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Verseform and voice in eddic poems: the discourses of *Fáfnismál*

In the body of medieval poems commonly described as eddic (that is, in the corpus constructed by the Codex Regius anthology GkS 2365 4to, the fragmentary collection of AM 748 I 4to, and the poems *Rígsþula*, *Hyndluljóð* and *Grottasöngur* preserved singly in other manuscript contexts) it is not uncommon to find distinct shifts in verseform from one stanza to the next. In the past, a mixture of verseforms has sometimes been seen as a sign of pastiche, with scholars assigning particular verses to various “original” components of the poem based on the formal criterion of metre.¹ Such a view is based on the assumption that rhythmic homogeneity was a natural feature of eddic verse prior to the process of “literarisation”.² While it may no longer be fashionable for editors to manufacture poems of uniform rhythm some still regard variations in verseform as a sign of disorder, if not chaos.³ The notion of metrical regularity does not seem to have been inherent in eddic verseforms themselves, and in this article I wish to argue that variations in rhythm appear to have signified specific changes in register within some poems. The study of those variations can open up a dimension of meaning that enriches our reading of eddic poetry.

While it has long been acknowledged that *ljóðaháttur* rhythm is typically used for direct speech in eddic poems and that *fornyrðislag* is the verseform for narrative poems⁴, a more finely-tuned account of kinds of verseforms is necessary to explain the heterogeneous form of many extant poetic texts and to understand the nature and significance of modulations between different rhythms. The corpus as a whole presents evidence of an apparent differentiation of metres according to particular types of speech-acts and according to

¹ See, for example, de Vries 1934:18. For a more recent expression of this idea, see Hallberg 1975:70

² For an explanation of this term and speculation about the process see Kurt Schier 1975:171–2.

³ One recent example is David Evans’s (1986:4) assessment of the text of *Hávamál*: “Metrically too the poem appears disordered in places . . . St. 80 to 90 are especially irregular: 80 is not in any recognizable metre at all . . . 88, which is in *ljóðaháttur*, might appear to have been interpolated into this unbroken sequence . . . Even more chaotic are strophes 141 to 145: 141 begins as *ljóðaháttur* but ends irregularly, 142 and 143 do not constitute recognized strophe-forms at all . . .”

⁴ See Finnur Jónsson 1920:I, 105–11, Andreas Heusler 1957:150–92, Hans Kuhn 1960, II, 42 and Klaus von See 1967:52–60.

the identity of different kinds of speakers. The relatively recent focus by Old Norse scholars on speech-acts as the basis for eddic composition (see Harris 1979 and 1983), along with the tools of pragmatics and conversation analysis (Bax and Padmos 1983) enable us to perceive sharper distinctions in compositional technique than previous critical approaches allowed. The catechism poems *Hávamál*, *Vafþrúðnismál* and *Grímnismál* are all in *ljóðahátt*, for example, and so are the sections of *Sigrdrífumál*, *Fáfnismál* and *Reginismál* where the interaction between speakers closely approximates a catechism. Yet a particular kind of speech-act is not necessarily tied to a given verseform. As Kurt Schier has observed (1986:375), *sennur* occur in the eddic corpus in either *ljóðahátt* or *fornyrðislag*. The characteristic that distinguishes one *senna* from another is the identity of its antagonists. When the constitution of the duelling pair does not include a mythological being, as in the two *sennur* between warriors in the *Helgaqviða Hundingsbana* poems (HH. I: 32–46 and HH. II: 19–24), the verseform is not *ljóðahátt*, as one might expect from such verse-*sennur* as *Locasenna* or *Hárbarðzlióð*, but *fornyrðislag*. If a hero engages in a *senna* with a giantess (HHv. 12–30), however, the exchange is cast in *ljóðahátt*. Such compositional practices indicate that the discursive style appropriate to particular verbal exchanges depended in part on the nature of the speech-act and its conventional cast in verse, and in part on the identities of the speakers and the style of discourse traditionally associated with their utterances.

Looking at this compositional phenomenon from another angle, the change in rhythm effected by a shift into *ljóðahátt*, for instance, may be interpreted as a signal to the audience of a change in discursive posture. In terms of semiotic theory, the rhythm and the language of verse together become a connotative signifier which engages the audience's wider understanding of discursive conventions and generates additional meanings above the expressive plane of the content of the lines of verse (see Silverman 1983:26 ff.). A study of eddic poetics needs to address not just the formal aspects of line length and alliterative structure, but also the connotative process triggered by particular rhythms and changes in rhythm, in order to describe the signification elicited by different verseforms in different contexts in the eddic corpus.

The first task in the project of charting the discursive significance of shifts in rhythm in eddic poems is an initial characterisation of types of eddic verseforms according to their typical subject matter and voice. As they are evidenced in the corpus of eddic poems, eddic metres are basically understood to be of two types. First, the continuous long-line rhythm of *fornyrðislag*, and the "heavier" variant of it, *málahátt* (Frank 1984:384). The second type, *ljóðahátt*, consists of shorter self-alliterating lines which alternate with long lines, and it has an augmented form, *galdralag*.

There is some doubt about the applicability of *málahátttr* as a description of the metrical form of poems in the eddic corpus as there is no proof that *málahátttr* and *fornyrðislag* metres were rigidly distinguished metres in early Norse (Dronke 1969:20 and Schier 1986:370). As syllabic regularity was not mandatory in eddic poetics, the distinction between a metre of mostly longer lines with some shorter lines and a metre of mainly shortish lines with some longer lines is probably not of generic significance. Most probably under the influence of skaldic practice, some eddic verse does show signs of regulating the number of unstressed syllables in a line, and in these cases it is appropriate to describe metrical form according to Snorri's distinctions. For example, the eddic poem *Atlamáal* is composed of lines of five or more syllables, conforming to Snorri's demonstration of *málahátttr*. No other eddic poems can be described as being composed in *málahátttr*, although stanzas of consistently longer lines are often designated as *málahátttr* stanzas, creating an illusion of metrical variegation where perhaps there was none.

The technical terms *fornyrðislag*, *málahátttr*, *ljóðahátttr* and *galdragalag* are all found in *Háttatal*, the section of Snorri's *Edda* which deals with verseforms. These typically eddic verseforms are listed and demonstrated at the tail end of *Háttatal*, reflecting Snorri's belief that they are the least appropriate for compositions in praise of princes because they lack the sophisticated formal characteristics of *dróttkvætt*, such as regularity of rhythm and fixed patterns of internal rhyme. These particular appellations are only found in the Regius manuscript of *Snorra Edda* (GkS 2367, 4to), where they are added in a fourteenth-century hand (Finnur Jónsson 1931:v). Although Snorri's examples of verseforms are confined to illustrations of princely encomia, it is illuminating to compare the mode of expression he uses for these traditional verseforms. Since the field of his expression is fixed throughout the poem (the poet's praise of his patron), and the mode is varied according to the metrical pattern being demonstrated, Snorri's examples provide a unique exhibition of the way in which tenor is related to mode in Norse poetics, that is, the characteristic voice that is invoked by composition in a particular conventional measure.⁵

His examples of *fornyrðislag* (vv. 96 and 102⁶) are distinguished by the lack of a first person speaker or agent of composition which is found in the

⁵ A general discussion of field, tenor and mode in relation to genre is provided by Kress and Threadgold 1988. For an explication of the term *voice* in literary theory see William J. Kennedy (1987).

⁶ The verseform of the final stanza of *Háttatal* is not named in any of the manuscripts but it is most similar to Snorri's example of *fornyrðislag*. Because of its more regularised line length and the double alliteration in the odd lines of the second half stanza, it has been identified as the metre *kviðuhátttr*, named only in *The Third Grammatical Treatise* and in *Háttalykill* (see Finnur Jónsson ed., *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar udgivet efter håndskrifterne*. 1931:251:21–2). All quotations from *Háttatal* are taken from this edition.

majority of the other verses of *Háttatal* referring to composition (for example vv. 5, 8, 21, 28, 30, 31, 67, 68, 69, 81, 92 and 95). This accords with the use of *fornyrðislag* in the extant corpus of eddic poems, where it is typically employed for external narration.

