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SOME LAUSAVÍSUR RECONNECTED

There is a marked separation between the praise-poetry of the Icelandic and Norwegian skalds and their output in other poetic genres. This separation has to do with the circumstances of composition and recitation, as depicted in the sagas. Encomiastic poetry, on the one hand, was intended for formal recitation in the house of the poet's aristocratic patron. Heroic poetry probably enjoyed a similar audience.¹⁾ But when these two genres are put aside the poet's audience, the circle for whom he intended his production of verse in erotic, satiric, elegiac, and other modes, assumes, if the sagas accurately reflect the practices of the time, an entirely different character.

The twenty-third and twenty-fourth strophes of Egils saga, a sample of erotic verse, are typical in the audience which they command. They were not intended, to judge from the saga, for public recitation or for entertainment. Rather, they represent a means by which the hero, Egill, speaking in private, can confide in a trusted friend, Arinbjörn. They constitute, taken with the prose dialogue of the saga episode, a declaration of love for a real woman, Ásgerðr; and Egill's revelation of his feelings has the eminently practical result of securing Arinbjörn's help in arranging a marriage. In Gísla saga a verse-improvisation on the part of the hero is again instrumental in determining his fortunes. He is shown indiscreetly delivering a stanza (strophe 11 of the saga) which admits his responsibility for the death of Þorgrímr. Here the audience is his sister. Overhearing, she memorizes the verse, solves the riddling allusion to Þorgrímr's name, and communicates the news to those who seek Þorgrímr's revenge. Rightly or wrongly, the saga-man has ab-

¹⁾ E.O.G. Turville-Petre, Origins of Icelandic Literature, 1953; p.14.

sorbed the delivery of the verse into the action of the saga, has made it one link in a chain of events that leads to Gísli's death.

These are instances of how, in the sagas, most skaldic verse apart from the heroic and encomiastic genres is represented as thoroughly personal and inseparable from a particular situation in the life of the poet. The creation of poetry is not so much a professional activity of the skald as it is a heightened element within his everyday discourse. His audience, for their part, are not uninvolved spectators but themselves actors in the drama.

But can we be certain that in linking poetry so closely to life the saga-men may not be guilty of fabrication? May they not to some extent be voicing their own romanticized notions of skalds and skaldic poetry? Kormakr is one skald whose professional activities have quite clearly been downplayed in the saga devoted to his life. His output is known, from fragments in Snorra Edda, to have embraced encomiastic poetry, but in Kormaks saga works in that genre receive no mention. The saga, on the other hand, is unusually generous in its representation of love-verses and lampoons. When other 'lives', such as Egils saga and Hallfreðar saga, reproduce a more substantial amount of praise-poetry it may be less out of interest in the poets' professional careers than out of the narrative appeal of the tensions between these poets and their royal patrons. The fundamental distinction between two types of poetry and two types of audience is present in these sagas just as in the more obviously romantic ones.

In one of Egill's love-verses (strophe 24 in the saga) the skald himself raises the question of his public.²⁾ Unfortunately the evidence of the strophe might conform with either of the two models of poetic performance which I have outlined. Egill is voicing a fear that connoisseurs of the skaldic art will deduce the name of the woman he loves from the riddling language of his verse. Abstracting the stanza completely from its context in the narrative, one might envisage Egill's public as a group of aristocrats, court functionaries and educated people, a public interested in the poem purely as

²⁾ Sophie Krijn, 'Nogle bemærkninger om Egils stil', Edda 1927 (27), p.478.

art, familiar with poetic techniques and conventions, and accepting the skald's declaration of secret love as one of these conventions. This view would harmonize with surmises on the audience for courtly love poetry in other mediæval European countries, but would run counter, as shown, to the conception of poet and public embodied in the saga. Fortunately, the saga evidence is not our only source on the public for erotic poetry. Erotic themes were in fact current and acceptable in the formalized poetry of the court. Haraldr harðráði blended the heroic and the erotic modes in a poem on his military exploits which returned, strophe after strophe, to the topic of his love for a mistress in Russia.³⁾ Love and heroism are also piquantly mixed in the Jómsvíkingadrápa of Bishop Bjarni, a full-length poem in an historical vein.⁴⁾ The court affiliations of these men can scarcely be assailed: the heroic, as mentioned, is a court genre: it is therefore highly likely that full-length poems devoted exclusively to themes of love also existed, composed like the poems I have mentioned, by men of the court and for ceremonial and entertainment purposes. Although no extended love-poem is preserved in its entirety, Snorra Edda may contain the fragments of such poems.⁵⁾

