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VERSES IN THE ISLENDINGASÖGUR

I hope to discuss here something of the literary functions of the verses to be found in the *Isleendingasögur*, especially those in *Eyrbyggja saga*¹⁾, in relationship to the literary structures of the sagas. My debt to the teaching of E.O.G. Turville-Petre, and to the writings of many scholars, is immeasurable: it is paradoxically at its greatest when I disagree most, since my own thoughts were prompted by the great stimulus of their ideas.

I

Scholars have largely used the verses contained in abundance in many sagas in attempts to verify, or disprove, the reality of the content of a saga, or to date its composition. But verses may be of greater intrinsic importance than this. It is plausible, for instance, that one source of the saga is the prose commentary and linking narrative essential for understanding much of the poetry, which would otherwise be incomprehensible. Thus it is arguable, for instance, that the prose links in the Poetic Edda preserve a very archaic stage in the development of the saga: in eg. *Heiðreks saga*, where the poetry is framed in prose narrative, and in *Völsunga saga*, where the poetry is paraphrased to give almost unbroken prose, we may see further stages in this development. This provides a model for the development of prose narrative other than historical or hagiographic²⁾.

1) All references to sagas are to the editions published by Hið Íslenska Fornritafélag, unless otherwise stated; references to poets are to Finnur Jónsson, *Den Norsk-Islandske Skjaldedigtning A I-II* (Copenhagen, 1912-15), and to E.A. Kock, *Den Norsk-Islandske Skaldediktningen* (Lund, 1946-49).

2) See T.M. Andersson, *The Problem of Icelandic Saga Origins*, p. 34.

Similarly the prose of eg. much of the *Skáldskaparmál*, a necessary commentary on the verses quoted by Snorri, could easily develop into a framing narrative for the poetry of a specific poet, giving, for instance, the circumstances of composition required to understand *lausavísur*. This in turn could develop into the genre of '*skáldasögur*', biographies of poets, which form a distinct group among the sagas³⁾. In these the original core of the saga, the poetry, is according to this view reduced to a 'secondary feature' of the work. This in itself could account for the presence of much poetry in sagas: that it may be a literary fossil inherited from an earlier stage in literary development. Or it may still play some active part in the organisation of sagas.

One point which suggests that verses were thought to fulfil some function within sagas, is that late sagas still contain verses, and that some (late) sagas have extra, 'spurious', verses added after their composition: eg. those added to *Njáls saga*. Secondly, we have some contemporary witness as to the function of some verses: Snorri's preface to *Heimskringla*, where he justifies the use of verses as historical sources in historical sagas. It has been considered plausible that authors of other types of saga also used verses as source-material, and that, in quoting verses, they were quoting their sources and proving their veracity. Both these points require qualification: late sagas might use verses in order to give the impression of archaic antiquity; similarly, spurious verses might be used in order to give a (false) impression of veracity. In practice, it is not always possible to distinguish between ancient verses and later imitations, since, although in dating poetry there are features which are certainly late, there are no early features which could not have been imitated later. Thus we can prove that some verses are late, but it is difficult

³⁾ See Bjarni Einarsson, *Skáldasögur*, Reykjavík, 1961.

to prove that any verse is early. However, for the illusion of antiquity or veracity to remain effective, the majority of verses quoted in sagas would have to be genuine.

Thirdly, we might consider from the continuing interest in skaldic poetry until the 14th century, that skaldic verses were thought to be of intrinsic value and beauty. So verses could have been included in, or added to, sagas for their intrinsic beauty. This argument is weak, both in theory and practice; if a saga is an organised æsthetic unity, the inclusion or addition of extraneous material, no matter how attractive in itself, is undesirable. Further, we find that much of the finest surviving poetry is not quoted in *Íslendingasögur*, and that the verses which are quoted in sagas vary from good to bad, just as any other sort of poetry. This suggests that the intrinsic quality of the poetry was not a particular criterion for its inclusion into sagas.

Lastly, we may consider that verses were included in or added to sagas because they were felt in some way to improve the saga æsthetically. I wish to investigate this possibility.

Saga-authors do not normally quote verses in the course of description or narrative: they are usually found in direct speech, or, at least, are given as the 'verse-remark' of a specific, and usually named, individual, eg. 'So spoke X the poet...'. Groups of verses occur; more frequently, verse-sequences are given in the form of 'verse-conversations' (see below). But usually verses appear more or less dispersedly throughout sagas, as *lausavísur*: information or comment on a situation or action, crystallised into poetry. From this it follows that they will normally occur when there is a noteworthy situation or action on which to comment. In other words, one can expect that verses will cluster round points or themes of importance within the saga, and that the verses will therefore serve both to reinforce and mark these: 'point' them. For this there is good æsthetic reason; skaldic poetry can be impressive and exciting: it will therefore be placed where the saga-author needs to impress or excite, and so will be attracted to points or themes of emotional tension in the

systems already existing, to reinforce them. All the skáldasögur show such ordering of verses: eg. Fóstbræðra saga, where, inter alia, one can note the 'clustering' of verses round the vengeance with Þormóðr Kolbrúnarskáld took for Þorgeirr his foster-brother, or around Þormóðr's final association with St. Ólafr, culminating in a virtual verse-description of the Battle of Stiklastaðir. Likewise, verses in Egils saga cluster at the crises and at the polarities⁴⁾; at crises in fact becoming full-length lays, eg. the Höfuðlausn, set at the crisis of a major episode. If Jón Helgason is correct in questioning the

4) A number of types of saga-structure will be mentioned in this paper:-

1. 'Development-structure'. Structural unity is achieved here by the development of a specific element throughout the structure. Different stages of this development are logically related, but may have abrupt intersections. Eg. if the element developed is narrative, development is normally causal, but decisive change, at which development is realised in terms of narrative situation, is rarely gradual, but usually takes place at a single climax, the 'crisis'. Thus in a narrative development-structure, strains will usually build up to a moment of decisive change, the crisis, at which the narrative situation is irreversibly modified. Elements other than narrative may be developed: eg. theme, character or function. Further, development need not only take place between an earlier and a later part of a work (diachronic development); different levels of a work, registering simultaneously, may form development-structures (synchronic development). Some allegory can be seen in this way.

