

**Contemporary Poetics:
Theorizing traditional versification in the
Sturlung Age**

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The thirteenth century in Iceland was a bountiful period for scholarship on poetry, and it was produced, for the most part, by members of a single family. Poetic treatises on metrics (*Háttatal*) and poetic language (*Skáldskaparmál*) were composed by Snorri Sturluson (d. 1241), a treatise on rhetoric (the so-called *Málskruðsfræði*) was written by Snorri's nephew Óláfr Þórðarson (d. 1259) whose brother, Sturla Þórðarson (d. 1284), documented their lives in the context of contemporary politics in *Íslendinga saga* and quoted from their poetry in this saga and in *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*. The focus of this paper is on the development of a vernacular *ars poetica* as it was articulated in these works, which in different ways were grappling with the emergence of skaldic poetry as a literary art. The works of the Sturlungs also need to be viewed against the broader picture of medieval Scandinavian poetics as it is evidenced from the earliest extant work on poetry, the twelfth-century metrical show-piece, *Háttalykill*, and the development of interest in vernacular poetics evident in the reception of *Snorra Edda* in fourteenth century manuscripts.

Little is known about the training of skalds (Whaley, 1993, 588) or the theoretical discourse that enabled the cultivation and oral transmission of vernacular poetics. It is in fact only when skaldic pedagogy moved into the school-room in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries that we find explicit and sustained theorizing about the art of traditional poetry. To some extent, implicit theorizing can be deduced from a study of the shifting fashions of composition in the earlier centuries of skaldic production as they are preserved in stanzas recorded in later centuries (Árnason, 1991). One example of this is the innovative adaptation of continental rhythm in the *hrynhendr hátttr* (Foote, 1982, 252), which seems to have taken place during the eleventh century, probably under the influence of hymns and devotional verse (Turville-Petre, 1976, xxxiiff.). In addition, a multitude of vernacular technical terms to describe traditional poetry appears to have sprung to the pens of both Snorri and Óláfr when they wrote their treatises, indicating that the meta-language of poetics was a well-established oral discourse.

But the transition from the oral to the literary sphere was not simply a process of transcription. What in an oral context was thought of as *íþrótt*¹ had to be

¹ Such is Snorri's description of the cultivation of poetry in the earliest days of nordic culture: "Hann [Óðinn] ok hofgoðar hans heita ljóðasmíðir, því at sú íþrótt hófsk af þeim í Norðrlöndum" *Ynglinga saga* ch. 6. All references to *Heimskringla* are to Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson's 1979 edition.

transformed into an *ars poetica* in which the parameters of the art form were defined and described, and the rules of composition systematically set forth. Although both Snorri and Óláfr chose to write in their own language and to take vernacular poetry as the material for their analysis, the influence of continental learning is fundamental to both their works, more transparently so in Óláfr's work because of his declared dependence on the *auctores* of Latin scholarship. It was the developed models of learned literate discourse to which the Icelanders turned to theorize about their own vernacular tradition because it was this conceptual framework, instilled by literacy, that enabled the systematic setting out of metrical and rhetorical types and their detailed documentation and explication.

In both theorists, however, a tension is evident between the description of oral tradition and the prescription inherent in an *ars poetica*. As they work to make the skaldic art literary, they both find themselves espousing a poetics that is often at odds with the corpus on which they draw for their demonstration of the traditional verbal art form (Clunies Ross, 1987, 76-7). Both Snorri and Óláfr were involved in the schooling of Icelanders in the new *ars poetica*. According to a passage in *Skáldskaparmál*, Snorri's *Edda* is directed to young skalds (Finnur Jónsson, 1931, 86), and there is much in *Háttatal* that is written in a didactic vein. Óláfr's treatise adapts the pedagogic tradition of Donatus and Priscian to an Icelandic environment, possibly to the school that he himself is mentioned as conducting (Tómasson, 1988, 35).

Háttalykill is the first extant work about vernacular poetics in the Norse corpus (Helgason and Holtmark, 1941). It was composed in the 1140s by the Icelander Hallr Þórarinnsson and the Orkney earl Rognvaldr. According to the description in chapter 81 of *Orkneyinga saga*, it was a joint composition and had five verses to demonstrate each metre, but being overlong, was cut down to a pair of verses per metre (though two later post-medieval texts of the saga say three). As the poem survives in later paper manuscripts, only two verses exist to demonstrate each of 41 metres. The matter of the poem, the enumeration of heroes from legendary figures to historic kings, is thoroughly traditional, as the opening of the poem makes clear: "forn fræði lætk frammi of borin" (Finnur Jónsson, 1912-15, BI 487). But in its scheme, and in some of its elaborations, *Háttalykill* was inspired by Latin models: the name itself is a calque on the Latin *clavis metrica*, a pedagogic genre of the Latin classroom, and a number of the verseforms are modelled on foreign metres rather than on traditional Norse forms (Helgason and Holtmark, 1941, 118ff; Kuhn, 1983, 317ff.). The cultural milieu in which *Háttalykill* was composed appears to have been that of an enterprising and cosmopolitan court (Bibire, 1988, 217), with a new aristocratic interest in ancient Norse culture developed in the context of the contemporary intellectual fashions of Continental

Europe (Meulengracht Sørensen, 1992, 279). As such, *Háttalykill* can be read as both a demonstration of the sophistication of the skaldic art, and an attempt to modernise it (Holtmark, 1961, 243).