It is tempting, where there is reason to doubt the veracity of a particular saga, to look beyond Snorra Edda in the search for fragments of extended love-poems or, for that matter, compositions in other genres. Sophie Krijn has analysed strophes nine to thirteen of Hallfreðar saga from this point of view.⁶⁾ In a famous scene, Hallfreðr is shown improvising on a nostalgic theme, his regret for the heathen past. The king, Óláfr Tryggvason, hears and rebukes him for these sentiments, demanding and eventually receiving a verse stating the skald's acceptance of Christianity. Treating these strophes as an illustration of the skald's chequered re-

3) Finnur Jónsson, Den Norsk-Islandske Skjaldedigtning (hereafter Skj.) IA 357-58.

4) Skj. IIA 1-10

5) Jón Helgason, 'Norges og Islands Digtning', in Litteratur-historie, Nordisk Kultur VIII B, p. 148

6) Sophie Krijn, 'Halfred Vandredaskald', Neophilologus XVI, p.126.

lations with the king, the saga, typically, relates poetic composition to a particular life-situation. Sophie Krijn's argument here is that the saga narrative connecting the verses is meaningless padding and that the verses, having such an inner unity of their own, must really be excerpts from a single long poem. Such a poem must have explored the theme of conversion, the poet's experience in undergoing the change from heathendom to Christianity. Sophie Krijn's argument presupposes that the saga-man, noting how Hallfreðr's poem portrayed a vacillation between the old and the new beliefs, sought to explain this movement by staging a confrontation between the skald and his patron Óláfr Tryggvason, an archetypal defender of the faith.

Naturally, not all the scattered stanzas (or lausavísur) to be found in the sagas can be explained in the way just proposed. It is notoriously unsafe to generalize on the origins of lausavísur. Some may well have been extemporized by the skald in just the circumstances the saga describes. From Grágás⁷⁾ it is evident that brief, one-stanza compositions—lampoons or love-poems—were sufficiently common in mediæval Iceland to warrant legal constraints. Lausavísur of this sort may actually be extant in such works as Þorgils saga ok Hafliða⁸⁾ and Gísla saga.⁹⁾ Again, other lausavísur must be ascribed to a narrator of the saga or even to a later redactor. In the famous account of the wedding at Reykjahólar in 1119 contained in Þorgils saga ok Hafliða the priest Ingimundr Einarson is described as embellishing his narration of the saga of Ormr Barreyjarskáld with a flokkr (an extended poem) of his own composition.¹⁰⁾ From this account and from the late linguistic forms manifested by verses in works like Grettis saga and Njáls saga it has been assumed that on occasion saga-men may themselves have devised verses which they put in their heroes' mouths.

7) Grágás, udg. af V. Finsen, 1852; II 183-84.

8) cf. Þorgils saga ok Hafliða, ed. Ursula Brown (Dronke), pp. xlvi

9) -xlvii; pp. 11-12.

10) lvv. 8 and 9.

10) Brown, op.cit. p. 18.

If lausavísur really arose in this way they could of course never have belonged to extended poems. Beyond these cases, which are naturally often difficult to pin down, there is a great quantity of lausavísur from which it may be possible to reconstitute longer poems. Particularly interesting are verses which can reasonably be surmised to bear a mistaken ascription in the saga or to refer to circumstances different from those outlined in the saga narrative. A clear case of a lausavísa which can be proved to be a fragment of a sequence of verses is the twentieth strophe of Gunnlaugs saga ormsstungu; isolated in that saga, it appears in Kormaks saga (lv.3) in company with three other strophes, with which it has close thematic ties.¹¹⁾

Normally, however, one must rely on internal evidence—weaknesses in the saga narrative, resemblances between lausavísur occurring in different contexts—in piecing lausavísur together and attempting to show that they are fragments of an original poem. The following two strophes from Bjarnar saga Hítödelakappa are a case in point.