2. 'Balance-structure'. Structural unity is achieved here by the symmetry of a number of elements, balanced with or against each other within the structure. The elements balanced need not be logically related, since the relationship between them is that of similarity and/or contrast; any two elements, however, can only resemble, or contrast with, each other within a specific 'area'. Eg. the first section of Hrafnkels saga shows the fall of a character from political power, the second his recovery of power. The 'area' within which contrast can take place is that of 'change of political power'. A balance-structure can contain a considerable number of elements; a tripartite structure is common, in which two similar sections 'frame' a central, contrasting, section.

Development and balance-structures are not necessarily mutually exclusive descriptions of material: it may frequently be a matter of individual judgement whether a structure can more easily be described in terms of the development of a single element, or the balance of a number of elements, or both.

3. 'Interlace-structure'. This is a well-known type of narrative-structure, in which a number of different narratives are interwoven, giving a polyphonic effect. The harmony between such interweaving narratives may be described in terms of balance-structures.

authenticity of this drápa, then the only reason for its inclusion is its æsthetic function at this point, and there could be no historical justification for its placing. Egils saga also gives examples of verses clustering along the lines of strain within the saga: the narrative element of Egill's hatred for Eiríkr blóðöx is accompanied by verses almost wherever it becomes explicit: this is the 'line of strain' which culminates and ends in the episode-crisis at York, at which the Höfuðlausn is set.

Any such theoretical description of some of the principles which may underlie the placing and frequency of verses within Íslendingasögur must be tested not only against examples which corroborate it, but against all the examples within a specific saga. Further, it may well prove to be the case that some of the extra-literary factors already mentioned (eg. the quotation of verses as genuine or spurious 'literary fossils', or as genuine or spurious sources) may interact with an æsthetic scheme of ordering within a work, to produce the diversity which in fact we see. Or yet further mechanisms may be at work.

II

Eyrbyggja saga⁵⁾ is rich in verses, and, although some are of no more than adequate literary standards (eg. the verses attributed to Þormóður Trefilsson), some of the poetry is very fine (eg. most of the verses attributed to Björn Breiðvíkingakappi). One of the most striking features of the verses is that they appear in groups, sometimes explicitly linked with each other. For instance, the two verses attributed to Oddr skáld are grouped together as (part of) the Illugadrápa, and the five verses attributed to Þormóður Trefilsson are three times grouped together as forming part of the Hrafnsmál. More often, however, the grouping is inexplicit. For instance, there is the 'verse-conversation' of seventeen verses attributed to Þórarinn svartí (the Máhlíðingavísur), or, again, the sequence of seven verses attributed to Björn Breiðvíkingakappi,

⁵⁾For the general structure of this saga, see the excellent discussions by L.M. Hollander, JEGP 1959, pp. 222-7 (and references there), and Vésteinn Ólason, Skírnir 1971, pp. 5-25.

associated with the narrative of his love-affair with Puriör at Fróðá. Other groups of verses are the three associated with the narrative of the berserks, and the two associated with the Glæsir-narrative; these groups are linked by proximity and shared subject-matter. There is also one isolated staka, v. 32, which is not skaldic, and to which I shall not give detailed attention. Thus all but one of the thirty-seven verses in the saga fall into clearly defined groups, and these groups are associated with specific narratives. Other narratives within the saga are entirely bare of verses: eg. the narrative of the marvels at Fróðá, or that of Þórólfr bægifótr.

There are a number of possible reasons for this unequal distribution of verses. Firstly, it is possible that the saga-author only inherited verses related to a part of his subject-material, and so could only quote verses in some episodes, not others. Another possible reason is that verses were considered appropriate to some types of subject-material, but not to others. This is arguable in the case of the verses attributed to Björn Breiðvíkingakappi, if we consider his narrative as a variation on the skáldasögur genre: a poet has an (unhappy) love-affair with a married woman, during which he composes many verses. Elsewhere in the saga, however, the same argument does not hold. For instance, there is good evidence in other sagas and elsewhere that verses were (and are) thought particularly fitting for supernatural matters: draugar etc. But the various hauntings and supernatural beings described in Eyrbyggja saga are virtually innocent of poetry, the only exceptions being the staka spoken under supernatural circumstances on the scree-slope Geirvör (v. 32), which is a portent of battle, and the two verses prophesying the death of Þóróddr Þorbrandsson during the Glæsir-narrative at the end of the saga (vv. 36-37). Thus the argument from literary convention is not adequate by itself. A third possible reason is that the saga-author wished to vary the type of literary structure and effect which he used. We shall see that he employs verses differently in different sections for literary effect; it is therefore probable that a different literary effect was also his object where he includes no verses at all.

III

The seven verses attributed to specific lays of praise, the *Illugadrápa* of Oddr skáld (vv. 1-2) and the *Hrafnsmál* of Þormóðr Trefilsson (vv. 20, 26, 33-35), are distinctive in style, quality and distribution. Verses 1-2 describe the violent climax of a law-suit at the Þórsnessþing; v. 20 describes the slaying of Vígfús; v. 26 describes the slaying of Arnkell; v. 33 describes the battle in Álptafjörðr; v. 34 describes Snorri goði's abortive expedition into Borgarfjörðr and the battle at the Þórsnessþing the following spring; v. 35 describes the final conflict of the Óspakr-narrative. All of these verses are placed immediately after the description of the same events in the narrative. Such a verse-sequence, in which each verse describes a single violent incident, can easily be paralleled: eg. the *Víkingavísur* of Sighvatr Þórðarson, the distribution of which through the earlier parts of the *Ólafs saga helga* in *Heimskringla* is similar to the distribution in *Eyrbyggja saga*⁶⁾.

Much of the function of these verses within the saga is dependent on their nature as single strophes, each celebrating a single specific decisive conflict. From this it follows that they can only occur in sections of the narrative where such conflicts occur and are decisive. For instance, they do not occur in the narratives of Björn Breiðvíkingakappi or of the Fróðárundr. Further, it follows that they can only occur in episodes of a certain structure: decisive conflict only takes place at the crisis of a development structure. The best example of this is perhaps v. 33, describing the battle in Álptafjörðr, at the (first) crisis of a narrative concerned with the enmity between the Eyrbyggjar and Breiðvíkingar on the one hand, and Snorri goði and the sons of Þorbrandr on the other. This is completely

⁶⁾ The skaldic lay in which a leader is praised for his actions in specific battles is an ancient genre; the earliest clear example is the *Glymdrápa* of Þorbjörn hornklofi. The further development in which single verses are allotted to single battles appears to be rather later; eg. the *Hákonardrápa* of Guthormr sindri.

central to the entire structure of the saga, since it picks up the old feud between the Kjalleklingar and the Þórsnesingar, the hostility between Björn Breiðvíkingakappi and Snorri over Þuríðr, Snorri's sister, the alliance between Snorri and the sons of Þorbrandr over the slaying of Arnkell, which is itself linked back; in fact, this section of narrative brings together the narrative threads of almost all earlier parts of the saga. Similarly, v. 26 occurs at a crisis in a development-structure: the crisis is the slaying of Arnkell, which is related back to the narratives of the slaying of Vígfús, of the earlier activities of Þórólfr bægifótr, and of the Máhlíðingar; it is therefore itself a unifying structural device. Such 'narrative convergence' is a very striking structural feature of the saga, although it occurs frequently elsewhere, eg. in *Njáls saga*.

