Margaret Clunies Ross
English Department, University of Sydney

VOICE AND VOICES IN EDDAIC POETRY

Caliban:

> Be not afeard: the isle is full of noises,
> Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight, and hurt not.
> Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
> Will hum about mine ears; and sometimes voices,
> That, if I then had wak'd after long sleep,
> Will make me sleep again: and then, in dreaming,
> The clouds methought would open and show riches
> Ready to drop upon me; that, when I wak'd
> I cried to dream again.
>
> Shakespeare, The Tempest III, iii, 147-55

Old Norse eddaic poetry is an isle full of noises, a body of dramatic texts, many of them dialogues between supernatural or heroic voices. Yet, even in those poems which consist only of dialogue, there is an ever-present narrative discourse in which the dialogue is embedded. In this paper I use some of the analytical tools of narratology to uncover the related units of discourse in eddaic poetry and to clarify the relations between the various participants inscribed in this group of texts, whose communicative stance with respect to its putative audience has sometimes seemed a little like Caliban's in relation to the voices that came to him as if from a dream. Like him, we may cry to dream again, but, being sober Old Norse scholars, we must proceed to wake and find out how those eddaic voices come to us.

Narratologists (e.g. Genette, Bal, Rimmon-Kenan) have used the term "voice", in an extension of its grammatical sense of the form of a verb by which the relation of the subject to the action implied is indicated (Shorter Oxford Dictionary, sense 5), to refer to the narrating act and its protagonists in spatio-temporal determination. Narrative communication is here considered as a locutionary act and its communicators can be distinguished as voices. The object of communication is a message, within whose limits a narrative subject called the narrator "proffers sentences, the direct content of which is a vision. This vision or presentation is the act of another subject who is contained relative to the first subject (the narrator), and this second subject is the focalizer. The identity of the focalizer can coincide

with that of the narrator, but does not necessarily do so. As subject of its vision, this focalizer presents a history or diegesis. This history is the act of another subject, usually plural, which is the agent of the events which compose the history and whom we call the actor. The actor's identity can also coincide with that of one of the other two subjects, but does not necessarily do so either" (Bal 1981:44-5). To these definitions we must add that of the narratee, the agent within the text whom the narrator addresses.

The ability of narratological models to make fine-grained distinctions between voices is of special usefulness in the study of a group of texts like those in the Codex Regius of the Elder Edda (GkS 2365, 4to.) and in other manuscripts containing poetry in the common Germanic verse-form. There are several reasons for this. The first and most fundamental is that direct discourse, such as we find in the dramatic dialogues that occur in much eddaic poetry, appears to be a form of mimesis in which the actors themselves, rather than a primary narrator, utter language. However, this is an illusion and hides the presence of a narrator who "quotes" the characters' speech, "thus reducing the directness of 'showing'" (Rimmon-Kenan 1983:108). So even within pure dialogue we may detect signs, of greater or lesser explicitness, of the narrator's voice and, if the two do not coincide, of the focalizer's.

It is of some interest that the compiler of the Codex Regius texts[1] often explicitly inscribed this level of narration in the form of "stage directions" in his paratext, ascribing the words of the mythological speakers to named actors. Thus, in poetic texts like Vafþrúðnismál and Þrymskviða the dramatis personae are made explicit by the compiler, often when there is a change of speaker; in other poems, such as Skírnismál, the compiler's role is more extensive and embraces other functions beyond that of specifying the actors. These stage directions make the subordination of the poems' dialogues to the otherwise hidden narrative frame quite clear. That the frame is a narrative one requires a little thought, but I postulate for the eddaic dialogue poetry a minimal narrative in which "Narrator says that Actor speaks", and in which the narrator's text represents the words of the actor(s) as act, not text (cf. Bal 1985:142).