Ort er of ræsi	þan er ryðr granar ⁷	
vargs ok ylgjar	ok vapnlitar	
þat mvn æ lifa	nema avld fariz	
bragninga lof	eþa bili heímar.	<i>Háttatal</i> 251:12-15

Niotti aldrs	ok avðsala	
konvngv ok iarl	þat er qvæþis lok	
falli fyr	fold iægi	
steini stvd	en stillis lof.	<i>Háttatal</i> 252:10-13

The appellation *fornyrðislag* is first found in Snorri's work (von See 1967:56), and may be his coinage. If so, it reveals something of the contemporary attitude to traditional eddic poetry, picturing it as the composition of ancient times. By composing in this verseform in his own time, as Snorri does for the sake of pedagogic thoroughness, an impersonal, "age-old" voice is affected. Judging from Snorri's construction of the *fornyrðislag* stanzas, the verseform is conventionally associated with narrative discourse, rather than direct first person address. In these two stanzas, Snorri also adopts the rhetorical device of binding the life of the thing expressed in verse (here it is praise of a prince) with the life of the world itself, a device also instanced in *Völuspá* 16. The concern with the transmission of praise verses is not overtly considered in the preceding stanzas of *Háttatal*, except in the closing stanza of the second of the three poems which make up *Háttatal*. In this parallel stanza of the second poem (v. 67) Snorri refers to poetry as a memorial ("Ortac avld at minvm"). Interestingly, the form of this verse is called *háttlaus* 'formless' because, like *fornyrðislag*, it has no internal rhyme scheme (*hendingar*). Perhaps Snorri's choice of an unrhymed verseform to strike the last resounding note of both the second and third poems indicates that this style of poetry was connotative of traditional memorial utterance, despite his predilection for the more sophisticated *dróttkvætt* as the metre for contemporary encomia composition.

Snorri's example of *málaháttv* does not share any of the features of voice found in his *fornyrðislag* compositions, having more in common with the voice of traditional skaldic metres such as *dróttkvætt* with its insistent focus on the poet and his unsurpassed talents:

⁷ Quotations of verses in eddic measure in this article will be set out according to modern editorial conventions of eddic lay-out, with long lines kept to one line and short lines indented.

Mvnda ec mildingi
 þa er Mæra hilmí
 flvttac flogvr qvæþi
 fimtan storgiafar
 hvar viti aðr orta
 með æþra hætti
 mæð of menglotvð
 maðr vnd himins skavtum.

Háttatal 251:6-10

Although Snorri does not provide any commentary on the characteristics of *málaháttur*, the contents of the stanza and its position in the hierarchy of metres suggest he regarded it as occupying a border-line position between metres closely related to *dróttkvætt* and less sophisticated verseforms of irregular line-length and without *hendingar* of any kind. *Málaháttur* follows straight after the numerous variants of *runhendr háttur*, but comes before *fornyrðislag* (and its variants *Bálkarlag* and *Starkaðarlag*), *líóðaháttur* and *galdralag*. As noted above, its determining characteristic is generally perceived to be lines of five or more syllables.

Snorri's demonstration of composition in *ljóðaháttur* also appears to inspire him to formulate his words according to the style of eddic poetry in the same verseform:

Glogva grein hef ec gert til bragar
 sva er tirætt c. talit
 hroþrs þrverþr skala maðr heitin vera
 ef sva fær alla hattv ort.

Háttatal 252:2-4

The syntactic pattern of the second half stanza – “. . . skala maðr . . / ef . . .” – is frequently found in the gnomic verses of *Hávamál* (sts. 42, 43, and 30) as well as in the gnomic section of *Sigrdrífumál* (st. 29). Moreover, the compositional device of deriving a general statement in the second half stanza from the particulars expressed in the first is a basic feature of *ljóðaháttur* composition. The particular experience admitted to by Óðinn and the concomitant moral expressed in the following stanza from *Hávamál* are not at all similar to Snorri's, but the rhetorical procedure is the same:

Qlr ec varð, varð qfrólvi
 at ins fróða Fialars;
 þvi er qlðr bazt, at aprt uf heimtir
 hverr sitt geð gumi.

Hávamál 14⁸

A further example is found in the following stanza, also from among the confessions of Óðinn in *Hávamál*, where the personal experience is set out in

⁸ Quotations of eddic verse are from Neckel, Gustav, ed., rev. Hans Kuhn (1983), *Edda. Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern* I. Fifth edn. Heidelberg.

the first half, and an aphorism, expressed in the third person, in the second. (The equivalence of aphoristic utterance and first person address in *ljóðaháttir* is discussed by Kragerud 1981:22):

Fullar grindr sá ec fyr Fitiungs sonom,
 nú bera þeir vánar vǫl;
 svá er auðr sem augabragð,
 hann er valtastr vina.

Hávamál 78

These correspondences are not close thematically, but it is hard to imagine how else Snorri could adopt the characteristic *ljóðaháttir* voice, which is omniscient and didactic, without giving offence to his primary addressees, King Hákon and Earl Skuli. For this reason he has probably chosen to direct the gnomes to his own position rather than to theirs. By the same token his composition in *galdralag* seems effete compared to the sinister words spoken by Skírnir in *Skírnismál*. Snorri again chooses to turn the incantation on himself, rather than on his patrons:

Sottac fremð sotta ec fvnd konvngs
 sottac itran iarl
 þa er ec reist þa er ec rena gat
 kaldan straǝm kili
 kaldan sia kili.

Háttatal 252:6-9

Ljóðaháttir is also the metre chosen to begin *Háttalykill*, the twelfth century precursor to *Háttatal* attributed to Earl Rǫgnvaldr and Hallr Þórarinnsson. This poem, whose title is a calcque on the Latin *clavis metrica*, or 'key to metres' (Helgason and Holtmark 1941), sets out a range of metres for the instruction of skalds, almost certainly in imitation of Latin models, though the metres it demonstrates, like those in *Háttatal*, are of the vernacular tradition. The voice constructed by the opening stanza is didactic, and echoes the admonition of *Hávamál*: "níóta mundo, ef þú nemr, þér muno góð, ef þú getr". The subject of the delivery, *forn fræði*, denotes the area of instruction conventionally set forth in *ljóðaháttir* poems such as *Grímnismál* and *Vafþrúðnismál*. These "eddic" devices were probably brought into play by poets to connote the instructional tone of traditional poems of learning:

Skyldr at skemta þykkik skǫtnum vera
 þeims vilja nýt mǫl nema,
 forn fræði lætk framm of borin,
 ef ér vilið heyrtr hafa.

Háttalykill 1 (BI 487)⁹

The perceived distinctions between utterances in *ljóðaháttir* and *fornyrðislag* are underlined by Snorri's use of the verseforms in another section of his

⁹ Quotations of skaldic poems are from Finnur Jónsson, ed. (1912–14 repr. 1973), *Den norske-islandske Skjaldedigtning*. B Rettet tekst I–II. Copenhagen.

work, *Gylfaginning*. When the gods speak, they characteristically speak in *ljóðaháttir* rhythm. The following list comprises all those introductions to verse quotation which place the utterance in the mouth of a mythological being (áss, jotunn, ásynja), and they all introduce verse in *ljóðaháttir*:

En hér segir svá Vafþrúðnir jotunn	(10. 26 ¹⁰)
svá sem hér er sagt at Óðinn mælir sjálfr við þann Ás er Loki heitir	(21. 19–20)
ok enn hefir hann [Óðinn] nefnzk á fleiri vega þá er . . .	(21. 30–1)
En er Njörðr kom aprt til Nóatúna af fjallinu þá kvað hann þetta	(24. 1–2)
Þá kvað Skaði þetta	(24. 9)
Ok enn segir hann sjálfr í Heimdalargaldri	(26. 8)
Þá mælti einn [af Vanum]	(30. 10)
Hon segir [Gná]	(30. 14)
En er Skírnir sagði Frey sitt eyrindi þá kvað hann þetta	(31. 26)
Svá er hér sagt i orðum sjálfra Ásanna	(34. 15)
Hon segir [Þökk]	(48. 3)

Verse in *fornyrðislag*, on the other hand, is usually introduced by an impersonal formulation such as “svá sem hér segir . . .”. The narrative accounts of events reported by the *völva* in *Völuspá* (and *Völuspá in skamma*) are cast in *fornyrðislag* and introduced by the formulation “svá sem segir í . . .”. Although the identity of the speaking subject is inscribed in these introductions, the narrative of the *völva* is characteristically extradiegetic (see Bal 1985), and her report is discursively very similar to the narrative reports of “unidentified” speaking subjects (or external narrators).

In the extant corpus of eddic poems, the determination of the verseform in which an actor’s speech is cast is subject to more complex constraints than the pattern of Snorri’s citations suggests. For instance, in a poem such as *Prymsqviða*, where dialogue is embedded within a narrative discourse cast in *fornyrðislag*, the words of the gods are subsumed within this metrical pattern, and they are quoted speaking in *fornyrðislag* rhythm. This seems to affect the style of their discourse, especially the degree to which it expresses dramatic interaction between them. At the dramatic climax of *Prymsqviða* (st. 31), the discourse shifts to an external description of Þórr’s emotions (“Hló Hlórriða hugr í brjósti”) rather than allowing him to declaim his triumph. Often in *fornyrðislag* narratives it seems direct speech is staged to maximise enjoyment of narrative development rather than to bring to life the interaction of the poem’s actors. Thus at the dramatic climax of *Hymisqviða*, the giant does not admit his defeat directly to Þórr, but addresses the audience, and then, nostalgically, addresses his beer:

¹⁰ References to the text of *Gylfaginning* are to the edition by Anthony Faulkes (1982), *Snorri Sturluson, Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*. Oxford.