Lastly, it also follows that these verses cannot normally occur in groups, since any decisive conflict within a narrative must be a unique event within that narrative, since it decides its outcome: eg. the slaying of Arnkell. Therefore individual verses linked to individual decisive conflicts will necessarily occur singly, as each crisis is reached. The exception in the case of vv. 1-2 is clearly explained by the text: there are two conflicts, one of which decided the outcome, and the other was an (unsuccessful) attempt to reverse it. In other words, the crisis of the (summary) section has been divided into two, balanced conflicts. Another, better, example of the same double-crisis structure can be seen towards the end of the saga, in the narrative describing the conflicts between the Eyrbyggjar and Breiðvíkingar, and Snorri and the sons of Þorbrandr: the first crisis, in which Snorri marginally has the upper hand, is the battle in Álptafjörðr, 'pointed' by v. 33, while the second crisis, in which the Eyrbyggjar have marginally the better, is the fight on the ice. The two crises counter-balance each other, narrative stalemate is reached, and the two sides are reconciled. This is an outstanding example of a combination of development and balance-structures within a single narrative: a structural tour-de-force.

These seven verses from the *Illugadrápa* and the *Hrafnsmál* thus serve the general function within the saga of 'pointing'

every violent crisis which involves Snorri goði: that is, every crisis in which he is involved as a major actor, other than the non-violent events when he obtains Helgafell from Börkr the Fat. These verses thus serve as a unifying device linking all the narratives concerning Snorri. This emphasises the central position of these narratives within the saga, as the other narratives cluster round Snorri and his actions, and, towards the end of the saga, gradually converge upon his central narrative. Further, a repeated pattern begins to emerge, underlying the saga like a ground-bass: a repeated pattern of six development-structures, the crisis in each of which is 'pointed' by a verse from the *Illugadrápa* or the *Hrafnsmál*⁷⁾. Against this recurring pattern, other narratives, of much more varied structure, can be superimposed.

Although in all probability the saga-author had these lays to hand, the literary use to which he puts these verses is his own.

IV

The narrative of the *Máhlíðingar* is set early in the saga: the characters are introduced and the initial situation is established in chapters xv-xvi; the main narrative occupies chapters xviii-xix, and its consequences occupy chapters xx-xxii. Framing the main narrative is the secondary narrative of Katla and her son Oddr; they provide supernatural and ethical motivation for the central narrative, Katla by her witchcraft and Oddr by his slanders; Katla also motivates the narrative of Þórólfr bægifótr. They are thus important in both structure and plot, although the active part that they play in the main action is minimal.

The text of the saga describes the two fights of the

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- 7) 1. (Summary of) dispute between Illugi svarti and the Kjalleklingar, mediated by Snorri (chapter xvii).
 2. Slaying of Vígfús (chapters xxiii, xxvi-xxvii).
 3. Dispute between Snorri goði and Arnkell (chapters xxxv-xxxviii).
 4. Dispute of Snorri and the sons of Þorbrandr against the Eyrbyggjar and Breiðvíkingar (chapters xxxix, xli-xlvi).
 5. Dispute between Snorri and the Borgfirðingar (chapter lvi).
 6. Óspakr-episode (chapters lvii-lxii).

action; after the event, Þórarinn svarti describes the action in seventeen verses. These are unlike the 'battle-verses' of the *Illugadrápa* and *Hrafnsmál* in a number of important particulars: firstly, they are not quoted in the saga at the point in the narrative to which they refer, but as a recapitulation after the event; secondly, their composition and recitation are ascribed to a specific character, time and place within the saga-narrative; thirdly, most of the verses are given as Þórarinn's replies to specific prose questions or comments from other characters. Vv. 3-4, 6-8, 10-13 and 15 are presented as replies to questions requesting information; vv. 5, 9 and 16-18 are presented as replies to comments; vv. 14 and 19 are presented as general comments on Þórarinn's situation, in the usual tradition of the *lausavísa*. In these seventeen verses as they are presented, we can thus see only slightly obscured the genre of the 'verse-conversation'. This is very ancient: examples of it in the Poetic Edda are the *Vafþrúðnismál* and (perhaps) *Grímnismál*, and there is an Old English example, the fragmentary *Solomon and Saturn*. The Eddaic examples, and the Old English example, are 'wisdom-games', in which a character is asked for (supernatural) wisdom, and makes reply in verse; the game usually ends when one character asks a question which the other cannot answer; the loser sometimes also loses his life. The games vary: sometimes both characters speak alternately; sometimes one character only gives information, replying to questions from the other. The *Grímnismál* appears to be basically of this form, although the questioning is only mentioned in the prose preamble. The *Máhlíðingavísur* are a notable example of this form put to skaldic purposes and divorced from its originally religious connotations; as such it is by no means unique: eg. vv. 28-31 of *Fóstbrœðra saga*, as they are presented, constitute a brief verse-conversation between St. Ólafr and Þormóðr Kolbrúnarskáld.

If, as is probable, the *Máhlíðingavísur* had an independent existence prior to the composition of the saga, if they existed as a group (with the possible exception of v. 19), if they existed in a substantially different order to that in which

they now appear, then we must consider their re-organisation within the saga. The most striking feature is their re-arrangement from (probably) a single flokkur into a group of three verse-conversations, with Geirríðr, Vermundr and Arnkell respectively. This can be seen as a successful attempt to overcome the difficulties inherent in incorporating a lay into prose narrative. If the lay is merely given as such, as for instance are the Höfuðlausn, Arinbjarnarkviða and Sonatorrek in Egils saga, the narrative has to cease completely for the duration of the lay, and so may be completely disrupted. There can be no progression of the action during the recitation of a lay, no interchange between the characters: in other words, a saga-author can only afford to present a lay directly as such at a point in his narrative when it has reached complete stasis: when no relevant action or interchange is taking place. There are a number of such points which are theoretically possible within saga-structure, but two of immediate interest are, firstly, at the end of any action, when a stable situation has been achieved. The placing of the Arinbjarnarkviða and Sonatorrek illustrates this principle; similarly the placing of the Glælognskviða in the Ólafs saga helga in Heimskringla. Secondly, such points of stasis are also reached within development-structures at the crisis: when the action and interchange which have led up to the crisis are complete there can be a moment of complete inactivity at the crisis, the 'eye of the storm'. The Höfuðlausn is set at, and 'points' such a crisis; similarly, the Darraðarljóð 'points' the crisis of the Battle of Clontarf in Njáls saga.