If we turn now to the question of the agent the narrator addresses in eddaic poetry, narratological analysis may also help us towards a perception of the nature and position of the narratee. It is axiomatic that the act of speaking necessitates a listener, even if a hypothetical one, and yet few studies of eddaic poetry have devoted much attention to the position of the narratee within these texts, except where the function of narratee has involved apparent textual inconsistencies. We shall

examine these shortly in Voluspá and Hávamál, the two eddaic texts of greatest narratological complexity. When speaking of the narratee, it should be made clear that he is not the same as the implied reader or audience of a text any more than the narrator is the same as the author (Genette 1980:259). It may be possible to proceed to a further level of analysis of the corpus of eddaic poetry in respect of its postulated audience, that is, to the "real", though historically distant world of its creators, performers and audience, through a study of the "spatio-temporal elsewhere" (Elam 1980:99) and its creating principles that eddaic poetry as a whole represents. But that is another task.

A third advantage of a narratological model lies in its ability to assist our understanding of the kinds of narrative to be found in eddaic poetry and of the relations of those kinds to non-narrative discourse within these texts. By no means all eddaic verse is narrative; for example, the catalogue of the gods' dwellings in Grímnismál 4-17 is principally informational; many of the precepts of Hávamál, Fáfnismál and Sigrdrífumál belong to an ethical or gnomic discourse type, while some passages of the Guðrún laments embody self-reflection and lamentation. Yet all these discourses are embedded (Bal 1981) in one or more narratives, even when the transition between them remains implicit, even when, as is often the case, the non-narrative discourse contains an allusive "narrative precipitate" whose understanding is essential to one's full comprehension of the text's dynamics.[2] So, in Skírnismál 21 the embedded reference to the origin of the ring, " þann er brendr var/ með ungom Óðins syni", with which Skírnir attempts to woo Gerðr, both locates the act in mythological time and indicates the value of the ring relative to the Baldr story and hence the seriousness of Freyr's intent towards her.

Another major contribution that narratology has made to our understanding of complex texts is its ability to differentiate finely between voices that are extradiegetic, that is, above or superior to the stories they narrate, the so-called impersonal narrator's voice, and those that are intradiegetic, or within the related narrative. Not only narrators but also all other participating voices may be differentiated in this way, and this identification may be further refined by discovering whether the voices do or do not participate in the stories in which they are narrators or actors. Some narrators may also be actors in embedded narratives they themselves relate, in which case they are what Genette (1980:243-5) has called "homodiegetic", in contrast to a heterodiegetic narrator who does not participate in the story.

These distinctions, when pursued rigorously in medieval texts, can clarify problems that have arisen in their interpretation using an older frame of reference. Hávamál

and Vǫluspá are two eddaic poems in which the narrators are also participants in at least part of the stories they relate. In the case of Vǫluspá the vǫlva relates stories that she herself was involved in as a witness whose role sometimes becomes that of a participant. Her discourse is the monologue of a narrator-actor who is both intradiegetic and homodiegetic; her role is expressed, by repetition of key verbs,[3] as to see, hear, understand and narrate (vel fyrtelja 1/6) the significant events of the world that she has experienced at first hand. Her kind of wisdom is experiential, like that of all the giant race, among whom she was brought up (str.2). The contrast between her knowledge, which derives from her direct, prior experience of the early days of the world, and the acquisitive, indirect kind of knowledge that Óðinn possesses through the exercise of magical domination over the powers of death, darkness and the giant world, gives this poem its dramatic force.

The poem's narrative frame, from which we infer that Óðinn has exercised a compulsive force over the vǫlva, who is in a state of coma or death (str. 66/8 nú mun hon sǫgvaz), comprises strophes 1, 28/1-4 and 66/8, together with the refrain vitoð ér enn, eða hvat?, which begins at strophe 27.[4] From strophe 1 we learn that the whole of the vǫlva's embedded vatic monologue, part of which recalls events of the past, part of which predicts events yet to come in mythological history, is addressed to two narratees, the extradiegetic mogo Heimdalar, "kinsmen of Heimdallr" (1/4), who, following Rígsþula, I take to be mankind, and the intradiegetic Óðinn, who is also an actor in the vǫlva's embedded monologue. Insofar as the fate of mankind seems to be bound up with that of the gods in a general way in Norse myth, the sons of Heimdallr have an interest in the vǫlva's recitation, but they are not participants in the narrative. Óðinn, on the other hand, seeks to know things of direct advantage to himself.

