SEMANTIC FOCUS AND THE RHETORIC OF SITUATION: CLOSE READINGS OF THE SHIELD KENNINGS IN *RAGNARSDRÁPA* AND *HAUSTLǪNG*

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Scholars commenting on the skaldic 'kennings' have fairly accurately reflected the unsure state in which we read the verses housing them. Since Meissner's Die Kenningar der Skalden[1], the focus has generally been on attempting to organise and define what limited concrete knowledge we have about them, in the hope that this stirring of the pot will turn up crucial new information or insight on the field. The real stirring required, I suspect, is at the profounder level of our approach to the kenning as phenomenon. These basically grammatical analyses are hampered, in any case, by our limited understanding of the nature and role of kennings, and this is only compounded when broader theoretical questions are overlooked — I often get the impression that most progress on the question of kennings is made in discussions for which they are not the primary focus. That said, this paper does focus on the nature and operation of kennings. It does so, however, within the broader context of semantics – of 'readings' of the verse. The focus proposed here is on the focus of the kennings themselves. That is, I wish to explore the rhetoricality of their formulation and contextual situation, and investigate the rhetorical purposes that are served as a result. Rather than embark upon an entirely theoretical discussion, however, I wish to turn to examine the kennings for shields in two comparable texts – the 'shield-poems'[2] *Ragnarsdrápa* by Bragi Boddason[3] and *Haustlǫng* by Þjóðólfr of Hvin[4] – in which, naturally, those kennings are semantically prominent. This contextual frame shall form the core of the method employed.[5]

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[1] Rudolf Meissner, Die Kenningar der Skalden: Ein Beitrag zur skaldischen Poetik, Georg Olms Verlag, 1984. For a critical discussion of kenning theory, see Thomas Gardner, 'The Old English Kenning: A Characteristic Feature of Germanic Poetical Diction?', in Modern Philology, 67, 1969-1970, pp. 109-117. One salient divergence from the systematic approach is E.O.G. Turville-Petre, Scaldic Poetry, Oxford, 1976, pp. xlv-lix. His comment, that 'Kennings, when skilfully used, give rich mental pictures,' and the subsequent discussion (p.lvi f.) were crucial in the development of my own ideas, as expounded in this paper.

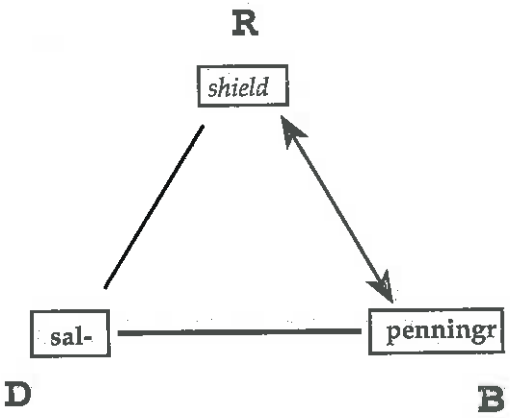
[2] So called because both were drafted by the poets in thanks for a shield-gift from the patron.

[3] My edition for this is taken from the unpublished BLitt. thesis of Margaret Clunies Ross, submitted at Oxford University, and supervised by E.O.G. Turville-Petre.

[4] Finnur Jónsson (ed.), Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning, Vol. 1B, Copenhagen, 1973 pp. 14-18.

[5] John Lindow, 'Narrative and the Nature of Skaldic Poetry', in Arkiv för nordisk filologi, 97, 1982, p. 99, argues that there has been 'a scholarly predilection to examine the stanza rather than the poem, and an overlooking of the spotty transmission of the entire corpus.' This point is taken, but not as ruling out contextual readings focused upon skaldic stanzas. Lindow shows (pp. 96-98) that there is little grammatical connection and prioritisation of the episodes in the verses. There is, however, a prominent use of juxtaposition, and this in itself is evidence for a strong contextual sensibility regarding the position of the stanza and even the half-stanza; evidence that this discussion, in focusing on a phenomenon – kennings – physically

Snorri has the god Bragi explain the basic sense of kennings to Ægir. 'These are periphrastic terms,' he explains. 'With each of those that I mention, I add a term for the attribute of another.'[1] In essence, this takes what we might call a kernel form (after Chomsky) of 'base term' (B) plus a 'determining term' (D), where the base is a substitution and the determiner a semantic colligation for a referenced sense (R) – the 'literal meaning' of the kennings. In the simple two-part form, the elementary terms may be either discreet or compounded nouns (but, if discreet, there is usually some syntactic link, such as a genitival relationship, between the base and the determiner). A diagrammatic representation of this system is something like the following (arrows signify a relationship of substitution):[2]



The 'elementary' structure is often complicated by either of two variations. The first is the possibility for potentially indefinite extension of the kenning by replacing any term with a whole sub-kenning – that is, a kenning for one of the original kenning's constitutive terms. The other is the skaldic practice of compressing the two terms of such a sub-kenning into one. This occurs in the once-extended (*tvíkennt*) kennings for some well-known referents – certain figures of myth, for example – collapsing them into apparently simple kenning forms. The 'rule' of replacement sub-kennings, then, is not hard or fast.