Eykyndill verpr öndu
 orðsall ok vill mæla,
 brúðr hefr baztar ræður
 breksöm, við mik nekkvat;
 en til Jarðar orða
 öltreyrar gengr heyra
 lítill sveinn ok leynisk
 launkárr ok sezkr fjarri. (12)

Snót biðr svein enn hvíta
 svinn at kvíar innan,
 reið esa Rínar glóðar
 ranglót, moka ganga;
 harðla nýt, súr heitir,
 Hlökk miðs víta Rökkva,
 sprund biðr út at andar,
 Eykyndill, mik skynda. (13)

'Eykyndill, celebrated woman, sighs and is about to say something to me—this demanding young wife makes the pleasantest conversation—but that puny knave comes to listen in to her words, craftily hiding and keeping at a distance.'

- 11) cf. Íslensk Fornrit (hereafter IF) III: Borgfirðinga sögur,
 Sigurður Nordal og Guðni Jónsson gáfu út. 1938 p.xliii.
 12) ibid. pp.141-42; lv.6: italics are mine and mark emendations.
 13) ibid. p.140; lv.3

'Cleverly, my lady tells this pasty-faced knave to go and muck out the cowshed—she is not unjust—me she tells, this exceedingly capable mistress, known as Eykyndill, to get out fast by the front door.'

The analysis of these two strophes reveals strong thematic links between them. Describing a lovers' tryst, they emphasize the lady's initiative and forceful personality. She is shown faced with a difficult situation, where an intruder (clearly her husband) surprises her and her lover, the skald, together. Both strophes dwell on the lady's loyalty and affection toward her lover, while alluding to the husband with evident contempt. Both are marked by an interest in the lady as speaker, whether as conversationalist or as strategist: one notes the repeated 'biðr' of the second strophe (lv.3) and such words as 'mæla', 'ræður', and 'orða' in the first (lv.6).

There are numerous correspondences, too, at a stylistic level. A distinct patterning emerges, for example, in the distribution of names and words referring to the lady. Most strikingly, the name 'Eykyndill' appears in the first line of lv.6 and in the last line of lv.3, both times at the head of the line. Three monosyllabic words for 'woman', 'brúðr', 'snót', and 'sprund', are spread through the two strophes, again all in line-initial position. In the second helming (quatrain) of lv.6 and the first helming of lv.3 occur two kennings for the lady, each consisting of three elements—'ǫlreyrar Jarðar' and 'reið Rínar glóðar'. This exhausts the range of terms for 'woman' except for a four-part kenning in the second helming of lv.3, where the text, unfortunately, is obscure. The lover and the husband gain less prominence in the diction, the lover being denoted simply by a pronoun, once in the fourth line of lv.6 and again in the eighth line of lv.3, a kind of chiasmic formalism which is reinforced by the use of the same term 'sveinn' for the husband, each time with an ornamental epithet, in the other two helmings. The language of both strophes gains richness from the free use of these and other epithets, which usually also occur at the head of the line: 'orðsall', 'breksöm', 'lítill', 'launkárr' and 'enn hvíta', 'svinn', 'ranglót', 'harðla nýt'. Sentence-structure and word-order are of the simplest throughout, the only poetic sophistication lying in the parentheses, which occur, symmetrically-placed and of identical length, in the third and part

of the fourth line of each stanza: 'brúðr hefr baztar ræður/brek-
söm' and 'reið esa Rínar glóðar/ranglöt'.

With the two lausavísur placed in this order, a brief, elegantly-constructed narrative sequence is revealed. The outer helmings show how the woman deals with her lover, the inner ones how she deals with her husband. She is alone with the skald, an idyllic scene, she sighing and about to speak, when her tiresome husband is observed trying to eavesdrop on them. Resourcefully, she sends the intruder off to muck out the cow-byre, meanwhile directing the skald to escape through the other door. A typical fabliau escapade, if rather a short one.