‘Mǫrg veit ec mæti mér gengin frá,
 er ec kálki sé ýr kniám hrundit.’
 Karl orð um qvað: ‘knácat ec segia
 aprt ævagi, þú ert, ǫlðr, of heitt.’

Hymisqviða 32

Another illustration of this stylised form of direct speech is found in *Helgaqviða Hiorvarðzsonar* 40, where Helgi’s address to Sváva sweeps forward to a future perspective (3–4) and then back through the present (5–6) to the past (7–8). It is only the greeting in the first line that is anchored in the immediate present of dramatic interaction:

‘Heil verðu, Sváva! Hug scaltu deila,
 síá mun í heimi hínztr fundr vera;
 tíá buðlungi blæða undir,
 mér hefir hiorr komið hiarta íþ næsta.

Helgaqviða Hiorvarðzsonar 40

The kind of speech-act that is uttered also appears to influence metrical form: the prophecies in eddic poems are always delivered in *fornyrðislag* (*Vǫluspá*, *Baldrs draumar*, *Grípisspá*, and *Hyndluljóð*), presumably because the discursive mode of the prophecy is so closely related to extradiegetic narrative. In both *Vǫluspá* and *Hyndluljóð* there is some overlap between history and prophecy, the latter poem blending genealogy with a prophecy of future events, and *Vǫluspá* beginning with ancient history and moving forwards to prophecy. A permutation of the *spá* genre is found in *Helreið Brynhildar*, where the delivery consists of a narrative history authorised and spoken in the first person. In the encounter between Brynhildr and the giantess on the road to hell, it is not Brynhildr who seeks a prophetic narrative from the *gýgr* (as Óðinn does in *Baldrs draumar* and Freyja does in *Hyndluljóð*), but the giantess who challenges Brynhildr’s conduct: “betr semði þér borða at rekia,/heldr enn vitia vers annarrar” (Hlr. 1:5–8). Nevertheless, Brynhildr’s journey is treated as a kind of quest (“Hvat scaltu vitia af Vallandi, . . húsa minna?”) and she takes on her interrogator in the spirit of a verbal duel: “ec mun occur æðri þiccia,/hvards menn eðli occart kunno” (3:5–8). Following the giantess’s statement of Brynhildr’s “history” (st. 4), Brynhildr takes the offensive, and delivers her own account: “Ec mun segia þér, svinn, ór reiðo, /vitlaussi mioc, ef þic vita lystir” (st. 5:1–4).

Brynhildr’s discursive stance here is not unlike that of the *vǫlva* in *Vǫluspá* – “vitoð ér enn, eða hvat?” – (de Vries 1967:II 146, n. 173), though Brynhildr’s is an active rather than reactive delivery. Brynhildr’s dismissal of her interlocutor with the words “sœcstu, gýgiarkyn!” signals the defeat of the giantess and the successful “publication” of her version of events. While aspects of the dramatic interaction between the actors and the discursive style of their speech find parallels in *Hyndluljóð*, *Baldrs draumar* and *Vǫluspá*, the identities of the speakers and the location of this “event” in the

larger context of legendary history produces an inversion of discursive practices as they are manifested in the *spá* poems. The delivery of a narrative account – whether it pertains to the future or past, to others' or to the speaker's own life – appears to have conventionally been cast in *fornyrðislag*.

Ljóðaháttur rhythm, on the other hand, is mostly found in dialogue poems where the exchange of words forms the basis of the narrative interaction, that is, where utterance constitutes an illocutionary act (Austin 1975). It is the verseform used in knowledge trials (*Vafðrúðnismál* and *Alvíssmál*), where, in Ohmann's phrase (1972: 51), the speech-acts have a "contractual character", and it is the rhythm in which relative status is debated, in *sennur* (*Locasenna*), where interpersonal effect is of the utmost importance, and in riddle contests where often one party's life is at stake (on the verseform of the riddles of Gestumblindi see Tolkien 1960:xviii ff.). It is also the verseform used to impart knowledge in the form of gnomes, *rúnar*, *lióð* or *ráð* (*Hávamál* and *Sigrdrífumál*). In monologues which function as catechisms of mythological or other lore (such as *Hávamál* and *Grímnismál*), even if the interlocutor does not himself speak, he is inscribed in the formulation of advice. The following stanza from *Hávamál*, the first instance of the use of the second person pronoun "þú", exemplifies this:

Haldit maðr á ker, drecci þó at hófi mioð,
 mæli þarft eða þegi;
 ókynniss þess vár þic engi maðr,
 at þú gangir snemma at sofa.

Hávamál 19

As *ljóðaháttur* seems to connote a very attentive relationship between speaker and addressee, it is the appropriate form for vital cultural knowledge to be delivered in. In this sense, every utterance of gnomes, or traditional wisdom, amounts to a re-enactment of a teaching situation, where the listener is provided with advice by a wise speaker. It is the association of the *ljóðaháttur* rhythm with interpersonal effect which also makes it the appropriate vehicle for insults (in *sennur*) and curses (in the latter half of *Skírnismál*). Several commentators have speculated on the link between *ljóðaháttur* and magic or ritual events (see Phillipotts 1920 and de Vries 1964:I, 24 ff.).

The type of speech-act that constitutes the main "event" or dramatic encounter of a poem appears to determine the verseform not only of the speech-act, but of the surrounding discourse as well. In a wisdom trial poem such as *Vafðrúðnismál* the stanzas that frame the speech-act proper (sts. 1–10) are cast in *ljóðaháttur* even though their function is narrative. Only one stanza is actually expressed in the third person (st. 5); in the remainder the narrative is expressed through the dialogue exchanges between Óðinn and Frigg and then Gagnráðr and Vafðrúðnir. At st. 10, before the commencement of the knowledge trial itself, the discursive mode shifts to another

ljóðahátt style, that of gnomic counsel. Although there is a significant difference in analytical terms between the conversation of Gagnráðr and Vafðrúðnir on the one hand and the voice of impersonal advice on the other, the two discursive modes are closely affiliated in the eddic grammar. Both styles express axioms related to the traditional procedure of attaining wisdom, the first half stanza in a fully dramatised way –

Út þú né komir órom hǫllom frá,
nema þú inn snotrari sér.

Vafðrúðnismál 7:4-6

– and the second using a conventional, generalised model of an omniscient speaker addressing a pupil in need of advice:

ofrmælgj mikil hygg ec at illa geti,
hveim er við kaldrifaðan kømr.

Vafðrúðnismál 10:4-6

As I noted at the beginning of this article, sometimes the metrical form of a poem is not homogeneous, and a change in discursive stance by a particular speaker is highlighted by a change in verseform. A particularly clear example of this is found in *Hamðismál*, where, within a speech directed towards his brother, Hamðir, Sǫrli adopts the gnomic mode and the rhythm of his utterance changes (Dronke 1969:176):

‘Af væri nú haufuð, ef Erpr lifði,
bróðir occarr inn þoðfrœcni, er við á braut vágom,
verr inn vígfrœcni – hvøttomc at dísir –,
gumi inn gunnhelgi – gorðomz at vígi –.

Ecci hygg ec ocr vera úlfa dæmi,
at vit mynim siálfir um sacaz,
sem grey norna, þau er gráðug ero
í auðn um alin.

Vel hǫfom við vegit, stǫndom á val Gotna,
ofan, eggmóðom, sem ernir á qvisti; . . . *Hamðismál* 28–30

In the majority of cases, the varied metrical texture of eddic verse can be shown to have its own rationale. The relationship between the dominant verseform of a poem and a subordinate verseform is most often one of modulation, brought about by a change in the discursive position of the speaker. For instance in *Reginismál* the rhythm changes from *fornyrðislag* to *ljóðahátt* between sts. 18 and 19, as the discursive mode changes from narrative (here carried forward by dialogue) to a form of catechism, as Hnicarr (Óðinn) counsels Sigurðr and Reginn on the propitious signs for battle:

‘Hverir ríða þar Rævils hestom
hávar unnir, haf glymianda?
seglvigg ero sveita stoccin,
munat vágmarar vind um standaz.’

Reginn svaraði:

‘Hér ero vér Sigurðr á sætriám,
er oss byrr gefinn við bana síalfan;
fellr brattr breki bröndom hæri,
hlunnvigg hrapa; hverr spyrr at því?’

‘Hnicar héto mic, þá er Hugin gladdi
Völsungr ungi oc vegit hafði.
Nú máttu kalla karl af bergi,
Feng eða Fiolni; far vil ec þiggia.’