In Eyrbyggja saga, the author could have 'pointed' the crisis of the Máhlíðingar narrative by setting the flokkur immediately after it. This would, however, have been out of proportion, because this narrative is secondary to the saga as a whole, and could not have borne the emphasis which such 'pointing' would have given to it. Further, the verses would then have lacked any integration with most of the surrounding text: a lack of integration which could make them more impressive, but which would also disrupt the narrative.

The saga-author, therefore, shows here the concern with overall unity and structure which is evident elsewhere: the verses still stand more or less immediately after the crisis, but they are spaced out and re-arranged, so that they can still 'point' the crisis to some extent, but are no longer visibly a lay composed about that crisis. The convention which is used to space out the verses is that of the 'verse-conversation'. It has the practical merit of involving other characters as well as the reciter, and it is thus used to illuminate the characterisation of, for instance, Arnkell. But it is itself archaic, and thus gives the passages concerned an almost ritual and certainly 'remote' movement and atmosphere. As is proper to part of a narrative which, in terms of the saga as a whole, relates the pre-history of the main actions: the conflicts of Snorri goði with Arnkell and others. The use of the convention, however, is still more subtle. For, as the consequences of the fights at and near Mávahlíð spread out in ever-widening circles from the central crisis of the narrative, so also do the verse-conversations. The first (vv. 3-5) is set at Mávahlíð, the scene of the action, and the questioners are Þórarinn's mother and wife. The second (vv. 6-14) is set at Bjarnarhöfn, and the questioner is mostly Vermundr the Thin, Þórarinn's brother-in-law. The third (vv. 15-18) is set at Bólstaðr, and the questioner is Arnkell himself. Thus the settings of the three verse-conversations move further and further from the scene of the action towards the central area of the saga-narrative, and the questioners become increasingly important as the repercussions of the action build up. The saga-author has thus used his redistribution of the Máhlíðingavísur to mirror the narrative of this part of the saga, showing the widening and deepening area of disturbance caused by the central action.

In internal organisation, the three conversations all follow roughly the order of events described in the text: introduction; fight; consequences of fight. The first conversation lacks an introduction, since it is set between witnesses of the beginning of the action; it is linked onwards with the second conversation by a reference to Vermundr at its end. It is possible, though not necessary, to see a distinction

between the two fights of the narrative implied in all three conversations.

One may notice not only how each verse-conversation follows the action of the narrative in the ordering of the verses, but also that there is a striking symmetry in the three conversations apart from their internal structure: the first conversation consists of three verses (vv. 3-5), and the last of four (vv. 15-18); these two short conversations frame a central verse-conversation of nine verses (vv. 6-14), thus forming a tripartite balance-structure.

V

There are seven verses in Eyrbyggja saga attributed to Björn Breiðvíkingakappi Ásbrandsson: vv. 24-25, 27-31. They concern for the most part his adulterous love for Púríðr, the lady of the house at Fróðá, and they include perhaps the finest poetry in the saga. This love-affair forms one of the major narratives of the saga. The basic motivation is given at the beginning of chapter xxii, where it is directly linked to the end of the Máhliðingar narrative; the story is taken up again in chapter xxix, with the introductory conventions proper to the opening of a major narrative. The preceding chapter ended the narrative of the berserks, and the saga-author now changes the subject and introduces a new character, Þóroddr skattkaupandi, with a lengthy and relatively impressive preamble concerning foreign nobility, exploits abroad, etc. These are the normal conventions for introducing a major character, who is normally to be the hero of the following narrative. The use of these conventions here, however, is ironic: the character himself is carefully dissociated from the foreign nobility involved (the earl of Orkney), and his exploits abroad, although eminently successful, are less than heroic. The mock-heroic introduction of Þóroddr, therefore, serves merely as a foil to Björn, who is not formally introduced at this stage: his true introduction, heroic and even legendary, is postponed. The saga-author clearly wishes to establish at the beginning of the narrative its comic status: he is deliberately not composing a tragédie

d'amour, unlike a number of other saga-authors. Further, there is a curious lack of heroic emphasis throughout the saga, although heroic values form much of its thematic material, and heroic structures underlie much of its narrative, which can often be seen in terms of variations upon such underlying conventional structures. For instance, the Óspakr episode shows both heroic values and heroic structure, functionally inverted: the hero as a bad thing. And the one seriously heroic character in the saga, Arnkell, is given no heroic introduction at all, and, at his heroic death, there is no praise of his last defence, but a brief lament for the man himself⁸⁾. This ostensibly unheroic stance is basic to the saga; the tension between the manner of the saga and its matter, in this as in other respects, is the source of much of its power.

A third reason for the use of this false, mock-heroic introduction concerns the structure of the narrative which it introduces: since this narrative is not told directly, its hero is not introduced directly but indirectly, by contrast with Þóroddr.

The main narrative is told in several parts, and the verses are divided into two groups: the first in chapter xxix and the second in chapter xl. After Þóroddr's introduction with at least muted fanfares at the beginning of chapter xxix, the central part of the chapter deals with his attempts to prevent Björn from seducing his wife. These attempts are largely comic; Björn comments on the situation in vv. 24-25. However, Snorri has Björn outlawed; he goes abroad and joins the Jómsvíkingar, with whom he performs various legendary exploits. It is this section of chapter xxix which fulfils the function of heroic introduction for Björn: the aristocratic, extravagant, even legendary adventures abroad, which conventionally fit a saga-hero for his later role at home. The mention of the battle at Fýrisvellir even links Björn inexplicitly with Hrólfr kraki and Böðvarr Bjarki⁹⁾. But the introduction has been displaced

⁸⁾ Not in all mss.; possibly later addition. See Vésteinn Ólason, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

⁹⁾ Hrólfs saga kraka, ed. D. Slay (Copenhagen, 1960), pp. 104-5.

to the end of this section of the narrative, and Þóroddr's introduction has taken its place at the beginning. The realistic narrative of the chapter is thus framed between two heroic introductions, both comic, since the first is ironic in tone and the second incongruous in position.