While they fall short of conclusive proof that these two strophes from Bjarnar saga should be read together, the formal patterns I have pointed out are of the precise sort one encounters as linking-devices between strophes in extended narrative poems. The 36th and 37th verses of Plácítúsdrápa provide an elaborate and interesting parallel:

Værr tók vegs ens fyrra
viggfinnandi at minnask
sunds, þás sína kendi
snarlundaðr húskarla;
sér leitaði sárir
seims huggunar beima
brátt í bæn af drótni
bilstyggr, þás tók hryggvask.

Kvaddi krapti pryddan
Krists rödd ara nísti:
dýrð hittir þik dróttins
dygg, skala þú nú hryggvask;
tíð kómur sóknar seiða
sendir þér at hendi
enn, sús yör mun finna
auð ok veg fyr nauðir. (14)

'The serene Placitus was put in mind of his former high station when, quick-witted, he recognized his retainers. In his distress the resolute man sought solace at once in prayer to the Lord of mankind.

'The voice of Christ addressed the mighty warrior: "The glory of the Lord, constant and abiding, is upon you; now you need feel no distress. The hour is at hand when suffering will cease to be your lot and you will regain prosperity and high station."

14) Text and translation after Skj.B 616.

In these two verses verbal parallelisms are organized on a chiasmic basis: 'vegs 'honour' in the first line of str.36 is echoed by veg in the last line of str.37, -finnandi in the second line of str.36 by finna in the second-last line of str.37, and conversely drótni in the second-last line of str.36 by dróttins in the third line of str.37 (both in line-end position); hryggvask appears at the end of the last line of str.36 and of the fourth line of str.37. The outer helmings each have a three-element kenning, the inner helmings have two-element kennings. Except in the final helming there is considerable use of ornamental epithets. In sense as well as in vocabulary the strophe-pair makes a full circle: the first helming shows Placitus recalling the status he once enjoyed, the second shows him troubled and praying, the third contains Christ's assurance that he need not be troubled, and in the fourth promises that he will regain his former status.

Supposing, then, that the third and sixth lausavísur of Bjarnar saga came from one poem and formed, as I have maintained, a coherent narrative sequence, why was the saga-man not content to quote them as a unit? Why has he instead reversed their order and assigned them to different, though almost consecutive, episodes? The answer is perhaps that, quoted piece-meal, the stanzas could be made to contribute more usefully to a section of the saga which is devoted to short episodes illustrating the growth of hostility between the chief characters, Bjørn and Þórðr. Each strophe, as we now find them, is the centre-piece of a scene, lv.3 in a context of a quarrel between Þórðr and his wife over farmwork and lv. 6 in the context of Þórðr's discovery of his wife and Bjørn together. In a similar way lvv.4 and 5 appear in quite a separate episode of the saga from lvv.14 and 15, though all evidently belong in a single flyting-poem. A trace of the saga-man's method can be seen in the way he disregards the final lines of lv.3, 'sprund biðr út at andar/...mik skynda', which find no echo in the prose. This is presumably because these lines contributed nothing to the quarrel over farmwork. They would have contributed to the discovery scene, but the saga-man had decided to reserve that until later.

Though in themselves a natural unit, the verses may have formed

part of a yet longer poem, a flyting, perhaps, between Björn and Þórðr or a narrative poem on the deception of Þórðr. That the function of this hypothetical poem, whatever its precise form and content, was to entertain seems clear from the lightness of its tone: the poet, forced into a hasty retreat, and the husband, dismissed to carry out a degrading task, emerge as slightly humorous figures. Outside the world of Scandinavian culture, one is reminded of the chansons d'aventure and of those ill-fated trysts so graphically and amusingly described by Dafydd ap Gwilym.

Like Bjarnar saga Hítðæla kappa, Egils saga contains certain lausavísur which appear closely allied in subject-matter and style yet occupy different contexts within the saga. Lv.28 and 29, the two strophes in which Egill reviles king Eiríkr blóðøx and his wife Gunnhildr, are represented as compositions from two separate occasions. It has been argued, however, that they must be taken together, and certainly to do so is to find a coherent sequence of thought, along with detailed stylistic correspondences.¹⁵⁾ If they were in fact composed on a single occasion, their separation must again be due to the saga-man's wish to use them in illustrating two quite distinct episodes.