Snorri Sturluson would have been familiar with this intellectual culture through his upbringing at Oddi, which was an important centre of learning in Iceland and had links with the Orkneys (Fidjestøl, 1993, 48; Faulkes, 1991, xviii-xix). His metrical tour de force, *Háttatal*, contains 102 stanzas, and has been preserved in the four medieval manuscripts of his *Edda* intercalated with prose commentary presenting his theory of Norse versification. It is not clear when the commentary was added to the poem, though it is generally agreed that *Háttatal* was the first part of the *Edda* to have been composed. Within the verse itself, there is mention of three praise poems followed by a fourth at st. 69 ("þjó ek kvæði . . . þrenn . . . fram skal in fjórða"²), which is reiterated at st. 95 ("fluttak fjögur kvæði"). The prose commentary, however, refers to only three poems within *Háttatal* marked at st. 31 ("Nú hefr upp annat kvæði") and st. 68 ("Nú skal upp hefja it þriðja kvæði"). That there is also some disjunction between the poem and the poetic theory of the commentary is outlined by Faulkes (1991, x).

The early reception of the work suggests that the poem was regarded as a praise poem in its own right, though as a eulogy for Earl Skúli more so than for King Hákon (Guðrún Nordal, 1992, 62). Ólafur Þórðarson refers to *Háttatal* as a work which Snorri had "ort" (15.15³) as does the Uppsala manuscript: "háttatal er snorri hevir ort um hakloni konung ok skvía hertugla" (Grape et al., 1977, 1).⁴ It may be that the introduction into Norse letters of the *clavis metrica* genre by Hallr and Rognvaldr provided Snorri with the initial inspiration to compose such a poem, but that the complex nature of the poetic tradition prompted him to a fuller elaboration of its rhythms, diction and mythological world of reference once it was complete.

Between *Háttalykill* and *Háttatal* a number of interesting shifts are evident in the theorizing of native poetic tradition. In its extant form, the commentary of *Háttalykill* consists only of the names of verseforms added as headings before each pair of verses. Whereas *Háttalykill* begins in *ljóðsháttir* - or *ljóðaháttir* as it is elsewhere called (Finnur Jónsson, 1892) - the metre characteristic of eddic didactic poems, and proceeds through a variety of metrical forms with no apparent system, Snorri's poem is a model of systematic categorisation and hierarchical order,

² All references to *Háttatal* are to Anthony Faulkes's 1991 edition. Following Faulkes's practice, references are to stanza number and line number.

³ All references to Ólafur's treatise are to Björn M. Olsen's 1884 edition. References are to chapter and paragraph as marked in Olsen's edited text, pp. 33-119.

⁴ The *Edda* as a whole is described as having been "saman sett" by Snorri. See Sverrir Tómasson (1988, 180-9) for a discussion of these terms.

beginning with *dróttkvætt* and its variants, followed by the verseforms "er fornskáld hafa kveðit" (st. 54ff.) and finally, verses composed "eptir inum smærum háttum" (stanza 68ff.), with *ljóðaháttir* coming in third from last. While many of the names of verseforms are common to both works, many of the correspondences between verse types are only approximate (Faulkes, 1991, xvii), and in the case of *rekit* the name denotes completely different forms (Helgason and Holtsmark, 1941, 65). In addition, Snorri's systemic account appears to generate new terms according to his hierarchical scheme: *in mestu refhvörf* (sts. 17-19), *in minni refhvörf* (st. 20), *in minztu refhvörf* (st. 22), *refhvarfa bróður* (st. 23), *meiri stúfr* (st. 50), *hinn mesti stúfr* (st. 51), *minni runhenda* (st. 81), *minzta runhenda* (st. 82), and the use of these same terms within five separate sub-classes of *runhent* (83-93).

Although the ostensible subject of Snorri's treatise is "hættir skáldskapar", it is apparent from the prose commentary that his focus is on "lofkvæði" (67/15) and both the hierarchy of verseforms and the judgements voiced in his commentary make clear his view of *dróttkvætt* as the pre-eminent form of *skáldskapr* (1/41-3):

Þetta er dróttkvæðr háttir. Með þeima hætti er flest ort þat er vandat er. Þessi er upphaf allra hátta sem málrúnar eru fyrir öðrum rúnum.

