.

was really the case. For example, a *heiti* of ‘boar’, *vaningi* (þ), was originally one of Freyr’s names and could have been transferred to the former because the boar was consecrated to Freyr. *Ófnir* and *sváfnir*, the names of mythological serpents, were most likely taken over by Óðinn, for, as it is told, in order to get the mead of poetry he turned into a serpent. As for the *heiti langbarðr* (‘longbearded’) applied both to ‘Óðinn’ (þ) and ‘serpent’ (þ), the direction of the name-exchange this time might have been reverse. It can, however, be assumed that polysemy of this kind may depend not only on the relations between the referents. The very role played in *þulur* by mythological names perhaps shows that the polysemy of the first kind (the one based on the inner form of a designation) could also affect the names of gods in the same way as it affected the names of their animals. The *heiti olgr* ‘noise-maker’ can be taken as an example – it is placed into several *þulur* including that of Óðinn’s names but never met in poetry. It might be noted in this connection that a number of Óðinn’s *heiti* have the same meaning ‘noise-maker’ and are also known only from *þulur* (cp. *Göllnir* (þ), *Göllorr* (þ), *Göllungr* (þ)).¹⁶ Judging by this evidence we can assume that all these names were created by the author of *þulur* himself, and if so, according to the same semantic pattern, widely used and applied by him to a large number of totally different referents.

The conclusion above finds its support in what has been said already about the position occupied by mythological names in *þulur*. As we have seen such names underwent a number of drastic deformations in these learned lists. First of all they passed into the class of *heiti*, the poetic synonyms, thus losing their links with former referents. Whereas in skaldic tradition the deformation of a mythological name was expressed in its transformation into a common noun and manifested itself in the fact that such a name was transferred from a unique being or object to the class it belonged to, in *þulur* the process of its destruction went even further. The functioning of a name, i.e. its transition from one *þula*-list into another, is realized in accordance with its inner form and can be absolutely independent of its original reference. Hence, the very fundamentals of the proper name are inverted. Being turned into a *heiti* it obtained the ability to connote, which it never had before, but at the same time it lost the main function of any proper name in a language, that is to point to a definite denotatum. In this respect a mythological name does not differ from a characterizing *heiti* which is incapable of gaining its own referential meaning because of the polysemy in the system constructed by the author of *þulur*. It should be pointed out, however, that “*heiti*” is nothing else but “*name*” and because of this its primary function consists in naming. Characterizing *heiti* together with a mythological name

¹⁶ On Óðinn’s names see Hj. Falk, *Odensheite* (Kristiania, 1924).

(disembodied and converted into a common noun) turn out to be entirely artificial units which come into conflict with the very nature of skaldic synonymy.

It might be concluded that the polysemy is a direct consequence ensuing from the essence of characterizing *heiti*, for, being devoid of referential meaning, such *heiti* could be applied to a wide range of objects. The polysemy, however, is not merely a logical development of the potentialities latent in the nature of characterizing *heiti*. First and foremost it leads to a considerable extension of synonymic systems and is therefore one of the *effective means* of creating *heiti*. As such the polysemy can influence the characterizing *heiti* and thus, making its own demands, force them to pave the way for its use. So, it is no mere chance that the ability described above of such *heiti* to be applied to most different classes of referents is not only preserved in *pulur* without any kind of limitation but also becomes a law. In this connection the apparent preference for certain semantic patterns (e.g. 'noise-maker', 'bright') can scarcely cause our surprise, for the creation of new lexical units and their posterior transference to other synonymic systems has to be regarded as interrelated processes called into being by the necessity to increase the number of *heiti* in *pulur*.

* * *

As was already shown above, mythological names in *pulur* cannot be distinguished from characterizing *heiti* as well as characterizing *heiti* there cannot be distinguished from mythological names. We could be convinced of the truth of this statement while investigating the behavior of the former mythological names and characterizing *heiti* within the entire range of *pulur*. However, if we examine closely the means of creating characterizing *heiti* as to their structure we will notice that their similarity to mythological names is rooted deeper than might have been expected. It is not based on the occasional use of some specimens of mythological names as models for constructing *heiti* but has to do with the very principles of mythological nomination itself. I mean first of all the problem of the nominal compounds with the so-called "substantival epithet" which were once of importance for the language of the Germanic epic poetry and for mythological nomination in particular.