Another pair of lausavísur in Egils saga, this time much more widely separated and ascribed to different skalds, invites analysis of the same sort. Both these lausavísur, the first and the seventeenth of the saga, describe the death of a man called Þórólfr. In the saga there are two characters of this name, Þórólfr Kveld-Úlfsson and Þórólfr Skalla-Grímsson. Lv.1 has Kveld-Úlfur lamenting the death of his son Þórólfr, while in lv.17 Egill laments the death of his brother Þórólfr.

Nú fráak norðr í eyju,
norn erum grimm, til snimma
Þundur kaus þremja skyndi,
Þórólfr und lok fóru;
létumk þung at þingi
Þórs fangvina at ganga,
skjótt munat hefnt, þótt hvettimk
hugr, malm-Gnáar brugðit.

15) Bo Almqvist, Norrøn Niddiktning: Traditionshistoriska studier i versmagi I (1965) pp.108-110.

Gekk, sás óðisk ekki,
 jarlmanns bani snarla,
 þreklundaðr fell, Þundar,
 Þórólfr, í gný stórum;
 jörð grær, en vér verðum,
 Vínu nær of mínum,
 helnað es þat, hylja
 harm, ágætum barma. (16)

'News has reached me that Þórólfr went to his grave on an island in the north. The norm is harsh to me; Óðinn chose the warrior with untimely haste. I was prevented from going to battle by oppressive old age, though my spirit willed me to do so; he will have no speedy vengeance.

'The killer of an earl and a man who knew no fear, he went into the great battle with alacrity; Þórólfr died with fortitude. New growth springs up on the earth where my proud brother lies buried, near the Dvina, but I must suppress my grief: it is a cruel necessity.'

This pair of strophes seems remarkably consistent in content. The account of an heroic death emerges clearly from both of them, lv.1 showing Óðinn himself claiming the fallen warrior, just as he does such valiant spirits as Hákon in Hákonarmál and Eiríkr in Eiríksmál, while lv.17 asserts Þórólfr's courage in the heat of battle and at the hour of his death. While the idea of an heroic death may be commonplace enough, the stanzas also agree in stressing the helpless passivity of the speaker: in lv.1 he laments his advanced old age, which prevents him from going to war or from taking up Þórólfr's cause, and in lv.17 he has only the inadequate remedy of repressing his sorrow. Both stanzas also, if a recent interpretation can be accepted,¹⁷⁾ allude to the dead man's burial: lv.17 has grass springing up again on the freshly-turned soil over the grave, whereas the words 'und lok fóru' of lv.1 may refer to the actual interment, if 'lok' is in fact a term for 'coffin-lid' or 'grave'.

The similarities of expression between the two lausavísur are equally impressive. Most arresting among them is the appearance of the alliterative pair 'Þundr' / 'Þórólfr', each time in the same order and in the third and fourth lines of the stanza.

16) text after Sigurður Nordal, ÍF II (1933), p.60 (lv.1) and p.142 (lv.17)

17) Vilhelm Kiil, "'fara und lok'", in Maal og Minne: Norske Studier 1953, p.103.

The phrasing of the two final lines of the verses, where in each case the initial monosyllabic word ('hugr' / 'harm') is followed by a syntactic break, is also distinctive. The three parentheses are similar in length, and their distribution sets up two different types of symmetry between the verses: 'helnauð es þat' is in straightforward symmetry with 'skjótt munat hefnt' (both being in the seventh line of their respective verses) but in chiasmic symmetry with 'norn erum grimm' (second line and second-last line of the strophe-pair). Correspondences of this rhetorical type imply that lv.1 and lv.17 must have been consecutive strophes if they originate in the same poem.