Snorri's definition of the acceptable forms of *dróttkvætt* is strict and prescriptive, and it is informed by a principle of metrical consistency that is not at the heart of much of the native poetic tradition, even within the encomium genre. The poetic theory articulated in the prose commentary to *Háttatal* therefore strikes out on a new path - acknowledging the aesthetic of the past, but remaking it according to contemporary notions of literary refinement:

Nú skal rita þá háttu er fornskáld hafa kveðit ok eru nú settir saman, þótt þeir hafi ort sumt með háttaföllum, ok eru þessi hættir dróttkvæðir kallaðir í fornum kvæðum, en sumir finnask í lausum vísum . . . (53/11-14)

[Viða er þat í fornskálda verka er í einni vísu eru ymsir hættir eða háttaföll, ok má eigi yrkja eptir því þó at þat þykki eigi spilla í fornkvæðum. (58/14-16)

In his survey of the verseforms in *Háttatal* and the extant corpus of skaldic poetry, Anthony Faulkes (1991, xviii) has found that there are "clear precedents for just over thirty of them; just over thirty have no precedents at all except in some cases in *Háttatlykill* and the rest have partial precedents, that is to say the features of the verseforms are found in individual lines of earlier verse, but not used consistently throughout a stanza or poem". The foreign fashion that most influenced the metrical inventiveness of *Háttatlykill* and *Háttatal* was rhyme (Helgason and Holtsmark, 1941, 129), although it was also an integral part of the *dróttkvætt* tradition from its beginning. Both works acknowledge the prestige of rhyme (both internal rhyme and end-rhyme) in their names for verseforms: *draughtent* (*Háttatlykill*

4 and *Háttatal* 65), *náhent* (HI 15 - where it is written 'háhent' - and Ht 75), *hrynhenda* (HI 16 - where it is written 'rynhent' - and Ht 62ff.), *detthendr* (HI 18 and Ht 29), *runhenda* (HI 24 and Ht 80ff.), *dunhent* (HI 33 and Ht 24) and *skjálfhenda* (HI 41 and Ht 35). In addition, *Háttatal* preserves the term *þríhent* (Ht 36) for a verseform also found in *Háttalykill* (6), and adds the term *hnugghent* (Ht 76) which clearly expresses the positive valuation of *hendingar*. This point is underscored by the term *háttlaus* (HI 26 and Ht 67) which in fact denotes verse composed without *hendingar* rather than without any other constituent of rhythmic form such as alliteration.

In *Háttatal*, Snorri composes 80 stanzas that involve internal rhyme, a further 14 with end-rhyme, and only 8 without a consistent rhyme scheme at all. He describes the form *alhent*, which has two *aðalhendingar* in each line, in the following way (44/9-20):

Þessi þykkir vera fegrstr ok vandastr, ef vel er ortr, þeira hátta
er kvæði eru ort eptir . . .

Snorri distinguishes his demonstration of the metre (described as "full alhending") from an earlier example by Bishop Klæingr where 'at' 'ek' and 'en' were used without being part of the rhyme scheme.⁵ As with many other verse-forms he demonstrates, Snorri's model is stricter and without internal variation compared to such earlier examples as may be found in the extant corpus (see Faulkes, 1991, 80; Kuhn, 1983, 305-6; Lie, 1958, 337).

Snorri presents the traditional art of *skáldskapr* with a close eye on the historical dimension of the tradition (8/30, 53/11, 58/16), as well as on the rules of praxis for contemporary skalds which he outlines in such detail. But his masterly performance as he makes his metrical century is not without its moments of swagger (95/5-8):

Hvar viti áðr orta
með æðra hætti
mæð of menglötúð
maðr und himins skautum?

and earlier (70/1-4):

[Mitt] er of möeti
[mart lag bralgar
áðr ókveðit
oddbraks spakan

Snorri calls this particular verseform *hagnælt*, a term not elsewhere attested, which may well be an expression of his self-conscious play both with metrical variation and with poetic nomenclature.

⁵ The opposition between syllables marked by rhyme, alliteration and prosodic length and unmarked syllables (see Gade, 1989) is probably another aspect of traditional *dróttkvætt* composition that Snorri is consciously aiming to systematise in his theory of poetics.

In medieval sources, Snorri is attributed with two other praise poems for Earl Skúli, one of which was a *drápa* with a *klofastef* featuring *alhendr*.⁶ The identification of *aðalhendingar* as the quintessential attribute of Norse poetry is expressed elsewhere in Snorri's work. In chapter 6 of *Ynglingasaga*, Snorri describes the speech of the god Óðinn in the following way: "Mælti hann allt hendingum, svá sem nú er þat kveðit, er skáldskapr heitir." None of Óðinn's poetry is quoted by Snorri in *Ynglinga saga* though when the god is quoted in *Gylfaginning*⁷ he speaks in *ljóðaháttir* or *fornyrðislag* rhythm without *hendingar*.⁸

It is clear from his poetic theory, his attribution of *hendingar*-composition to Óðinn, the god of poetry, as well as his own practices as a poet, that Snorri viewed *dróttkvætt* praise poetry as the pre-eminent form of traditional Norse versification, and that in his writings, he aimed to promote this view. In *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* (ch. 91), for instance, he represents King Harald declaiming a verse in simple eddic measure as he goes burnie-less into his final battle, only to pull himself up in a moment of poetic quality-assurance to better commemorate the occasion with a *dróttkvætt* composition:

Þá mælti Harladr konungr Sigurðarson: "Þetta er illa kveðit, ok mun verða at gera aðra vísu betri." Þá kvað hann þetta . .