Þeir vico at landi, oc gecc karl á scip, oc lægði þá veðrit.

‘Segðu mér þat, Hnicarr, allz þú hvárttveggia veizt,
goða heill oc guma:
hver þøzt ero, ef beriaz scal,
heill at sverða svipon?’

Hnicarr qvað:

‘Morg ero góð, ef gumar vissi,
heill at sverða svipon;
dyggia fylgio hygg ec ins dœcqa vera
at hrottameiði hrafn.

Reginismál 16–20

The shift in verseform is accompanied by a change in the relationship between the speakers, and a change in the field of their discourse. In sts. 16–18 the speakers’ dialogue establishes their relative positions. Sigurðr’s address at st. 19:1–3 attributes Hnicarr with superior status because of his knowledge, and Sigurðr and Reginn accordingly submit to the role of recipients of knowledge. By the same token, whereas the dialogue of sts. 16–18 concerns the speakers’ identities, the field of discourse from st. 19 onwards is specialised, numinous knowledge, designated in the poem as *þøzt* ‘signs’. The stereotyped character of Hnicarr, as well as his names (Hnicarr and Fiolnir are both given as names for Óðinn in *Grímnismál* 47), establish the speaker as an authority with knowledge superior to men’s. By st. 25, the field of specialised knowledge has been extended to gnomes, linked thematically to the preceding series of propitious signs by the common concern for the warrior to be as well prepared as possible for battle:

Kemðr oc þveginn scal kænna hverr
oc at morni mettr;

þvíat ósýnt er, hvar at apni kǫmr;
illt er fyr heill at hrapa.’

Reginismál 25

The syntactic style of st. 25 is paralleled in many of the gnomic verses of *Hávamál* (for example sts. 6 and 38), a poem which exemplifies *par excellence* shifts in verseform and discursive mode. Within the series of signs expounded by Hnicarr there is a further modulation in the metrical pattern at st. 23, where the third half line of each half stanza extends to a full long line:

Engr scal gumna í gogn vega
síð scínandi systor mána;
þeir sigr hafa, er síá kunno,
hiorleics hvatir, eða hamalt fylkia.

Reginismál 23

The discursive mode of this stanza is also gnomic, prescribing a particular kind of behaviour and valourising those who practice it. The bare bones of a *ljóðaháttir* half stanza are discernible in the second half stanza, the extension being a phrase in apposition with line 6, following the alliteratively self-sufficient line “hiorleics hvatir”. This kind of extension is also found among *ljóðaháttir* stanzas in *Hávamál* (st. 146) and *Skírnismál* (st. 28). The metrical pattern of the first half stanza, however, is indistinguishable from a *fornyrðislag* half stanza, though according to Snorri’s scheme, the second long line exemplifies the alliterative pattern of *Bálkarlag* and the fourth long line accords with *Starkaðarlag*. The *ljóðaháttir* full-line is the least restrictive of all eddic line patterns, since it may carry either two or three stressed syllables (see Lie 1965 and Turville-Petre 1976:xvi). It therefore represents a metrical environment where there was a considerable amount of compositional freedom. The form of *Reginismál* 23 may simply be an expression of this freedom. Unlike certain other shifts between metrical styles, st. 23 does not carry with it an altered discursive stance.

Yet there is a related kind of modulation between verseforms that does not seem to imply any change in the speaker’s stance, relying instead on the discursive signification already established in the preceding stanzas. Such is the case with the *fornyrðislag* sections within *ljóðaháttir* catechisms which usually occur at a point where an aggregate of items is presented (for example, *Hávamál* 81–3, 85–7, 137, and 144; *Grimnismál* 28, 47–8; and *Sigrdrífumál* 15–17). In all these cases where *þulur* are listed the shift to long lines represents an economical means of presenting a mass of detail within the framework of the catechism (see Schier 1986:372–3). In *Hávamál*, long-line stanzas are sometimes syntactically dependent on the *ljóðaháttir* superstructure: for instance, the three-stanza list beginning “Brestanda boga, brennanda loga” is syntactically in apposition with “Meyiar orðom” as the

object of “scyli mangi trúa” (st. 84). In this example, the scribe does not even indicate the beginning of a new stanza as the rhythm shifts back into *ljóðaháttir* (“acri ársánom . . . 88:1). Because the pace of the long line quickens the delivery of material, the more solemn *ljóðaháttir* rhythm of the catechism was sometimes preferred. Such is the case in *Grímnismál* where the catalogue of Óðinn’s names constitutes the dramatic climax of his address to Geirroðr (sts. 46–50). Even here, the middle portion of the list is cast in *fornyrðislag*, the pace slowing again as Óðinn produces his *noms de guerre* in various triumphant martial encounters (sts. 49–50), thus signalling Geirroðr’s imminent humiliation.

Galdralag also functions as a modulated form of *ljóðaháttir* rhythm, being employed at dramatically crucial points within catechisms. In both *Hávamál* and *Sigrdrífumál* the incantatory rhythm is linked to the transfer of runic knowledge from an otherworldly being to an initiand. In *Hávamál*, knowledge is transferred from Óðinn to his addressee, who is identified as Loddfáfnir in one segment of the poem, but who otherwise is implicitly defined as an astute human listener (Clunies Ross 1990:227). Like Sigurðr in *Sigrdrífumál*, the addressee is guided through a series of gnomes before being initiated into runic wisdom, the forms of instructions functioning as a rite of passage for the addressee.

In both poems the repetition of ideas expressed through parallel syntactic constructions, the hallmark of *galdralag*, occurs in the account of Óðinn’s initial assumption of the runes. The incantatory rhythm signals the move into a realm of knowledge that is both mystical and esoteric. It also conveys the sense that the internalisation of rune knowledge is a ritual which is accomplished by incantation. The association of incantation with both the description of the gods’ original creation of runes and with the initiand’s subsequent assimilation of them is analagous to the parallel between Óðinn’s initial ingestion and expression of the mead of poetry and the poet’s subsequent metaphorical re-enactment of these processes during the act of creation. In both cases the initial act is invoked during subsequent acts as a way of empowering the subject:

Hugrúnar scaltu kunna, ef þú vilt hveriom vera
 geðsvinnari guma;
 þær of réð, þær of reist,
 þær um hugði Hroptr,
 af þeim legi, er lekið hafði
 ór hausi Heiddraupnis
 oc ór horni Hoddrofnis.

Á biargi stóð með Brimis eggjar,
 hafði sér á hofði hiálm.

Pá mælti Míms höfuð
fróðlicr iþ fyrsta orð,
oc sagði sanna stafi.

Á scildi qvað ristnar, þeim er stendr fyr scínandi goði,
á eyra Árvacs oc á Alsvinnz hófi,
á því hvéli, er snýz undir reið Rungnis,
á Sleipnis tønnom oc á sleða fíotrom, . . . *Sigrdrífumál* 13–15

Pat er þá reynt, er þú at rúnom spýrr,
inom reginkunnum,
þeim er gorðo ginregin
oc fáði fimbulþulr,
þá hefir hann bazt, ef hann þegir.

At qveldi scal dag leyfa, kono, er brend er,
mæki, er reyndr er, mey, er gefin er,
ís, er yfir kømr, ǫl, er druccit er. *Hávamál* 80–1

In both *Sigrdrífumál* and *Hávamál* the incantatory rhythm of *ljóðaháttir* gives way to a long-line verseform for the dense catalogue of prescriptions. It is as if once the incantation has induced a state of heightened receptivity, the matter of the runes can be communicated. At a later point in *Hávamál*, when rune knowledge is again the subject of instruction, the verseform undergoes another modulation through *galdralag* to *málaháttir* as the discursive mode shifts from incantation to rhetorical inquisition. The *málaháttir* stanza, which is not unlike *galdralag* in its use of repetitive syntax, aims to instill in the addressee the abilities and actions necessary for the acquisition of wisdom, the ability to *rísta*, *ráða* and *fá* in imitation of the acts of the gods, the ability to *freista* and *biðia*, according to the conventional practices of face-to-face learning, and the necessity to *blóta*, *senda* and *sóa* in order to secure the co-operation of the gods in the transfer of knowledge:

Rúnar munt þú finna oc ráðna stafi,
mioc stóra stafi,
mioc stinna stafi,
er fáði fimbulþulr
oc gorðo ginregin
oc reist hroptr royna,

Óðinn með ásom, enn fyr álfom Dáinn,
Dvalinn dvergom fyrir,
Ásviðr iotnom fyrir,
oc reist síálfr sumar.