In style and prosody there is nothing to indicate that they are other than the work of one man. The kennings are of the simpler type, consisting of either two or three elements; the vocabulary of both strophes is enriched by compounds like 'fangvina' and 'helnauð'. Greater elaboration is evident in the complex interweaving of three clauses in each helming, such interweaving being a hallmark of the style of Egill.¹⁸⁾

The assumption that these two lausavísur are really successive stanzas of a lost poem may be used to explain how a variant reading arose in the third line of lv.1. Side by side with the received text, 'Þundr kaus þremja skyndi', occurs a reading: 'Þundr fell þremja vandar', which eliminates the Óðinn reference but can nonetheless readily be translated as 'the warrior fell', with 'Þundr' as the base-word of the kenning and 'þremja vandar' ('sword') as the defining words.¹⁹⁾ The latter appears to be the lectio faciliior: the word 'þremjar' is elsewhere used five times, according to Lexicon Poeticum,²⁰⁾ as a defining element in sword-kennings but only once as the defining element in a warrior-kenning, the way in which it is used in the received text of lv.1. If the variant reading is a simplification it also has the effect of increasing the resemblance between the third line of lv.1 and its counterpart

18) Sophie Krijn (v. n.2) p.476.

19) IF II p.142n.

20) 2. Udgave ved Finnur Jónsson, s.v. þremjar. (hereafter LP)

in lv.17:

Pundr fell þremja vandar...
þreklundaðr fell, Þundar....

with the word 'fell' appearing in both lines and the grammatical subject of the clause which each line initiates being an expression for Þórólfr. Since a copyist's misreading seems insufficient to explain so large a variation between the transmitted texts, one may wonder if the error arose in recitation. If lvv.1 and 17 had originally been successive stanzas in a poem, a reciter might have anticipated lv.17 in delivering lv.1, allowing the symmetry which already existed between 'Pundr / Þórólfr' and 'Þundar / Þórólfr' to trick his memory into creating further correspondences. If this corrupt version itself gained a certain currency it could easily find its way into texts of the saga, the copyists perhaps automatically writing the version which was familiar to them.

Another reason for associating the two lausavísur together as fragments of a single poem is that their contexts in Egils saga are less than totally convincing. With lv.1 the difficulties are admittedly not especially acute: I note merely that Kveld-Úlfr, Egill's grandfather, is not known to have composed other poetry. Does the ascription to him have any more authority than that of lv.2, which, attributed to Egill's father Skalla-Grímr in the saga, has been given to Egill himself by Nordal,²¹⁾ because of the strophe's distinctive metre? It is tempting to suppose that the saga-man illustrated the lives of Egill's forebears with verses which the skald had actually composed himself.

Lv.17, on the other hand, seems to be in direct contradiction to its prose context. While the prose places Þórólfr's death at a battle-field called 'Vínheiðr' the verse has it that he died near 'Vínu', ^{a dative form,} Now 'Vínheiðr' is presumed to be the Norse reflex of the English place-name 'Wendune' or 'Weondune' which occurs in Simeon of Durham;²²⁾ if prose and verse were in harmony, the 'Vínu' of lv. 17 would be an adaptation of an English river-name 'Wen', which Nordal hypothesizes as the first element of 'Wendune'.²²⁾ Since,

21) ÍF II p.x

22) ÍF II p.xliii

however, there is apparently no evidence for any river of this name in England, 'Vínu' can only be the dative of 'Vína', the standard Norse name for the river Dvina in Russia.²³⁾ The appearance in the prose of a place-name which, unlike 'Vínheiðr', is a regular compound on 'Vína'—the form 'Vínuskógar', which is not paralleled elsewhere²⁴⁾ may indicate that some teller of the saga had noted the form 'Vína'^{implied} by lv.17 and felt that it needed to be further 'established' in the narrative. At an earlier stage, however, the same form must have been taken as implying a nominative 'Vín', a supposition which seems to be reflected in the river-name 'Vín' of the Þulur, again not paralleled elsewhere.²⁵⁾ This form 'Vín' could easily be associated with 'Vínheiðr', on the basis of a pair like 'Dún' and 'Dúnheiðr'.