The narrative is resumed in chapter xl, though there have been reminders of it during the intervening passages: for instance, Arnbjörn's purpose in going abroad in the preceding chapter is to seek his brother Björn, and it is his journey abroad which motivates the narrative of the hostility between the Breiðvíkingar and the sons of Þorbrandr. When the two brothers return together, Björn recognises his own illegitimate son and composes two verses about him; he then resumes his intimacy with Þuríðr. Þóroddr also resumes his attempts to prevent this, by paying a witch to conjure up a storm in which Björn is caught; while he shelters in a cave, he composes three further verses, bewailing his situation. Both brothers are briefly reintroduced as the narrative recommences, but the introductions are short and factual, as is usual in this saga¹⁰⁾. The realism of Björn's re-introduction contrasts sharply with the previous, heroic introduction; the contrast shows the unreality of such definition in terms of remote and legendary exploits, and so reduces Björn from unreal heroism to more realistically human proportions. It likewise therefore reduces his narrative, at least temporarily, from that of an idealised romance to a much more realistic, and potentially comic, level. The re-introduction of the characters also serves as a conventional opening for a new section of the narrative. The narrative itself is in two parts: the first concerns Björn's illegitimate son, Kjartan, and the two verses in which Björn discusses the boy's parentage are set as a verse-conversation with another character. The second part of the narrative, after a brief link-passage, describes the storm in which Björn is benighted, and on which his last three verses form a commentary. These two parts of the narrative, containing two and three verses respectively, are also approximately of

¹⁰⁾ cp. the introduction of Arnkell, chapter xii, p. 20.

equal length and narrative significance. But they contrast in their content: the first is strictly practical and realistic, the second is romantic and supernatural. They thus form a balance-structure within the chapter: a balance of like with like in form, of like against unlike in content.

The third section of the narrative picks up the realistic aspect of Björn's love-affair: chapter xlvii describes, in somewhat comic terms, an attempt by Snorri to deal with Björn, which results in Björn agreeing to go into voluntary exile. His ship, however, never reaches Europe. The passage is comic, because its actual content contrasts markedly with the heroic parallel, of Gunnarr at Hlíðarendi, explicitly invoked by Snorri: neither Snorri nor Björn behave in the heroic manner which the convention demands. So we can see here again, an underlying heroic structure, against which the actual narrative plays. The last section of the narrative, however, resumes the romantic aspects of the story. Chapter lxiv is introduced as a separate páttir within the saga, with its own characters. The Irish associations of this remarkable passage are explicit and have long been recognised; its associations with Irish legends of lands to the west, in or across the Atlantic, are clear. The literary functions of this association, however, seem not to have been recognised. A number of Irish legends speak of legendary or mythical heroes departing west to a mythical Land of Youth, in origin the Otherworld of Celtic mythology: eg. the Voyage of Bran¹¹⁾; the heroes themselves, or reports of them, occasionally return to mortal lands centuries later. Björn himself is now made just such a hero, and the saga-author has used this Irish literary convention to set Björn's last appearance in the saga as that of a remote and legendary figure, receding into the strange and unreal depths of an exotic mythology. A surface appearance of realism, however, is maintained even at this stage: a superficial identification of the unknown land with Vinland is undoubtedly implied, so that the saga's literal credibility is never over-strained. How the saga-author met with the Irish legends is uncertain: most probably directly from an Irish tradition imported into or

¹¹⁾ ed. Meyer and Nutt, London, 1895-7.

preserved in Iceland, but also possibly through romance tradition.

The last two sections of the narrative about Björn Breiðvíkingakappi thus contrast markedly: chapter xlvii is realistic and comic, and the heroic, although introduced, serves merely to create comic contrast with the actual narrative: Björn is a down-to-earth and unheroic Icelandic farmer. Chapter lxiv, in contrast, presents Björn as a remote and legendary figure, by implication to be equated with Celtic mythical heroes, departing, like Arthur, to a supernatural Otherworld west across the seas. Only superficial realism is maintained here. These two chapters, which between them conclude the narrative of Björn Breiðvíkingakappi, thus stand in the same relationship to each other as the two parts of chapter xl: the first realistic and the second romantic; we can thus draw the same structural conclusion about them, that they together form a balanced pair. So the total structure of the narrative is, firstly, a passage of realistic, comic narrative, framed at beginning and end by two heroic introductions, both comic; secondly a balanced pair of narrative sections, one realistic and the other romantic and supernatural; thirdly and fourthly, a balanced pair of narratives, the first realistic and comic, the second 'remote' and legendary. The (comic) balance of practical realism and romantic/heroic unreality is basic, therefore, to the narrative form of the story of Björn Breiðvíkingakappi as it stands in the saga; it is also basic to the saga-author's double vision of heroism. Narrative form and thematic structure thus complement each other in this part of the saga as elsewhere.

As mentioned, the verses occur in the first and second sections of the narrative, distributed more or less symmetrically; for the most part they describe and comment on the situation in which the poet finds himself, and they do not in general describe past events except in relation to the present situation. They are thus plausible as lausavísur, extempore verse-comments, and such is their presentation in the saga, apart from vv. 27-28, which, as mentioned, are presented as a brief verse-conversation.

Five of the seven verses attributed to Björn Breiðvíkingakappi make more or less explicit reference either to love or to

sexual activities in general. The two verses (vv. 24-25) in the first section of the narrative (chapter xxix) make functional use of this. The first is an expression of foreboding at the passing of joy in love, using basic imagery of day's ending and the coming of night; it is addressed to the beloved. The second is primarily a battle-verse: the poet declares that it is a different matter for his cowardly adversary to deal with him, than to roll the woman or to buy tribute; the poet has killed the two sons of Wood-Leg. So in the two verses, Björn contrasts his own love with Þóroddr's contemptible lust. The contrast between the two verses, however, goes further than this. The first is romantic, concerned with human emotion on a number of levels: love, joy, and a regretful but resigned fear of the passing of this joy. The second is a vigorous battle-verse; it contains no reference to human emotion, although it expresses contempt for the poet's enemy. The verse is impersonal: it has no reference to an addressee; its imagery is warlike or mythological. Therefore it is in the central tradition of skaldic verse, and so contrasts with the romanticism of the first verse. This contrast also is functional, since Björn as hero has two functions: the (exotic) romantic lover and the (traditional) warrior hero. The two verses, here set against each other, thus establish an opposition of the two aspects of Björn's heroic character. The exotic associations of the romantic lover are confirmed at the end of the chapter when Björn goes abroad to his suitably legendary adventures. Thus the two verses participate in the structure of the chapter: within the realistic central narrative, framed by two heroic introductions, they form a balance-structure, expressing two contrasting aspects of heroic character.