As Roberta Frank (1978, 28) has observed, by making Harald recite a *dróttkvætt* stanza to replace his eddic verse, "thirteenth-century literary criticism . . . touted the superiority of what was difficult, their own *trobar clus*".

It is apparent from his nephew's account in *Íslendinga saga* that Snorri's views on poetry were not just academic, and that he took *dróttkvætt* composition very seriously indeed. Far from being an ornamental commentary on contemporary Icelandic events, the composition of *dróttkvætt* verse was a political act of great significance (Guðrún Nordal, 1992). After a killing, for instance, discussion centres on "hversu Snorra myndi líka víg þessi eða hvárt hann myndi yrkja um" (357⁹). Sturla also reports in chapters 38-9 of his saga that Snorri's praise poetry (which must have been orally transmitted and recited far and wide) was scorned and parodied in the south of Iceland. The parody hinges on the description of Skúli as

6 "Snorri hafði ort um jarl tvau kvaði. Alhend váru klofastef í drápunni: Harðmúlaðr vas Skúli/ramblíks framast miklu/gnaphjarls skapaðr jarla" (*Íslendinga saga* ch. 38, p. 278).

7 For example "svá sem hér er sagt at Óðinn mællr sjálfv við þann Ás er Loki heitir: Örr ertu Loki/ok ørviti/hví ne legskapu, Loki?/Þriqq Frigg/hygg ek at qll viti/þótt hon sjálfgi segi." and "ok enn hefir hann [Óðinn] nefnzk á fleiri vega þá er hann var kominn til Geirröðar konungs: Heitumsk Grímr/ok Gangleri./ Herjan, Hjálmberti./ Þekkr, Þriði . . ." (21). Quotations from *Gylfaginning* are from Faulkes's 1982 edition.

8 All of the 32 stanzas of poetry Snorri quotes in *Ynglinga saga* are by historical skalds, and only one, by Bragi inn gamli, uses *hendingar* as a structuring principle of the verseform. He quotes 28 stanzas by Þjóðólfr inn hvinverski from *Ynglingatal* and three from *Háleygatal* by Eyvindr skáldaspillir.

9 All references to *Íslendinga saga* are to the 1946 edition of Jóhannesson, Finnbogason and Eldjárn.

hard-nosed ("harðmúlaðr es Skúli") but turn harshly against Snorri as both politician and poet (278-9):

Oss lízk illr at kyssa
jarl, sás ræðr fyr hjarli,
vörr es til hvöss á harra,
harðmúlaðr es Skúli.
Hefr fyr horska jöfra
hrægammis komit sævar,
- þjóð finnr löst á ljóðum -,
leir aldriði meira.

The defamatory words of the poem no doubt found their mark. The kenning "hræsævar gammis leir" refers to the mythic narrative in which Óðinn, disguised as an eagle, obtains the mead of poetry from the giant Suttung and delivers it to the gods, which Snorri tells in chapter 6 of *Skáldskaparmál* (Finnur Jónsson, 1931, 85):

þa spyttli hann vpp miþinum ikerin, en honum var þa sva nær komit, at Svttvngur myndi na honum, at hann sendi aptr svman miopinn, ok var þes eckli gætt; hafði þat hvern, er vildi, ok kollum ver þat skaldfifla lvt. En Svttvnga-mioð gaf Opin asvnum ok þeim monnum, er yrkja kvnv.

Ousted from the company of those skilled in the art of poetry, Snorri is ranked among those who were not recipients of Óðinn's gift but who took for themselves a portion of eagle-shit. For all his learned authority in written treatises - where as self-appointed arbiter of poetic quality and self-made *auctor* in the new syllabus of *skáldskapr* his credentials are unquestionable - Snorri can still be stung by the virulence of the living oral tradition.

Not surprisingly, Sturla reports (284) "Líkaði honum [Snorri] ok illa spott þat, er Sunnlendingar höfðu gert af kvæðum hans," and within a short time physical and poetic justice are meted out to the southerners. Sturla quotes a stanza that did the rounds at Stafaholt at the time, which with good reason has been attributed to Snorri (Guðrún Nordal, 1991, 58). The image of the reluctant kiss is turned against Björn (who receives Grásfóða's fatal kiss), and the opening line of Snorri's stef - "Harðmúlaðr vas Sturla" - is reiterated with cold self-assurance to close the stanza.

As well as the composition of three praise poems for Earl Skúli, Sturla Þórðarson mentions that Snorri also composed poems for King Sverrir and Earl Hákon galinn. *Islandinga saga* is quite explicit about the earl's long-distance reception of the poem - "ok sendi jarlinn gjafar út á mót" and "Jarlinn ritaði til Snorra, at hann skyldi fara utan, ok lézt til hans gera mundu mıklar sæmðir" (269), but of the composition and transmission of the poem the saga says only "Hann [Snorri] orti kvæði". Another of Snorri's compositions, a *lausavísa* composed after the deaths of his brother Sighvatr Sturluson and his nephew Sturla Sighvatsson, is said to have been sent to another relative, Þórðr kakali Sighvatson (ch. 139), a

description that could imply either a written missive or a memorised and recited performance.