Clearly, there are several levels of confusion here. Though the verse (lv.17) presumably contains the older tradition, with Þórólfr dying in Russia, his death is placed in England by Íslendingadrápa as well as by the prose of Egils saga. More difficult to interpret is the Þórðarþók, which places his death in 'Vindlandi'; this might either be an error for 'Vínheiði'²⁶⁾ or else represent a more easterly tradition on Þórólfr's last battle. The prose of Egils saga itself contains hints of another tradition on Þórólfr:²⁷⁾ at one point it mentions an expedition to Bjarmaland in which Þórólfr participated, under the leadership of Eiríkr blóðox, and which included a major battle by the Dvina.²⁸⁾ The saga also gives us warrant to suppose that this Bjarmaland battle figured in praise-poetry.²⁹⁾

Can lv.1 belong with lv.17 in a Russian setting? The only indication of setting, 'norðr í eyju', is, while not very specific, certainly not in conflict with the other lausavísa. The island of lv.1

23) Alistair Campbell, 'Skaldic verse and Anglo-Saxon History' p.6 (Dorothea Coke Memorial Lecture in Northern Studies, 1970, publ. University College London 1971).

24) ÍF II p.132

25) LP s.v. Vín

26) ÍF II p.xxxii

27) Campbell, loc. cit.

28) ÍF II p.93

29) ÍF II p.94 and n.1

might either be one of those which dot the lower course of the Dvina or else one offshore from the river in the White Sea.

While the question of authorship is not of first importance to my argument, I note that if both lausavísur are by Egill they agree well with that skald's great poem Sonatorrek, which also portrays the speaker as an old man who has lost a younger and stronger brother.

Reading the two lausavísur as a unit, the first helming, opening with the customary 'frák', establishes the time and place of Þórólfr's death and the speaker's sense of loss. Implacable forces, Óðinn and the norn, have interposed themselves between the skald and the fallen warrior. The second and third helmings develop a contrast between the warrior, who went to battle, and the skald, who was unable to, while stressing the courage of both men ('þótt hvettimk/ hugr': 'sás Óðisk ekki'). The speaker lends mythological depth to his stance of helplessness with a kenning for 'age' which recalls the humiliation of the mighty Thor at the hands of Elli, the old woman who defeats the god in a wrestling match. Since the skald can no more overcome age than he can the norn or Óðinn he must despair of revenge for Þórólfr. The last helming sums up these themes, while also revealing, in a final line which reads as a climax, that Þórólfr and the skald are in fact brothers. As in the first helming, the place of the grave is important. The skald, far away, repressing his sorrow, and the soil, concealing his brother's corpse, are associated in a single line, hinting that both are for ever pledged to this act of concealment: the words 'jörð grær', divorced from the rest of their clause and placed prominently at the beginning of the helming, recall the formulaic phrases of the 'Tryggðamál'³⁰⁾ for all that is permanent and unchanging, and so insist, by implication, on the permanence of the speaker's loss.

This pair of lausavísur may be merely a fragment from a longer poem, describing the loss of many kinsfolk, or it may represent a short memorial ode on Þórólfr alone. Its themes, in either case,

30) cf. ÍF VII Grettis saga p.232 and note.

are immediately reminiscent of Sonatorrek—the skald implicating Óðinn in his loss, chafing at old age, a helpless figure without his younger kinsmen. Both poems, although so personal in 'feel', belong to a recognizable genre, the elegiac.

Such was the prestige of the skalds in mediæval Icelandic society that they seem to have taken on the status of folk-heroes. Sagas were devoted exclusively to their lives. Hand in hand with the romanticization and idealization of the life of the skald which the sagas manifest went a masking of the skald's real function in society. I have confined myself here to trying to demonstrate that the sagas^{are} unreliable in their testimony on the circumstances of poetic composition. The two examples I have selected from a potentially very large body of evidence indicate that although the lausavísur are depicted in the sagas as a spontaneous reaction on the part of the skald to a real-life situation, they should rather be considered as fragments of longer, finished poetry—erotic, satirical, or elegiac. Although lausavísur may appear, often, to depend on their prose context for their comprehensibility, the effect of reconnecting them into sequences is to make them less 'jagged' and occasional, more self-contained and formally satisfying. The motives of the saga-men in breaking up these longer poems may have been a zeal to make poetry true to life, an idealistic attitude towards poetry which one encounters in other ages and in other cultures, or a need for corroborative citations to authenticate their narrative. It is my contention that in his professional role the skald was expected to produce not merely encomiastic poetry but verse in a wide range of other genres for entertainment and ceremonial purposes, and that in certain groups of lausavísur we can glimpse this wider aspect of his household duties.