Veiztu, hvé rísta scal, veiztu, hvé ráða scal?
 veiztu, hvé fá scal, veiztu, hvé freista scal?
 veiztu, hvé biðia scal, veiztu, hvé blóta scal?
 veiztu, hvé senda scal, veiztu, hvé sóa scal? *Hávamál* 142–4

The transfer of rune knowledge is represented as a more physical process in *Sigrdrífumál*, where the ancient runes are shaved off, mixed with mead to form a liquid, and distributed among Æsir, elves, Vanir and men (Sd. 18). The dialogue between Sigrdrífa and Sigurðr is of a different character from Óðinn's address in *Hávamál*. The relationship in *Hávamál* is between master and initiand, and a great deal of emphasis is placed upon the interpersonal distance between the two. While the paradigmatic relationship of bestower of wisdom and receiver of wisdom still holds in *Sigrdrífumál*, the interpersonal distance between the speaker and addressee has undergone modification. As a valkyrie, Sigrdrífa mediates between the worlds of men and gods. But Sigrdrífa has become something of a renegade valkyrie, having disobeyed Óðinn's instructions and attempted to subvert his activities, making the way open for her relationship with Sigurðr. The tone of her advice is personal and supportive – she provides her charge with *ástráð* (st. 21) – in contrast to Óðinn's awe-inspiring pronouncements.

In both poems the incantatory rhythm of *galdralag* is again invoked when the focus shifts to the addressee's side of the wisdom transfer. The incantation aims to effect the listener's apprehension of the runes, just as it was used to recall the atmosphere of the paradigmatic ritual:

Ráðomc þér, Loddfáfnir, at þú ráð nemir,
 níóta mundo, ef þú nemr,
 þér muno góð, ef þú getr:
 nótt þú rísat, nema á niósn sér
 eða þú leitir þér innan út staðar. *Hávamál* 112

Þat kann ec iþ siautiánda, at mic mun seint firraz
 iþ manunga man.

Líóða þessa munðu, Loddfáfnir,
 lengi vanr vera;
 þó sé þér góð, ef þú getr,
 nýt, ef þú nemr,
 þorþ, ef þú þiggr. *Hávamál* 162

Þat ero bócrúnar, þat ero biargrúnar,
 oc allar qlrúnar,
 oc mætar meginrúnar,
 hveim er þær kná óviltar oc óspiltar
 sér at heillom hafa;

nióttu, ef þú namt,
unz riúfaz regin.

Sigrdrífumál 19

Modulation between the *ljóðahátt* and *galdralag* verseforms is also used in *Skírnismál* at the height of Skírnir's tirade of threats against the giantess Gerðr. Like the incantation sections in the catechism, the *galdralag* phases in *Skírnismál* are used to lend the utterance potency. Whereas the catechism aims to instill wisdom in the addressee, the curse delivered by Skírnir is aimed at enervating his addressee (see Lönnroth 1977 and Mitchell 1983). And it does just that – Gerðr capitulates at st. 37 after the curse has been formalised by an inscription in runes. The association of *galdralag* rhythm with efficacious utterance can be seen in the following stanzas, where Skírnir first pronounces Gerðr's fate, and then uses the chant rhythm to connote the ritual nature of his spell-binding. The emphatic nature of *galdralag* is used to articulate the cumulative curses (31:4–5) and the trance-like state of the speaker (32:3–4):

Með þursi þríhöfðoðom þú scalt æ nara,
eða verlaus vera;
þitt geð gripi,
þic morn morni!
ver þú sem þistill, sá er var þrunginn
i önn ofanverða.

Til holtz ec gecc oc til hrás viðar,
gambantein at geta,
gambantein ec gat.

Skírnismál 31–2

The performative aspect of *ljóðahátt* verse is especially clear in the stanza in which Skírnir is on the point of sealing Gerðr's fate:

Purs ríst ec þér oc þriá stafi,
ergi oc æði oc óþola;
svá ec þat af ríst, sem ec þat á reist,
ef goraz þarfar þess.

Skírnismál 36

In this phase of the poem, the discursive mode of *Skírnismál* bears some resemblances to that of the catechism. Like the speakers of *Hávamál* and *Sigrdrífumál*, Skírnir invokes Óðinn's mastery of rune magic to add force to his curse, attempting to bring down upon Gerðr the full weight of the gods' *gambanreiði* (st. 33). In his call to frost giants and gods to bear witness to his curse (st. 34), Skírnir's tactic is similar to Sigrdrífa's, who, at the beginning of her counsel to Sigurðr, calls upon Dagr and Nótt to look kindly upon them, and gods and goddesses to grant them wisdom (sts. 3–4). The object of his delivery is of course the opposite of Sigrdrífa's, but the discursive mode of the curse is related to that of the catechism in as much as both use

incantatory rhythm and invocation to render their communication more effective.

The title *Skírnismál*, which is found only in the A manuscript, presumably reflects the generic similarity between this poem and other *ljóðaháttir* dialogues, which are characteristically entitled “Xs mál” (*Vafðrúðnismál*, *Grímnismál* and *Hávamál*) (Quinn 1990). The title in the Regius manuscript, *For Skírnis*, has more in common with the descriptive headings of narrative poems in the second part of the manuscript (*Dráp Niflunga* or *Brynhildr reið helveg*). The compiler of Regius (or whoever originally gave the poem this title) has presumably assessed its genre by comparison with other narrative poems that are constituted out of dialogue, such as *Helreið Brynhildar*, rather than using the criteria of verseform and discursive style as a guide to typology. The variation in titles is partly due to the heterogeneous nature of the discourse of the poem, which moves between the paradigm of the quest, which is fully articulated in the narrative, and the paradigm of the curse. It is significant in this regard that the whole poem is cast in *ljóðaháttir*, including the first movement of the poem which is similar to a typical narrative quest poem such as *Þrymsqviða*, which, by contrast, is cast entirely in *fornyrðislag*.

A different kind of modulation between verseforms is found in the *ljóðaháttir* poems, *Hávamál* and *Sigrdrífumál*, which contain brief sections in *fornyrðislag* outside the context of *pulur*. In *Sigrdrífumál*, the speech-act of the catechism forms the kernel of the poem, but enclosing this there is a narrative shell, part of which is cast in *fornyrðislag*. Sts. 1 and 5 provide the narrative context of Sigrdrífa’s counselling of Sigurðr. In st. 1 the speakers are identified and located in a narrative framework:

‘Hvat beit brynio, hví brá ec svefni?
hverr feldi af mér fólvar nauðir?’

Hann svaraði:

‘Sigmundar burr, sleit fyr scømmo
hrafns hrælundir hiorr Sigurðar.’ *Sigrdrífumál* 1

Biór færi ec þér, brynþings apaldr,
magni blandinn oc megintíri;
fullr er hann líóða oc línstafa,
góðra galdra oc gamanrúna. *Sigrdrífumál* 5

St. 5 narrates her action of delivering counsel to Sigurðr (here metaphorically described as the offer of a draught of beer, full of spells and runes), and refers to the delivery which in fact takes the remainder of the poem to be played out. In contrast to those *ljóðaháttir* stanzas which describe actions at the moment they take place (such as Skírnir’s inscribing of magic runes), Sigrdrífa’s words describe her speech-act as a whole and foreshadow actions

that have not yet happened. As I pointed out earlier, this style of self-narration from a standpoint in time outside the dramatic present is characteristic of narrative poems in *fornyrðislag*.

In *Hávamál* there is a similar movement from the perspective of the speaking subject to external narration between sts. 145 and 146. The verseform changes from *ljóðaháttur* to *fornyrðislag* for two lines, and adopts the characteristic syntactic patterns of *fornyrðislag* narration – the use of words such as *svá* and *þar* – to situate the information in a sequence of events:

Betra er óbeðit, enn sé ofblótið,
ey sér til gildis giof;
betra er ósent, enn sé ofsóit.

Svá Þundr um reist fyr þjóða rǫc;
þar hann upp um reis, er hann aprt of kom.

Lióð ec þau kann, er kannat þjóðans kona
oc manncis mǫgr; *Hávamál* 145–6

The move into the third person is not unfamiliar from the preceding *ljóðaháttur* series of stanzas, where for instance the Odinic voice has just declared: “Óðinn með ásom, . . . ec reist siálfr sumar” (*Háv.* 143). What is distinctive about the lines in *fornyrðislag* is the disengagement of the voice from the here and now of the discourse, referring instead to the “þar” and “svá”. The emergence of an overt narrating voice at this point serves to tie off the section of verses on runes before the commencement of the series of *lióð* which follows (st. 144 ff.). The chronological placement of Óðinn’s deed as “fyr þjóða rǫc” reveals the perspective of the speaker of the *fornyrðislag* lines as including that of humans. The lines therefore function to contextualise the subject of the foregoing stanzas in relation to mankind, and to place it within a more extensive mythological narrative.