In order for the heritage of skaldic composition to have been transmitted down to thirteenth-century Icelanders, poems of considerable length and complexity must have been routinely committed to memory and recited by speakers other than the poet. Snorri's faith in the form of *dróttkvætt* as a guarantee of authenticity even in oral tradition (as articulated in the Prologue to *Heimskringla*) and the cultural prestige of the tradition among upper-class Icelanders lend weight to the possibility that Snorri's own praise poems, including *Háttatal*, were delivered to their patrons without necessarily having been dictated and transmitted as documents.¹⁰ Letters were certainly the medium used by the Norwegian king to give effect to his death-warrant on Snorri (*Íslendinga saga* ch. 151) but whether they were also the medium for Snorri's miscalculated praise two decades earlier is an open question. The compiler of *Sturlunga saga* describes Sturla's sources as "vísindi af fróðum mönnum, þeim er váru á öndverðum dögum hans, en sumt efter bréfum þeim, er þeir rituðu, er þeim váru samtíða, er sögurnar eru frá" (I, 115). There is, however, no indication that the genre of letter writing was anything other than prose, though it is not impossible that the compositional habits of saga narration, including verse quotation, found their way into letters.

Whether it first existed as document or not, the verses of *Háttatal* are likely to have been orally transmitted along with other praise poetry within the charged debate about Icelandic sovereignty in relation to the Norwegian crown, as well as within the less dramatic but culturally significant debate about the parameters of traditional versification in relation to Continental conventions. As *prosimitrum*, *Háttatal* gives voice to two contemporary, but dissimilar, traditions: the oral tradition of virtuoso skaldic composition, in which innovation was an inherent form of display, and the written tradition of pedagogy, in which the definition and naming of types was paramount. Within the verses, Snorri is mindful of the mnemonics necessary for teaching: in st. 67, he refers to the sixty metres he has composed ("Ortak . . . með sex tögum háttá") and in st. 100 he refers to the tally again ("svá er tírætt hundrað talit"). The lesson is reiterated in Snorri's prose. After having initially established the pattern of didactic dialogue between *magister* and *discipulus* that was a convention of continental pedagogy (Krömmelbein, 1992, 118), Snorri continually refers to numbers in his systematic analysis of types: "Sjá hátt er nú skal rita er hinn fjórði þeira er breyttir eru, en hinn fimti at háttatali" (11/9-11); "þessi er hinn tífundi hátt" (16/11); "Tólpta [leyfil] er . . ." (8/40).

¹⁰ Anthony Faulkes (1991 ix) comes to the opposite surmise, that *Háttatal* was likely to have been written down and sent in manuscript form to Norway.

This pedagogic aspect of Snorri's work seems to have been at the forefront of later compilers' minds, as they assiduously numbered types of verseforms for ease of reference¹¹ and, in the Uppsala Codex, provided a kind of table with the names and first lines of stanzas set out in memorable form.¹² The Prologue to the four grammatical treatises in the Codex Wormianus of Snorri's *Edda* makes clear the pedagogic purpose of the assembled works, and focusses particularly on the "ný skáld" - the product of the new literary *ars poetica* of praise poetry that Snorri had promoted so enthusiastically (Ólsen, 1884, 153):

Enn nú skal lýsa hversu ný skaald ok fræði menn, ok æinkannlega klerkarner, villu lofaz lááta, hversu kveða skal, ok onyta æigi at helldr þat, sem forner menn hafa framit, vitan þat sem klerklegar bækr banna, þvíat þat er nattrylgt at menn se nú smasmvlgari sem fræði bækrnar drefaz nú viðara.

The strands which are brought together in fourteenth-century compilations did not necessarily run side by side a century earlier. The degree to which Snorri's metrical treatise is a singular presentation of traditional poetry according to particular aesthetic and cultural values can be assessed by comparing it to Óláfr Þórðarson's treatment of traditional Norse poetics within his grammatical treatise. Óláfr's frame of reference is quite different from Snorri's, determined as it is by the theoretical orientation and procedures of Continental rhetorical scholarship. But the ideas set forth in Snorri's prologue (Cluntes Ross, 1987, 27) appear to inform Óláfr's elaboration of the relationship between northern and classical poetry (10.4):

öll ær æin listin skalld skapr sa, ær romverskir spækingar namv iathænis borg a griklandi ok snerv siþan i latinv mal, ok sa lioða hátt æða skalldskapr, ær oðinn ok aðrir asia menn flvttv norðr higat . .

Throughout his treatise, Óláfr maintains a clear distinction between "diktív vers ritin í latinv skalldskap" (5.8) and "norrænn skalldskapr" noting when particular formations are "litt geymt" in Norse poetry (5.11) or a classical figure "finz stalldan" (15.7) in traditional verse.¹³ Nor does he suppress the need to discourse at some length about the particularities of Norse poetry when it is significantly different from classical forms. As we saw above, Snorri lays the emphasis on the role of *hendingar* in *dróttkvætt* and its variations, taking for granted the fundamental structural role of alliteration.¹⁴ In his consideration of *paronomasia* Óláfr echoes Snorri's judgement, and refers explicitly to Snorri's work (15.15):

¹¹ The numbering system varies between manuscripts. See the textual notes in Faulkes, pp. 41-7.