The verses (vv. 27-31) in the second section of the narrative of Björn Breiðvíkingakappi (chapter xl) also contain several sexual references, which again are functional. Vv. 27 and 28 both have the same meaning: the child is like the poet, who is therefore probably its father. However, in the first verse, attention is directed on to the child alone, and the imagery is warlike. In the second verse, however, attention is directed almost entirely on to the mother, and the child is

merely mentioned indefinitely (in the plural) late in the verse; the two subordinate sentences in the verse state respectively that the woman loved the poet and that the poet still loves the woman. We can note here a weaker example of the contrast in genre and attitude which we observed in vv. 24-25, although the contrast in content and expression between the two verses serves here not so much to illuminate different aspects of a character as of the situation at large: it is more indefinite. However, although a weak balance-structure may be observed between these two verses, it is wholly subordinated to the overall structure of the chapter, itself a balance-structure, the component elements of which must not disintegrate due to internal contrasts.

Sexual references also play a functional role in the last group of verses (vv. 29-31). In the second half of each, the poet comments on his present unhappy state, alone and wet, stormbound in a cave, and he contrasts it with previous happiness, which he mentions in the first half of each verse. In vv. 29 and 30, the previous joy experienced was in the woman's bed; in v. 31 it was in heroic battle. Here, therefore, we see the same development of different functions of Björn's character as in vv. 24-25, and in the same order: firstly romantic lover; secondly warrior hero. The order is reversed in the intervening group of verses, vv. 27-28, where the first is warlike, the second courtly, and where the reference is less specifically to the hero. The similarity of structure of vv. 29-31 binds them together; further, since, joy in love and joy in heroic battle occur in the same position and fulfil the same function within the verses, one is led to equate these two aspects of heroic experience. In this, the role of v. 30 is important, since it serves as the bridge between them: Björn performs at least partly heroic feats of seamanship (a winter voyage to Iceland, if one may take sýlda, 'frozen', literally) because of his love for the woman; his heroism is no longer contrasted with his romantic love, but springs from it. Thus vv. 29-31 also remain intact as a coherent group, and are not broken up by internal contrasts.

It is interesting to note that the verses which refer to

Björn as warrior hero are both set as replies to questions when he returns home to Kamb after a taxing but ultimately successful journey from Fróðá, during which he was attacked, physically or supernaturally, by Póroddr. This forms a direct link between v. 25 and v. 31, each of which is final in its group, and so it enables us to link the two groups of verses also.

Thus, within chapter xl, the two groups of verses participate in the balance-structure described above, 'pointing' respectively the realistic matter of an illegitimate child, and the legendary feat of endurance during a supernatural storm. Further, they are similar in that they are both concerned with two aspects of the narrative: the warlike/heroic and the courtly/romantic. They are contrasted, however, firstly in that the earlier group is concerned with the situation at large, the latter with the specific character of the hero; secondly, in that they deal with these aspects in reverse order, warlike:courtly; romantic:heroic. So they are bound together in a pattern of symmetrical similarities and contrasts. Beyond this, however, the last group of verses is directly linked back to the first group, vv. 24-25, at the heart of the first part of the narrative (chapter xxix). These two groups of verses are similar in that they also are both concerned with the romantic:heroic contrast in that order. However, the first group merely uses these two aspects as the two elements in a binary balance-structure, whereas the second group, using an extra verse (v. 30) as a link, equates and conflates the two aspects to make a unity of them. Thus the first and last group of verses also form a balance-structure, of symmetrical similarities and contrasts, altogether forming a complex frame for the less specific, central group of verses, vv. 27-28, which deal with the illegitimate child. This is given such importance since the child, Kjartan, is to form a major narrative link with later parts of the saga: the Fróðárundr and Snorri's conflicts with the Borgfirðingar. Framing for emphasis can be exemplified frequently elsewhere in the saga.

These three groups of verses can also be seen as a thematic development-structure within the narrative: a progressive reduction of contrast between the two aspects of Björn's character until these are unified.

Thus the verses of chapter *xi* do not only form a satisfying binary structure in themselves, but they are linked back to the verses in the first part of the narrative of Björn Breiðvíkingakappi, chapter *xxix*, to form a larger, trinary structure, functional not only in terms of the character of Björn, but in the motivation of other, later parts of the saga. The contrast between romantic love and warlike heroism in the verses also mirrors the contrast in the prose text between legendary heroism and comic realism: this in turn forms a thematic structure within the narrative.

VI

The narrative of the berserks contains three verses, attributed respectively to Halli the berserk, to his brother Leiknir, and lastly to Víga-Styrr. The narrative itself is in two parts. It starts in chapter *xxv*: consequent upon the Máhlíðingar narrative (which thus motivates this narrative) Vermundr the Thin goes abroad and enters the service of Hákon Hlaðajarl. From him he obtains the two berserks, although Hákon doubts his ability to control them. And so it turns out; by the end of the chapter, Vermundr prevails on his brother, Víga-Styrr, to take them. The slaying of Vígfús and its consequences are told in the two following chapters, and in chapter *xxviii* the narrative of the berserks is resumed and concluded. Although the Vígfús-narrative began earlier, and thus interweaves with the narrative of the berserks (interlace-structure), nonetheless the actual slaying is framed within the two sections of the berserks-narrative. This framing is of importance, since the slaying of Vígfús has major narrative consequences in the feud between Arnkell and Snorri goði. The frame itself also has consequences, since the narrative of the berserks leads to a dynastic re-grouping within the community described by the saga.