In a large number of Old Norse myths and in other poems of the Elder Edda such as Vafþrúðnismál, Grímnismál and parts of Hávamál, Óðinn's power is seen to derive both from his ability to acquire knowledge from chthonic otherworld beings which he can use to the gods' advantage and from his genealogical connection with the new generation of survivors after Ragnarǫk (cf. Kragerud 1981:33-5). It is the latter focus, on what one might call Óðinn's personal problems, which include the operation of fate, Baldr's death and Ragnarǫk, that appears in the second part of Vǫluspá, and it is in this section (from strophe 19 onwards) that we find both a change from past to present tense in the vǫlva's recitation and an alternation between first and third person pronoun in the narrator's references to herself. There is also an absolute increase in pronominal reference to the narrating subject from this point.

Although I believe Gutenbrunner (1957) has offered a reasonable explanation of the alternation between ek and hon as the volva's "self-objectification", this apparent inconsistency of self-reference on the narrator's part can be more sharply focussed when we appreciate the seeress's role as focalizer as well as narrator of a series of temporally and logically bound narratives. When she uses the first person ek she focalizes problems of special urgency or personal relevance to her interlocutor, namely the operation of fate (19/1), Óðinn's sacrifice of his eye to gain knowledge of the runes (28/7-8), the death of Baldr (31/1) and the coming of Ragnarǫk (44/6 and 49/6). In other words, this narrative device allows us to perceive the angle of vision through which the story is filtered in the text and also acts as a signal of the tension operating between Óðinn and the volva which has its objective correlative in her sub-divided ego while in a state of trance. It is of interest here that modern studies of hypnotically activated subjects indicate that, in narrating, these subjects frequently produce discourse in which there is a projection of multiple ego-states, one being articulated as subject (I) and the others as objects (he, she or it) (Fischer 1987:357-60). Perhaps there is also a degree of psychological realism in the Old Norse Vǫluspá.

Baldrs Draumar, which is extant only in MS AM 748, 4to., shows how one of Óðinn's problems, the fate of his son Baldr, can be dramatised in an eddaic medium in a quite different and much more straightforward way, narratologically speaking, from the complex discourse of Vǫluspá. The narrator here is of the impersonal, extradiegetic kind, and is in no sense a participant in the story. Óðinn and a volva are established as diegetic actors in this story, whose rationale is given in the first stanza, at the level of the frame narrative, by the indirect question "hví væri Baldri/ ballir draumar"? (1/7-8) The first level narrative proceeds by means of the conventional "journey to the other world" topos (Lönnroth 1977:154) and brings Óðinn to where he knows the volva's grave lies (str.4). We notice how much more explicit the dead volva's condition is made in this poem than in Vǫluspá, and yet both poets use comparable formulae to indicate the state of compulsion under which the two seeresses labour. The actor Óðinn clearly defines his own and the volva's respective spheres of knowledge - "segðu mér ór helio - ec man ór heimi-" (6/3-4) and the contrast between the two worlds of life and death is, at the specific level of Baldr's fate, the poem's subject.

A duologue between Óðinn and the volva, which is largely an embedded mythological catechism concerning the circumstances in which Baldr will meet his death, occupies the rest of the poem. This duologue is largely non-narrative, but, like most eddaic catechisms, contains several narrative precipitates as answers