Unlike a logical attribute a substantival epithet has a qualitative meaning. It is a characteristic, based not so much on the material meaning of a word as on the associations and connotations which accompany a word in a certain tradition. According to M. I. Steblin-Kamenskij, who investigated the substantival epithet in Anglo-Saxon poetry, when the noun is used attributively and as a result is converted into a "qualitative name" "the most impressive, the most typical, the most emotionally important features of an object,

named by this noun, are pushed into the foreground".¹⁷ Hence, the meaning of the OE *gār-* (e.g. in *Gār-Dene*) is not 'a spear' but 'warlike' or 'valiant'; the meaning of *heoru-* is not 'a sword' but 'brutal', 'terrible', 'ferocious' (*heoru-wulf*), the word *gūð* 'battle' if used as a substantival epithet has to be interpreted not literally but as 'famous', 'glorious' or the like (*Gūð-Gēatas*).¹⁸ However, it is hardly possible to establish the exact meaning of a substantival epithet, and not only because it is wholly determined by the cultural tradition it belongs to but also because "a substantival epithet does not classify the features of a certain object but presents them diffuse through a mutual reflection of the objects it is applied to".¹⁹

The greatest difficulties for an investigation of substantival epithets are presented by the Old Norse tradition. While in the Anglo-Saxon poetic language there is a considerable amount of compounds with substantival epithets, this pattern does not play any noticeable role in the poetic language of the Elder Edda, and as a rule its use is restricted to the domain of mythological nomination. Preserved as a part of some traditional compounds inherited from the past, the substantival epithet in the Old Norse poetic language lost its former productivity and became a rudimentary element with an obscure sense. Examples of such substantival elements with a lost meaning are well known. One may recall *jörmun-* and *fimbul-* (cp. *jörmungandr* and *fimbulvetr*); probably the words went out of use very early and have survived only as first parts of a few mythological compounds. At the same time the role played in *þulur* by the mythological names inserted into these lists where they are subjected to a series of very important transformations, gives us every reason to raise the question whether any compounds of this type were also present in *þulur*. It is natural enough to expect that while using mythological names as models for creating *heiti*, the author of *þulur* did not avoid the names built according to the patterns in question. However, the main difficulty does not consist in finding such compounds in a synonymic system but in giving them an adequate explanation. Indeed, even if the author of *þulur* founded his system of characterizing *heiti* on the basis of mythological nomination, and thus followed the old mythological *þulur* (i.e. *þulur* in their original generic form), as a compiler of these versified lists

¹⁷ M. I. Steblin-Kamenskij, "Substantivnyj epitet v drevneanglijskoj poesii (K voprosu o razvittii drevneanglijskogo poetičeskogo stilja)" ["The substantival epithet in the Anglo-Saxon poetry (towards the problem of the development of the Anglo-Saxon poetic style)"] in *M. I. Steblin-Kamenskij, Istoricheskaia poetica [Historical Poetics]* (Leningrad, 1978), p. 32.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 33–34; See also E. A. Kock, "Old West Germanic and Old Norse", *Studies in English Philology. A Miscellany in Honor of Fr. Klaeber* (Minneapolis, 1929), pp. 14–20.

¹⁹ O. A. Smirnickaja, "Skal'dičeskaja synonymyka i myfologičeskaja nominacija (o dvuh modeljah složnyh poetizmov v drevneislandskom)" ["Skaldic synonymics and mythological nomination (on two patterns of the poetic compounds in Old Norse)"] in *Skandinavskaja filologija. Scandinavica [Scandinavian philology. Scandinavica]* (Leningrad, 1985), p. 148.

of synonyms he himself belonged to another tradition, namely the skaldic one, and at least one of his aims could only be to serve its needs. Suffice it to say that his very efforts to multiply the synonyms betray his purely skaldic experience.

The position of characterizing *heiti* at the cross-roads of two poetic systems, epic and skaldic, makes the problem of their interpretation still more complicated. This is not in the last place because the mythological names in *pulur* have already undergone a series of considerable semantic deformations. Thus, we have good reasons to suspect that any new lexical unit produced there according to an old "mythological" pattern was not necessarily identical with its immediate model. That is why we have to bear in mind that the problem of nominal compounds with substantival epithets which may be present in *pulur* can hardly ever find its final solution. On the one hand, mythological names with substantival epithets could be interpreted literally, in conformity with the direct meaning of a noun used in the attributive function; on the other hand, the substantival epithet could be preserved as such, but in this case with a considerably reduced meaning, that is having already lost a good deal of its original sense and associations. Sometimes it is the synonymic system of a *pula* that can shed light on the meaning of the first part of a compound.