The anecdote is by no means serious in tone; it has explicit links with legendary sagas, as is shown when Styrr compares his own attitude to that of 'men of old' (p. 72): "Nú mun ek gera sem fornir menn...". The structure of the narrative is a (double) mock-heroic development-structure,

at the main crisis of which stand the three verses, thereby 'pointing' it. A major character goes abroad and performs aristocratic feats; on his return he brings something, tangible or intangible, which brings disaster on his subsequent career¹²⁾. The motif is common; there are two interesting examples in Grettis saga: on the first occasion Grettir brings back a sax with which he destroys Glámr, and thus brings a curse upon himself; the sax is eventually the instrument of his own decapitation; on the second occasion, he is accidentally the cause of a fire in which two young men die; he brings back the guilt of this, which is the immediate cause of his outlawry, persecution and death. Here Vermundr brings back the two berserks, who motivate this narrative. The tensions formed by the introduction of an alien element into the closed world of Icelandic society build up in a classic development-structure until the crisis: it is only modified in that there are two heroes, Vermundr and Víga-Styrr, distributed between the two sections of the narrative. The crisis, however, is not tragic or heroic: Víga-Styrr, having invoked the association with heroes of old (fornir menn), behaves in a most unheroic fashion and does not meet a heroic death¹³⁾, but lives to fight many another day. Just as Snorri, in attempting to deal with Björn, had invoked the tragic example of Gunnarr at Hlíðarendi, and Björn then acted, and survived, unheroically. The comedy of the episode, thus, is largely that of the grossly unheroic (and surviving) hero, set in a suitably heroic structure. Vermundr and Styrr both parody the more conventional hero exemplified by Hrútr or Gunnarr. The love-interest is also comic. The unhappy lover woos a disdainful lady; her father does not wish to grant her to him, and therefore both plots his death, and sets him impossible tasks, duly performed: all this is a stock romance situation, and can be traced as far back as the Tale of Culhwch and Olwen in the Mabinogion. However, here the situation is inverted: the father, not the lover, is the hero, and the lover comes to a suitably bad end. Thus the narrative

¹²⁾ For a discussion of this motif, see George Clark, forthcoming.

¹³⁾ Cp. Tolkien, "the wages of heroism is death" (Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics (London, 1936), p. 27).

can also be seen as a variation upon, and parody of, an underlying romance structure, just as it and other narratives in the saga are also variations upon heroic structures.

The verses do not only 'point' the crisis of a development-structure. As we have seen in the discussion of the verses attributed to Björn Breiðvíkingakappi, skaldic poetry is associated both with traditional heroism and romantic love. Therefore, since this narrative is concerned with both aspects, each is 'pointed' by verses: romantic love in the two verses attributed to the berserks, warlike heroism in the verse attributed to Víga-Styrr. And the two aspects are set against each other in the distribution of the verses: romantic love immediately before the crisis, martial heroism immediately after, thus framing the crisis itself within a balance of the two aspects of the narrative. The two verses attributed to the berserks are chiefly remarkable for the magnificently ornate woman-kennings they contain: excluding epithets, the first verse (v. 21) contains two kennings, one of four elements, the other of three; the second verse (v. 22) contains four kennings, two of four elements, the other pair of two elements each. The first kenning in v. 21, 'Gerðr of the flame of the hanged man of the limb', is remarkable for the ambiguity of its associations: the death-imagery is not only psychologically relevant, but anticipates the speaker's own approaching death. Both verses ask where the woman, so finely dressed, is going, and what is her purpose: questions which receive no answer in the text, until the crisis provides the reader, if not the berserks, with an answer, and thus completes this small literary structure. The verse attributed to Víga-Styrr (v. 23) is almost as warlike as the verses attributed to the berserks are courtly: it contains three kennings for 'warrior'. It is, however, grimly conventional in most respects, and in this contrasts with the almost baroque exuberance of the two preceding verses. After the somewhat improbable events and attitudes which have gone before, it represents a return to grim reality, a reality which is implicit throughout the entire narrative: hence the ironic vision of the saga. A return to realism at this point is

confirmed in the text. Before the verse, the burial of the berserks is described: under a cairn in a gully in the lava-field, so deep that only the sky can be seen from it. This is very reminiscent of much in legendary sagas and folktales: one may remember that the witch Gullbrá wished to be buried in a ravine where the sun could never shine and church-bells never be heard. However, after the verse, the text goes on to describe the marriage-arrangements between Snorri goði and Styrr's daughter. The verse, therefore, marks the transition in the text from the remote and legendary matter of the main narrative of the berserks, back to underlying realism.

Thus it can be seen that the three verses in this narrative, firstly, point the crisis of a development-structure; secondly, they express the two balanced and parodied themes of the narrative, romantic love and warlike heroism, in a balance-structure set across the crisis; thirdly, they all participate in local literary structures: a question and answer structure comprising the first two verses and the actual moment of decisive violence, and a 'literary hinge', in which the third verse marks the joint between legendary and realistic narrative.

VII

The last group of verses in Eyrbyggja saga is the pair of verses spoken by the foster-mother of Þóroddr Þorbrandsson, prophesying his death to be caused by the bull Glæsir. This narrative comes very near the end of the saga (chapter lxiii), and is followed only by the Guðleifr episode (chapter lxiv), which concludes the narrative of Björn Breiðvíkingakappi, and the conclusion itself, mostly describing the descendants of Snorri goði. The Glæsir-story has an independent structure, but it is also the conclusion of the narrative of Þórólfr bægifótr, and it concludes the various narratives concerning the sons of Þorbrandr, and so plays a part in larger and more complex narratives within the saga: in this it is very comparable to the following episode of Guðleifr. The narrative is given in one uninterrupted passage.

Einar Ólafur Sveinsson¹⁴⁾ describes the narrative as a "þjóðsaga" (his quotation marks). This is an illuminating comment: the narrative has much of the attitudes and atmosphere of folktale, yet cannot be considered as a folktale proper. Its content is insufficient to fulfil Einar's third condition, that of söguefni¹⁵⁾. Nor does it fulfil the formal requirements of folktale, as discussed, for instance, by V.I. Propp¹⁶⁾. The basic 'story' is simply 'bull kills man'. Superimposed on this are two implicitly linked and supernatural elements: the origin of the bull, and the prophecy of the man's death. Neither of these are necessary for the story itself; the first motif links the Glæsir-narrative back to the main narrative of Þórólfr bægifótr, and the second runs parallel with the narrative: when Glæsir is born, the old woman hints at disaster to come if the calf is not killed; when Glæsir is fully grown, she makes an explicit verse-prophecy of Þóroddr's death. The motif of the apparently senile foster-mother who foretells or even brings about disaster has many parallels: in Njáls saga, Sæunn, the foster-mother of Bergþóra, is an example, while a malevolent instance is the witch Puriðr, foster-mother of Þorbjörn öngull, in Grettis saga. The motif may ultimately be derived from that of the sybil seen in a number of Eddaic poems, eg. Baldrs draumar. The use of the motif here is impersonal and unadorned: the old woman is neither named nor characterised, and the motif is given none of the picturesque details seen in Njáls saga or Grettis saga. Further, its use runs in parallel with the 'bull kills man' motif, rather than being fully integrated with it: for instance, the prophecy does not cause Þóroddr to take steps which actually result in his death, unlike Njáll's foresight. This enables the saga-author to maintain surface-realism completely intact: at one level, Þóroddr is merely a farmer going about his business. Whereas the old woman and her prophecies can be used at a second, conventional, level of the narrative, without prejudicing surface

¹⁴⁾ Edition (ÍF IV), introduction, p. x.