¹² See Grape et al. (1977) facsimile and transcription of p. 93.

¹³ In other places the distinction is expressed simply by the opposition *vers* and *skalldskap* (14.10). Note too the clarifications "ok ær sv figura [elipsis] mǫk i versum, ænn ækci finnvm ver hana inorænmv skalldskap" (14.14).

¹⁴ "Hér er stafasetning sú er hætti ræðr ok kveðandi gerir, þat eru tólf stafir í eyri, ok eru þrír settir í hvern fjórðung . . . Sá stafur ræðr kveðandi" (1/9-13).

Þetta kǫllvm ver aðalhæendingar (skaldskap, ok taka af þessi figurv vpphaf þeir hættir, ær með hæendingvm ærv saman sættir, ok breytiz þat amarga vega, sœm finnaz man þatta tali því, ær snorri hæfir ort.

But as he moves to the next category of *schema lexeos, paranomeon*, the divergence between Óláfr's focus and Snorri's becomes plain. Once vernacular poetry is considered in the context of Latin poetics, where alliteration serves only an ornamental role, the fundamental nature of alliteration in the Norse tradition needs to be brought to the fore (15.17-19):

Þessi figvra ær miqk hǫfð i mals snilldar list, ær rethorica hættir, ok ær hon vphaf til kvæðanndi þeirrar, ær saman heilðr norænvvm skaldskap, sva sœm naglar hallda skipt saman, ær smiðr gerir, ok ferr svndrlavst ælla borð fra borði. sva hæilðr ok þessi figvra saman kveðandi iskaldskap með stǫfvm þeim ær stvðlar hæita ok hǫfvðstafir. hin fyrri figvra gerir fægrið með liðs greinvvm iskald skap, sva sœm fælling skips borða. Ænn þo ærv fastir víðir saman, þeir sem negidir ærv, at æigi sæ væl fæilðir, sœm kvæðandi hællz i hædingarlavsvvm hattvm.

The structural integrity of Norse poetry - from *ljóðaháttir* to *dróttkvætt* - depends on the system of alliteration, and the alliterating staves are described by Óláfr as analogous to the nails that hold the planks of a ship together: without nails the planks fall apart and there is no ship; without alliterating staves the lines fall apart and there is no poem. *Hendingar* take their place in this structural analogy as perfectly fitted planks - something that makes for a better finish but is not structurally essential. As Óláfr makes clear, *kveðandi*¹⁵ still obtains in metres that are *hendingalaus*.

Óláfr's theory of traditional Norse versification is articulated in ch. 15 of his treatise, entitled *de scemalexo*. "Scema ær kǫllvð agirzkv ænn skrýð a norenv" is widely used "þviat hon þikcir lafnan fegra iskaldskap" (15.1-2). Within this chapter Óláfr ranges freely across the corpus of vernacular poetry in his selection of examples, beginning with a quotation from an otherwise unknown eddic poem about Óðinn's ravens Huginn and Muninn, and later choosing another pair of lines from the eddic *Grímnismál*. As *schema* is the category of classical rhetoric that most pertains to poetic structure,¹⁶ it is noteworthy that of the 22 poetic quotations Óláfr chooses as illustrations, ten are composed without *hendingar*. In the treatise as a

¹⁵ The word *kveðandi* denotes the sound of poetry, or the general concept of language structured as poetry. In both Snorri's use and Óláfr's, it most often refers to alliterative structure, but in certain contexts it can also incorporate *hendingar* as a constituent of structure (see Faulkes, 1991, 123-4).

¹⁶ The overlap between Snorri's work and the final chapter of Óláfr's treatise, *De Tropo et Metaphoræ*, involves *Skaldskaparmál* more than *Háttatal*, though *sannkenningar* are discussed in both works. Óláfr again draws attention to the greater significance particular figures have for Norse versification: "Með þessi figurv ímetaphoral ærv saman settar allar kenningar i norrænvvm skaldskap, ok hon ær miqk sva vpphaf til skaldskaparmals" (16.21), and the aesthetic importance of *sannkenningar* "ok þikcir þessi figvra mest þryða skaldskap" (16.40).

whole the proportion is less than one fifth; nevertheless Óláfr's selections demonstrate a different sense of the scope of *skaldskap* from Snorri's. Neither treatise aims to document the full poetic tradition as it had survived into the thirteenth century, yet within their different projects both authors show knowledge of a vast corpus of orally transmitted verse, and give expression to judgements about how that heritage can be transformed into a literary canon.