Thus, because the word-building form of *valhrímnir* (þ) helmet makes it possible to line it up with the name of king Aðils' helmet *hildigöltr* 'battle-boar' present in the same *pula*, and what is more, to see in its parts a kind of variation or the synonymic substitution of the inner structure of the latter²⁰ it must be admitted that the meaning of *val-* here cannot be the same as *valr* 'the slain'. At the same time it is probably devoid of all the connotations which surrounded *val-* as a substantival epithet conveying the notion of death in its elevated, heroic aspect (cp. *Val-höll* 'val-hall' and two other eddic compounds closely associated with it, *val-sinni* 'val-journey' and *val-grind* 'val-grating', i.e. the grating of the gates of *Valhöll* which marked the mortal way of a hero).²¹

The first component in *valhrímnir* scarcely has any other sense than *hildi-*, *her-*, *víg-*, i.e. 'war-', 'battle-', and thus, compared with the use of this substantival epithet in the epic tradition, is already partly reduced in its meaning. It appears that *heiti* like *valglitnir* (þ) boar, *herbrái* (þ) sword, *víggláðr* (þ) shield, *vígglitnir* (þ) horse, the second part of which means 'glittering' and the first one conveys the notion of a warlike nature of their bearers (or of their belonging to the battle), might confirm the above interpretation of *val-* in *pulur*. The same use of such elements as *val-*, *her-*,

²⁰ This interpretation is based on the assumption that the second component in *valhrímnir* is *hrímnir* (þ) boar, the *heiti* known from the list of *galtar heiti*.

²¹ See O. A. Smirnitskaja, *ibid.*, p. 148.

víg- as the first components of *heiti* for quite different referents could not only prevent them from retaining their direct, material meaning, but could also obliterate their sense as that of traditional substantival epithets.

Side by side with the use of the old stock of substantival epithets²² in their traditional or to a certain degree obliterated meaning, apparently there could as well emerge some new elements which were employed in *þulur* in the same function. For example, it is very likely that the substantival attribute in *élviðnir* (þ) *bear* has to be treated as one with a qualitative meaning. *Heiti viðnir* (þ) 'forest-dweller' (to *viðr* 'wood') is used in *þulur* as a designation for 'wolf', 'hawk', and 'serpent' (cp. *hyllingr* to *holt* used as a *heiti* for serpent). The first element in the bear's *heiti* *él-* finds its support in *él* 'storm' but is hardly wholly identical with it. In all probability, it might be interpreted as 'violent' or 'furious' (cp. *eikismiðr ox* 'a furious smith'). On the other hand, we cannot exclude the possibility that *él-* could have been brought into correlation with *vind-*, for the synonymic substitution of this type seems to be very much in line with the variation of parts of poetic compounds we often find in *þulur*. In that case the meaning of *élviðnir* must be 'warlike' or 'dangerous forest-dweller', because *vind-*, as follows from a number of mythological names, might also be interpreted as a substantival epithet giving the word it was attached to a notion of horror and destruction (cp. *vindöld* which stands in one line with *vargöld*, *sceggöld* and *scálmöld* in the famous eschatological description in *Völuspá*, 45).²³

However, while in some cases we have more or less sufficient grounds to determine the meaning of the first part of a *heiti* as that of a qualitative attribute, in some other cases it is impossible to decide whether such an interpretation might be considered to be a correct one. For example, a *heiti* of 'sword', *höfuðhvesingr* (þ), can with equal reason be interpreted as 'very sharp' and literally as 'sharp-headed' (cp. *eggjumskarpi* (þ) 'sharp-edged' in the same *þula*). We are ready to understand the *heiti* of sword *vallangr* (þ) as 'longing for the slain', but its sense can just as well be 'warlike-long'. The same can be said about another *heiti* of 'sword', *hrævarðr* (þ), which can be interpreted as 'a warder of carrion' or as 'a warlike warder'. On the whole, it is worth mentioning that whatever meaning of these words was implied by the author of *þulur* himself, the first parts of such compounds could scarcely ever have contributed to the identification of their supposed referents.