It is interesting to note that when eddic conventions were employed by skalds in praise poems, constant shifts between metrical styles are also in evidence. *Eiríksmál* begins in *málaháttur* but switches to *ljóðaháttur* when dialogue between the gods is represented (st. 3). The gnomic cast of Óðinn’s answers to questions, put to him by his retinue, accords with one of the conventional usages of *ljóðaháttur* in the eddic corpus and reflects the same choice of diction (“óvíst er at vita”, for instance, occurs at *Eiríksmál* 7 and in gnomic pronouncements in *Háv.* 1:5–7, 38:4–6, and *Rm.* 25:4–6). The final pair of *ljóðaháttur* stanzas of the poem works to elevate Eiríkr to the status of wise respondent in a dialogue with Óðinn (though the speaker of the question is not explicitly identified in the text). The representation of Eiríkr speaking in *ljóðaháttur* enhances the poet’s tribute to him, associating him both with the wisdom to be able to answer the first question put to him on

entering Óðinn's hall, and with the aplomb to answer in the appropriate mode:

... hins vilk ek fregna, hvat fylgir þér
 jofra frá eggþrimu.

Konungar ro fimm, kennik þér nafn allra,
 ek em enn sétti sjalfr.

Eiríksmál 8–9 (BI 165–6)

In *Hákonarmál*, the modulation between verseforms seems to be determined not just by the identity of the speakers, but also by the locale in which they operate. The description of Óðinn sending his valkyries out on a mission, which opens the poem, is cast in *ljóðahátt*, but the valkyries' ensuing narrative of battle (sts. 2–9) is in *málahátt*. Mention of the warrior's translation from middle earth to Valhøll, however, is accompanied by a shift in rhythm:

Sótu þá döglingar með sverð of togin,
 með skarða skjöldu ok skotnar brynjur,
 vasa sá herr í hugum ok átti
 til Valhallar vega.

Hákonarmál 9 (BI 58)

The remainder of the poem (which is set in Valhøll) is cast in *ljóðahátt*, and represents the speech of valkyries, gods and Hákon, who demonstrates his facility with gnomic utterance (st. 17). The poet too assumes the authoritative voice of eddic pronouncement at the end of the poem, apparently transcending with Hákon the limited world-view of men: in statements of mythological "fact" and gnomic wisdom (sts. 20–1), he is able to comment on Hákon from the perspective usually reserved for Óðinn.

The metrical shifts in *Haraldskvæði* appear to be determined by the discursive style of the actors' speech rather than by their identity or location. The report given by the raven to the valkyrie is cast mainly in *málahátt*, and is not dissimilar in style to the reports of birds on the adventures of heroes in the Codex Regius collection (cf. Fm. 32 f.). At st. 18 of the poem, the valkyrie's questions take on the tone of a knowledge trial, and the metrical pattern switches to a form of *ljóðahátt* (a long line followed by a *ljóðahátt* half stanza):

At skalda reiðu vilk spyrja, alls þykkisk skil vita;
 greppa ferðir, þú munt gørla kunna,
 þeira's með Haraldí hafask.

Haraldskvæði 18 (BI 24)

The more interactive nature of their exchange is signalled both by the change in diction and in rhythm. The raven's answers are cast in a mixture of long lines and *ljóðahátt*, with lists of items cast in the long-line measure (st. 19).

I now want to extend my examination of shifts between metrical styles

within poems to look at the way in which the different discursive modes of *Fáfnismál* cohere, how voice and verseform are constructed, and how the dramatic and narrative dimensions of the poem interact. The narrative substratum of the poem – the physical action of slaying Fáfñir and Reginn – marks Sigurðr's rite of passage from youth to maturity in the larger story of his life told in the sequence of poems of which *Fáfnismál* forms a part. Sigurðr is hereafter known as Sigurðr Fáfnisbani. Narrative events underpin *Fáfnismál*, but they are no means its focus. The story is assumed by the text: the mortal wounding of Fáfñir (which occurs prior to st. 1), Sigurðr's killing of Fáfñir's brother Reginn, (which occurs between st. 39 and st. 40) and finally, in the prophetic last stanzas of the poem, the poem anticipates Sigurðr's next adventure – his encounter with the valkyrie Sigdrífa, who is actually his future wife Brynhild. The poetic text consists entirely of dialogues between Sigurðr and usually one other figure, and the topics of their conversations constantly range away from narrative.

The only rubric in this part of the text in the Regius manuscript occurs before the first stanza, and announces the narrative topic of the poetic text: "frá dauða Fáfñis". What modern editors print as the prose coda to the poem is continuous with the prose introduction to the next poem, *Sigrdrífumál*, which has no rubric either before the prose preface or before the first stanza. In fact, we cannot be certain where one "poem" ends and the next begins. Snorri quotes a single stanza in *Gylfaginning* and a pair of stanzas in *Skáldskaparmál* which correspond to *Fáfnismál* 13, 32 and 33 in the Regius text, though he does not name his source on either occasion. Therefore we cannot deduce from this information whether Snorri knew *Fáfnismál* in the form we have it, or whether the poem in oral transmission was constituted in exactly the same way as the single extant written text of it.

The principal function of the prose links in the text of *Fáfnismál* is to bring to the surface of the text the underlying narrative of the verse – a narrative usually already elliptically expressed in the verse, and most probably a narrative with which the poem's audience was thoroughly familiar. The sequence of dialogues constituting the poem takes place, as it were, in pauses in the narrative, and allows different aspects of the hero's character to be probed. While the narrative sub-text follows Sigurðr's physical rite of passage, the discourses of the poem itself map his intellectual rite of passage. The process of acquiring the wisdom and judgement appropriate to a king is revealed through Sigurðr's interaction with a series of conventionalised figures of authority.

First, in sts. 1 to 22, Sigurðr encounters Fáfñir, who is called an *ormr* (sts. 26 and 28) but who is also identified with different types of otherworldly groups: after his death he is described as *inn aldni iotunn* (st. 29), the typical source in eddic poems of otherworldly knowledge (see, for example, *Vaf-*

ðrúðnismál). Fáfñir also has special status as a speaker because of his mortal wounding. In a number of Norse sources we meet the man doomed to die who, in the interval between mortal wounding and death, was thought to have intellectual possession of otherworldly knowledge, including information about the future (see Boberg 1966:84–D1812.2.4). In the moments before he passes from this world to the next he retains the ability to communicate this knowledge to other mortals.

Sigurðr's next exchange is with the otherworldly figure of Reginn, Fáfñir's brother, described in the prose preface to *Reginismál* as “ðvergr of vøxt; hann var vitr, grimmr oc fiolkunnigr”. He has another dwarfish attribute – the ability to craft superior weapons, like the sword he makes for Sigurðr, which is so sharp that when plunged into a river with a strand of wool drifting against it in the stream, the fibre is sliced in half. Just as Fáfñir is described as *inn aldni iotunn*, Reginn is characterised as *inn hári þulr* and *inn hrimkaldi iotunn*, identifying him too with the category of beings who constitute the “other” for gods and men, the possessors of knowledge that is coveted by them.

Finally, Sigurðr encounters a group of birds, *igður*, who like other female non-human figures are invested with prescience and wisdom. The nut-hatch is unlike the *vølv*a or seeress who is compelled to reveal knowledge about future events which she does with great reluctance. And she is unlike the *valkyrja* who looks like a woman and speaks the same language as the hero. The valkyrie takes a special protective interest in her human interlocutor as she provides him with *ástráð* ‘fond counsel’. The nut-hatches also provide *ástráð*, but they are removed from the hero both physically and linguistically: nut-hatches are non-human and sit above the hero in trees, speaking a bird-language which can only be understood by some fortuitous event – such as tasting the blood of the serpent Fáfñir.

The formal characteristics of the poem have, in the past, led editors and scholars to judge the text to be corrupt, a hotchpotch of styles, an unhappy synthesis of fragments from disparate periods (see, for example, Holtsmark 1961:417, or earlier, de Vries 1934:17). It is generally the abrupt transitions between types of discourse that cause such consternation among critics, who find the shifts in verseform and style somehow discordant. But in a recent study of the poem Alv Kragerud has made the important observation that changes in verseform cannot be regarded as a reliable criterion for the division of an extant poem into supposedly earlier fragments since such metrical shifts could sometimes be “en poetisk finesse” (1981:footnote 35). Some of the techniques behind this poetic finesse are the focus of this article. Far from being discordant, the interplay of discourses in *Fáfñismál* reflects the modulations involved in Sigurðr's meetings with remarkable beings. These patterns of modulation are traditionally termed generic patterns in

literature, and another way of conceptualising the process of interpreting them that has been articulated by Joseph Harris (1990:238–9) is discovering the “principles of code coherence in the matrix form” of each text.