It is beyond the scope of Óláfr's treatise to make explicit judgements about the hierarchy of metrical forms, or the pre-eminence of *dróttkvætt* praise poetry, though his commentary on the figure of *ironia* is worthy of note: "her er oæginlig framfæring ok líking, þvíat lof ær fyrir háðil sætt. Þessi figvra ær lafnan sætt i skaldskap" (16.58). Óláfr was himself an accomplished poet in the *dróttkvætt* tradition, having composed poems on King Hákon, Thomas A'Beckett, *Árónsdrápa* and a twelve-stanza poem in *hrynhent* metre (Finnur Jónsson, 1912-15, All 92-8). Mention is also made in *Íslendinga saga* (chapter 121) of a *drápa* Óláfr composed about Bishop Þórlakr. In all probability, his own poetic praxis accorded fairly well with the *ars poetica* Snorri articulated in *Háttatal*.

While the ambit of Óláfr's treatise is broader than Snorri's, he nevertheless seems to be mindful of the newly defined prescriptive tradition of *dróttkvætt* composition outlined by Snorri. In his explanation of *antonomasia* in chapter 16, Óláfr says: "Þessa figvrv kollv ver niarðarvott i skaldskap, ok ær hon þo æigi með læfvm talit" (16.32) - apparently referring to the licences enumerated by Snorri in *Háttatal* (Collings, 1967, 71), though *niarðarvotttr* does not seem to involve a metrical licence.¹⁷ In his discussion of end-rhyme and its analogous role in Latin and Norse poetics, Óláfr first quotes a Latin couplet and then turns to Snorri for a parallel metrical example (5.9):

Þessar somu hendingar ærv ok settar i norrænv skaldskap i þeim
hætti, er ver kollvm rvnhendv, sem snorri kvað:
Orms ær glatt galla
með gumna spjalla.

The verse he quotes is from *Háttatal* 83, which is there described as composed "með fullri runhending" with all eight lines rhyming on "-alla". Although there is abundant evidence of end-rhyme used in Norse poetry, there seem to be no examples of *full runhenda* before Snorri's time, and the exact metrical pattern of *Háttatal* 83 is not elsewhere attested (Faulkes, 1991, 86-8). In such a case, Snorri's poetics may be seen as laying the foundations on which Óláfr can subsequently build his theory of commonality between the classical and vernacular traditions. Similarly, Óláfr's

¹⁷ Óláfr only uses the word *leýfi* on one other occasion (15.1) to explain the appropriateness of *schemata* in poetry ("ænn þo ær scema miklv i leýfi sætt, þvíat hon þikcir lafnan fegra iskaldskap"). Snorri, however, uses it frequently, both in the methodological outline of his work (0/7), and in his enumeration of twelve metrical licences: 6/22, 8/15, 8/17, 8/18, 8/24, 8/25.

identification of *homoeoteleuton* with the Norse form *nýi háttir* depends on Snorri for a poetic demonstration (*Háttatal* 73), and perhaps Snorri is responsible for the innovation of both verseform and terminology, since this metrical name does not occur in *Háttalykill*.¹⁸

In all, Óláfr quotes eight excerpts of poetry by Snorri, six of which are from *Háttatal*.¹⁹ In other instances, Snorri is appealed to not as an authority on particular metrical forms, but as a canonical poet in the native tradition. For example, the second pair of lines from verse 28 of *Háttatal* which exemplifies the metre in which only one syllable separates the alliterating staves in the first line of each pair (termed *tvískelft* by Snorri), is quoted by Óláfr to demonstrate *cacemphaton* (13.4) "æf sa ær niðr lags stafr i æinni søgn, ær fyrstr ær sættr i því orði, ær eptir kemr" an altogether different phonic phenomenon. Óláfr gives the native term for this stylistic feature "þræsköld," a poetic term not elsewhere recorded.²⁰

In many cases, Óláfr's terminology accords with Snorri's usage. *Bragarmál* is used in both works to denote the elision of vowels to contract two syllables into one²¹ - indicating either a traditional poetic term in common use (though it is not elsewhere recorded) or direct scholarly influence. At the level of lexis, the vagaries of textual transmission and preservation do not permit confident assertions of originality of terminology or water-tight claims of intellectual dependence between earlier and later works. The metrical term *kviðuháttir*, for instance, occurs in *Háttalykill* (st. 2) and Óláfr's work (11.9), but not in *Háttatal*, although the verseform it describes is the final one to be demonstrated by Snorri (Wessén, 1915). In some cases, such as *niarðarvottr*, the mention by Óláfr is unique in the written record.

In other cases, *Háttalykill* and *Háttatal* preserve intriguingly different names for the same verseform. What in *Háttalykill* is termed *konungslag* (st. 37) is called *trollsháttir* by Snorri (st. 63), perhaps reflecting Snorri's distaste for metrical excess (Faulkes, 1991, xi). The related *hryniandi* verseform, *draughtent* (st. 65), is described by Snorri in terms of the *dróttkvætt* stanza perceptible within it ("Svá má ok af taka í qðru ok hinu fjórðan vísuorði ina sömu samstöfun ok er þá þat dróttkvætt") and he ends his description with the judgement "ok verðr sumt eigi mjúkt" (65/12-14). This negative evaluation is expressed in another native term, *flagðaháttir* (*flagðalag* at *Háttalykill* 32), which also seems to be conceived by Snorri as *dróttkvætt* disfigured:

¹⁸ Anthony Faulkes (1991, 85) observes that this form may have been invented by Snorri.