The first elements *gunn-*, *her-*, *víg-*, *val-* and *hræ-* did not necessarily put the *heiti* into the sphere of war but on the contrary could extend the limits of

²² Cp. also *reginspönn* (þ) *battle-axe* and some eddic compounds with *regin-* 'mighty' or something like that (from *regin* 'gods'): *regingrjót* about the mill Grotti (Gr. 20) and *reginkunnr* about the runes (Háv. 80) (in the last word *regin-* might be also interpreted as a logical attribute, i.e. 'descending from gods').

²³ On *vind-* as a substantival epithet see O. A. Smirnitskaja, *ibid.*, p. 153.

its reference. As a result, such elements, when not used in their direct lexical meaning, should inevitably acquire in *pulur* a qualitative sense which conformed well with the nature of characterizing *heiti*. Thus, the universality of characteristics applied to most different referents caused the semantic deformation of the inner form of *heiti*. So, it might be concluded that *pulur* fertilized soil for the transformation of a denotational meaning of the word into a qualitative one (hence for the use of substantival epithets!). However, this was not due to the mutual enrichment of the meaning of the first components in the compound *heiti* (as was normally the case in Old Germanic poetic language), but quite the opposite, due to a considerable reduction of their meaning.

Thus, as we could see, behind the far-reaching similarity between the characterizing *heiti* and the mythological names there are hidden some very important differences. Having adopted the mechanism of mythological name-giving itself, the *pulur* used it in their own way and in perfect compliance with the requirements of the poetic system they were meant to realize. Hence, the “revival” of the mythological name-giving in *pulur* served the purpose of creating none other than a great number of wholly formalized poetic synonyms.

It may be assumed that all the peculiarities of the characterizing *heiti*, their similarity to as well as their difference from the mythological names, are determined by the unique place occupied by *pulur* in Old Icelandic poetic tradition. *Pulur* are a poetic text and at the same time the first learned writing dealing with the way the poetic language was constructed in. However, the originality of *pulur* is not merely due to their position on the crossroads of poetry and poetics. It is also of no less importance that the *pula*-genre itself, mythological by nature,²⁴ was transferred into a new poetic tradition where skaldic synonyms created its new content. The collision of poetry with poetics, on the one hand, and of the skaldic tradition with the epic one, on the other, could not but predetermine the nature and the fate of the *heiti* invented in *pulur*.

The old mythological *pula*-genre had not merely left its imprint on *pulur* in *Skáldskaparmál* but to a great degree changed their system of skaldic synonyms. The mythological names could not but become an indispensable material which, to comply with the demands of *pula*-genre, had to underlie this poetic lexicology. To a certain extent this “forced” choice made by the author of *pulur* could also find support in the fact that the mythological stuff

²⁴ On *pula*-genre see especially W. H. Vogt, “Der frühgermanische Kultredner, *pulr*, *pula* und eddische Wissensdichtung”, *Acta Philologica Scandinavica* (1927), 250–263; W. H. Vogt, “Die *pula* zwischen Kultrede und eddischer Wissensdichtung”, *Nachrichten von der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen. Philol.-Histor. Klasse*, 1 (1942); J. de Vries, “Om Eddaens Visdomsdigting”, *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 50 (1934), 1–59.

had been by no means alien to the skaldic system. Although constantly re-making their ancient heritage, the skalds were ever related to the foregoing poetic tradition.

However, in *pulur* a new step in the reinterpretation of this old mythological heritage was taken. Whereas the skalds converted into *heiti* nothing but the available stock of mythological names, i.e. a comparatively restricted number of designations, the author of *pulur* placed at his service the very methods of mythological nomination. The ways of name-giving that came into existence to distinguish the unique objects and beings or their different incarnations in *pulur* were turned into an ordinary and regular means of enlarging synonymic systems. Thus, applying the main skaldic poetic principle – that of variation and multiplication of different poetic expressions – to a mythological name caused its transformation into a characterizing *heiti*, a designation that, while reproducing the formal traits of its prototype, is contrary to it in its very essence. As we already know, this transformation had one more consequence: the greatest part of these *heiti* could not even perform the function they were meant for, that of real poetic synonyms. But however artificial this attempt at poetic lexicology might have been, there is no doubt about its purely skaldic nature. More than that, the essence of skaldic poetry revealed in the separation of form and content is best of all manifested in *pulur*, for in the shape of mythological names there are enumerated none other than entirely formalized and interchangeable poetic synonyms.