The poem can be viewed as a series of different (though related) discursive interactions. One of these groups is the mytheadidactic series of stanzas 12–15, where Sigurðr asks Fáfñir about the origin of the *nornir*, the female supernatural beings who determine each man’s fate at birth, and the name of the field where the final battle between the gods and the giants will take place. This group has been the subject of the excellent study by Alv Kragerud mentioned above, in which he examines the place and meaning of these stanzas in the poem, in the light of the poem’s theme, and in connection with the use of mytheadidactic elements elsewhere in the eddic corpus. The generic conventions operating in the other groups of stanzas in the poem can also be teased out using the procedure adopted by Kragerud, and in the light of the study of *Hárbarðzlióð* by Marcel Bax and Tineke Padmos (1983), in which they investigate the way speech-acts and the conventions surrounding their performance interact in that poem.

Kragerud (1981:23) views the heterogeneous discourses in the first part of the poem as thematically integrated into the poem, but does not believe they can be read as integrated into its dramatic or psychological development: “Den psykologiske problemstilling hvorfor Sigurd spør og svarer som han gjør, er uforenlig med de formhistoriske tradisjoner som bestemmer diktet”. Accordingly, he sees the various discursive forms deployed in the poem – gnomic aphorism, mythological catechism etcetera – as determined by each topic as it is raised in the dialogue. When the subject changes from moral philosophy to the mythological question of creation, “trer den mytheadidaktiske form inn” (1981:22). It is my argument that the discursive forms deployed in *Fáfnismál* encode not only particular fields of experience, but also the interpersonal position of each speaker. In other words, to see the discursive style as determined principally by subject matter is to understand only part of the generic aesthetic that is at work in the text. The consequence of Kragerud’s view is his perception of the character Sigurðr as a vehicle for certain kinds of discourse rather than the speaker of them: Sigurðr is “et lydig redskap ved dikterens formgiving” and “vi får enda et tilfelle hvor den litterære finesse består i at mediets åpenbaringer når fram til det lydhøre publikum over hodet på interpellanten” (Kragerud 1981:23).

When viewed against the background of discursive styles throughout the eddic corpus the conversation between Fáfñir and Sigurðr is thoroughly dramatic. Whether or not the import of some of Fáfñir’s speech goes over Sigurðr’s head or not, he engages with the dying dragon in a series of exchanges that is tactically complex. Indeed, if Kari Ellen Gade’s recent proposal (1990) that Sigurðr’s gambit consists of a clever onomastic pun on

his own name (calling himself “göfuct dýr”) is accepted, we are dealing with a speaker of considerable sophistication. To understand the strategies employed by both speakers it is necessary first to be familiar with the range of discursive positions taken up by them, and the rules of play coded in each type of discourse. The relationship between the speakers as the poem opens is complicated. Sigurðr has already mortally wounded Fáfñir, who therefore is in a severely compromised position – physically and discursively. According to convention, however, he is a figure of authority, vested with specialised and highly coveted knowledge.

In the opening stanzas of the poem Fáfñir initiates the exchange and Sigurðr responds with obfuscating play (“foður ec ácca, sem fira synir, /geng ec æ einn saman.”). By the end of the fourth stanza, however, he has answered Fáfñir’s initial question (“hveriom ertu sveini um borinn, hverra ertu manna mögr?”), despite his prevarications, and Fáfñir has established himself as the dominant speaker. In his next answer to Fáfñir’s question about his motives for stabbing him, Sigurðr grows bold and completes his response with an aphorism – “fár er hvatr, er hrøðaz tecz, /ef í barnæscio er blauðr”. As Bax and Padmos have noted (1983:161), the use of proverbs is an assertive means of validating the speaker’s argument. Such impudence is not countenanced by Fáfñir, who takes up the topic of youthful promise in a direct taunt to Sigurðr in st. 7:

‘Veit ec, ef þú vaxa næðir fyr þinna vina briósti,
 sæi maðr þic vreiðan vega;
 nú ertu haptr oc hernuminn,
 æ qveða bandingia bifaz.’ Fáfñismál 7

The syntax and diction of this stanza is similar to that used in the *senna*, where knowledge of another’s infamy is exposed with a view to silencing them (cf. *Locasenna* 34). Sigurðr’s response follows the *senna* pattern of denying the charge in the second half stanza, and commenting on it in the first:

‘Því bregðr þú nú mér, Fáfñir, at til fiarri siác
 mínom feðr munom;
 eigi em ec haptr, þótt ec væra hernumi,
 þú fannt, at ec lauss lifi.’ Fáfñismál 8

The last line of his tough-minded retort turns the taunt back on Fáfñir, who is in no position to doubt Sigurðr’s bravery at arms.

At this point Fáfñir changes tactic slightly and uses another resource evidenced in the *senna*. As well as bringing up embarrassing stories from someone’s past, *senna* taunts can also disclose the details of someone’s death. So Fáfñir reveals Sigurðr’s doom — “iþ gialla gull oc iþ glóðrauða fé, /

þér verða þeir baugar at bana” (st. 9:4-6). In the first half stanza Fáfnir attempts to re-align the discursive relationship between them: whereas in the context of a *senna* the first half stanza of such a revelation would be aimed at silencing the opponent, Fáfnir instead scolds Sigurðr for interpreting his words within this convention – “Heiptyrði ein telr þú þér í hvívetna,/enn ec þér satt eitt segic” (st. 9:1-3). Unable to counter this move, Sigurðr attempts to shrug off the announcement of his fate by pronouncing platitudes, and trying to generalise the situation beyond his own sorry prospects (a comparable strategy is attempted by Þórr at Hrbl. 5):

‘Fé ráða scal fyrða hvern
æ til ins eina dags,
þvíat eino sinni scal alda hvern
fara til heliar heðan.’

Fáfnismál 10

Gnomic wisdom is conventionally associated with the voice of a wise master, not a young student. Sigurðr’s lack of mastery of gnomic discourse prompts Fáfnir to demonstrate how gnomes work in the mouth of a wise giant.

‘Norna dóm þú munt fyr nesiom hafa
oc ósvinnz apa;
í vatni þú drucnar, ef í vindi rær:
alt er feigs forað.’

Fáfnismál 11

What is more, Fáfnir uses the diction of gnomic advice to insult Sigurðr again – only a fool would mock such forebodings. Fáfnir has won this round.

Sigurðr is effectively humbled by the dying dragon’s pronouncement, and rather than carrying on with a *senna* he institutes a knowledge trial, where at least he can pose the questions, and possibly expose a blind spot in the sage’s knowledge as Óðinn manages to do in his contest with the giant Vafðrúðnir. Since Fáfnir apparently knows so much about his fate, he may well learn something from him. His questions and Fáfnir’s answers are linked thematically to the problematic of the poem – the nature and workings of fate – or the judgement of the norns – in Sigurðr’s life. As Kragerud (1981:30) has shown, what appears at first to be a digression, is in fact the development of an idea with the help of a mythological paradigm – here the nature of the norns and the ultimate fate of all the gods.

The brief knowledge trial ends with Fáfnir’s successful answer which signifies his superior status in this kind of discourse. Having thus established himself he switches to another of the discursive modes available to the wise mythological informant – a first person narrative which has some bearing on the preceding topic (st. 16). Like Óðinn in *Hávamál* (st. 101) he admits to his fallibility – foolishly, he tells Sigurðr, he had thought the fear-helm made him invincible. The sub-text here of course is that Sigurðr should not make

the same mistake. Although he has been soundly beaten in the *senna* and humbled by the knowledge trial, Sigurðr does not accept his inferior discursive position without a fight. He interrupts what would according to convention become a monologue, and assumes a position of equal authority in delivering gnomes back to Fáfnir: “þá þat finnr, er með fleirom kœmr,/at engi er einna hvatastr” (st. 17:4-6).

At st. 20 Fáfnir makes a final bid to define their relative positions, and resorts to another of the discursive modes used by the teacher to the student – he offers Sigurðr advice: “Ræð ec þér nú, Sigurðr, enn þú ráð nemir/oc ríð heim heðan!”, and reiterates his prophecy that possession of the gold hoard will mean his death (st. 9:4-6 and st. 20:4-6). Not only does Sigurðr reject Fáfnir’s advice, he taunts him as he lies dying on the heath:

‘Ráð er þér ráðit, enn ec ríða mun til þess gullz,
 er í lyngvi liggir;
 enn þú, Fáfnir, ligg í fíorbrotom,
 þar er þic Hel hafi!’

Fáfnismál 21

With little to lose Fáfnir offers a final word of warning to Sigurðr – not to be fooled by Reginn – and formally closes their dialogue according to the conventions of a wisdom contest, by commenting in the third person on his opponent’s superiority, just as Vafðrúðnir does when Óðinn has defeated him:

‘Reginn mic réð, hann þic ráða mun,
 hann mun ocr verða báðom at bana;
 fíor sitt láta hygg ec at Fáfnir myni,
 þitt varð nú meira megin.’