¹⁵⁾ Einar Ól. Sveinsson, Um Íslenzkar Þjóðsögur (R.-vík 1940), p. 8.

¹⁶⁾ V.I. Propp, Morphology of the Folktale, 2nd (trans.) ed., Texas, 1968.

realism. Within an ostensibly realistic setting, this use of a conventional motif, unmodified and unadorned, in the impersonal manner of folktale, qualifies that realism.

The two verses contain the second and more explicit prophecy of disaster to come. Verse-prophecies are common: the *Völuspá* itself is partly cast in this form. The majority of examples, however, are in Eddaic rather than skaldic metres: an example within this saga is the staka (v. 32) prophesying battle at Geirvör. Skaldic parallels, however, are to be found: eg. the verse attributed to the dream-man in Flosi's dream (*Njáls saga*, v. 16), which is in functional contrast with the Eddaic verse attributed to the dream-man in Runólfr Þorsteinsson's dream (*Njáls saga*, v. 12). The skaldic metre modifies the function of the prophecy in the Glásir-narrative: it casts the prophecy in the form of lausavísur. The old woman sees and comments on an event: en sék gorva (v. 36); þat sér golls ens gjalla / Gerðr (v. 37); the distinction here is that the event is future, not present. A future event is experienced, and commented on, as though already real and present. This gives that event an over-riding inevitability, which, with its sense of a mechanical sequence of events set in motion, has two consequences. Firstly, it gives the verses the passion, and unreality, of nightmare, in which a human awareness is able only to observe, not to modify, the course of events: Opt es auðar þopta / ær... sék á blóðgum búki / bengrát (v. 37). Secondly, the inevitability of the action, here produced by the manipulation of literary convention (the lausavísur), is identical with the narrative inevitability of folktale, there required by the constraints of form. Thus the folktale atmosphere of the narrative, already developed by the saga-author's use of the motif of the old woman as a whole, is reinforced in the literary effect of the verses. The folktale atmosphere itself, as already mentioned, qualifies the realism of the narrative. And this conjunction of passion and unreality is functional: it serves to withdraw the narrative from the passionate reality at the centre of the saga. In this it may be compared with the legendary passion of the narrative of the Battle of Clontarf in

Njáls saga, which serves a similar function in that saga.

Within the structure of the narrative, the two verses stand immediately before the climax, the death of Þóroddr; they thus 'point' the crisis of a small development-structure. It is noteworthy that, immediately after the death, the men of the farm chase Glæsir across the scree-slope Geirvör, which, as we have already seen, is associated with the other prophetic verse in the saga, as well as with the battle which later took place there. The reference back is more than merely to the earlier verse: it is to the memory of evil now past and at last exhausted, as, with the loss of Glæsir, the evil of Þórólfr bægifótr is also at last exhausted. The verses also are to be related back to earlier parts of the saga. They contain a curious blending of the homely and the ornate: eg. hjarðar vísi as a bull-kenning; fé fjotrar fjor þitt (v. 36), and the two courtly woman-kennings in v. 37. This does not produce a comic contrast: the two aspects are too well integrated with each other. The effect, however, is to modify the literary level. These verses, although they can have no pretensions to the level of heroic legend, retain courtly echoes. The last son of Þorbrandr has been reduced from the heroism of which we are reminded by the mention of Geirvör, to a level of everyday quasi-folktale; yet he trails clouds of glory behind him in the courtly references of these verses, which, together with the mention of Geirvör, 'frame' his death. The verses therefore serve to show the shift in literary level which distinguishes the Glæsir-narrative from the central narratives of the saga: it is no longer heroic, but it retains heroic and courtly references, which are set immediately before and after the crisis.

In these respects the Glæsir-narrative is remarkably similar to the Guðleifr episode. The one completes the story of the last remaining son of Þorbrandr, and the other completes that of Björn Breiðvíkingakappi. Both of these stories were concerned with one form or another of heroism, and both sections show a withdrawal from the central heroic realism of the saga, already partly discussed, towards unreality. But Björn recedes from realism into the mists of romantic legend, while Þóroddr is reduced from heroism towards folktale. The two sections

of narrative are thus balanced against each other, fulfilling the same function in contrasting ways.

Thus the Glæsir-narrative can be seen as a withdrawal from serious realism; it is superficially realistic, but the use of the uncharacterised figure of the old woman, and of her verse-prophecies, as an unmodified and stock convention, qualifies this realism, and gives the narrative the atmosphere of folktale. The narrative is also lowered to an everyday level, but it retains heroic associations. The verses 'point' the crisis of the narrative; together with the reference to Geirvör they frame the crisis with courtly and heroic associations. They also corroborate the unreality of the narrative, but add to it a passion not found in the prose. This conjunction of emotion and unreality can be seen as functional within the structure of the saga as a whole, in that it forms a withdrawal at the end of the saga from the core of serious emotion at its heart.

VIII

A moral rather than a conclusion is to be drawn from this material. In each of the cases discussed, the verses have added much to the narratives in which they are set, either by 'pointing' or otherwise corroborating structures or effects already present in the text, or in creating new structures or additional literary effects, harmonising with those in the text. But the ways in which the verses are used have varied considerably from one example to another, and, although we can describe such variations in theoretical terms, we cannot usually predict them. For they are dependent upon other elements, such as the surrounding structures of the prose, or the literary genres in relation to which the author is working, or, in the last resort, the author's arbitrary judgement, as in any product of the human mind. Thus it is foolish to attempt to construct a predictive theory of the organisation of verses in *Íslendingasögur*: there are too many uncontrollable variables. The moral to be drawn, then, is this: we cannot attempt to set up normative rules, but must simply study and describe each example individually.

This is no counsel of despair, rather of hope. For through it we may eventually come to appreciate a little of the subtlety and beauty, not only of the poetry, but of its use by a saga-author such as this.