¹⁹ 5.9 (Ht 83/5-6); 12.10 (source not extant); 13.4 (Ht 28/3-4); 15.10 (Ht 15/7-16/1); 15.11 (Ht 40/1-4, though Óláfr introduces the quotation simply "sem her"); 15.23 (Ht. 73/1-4); 16.34-5 (Ht 5/3-6); and 16.66 (See Finnur Jónsson, 1912-15, All 78).

²⁰ I am indebted to the Arnarnagæan Dictionary card file for this and other observations on the occurrence of technical terms in medieval prose works.

²¹ Snorri (8/20) and Óláfr (14.5).

"er her aukit bæði samstöfu ok fullnat orðtak sem framast, ok eptir þá samstöfun eru þrjár samstöfur ok er rétt dróttkvætt ef hon er ór tekin" (34/9-11).

A comment made by Óláfr suggests that he and Snorri were not alone in their consideration of Norse poetics in relation to continental models. His discussion of pronunciation and intonation patterns in Latin verse concludes (8.8):

Enn með því at þesskonar greinir heyra litt norrænv skaldskap
at flestra manna ætlan, þa tala ek þar vm ekki fleira at sinnt.

Who the other members of this literary circle are is left unsaid, but it is presumably the same group Óláfr has in mind when he says "ok þat hyggivm ver fornt mal vera. ænn nv ær þat kallað vindandin forna i skaldskap, þvíat þat ær nv ekki haft i norænv mali" (14.4). We might also suppose that many of the terms introduced by Óláfr with - "ok kollum vér þat . . ." - were current among members of this community. Snorri uses similar formulations in *Háttatal*: "Þenna hátt kalla menn . . ." While these phrases probably do service as stylistic clichés in both treatises, they are also likely to reflect an intellectual milieu in which the parameters of poetic innovation and *skrið* were discussed and assessed, and where a vernacular terminology with which to theorize native poetics within the context of learned continental rhetoric would have been expanded.

Presumably this community would have encompassed practising skalds and those who took an active interest in textual production in the vernacular. An explicit reference to the copying of manuscripts among the Sturlunga (*Íslendinga saga* chapter 79) involves Sturla Sighvatsson, a member of the branch of the Sturlung family whose poetic works appear not to have been as well documented as the branches headed by Snorri and Þórðr (Sveinsson, 1937). Sturla and his father Sighvatr Sturluson are attributed with one and two stanzas respectively in *Íslendinga saga*, but Sturla's sister, Steinvör Sighvatsdóttir, who is listed in *Skáldatal* as a poet in the service of the Norwegian chieftain Gautr á Mel, has ascribed to her only one half-stanza of a dream verse (*Íslendinga saga* ch. 134).

The manuscripts of *Snorra Edda* provide evidence of a continuing industry of poetic nomenclature into the next century. The Codex Regius of *Snorra Edda* preserves a text of *Háttatal* written around the middle of the first half of the fourteenth century, that is, around a century after its supposed composition. A second, apparently contemporary hand (Finnur Jónsson, 1892) has added the following technical terms: "mala háttir" (st. 95), "stakarþar lag" (st. 98 - the prose text has "stikkalag"), and "galldra lag" (st. 101). The Utrecht manuscript dubs the verseform of st. 54 (which in the prose is ascribed to the poet king Ragnarr lóðbrok) "Ragnarsháttir" and that of st. 11 "fjórðungalok".

The latter name is also preserved in the Uppsala manuscript of *Snorra Edda* but not within the text of *Háttatal* itself. *Háttatal*, as we know it from other

manuscripts, begins on the verso side of a leaf within the second last gathering of the manuscript. The recto side of that leaf preserves 22 lines that constitute an enumeration of the names and first lines of verses 1 to 34 and verse 36 of *Háttatal*, and although spaces have been left for headings within the text of the treatise, they have not always been written (see especially p. 99, where generous spaces have been left before verses 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15). Other metrical names in the summary list in the Uppsala manuscript are "bragarhátt" (st. 31) and "langlokum", the latter term also written into the Regius text by the second hand, and used by the author of the so-called *Fourth Grammatical Treatise* preserved in Codex Wormianus of *Snorra Edda*.

The explicit theorising that is evident in learned treatises has been the focus of this paper, but there are other interesting textual practices that also add to our understanding of thirteenth-century poetics. One of these is verse quotation within prose works, and more particularly the kinds of verses chosen to open and close different kinds of texts. In *Gylfaginning*, for instance, Snorri quotes the verses of historical skalds in the frame narrative with traditional eddic verse spoken, or quoted, by Hár within the mythic narrative itself. Sturla Þórðarson, on the other hand, opens and closes *Íslendinga saga* with verses spoken in dreams by legendary figures, but uses verses by actors in the narrative for the bulk of quotations within the saga. I have examined the quotation of dream verses in *Íslendinga saga* elsewhere (Quinn, 1987), and the interesting alignment of verseform with the gender and social status of the dreamer as an index of contemporary attitudes to poetry.

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