to Óðinn's questions. These are verbally almost identical with Voluspá's lines on the same subject (strs.31-3). Strictly, the duologue falls into four parts. Strophes 5-6/4 are a conventional interrogation of the intruder into the other world by the volva; he answers with the false "Odinic wanderer's" name Vegtamr; then follow the catechistic strophes 6/5 to the end of 11, which lead into the paired stanzas 12 and 13. Their prime function is to resolve the dramatic problem of Vegtamr's identity by means of a question unrelated to the matter of Baldr's fate but of a kind that, in combination with the questions about Baldr, could not but reveal Óðinn's identity to the most obtuse of otherworld interlocutors. The question, which is strikingly similar to some of the riddles of Gestumblindi in Heiðreks Saga, the answer to which appears to be "waves", was presumably restricted to the persona of Óðinn the wanderer in Old Norse literature and could thus be used in a kind of code slippage, to bring the dialogic sequence to a satisfactory conclusion.[5] By yet another code slippage, Óðinn reacts to his unmasking by directing a couple of lines of senna-like abuse at the volva (13/5-8). The poem is brought to a conclusion by the volva's prolepsis to future time, when Loki will break free of his bonds and the generalized destruction of Ragnarok will come to pass. This final narrative precipitate, in the context of the Baldr story, suggests that Baldr's death is a prefiguring of Ragnarok. Unlike Voluspá with its prolepsis to a brave new world in which Baldr will return - and the volva's endorsement of this vision is quite explicit (bǫls mun allz batna,/Baldr mun koma 62/3-4) - Baldrs Draumar does not incorporate the concept of renewal.[6]

Even in recent years, a majority of eddaic scholars (most recently Evans 1986) have struggled to make sense of Hávamál considered as a whole literary work rather than a set of more or less distinct segments, with the possible exception of Klaus von See's theories (e.g. 1972), which, however, are heavily dependent on source studies. I suggest that narratological analysis is especially useful in understanding the relationship between the narrating voice and the material that is embedded in the first level of Hávamál's discourse. For purposes of this analysis I shall ignore questions of the possibly disparate origin of sections of the poem and consider the text extant in the Codex Regius.

As with Voluspá, the compiler introduces no paratextual material into his presentation of Hávamál. When the poem opens we hear what is an apparently extradiegetic narrative voice directly addressing an unspecified "you", advising caution upon entering a strange hall. In the second strophe the narrator hails unspecified hosts, telling them that a guest has arrived and querying where he should sit. There then follows a large number of strophes devoted to questions of etiquette, especially between guest and host, practical wisdom for the traveller and everyday morality

generally. From the first two strophes we may infer that the first level narrative frame is the skeletal "N qvað X", where X stands for the monologic text of the poem. The narratee is the þú grammatically implict in the verbs of strophe 1 together with the gefendr of strophe 2. As they are not personalized, we must accord them Everyman status. At this point the narrator is also Everyman-like. The subject of their discourse is proclaimed as ethical wisdom and morality, especially relevant to travellers. That this is a correct interpretation of Hávamál so far is attested by Snorri Sturluson's placing strophe 1 in the mouth of King Gylfi, who quotes it when he enters the hall of the Æsir from Troy in Gylfaginning (Lindow 1977:123-4).

The literary interest of Hávamál depends fundamentally on the development and further specification of the voices of narrator and narratee as the poem proceeds. I think the best way to conceptualize this process is to postulate that the narrator assumes the positon of the archetypal wise wanderer and the narratee is the archetypal pupil, who is also Everyman the guest-host. Implicit in this paradigm is the identification of the narrator as potentially a supernatural figure and the narratee as basically human. More specifically still, the narrator may, by virtue of the large number of extant Old Norse stories in which Óðinn plays the part of the wandering deity in the world of men, be identified as that god. The narratee is also given a specific persona at certain points in the poem, being addressed in strophes 112-37 and again at 162 as Loddfáfnir, a name whose connotations we no longer understand.

The narrator's monologue contains a series of embedded statements in the form of moral precepts, many of which have narrative form and involve some manifestation of the narratee as actor. He may be "the wary guest" of strophe 7, "the greedy man" of strophe 20, the early riser of strophe 59, the student of runic wisdom of the Loddfáfnir strophes and so forth. Similarly, although it is not immediately obvious, the narrator is also an actor-participant in the discourse he relates, and at times he tells a story in which another or a younger version of his "self" participated. Hence, as we read or listen to Hávamál, we become aware that the apparently extradiegetic narrator as well as the narratee are participants in the narrated discourse. They are both, therefore, intradiegetic and homodiegetic, thus fulfilling Genette's principle that the narrator and narratee are necessarily located at the same diegetic level (1980:259).