Fáfnismál 22

Fáfnir makes it clear, however, that Sigurðr has only won because of his superior physical strength, and not because of his superior wisdom. In his final volley Fáfnir also puns on the verb *ráða* which means both to advise and to deceive, leaving Sigurðr with the decision of whose *ráð* to take – that offered by the wise serpent, or that offered to him by Reginn. The word is punned on in turn by Sigurðr in his conversation with Reginn at st. 26, and by the nut-hatches at st. 37. The potential for generic play in eddic composition is particularly clear in lexical elements such as this, as well as at other levels of poetic structure.

In the second conversation of the poem, between Reginn and Sigurðr, Sigurðr again contends with his one-time advisor using the resources of the *senna* and gnomic counsel. Reginn’s attempted flattery in st. 23 is countered by Sigurðr’s sage comment: “Þat er óvíst at vita, þá er komom allir saman,/sigtíva synir,/hverr óblauðastr er alinn” (st. 24:1-4). He uses the diction and syntax of gnomic wisdom to position himself above Reginn who by contrast seems glib and foolish. By broadening the scope of his comment beyond men

to include all the gods as well, Sigurðr positions himself in a mythological context, where he is, at least theoretically, of equal status with Reginn, the cunning dwarf. In this stanza, too, he moves the emphasis away from valour through martial feats – the ground on which he was able to get the better of Fáfnir – and attempts to redefine valour as dependent on wit as well as strength.

Reginn ignores his tactical move and continues in the same vein as his first address. In the second half of st. 25 however, he makes a threatening reference to his kinship bond with Fáfnir which entitles him to atonement from Sigurðr or revenge on him. Sigurðr's cool demeanour evaporates and he resumes the status of Reginn's charge: "Þú því rétt, er ec ríða scylda/heilog fioll hinig" (st. 26:1-4). In the final line of this stanza Sigurðr refers to the *senna*-exchange prior to the action of this poem in which Reginn mocked Sigurðr's manliness as a means of goading him on to the murder of Fáfnir ("nema þú frýðir mér hvatz hugar"). In st. 27 Reginn has re-established his position of dominance and gives orders to Sigurðr. Sigurðr, however, responds with a stock *senna* insult to Reginn – "Fiarri þú gect, meðan ec á Fáfni rauþc/minn inn hvassa hior . . . meðan þú í lyngvi látt" (st. 28) – a serious imputation of cowardice and unmanliness. Reginn tries to deflect this insult by redefining their relationship. Sigurðr would not have achieved his present intellectual status of winning a contest against a wise giant if Reginn had not favoured him by making him a superior weapon: "ef þú sverðz né nytir, þess er ec síalfr gorða" (st. 29:4-5). Put bluntly, he attempts to make Sigurðr indebted to him, and to restore the relationship of dependence. Sigurðr does not even bother to respond directly to this proposition, but assumes the position of wise speaker and delivers two stanzas of gnomes:

'Hugr er betri, enn sé hiors megin,
 hvars vreiðir scole vega;
 þvíat hvatan mann ec sé harliga vega
 með slævo sverði sigr.

Hvøtom er betra, enn sé óhvøtom,
 í hildileic hafaz;
 gløðom er betra, enn sé glúpnanda,
 hvæt sem at hendi kømr.'

Fáfnismál 30-1

By silencing Reginn he has thus won this round intellectually, prefiguring his physical victory over him a little later when he decapitates him. In the second stanza of his gnomonic pronouncement, Sigurðr delivers a further insult to Reginn by comparing the fierce fighter with the cowardly, down-cast man who is reduced to deceit and guile.

In this sequence as in the first, the interpersonal effects of each utterance are not explicit, but they are coded in the conventional types of discourse. In the final sequence of the poem taunts and gnomes are again the material of debate but a further discursive style, the prophecy, is brought into play. Up to this point, the range of styles has been confined to interactive dialogues cast in *ljóðaháttur*. A different metre, *fornyrðislag*, is used at st. 32, in the first speech by one of the nut-hatches. The nut-hatches discuss, apparently between themselves, Sigurðr's situation, in particular the best course of action for such a hero to take. Although the dramatic situation between prophet and the subject of the prophecy is frequently highly charged, the prophecy is usually presented as an involuntary act, with the speaker constructed as a more or less reluctant medium for the transmission of a narrative of future time. In this situation there is of course the potential for the relationship between speakers to change – and this is indeed what happens in the poem *Baldrs draumar* when the *völva* detects Óðinn's identity and he, in anger, insults her as “þriggia þursa móðir”. The resources of the *senna* appear to come quickly to the lips of many a participant in eddic dialogue.

In *Fáfnismál*, where the dramatic situation of the prophet and the subject of the prophecy is highly particularised at a point in the narrative action, the prophecy gives way to incitement to action, to which the usually passive subject of the prophecy responds. The opening of st. 32 is similar to the characteristic opening of a prophecy – “Þar sitr X” or “Þar liggr Y” (cf. Vsp. 35, Ls. 41, HHv. 8). The second half stanza departs from this mode of impersonal observation by venturing the speaker's assessment of the best plan for the subject of the prophecy to adopt:

‘Þar sitr Sigurðr,	sveita stoccinn,
Fáfnis hiarta	við funa steikir;
spacr þætti mér	spillir bauga,
ef hann fiorsega	fránan æti.’

Fáfnismál 32

The more personal and interactive mode of this discourse is made evident in st. 34 when the imperative mood is used. In this stanza one of the nut-hatches goes near to inciting Sigurðr to action, and here for the first time the verseform shifts to *ljóðaháttur*.

‘Höfði scemra	láti hann inn hára þul
fara til heliar heðan!	
ollo gulli	þá kná hann einn ráða,
fiolð, því er und Fáfni lá.’	

Fáfnismál 34

St. 35 reverts to an impersonal mode using a conditional clause and an impersonal verb of perception again – “Horscr þætti mér, ef hafa kynni/ástráð mikit yðvar systra”. The nut-hatch speaker makes explicit the sympathetic relationship they are trying to construct between themselves and Sigurðr, characterising their discourse as *ástráð*. This is the term used by Sigurðr to describe the counsel offered him by the valkyrie Sigrdrífa (Sd. 21), and it designates a discourse affiliated with *ráð* rather than a *spá*. In this stanza, too, an aphorism is used by the nut-hatch in her counsel to Sigurðr: “þar er mér úlfs vón, er ec eyro séc”.

In st. 37 the discursive mode turns fully to the gnomic mode – and the verseform and syntactic patterns change to those found in other *ráð* poems such as *Hávamál* and *Sigrdrífumál*:

‘Mioc er ósviðr, ef hann enn sparir
fiánda inn fólcscá,
þar er Reginn liggr, er hann ráðinn hefr;
kannat hann við slíco at síá.’ *Fáfnismál 37*

The last line of st. 37 offers a mild rebuke of Sigurðr’s intellectual ability to use the *ráð* that they provide. St. 38 reiterates the counsel given in st. 34, but this time the second half stanza is cast in the second person, not the third: “þá mundu fiár, þess er Fáfñir réð, /einvaldi vera”. It is at this point that the interactive discourse adopted by this nut-hatch provokes a response from Sigurðr:

‘Verðra svá ríc scöþ, at Reginn scyli
mitt banorð bera;
þviat þeir báðir bræðr scolo brálliga
fara til Heliar heðan.’ *Fáfnismál 39*

Following Sigurðr’s action of disposing of Reginn, the nut-hatches turn their attention to the next event in his story – his wooing of Sigrdrífa (sts. 40–4). Their prophecy is cast in *fornyrðislag*, and their discourse (“mey veit ec eina” st. 40:5, “Salr er á há” st. 42:1, and “Veit ec á fialli” st. 43:1) resembles the syntactic and lexical style of *Völuspá* (for example, sts. 19 and 38). While this series of stanzas might be viewed as belonging equally well to the preamble to Sigurðr’s encounter with Sigrdrífa (Sd. 1), the discourse of the nut-hatches coheres thematically with earlier stages of *Fáfnismál* through their reference to Sigurðr’s fate set by the norns: “fyr scöþom norna” (44:8).

In this analysis of *Fáfnismál*, I have aimed to show that different discursive styles are deployed not simply as a consequence of the historical association between particular discourses and particular poetic forms. Rather, different

discursive styles are determined by the dialogic potential between speakers in a given narrative context. Changes in rhythm constitute one of the semiotic systems at work in the process of eddic praxis, spinning webs of signification around different styles of utterance and different discursive postures that we can only partially apprehend. By studying recurrent patterns of poetic composition, such as shifts between *fornyrðislag* and *ljóðaháttir* rhythm, we see further into the world of eddic poetry and can distinguish more clearly the characteristics of particular eddic voices. It is only then that the significance of figures like Sigurðr assuming different voices and different discursive strategies becomes apparent.

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