The interesting things about the narratives told by the narrator as actor are that they serve to identify him as Óðinn and also have a thematic function in relation to the first level narrative. The first level narrative, we remember, represents the narrator as empowered to tell a body of ethical and gnomic wisdom as well as

the useful knowledge embodied in the runes. The second level narratives tell how he, in his divine form, gained control of this wisdom. They also, I believe, establish a fundamental difference in the means of learning between the divine narrator and the human narratee.

Some of the narrator's first person utterances are pithy narrative vignettes (e.g. strs. 70, 78), some are gnomic statements (77, 91, 118, 131), others often ironic reflections on various of his self-representations (47, 49, 66-7, 110, 134). The narrator may also refer to himself in the third person, just as the seeress of Vǫluspá does (110-11, 142ff). The embedded narratives that establish Óðinn's credentials as a purveyor of knowledge and tell how he came to acquire it are strophes 13-14, his drunkenness at the house of the wise Fjalarr; strophes 96-102, the adventure with Billings mær (which he tells against himself) and the successful adventure with Gunnlǫð, in which he acquires the poetic mead (strs. 104-9). The last of this group is the subject of strs. 138-41 and tells how Óðinn sacrificed himself by hanging on the "windy tree" to gain control of the runes of knowledge. In this mythological flashback the sub-divided ego is evident in the paradoxical enunciation of 138/4-5:

> geiri undaðr oc gefinn Óðni,
> sjálfr sjálfom mér.

Strophe 111 seems to provide most problems in the disentanglement of narrator, narratee and actors, but if the narrator is Óðinn, as the build-up of evidence to this point makes inevitable, then he must also be the þulr and the stól ... Urðar brunni at must be his seat; as a sub-divided ego, he experiences himself as both subject and object, narrator and actor. This strophe leads into the so-called Loddfáfnismál and epitomises Óðinn's particular kind of knowledge and unique powers. He has power over language as a medium for effecting change in the world (mál er at þylia) which he has gained by looking, listening, contemplating and understanding secret knowledge. His sort of knowledge finds expression as practical truths and ethical statements, which may then make humans wise. Hence comes the general tenor of Hávamál and of all those eddaic poems like Fáfnismál and Sigrdrífumál in which supernatural figures impart their knowledge to men. The way in which the god Óðinn learns himself is by the seance or the mythological catechism, hence the vatic mode of Vǫluspá and the catechistic form of other eddaic poems like Vafþrúðnismál and Grímnismál. His other method of acquiring wisdom, according to Norse myth, is by means of a quest for a numinous object, like the mead of poetry, which he acquires from the other world by subterfuge or, like the runes, by self-mutilation.

It is narratives of the quest type that form the embedded substrate of Hávamál and which are the subject of a number of independent eddaic poems. In most cases,

the nature of the story as quest requires a more direct narrative presentation than we find in the poems I have examined here, for it focusses on the journey to the other world which is itself a test of the protagonists, on other tests of the hero's strength, courage or intellect and on the strategies to be deployed in gaining the numinous object or person, usually a woman, which the divine or heroic protagonist wants to acquire for himself. Many of these poems have wondertale or "Proppian" structures. Poems like Hymiskviða, Þrymskviða, Vǫlundarkviða and Skírnismál show a variety of narrative strategies, including continuous "omniscient" narration, together with a variable amount of dialogue attributed to the actors, through to a completely dialogic means of carrying on the narrative, as in Skírnismál, with the narrative frame partly supplied by the compiler and partly expressed through various literary devices within the dialogue. These include the naming and characterisation of the protagonists by one another, the use of systematized metaphorical descriptions, reference to other mythic narratives, the use of sententiae and some chorus-like devices.

Further examination of other groups of eddaic poems would undoubtedly uncover even greater diversity of narrativity, especially in those groups, such as the Helgi lays or the poems of Sigurðr's youth, where the compiler has stitched parts of extant poems together with summaries of others (Harris 1983). Perhaps the most interesting perception that narratology allows us, however, is the matching up of kinds of narratives with kinds of narrators and kinds of subject matter. A systematic pursuit of this sort of analysis should lay bare both the rhetorical and conceptual system of eddaic verse.

NOTES

1. All citations of eddaic texts are from the edition of Neckel-Kuhn (1983). For convenience I use the singular number throughout to refer to the compiler of the Codex Regius, even though the text we have may have been the work of several hands.

2. I have borrowed the term "narrative precipitate" from Amory (1989), where he uses it to refer to the narrative component of skaldic kennings. Lindow 1982 has examined the narrative element in skaldic verse in some detail.

3. The verbs in question are (ec) man (1/8; 2/1 and 5), (hon) man (21/1); (ec) veit (19/1; 28/7), (hon) veit (27/1; 44/5; 49/5); (ec) sá (31/1); (hon) sá (30/1; 35/1; 38/1; 39/1); (ec) sé (44/6; 49/6); (hon) sér (27/5; 59/1; 64/1).

4. It could be argued that 28/1-4 is a reminiscence of the narrator within the embedded discourse. There is no way of telling, as far as I can see.

5. Christopher Tolkien (1960:xx-xxi), quoting Bugge, has registered dissatisfaction with this conclusion to Baldrs Draumar, but one must accept that these kinds

of topical shorthand were not frowned upon by eddaic poets and their audiences.

6. On the other hand, Vafðrúðnismál certainly does with its "unanswerable" question of what Óðinn had whispered in Baldr's ear (cf. Kragerud 1981:33-5). Weber (1987:135-6), fn.46 argues plausibly that the "answer" must have been: "You will return from the dead after the end of the world!"

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Amory, Frederic (1989), "Kenning" in P. Pulsiano, ed., Medieval Scandinavia : An Encyclopedia. New York

Bal, Mieke (1981), "Notes on narrative embedding", Poetics Today 2.2, 41-60

Bal, Mieke (1985), Narratology. Introduction to the Theory of Narrative. Toronto

Elam, Keir (1980), The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama. Methuen New Accents Series, London and New York

Evans, David A.H. ed. (1986), Hávamál. Viking Society for Northern Research Text Series 7, London

Fischer, Roland (1987), "On fact and fiction - the structure of stories that the brain tells to itself about itself" and "Rejoinder" to various critical comments, Journal of Social and Biological Structures 10, 343-51 and 57-60

Genette, Gérard (1980), trans. Jane E. Lewin, Narrative Discourse. An Essay in Method. Ithaca, New York (orig. French publ. 1972)

Gutenbrunner, Siegfried (1957), "Eddastudien III. Über ek und hon in der Völospa", ANF 72, 7-12

Harris, Joseph (1983), "Eddic Poetry as Oral Poetry: The Evidence of Parallel Passages in the Helgi Poems for Questions of Composition and Performance", in H. Bessason and R.J. Glendinning eds., Edda. A Collection of Essays. University of Manitoba Icelandic Studies 4, Winnipeg, pp. 208-40

Kragerud, Alv (1981), "De mythologiske spørsmål i Fåvnesmål", ANF 97, 9-48

Lindow, John (1977), "The Two Skaldic Stanzas in Gylfaginning", ANF 92, 106-24

Lindow, John (1982), "Narrative and the Nature of Skaldic Poetry", ANF 97, 94-121

Lönnroth, Lars (1977), "Skírnismál och den fornisländska äktenskapsnormen", in B. Jacobsen et al., eds., Opuscula Septentrionalia: Festskrift til Ole Widding. Copenhagen pp. 154-78

Neckel, Gustav ed., rev. Hans Kuhn (1983), Edda. Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern. 5th. edn. Heidelberg

Rimmon-Kenan, Shlomith (1983), Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics, Methuen New Accents Series, London and New York

von See, Klaus (1972), Die Gestalt der Hávamál. Frankfurt am Main

Tolkien, Christopher, ed. and trans. (1960), The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise. Nelson's Icelandic Texts, London etc.

Weber, Gerd Wolfgang (1987), "Intellegere historiam. Typological perspectives of Nordic prehistory", in K. Hastrup and P. Meulengracht Sørensen eds., Tradition og historieskrivning. Acta Jutlandica LXIII:2. Humanistisk Serie 61 (Århus, 1987), pp. 95-141.