Much more likely to cause referential trouble for the reader than the quirks in kenning structure, which is theoretically quite simple, are the practical difficulties: of locating and construing kenning elements, especially due to the typical syntactic dispersion of elements in skaldic stanzas; and of

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located at the level of stanza and *helmingr*, must take as a primary justification – a 'first principle'.

[1] Anthony Faulkes (trans.), Snorri Sturluson: *Edda*, Everyman, London, 1992, p.64.

[2] The 'system' being most clearly expressed by Thomas Gardner, 'The Application of the Term "Kenning"', in Neophilologus, 56, 1972, pp. 464-468. My example here is the *Ragnarsdrápa* shield kenning *salpenningr* (st. 12) – 'hall-coin'.

the often esoteric reference afforded. This latter obscurantism takes such forms as far-flung allusion to Norse myths and their details, disaggregation of the forms and functions of referring and referenced objects, connotatively disconnected base and determining terms, and so forth. The former, meanwhile, raises the disconcerting possibility of audience's (or reader's) misconstrual and dislocation. Both difficulties are clearly as much a part of the system as any aspect that could be described as within the kenning structure proper. Skaldic poetry gives many indications that interpretative challenge was an acknowledged textual feature, through the positioning of adjectives that prompt, and of verbs that metaphorically suggest, to steer recipient analyses towards particular senses and collocations of the terms. It is clear that semantic difficulty was an accepted and appreciated aesthetic correlative of the skaldic techniques — not that this comes as any surprise: if the poetic culture had not valued the textual strategies of ambiguity and interpretative thwarting, one would hardly expect that the intricate corpus of kennings should have arisen.

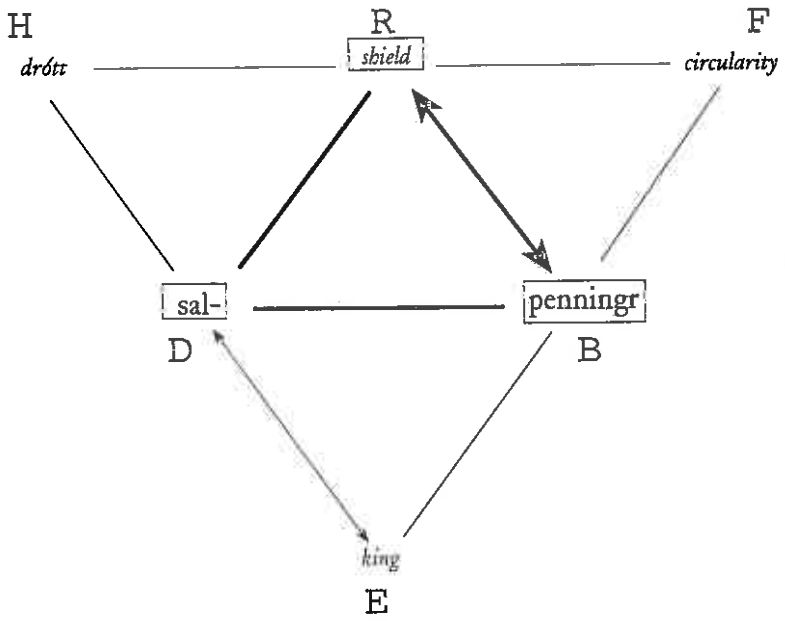
The pictorial representation of the kenning is of particular interest in that it illustrates the three terms as though located on one plane. Of course, this is not textually concrete; the referent is not physically present in the instant of the kenning, but is rather inferred, or abduced, from the clues given within the kenning, plus all those available to a listener (or reader) from outside it. That means 'decodings' of a kenning can vary from person to person, although in general most of the relevant clues are common to all listeners. The two basic clues of a kenning are a trigger for individualised semiosis, then. The fact of this trigger is our only licence for treating the referent as a textual presence; it is an acknowledgement that we are dealing with concepts and their colligations. Once we have acknowledged this, we are free to explore in detail the operation of kennings within the conceptual domain. At that level, the kenning is a much richer phenomenon than the straightforward referential model gives it credit for. This is because its semantics are more conceptually extensive than this approach has acknowledged.

If I may be permitted a certain digression, the consequences of this line are worth considering. According to the diagrammatised model, when we recognise points B and D, we infer R. But if we can abduce the substitution for B, then we must be aware of a potential substitution for D — that is, a determiner that would premise B instead of R. It is intrinsic to the kenning model that any term has specific terms that it may be *kennt við* in certain semantic environments. For *salpenningr*, our archetype, this notional 'exchange' determiner (E) is probably 'king'[1]. That, at any rate, is the collocation to *sal* that I read. At the same time, since this potential for a semantic inference away from the direct referential focus of the kenning is grounded in an assumed sense of the semantic properties of the elementary terms (B and D), and if our evidence to impute such a sense is the properties that B and D share with R (the premise that R is inferred from the semantics

[1] Taken in its mythological context, the king alluded to by this kenning is none other than Óðinn. Although such contextual readings are the goal of this paper, in this case I hope it is sufficient to show simply that there is an 'E'-type allusion in any such kenning, and turn to that contextualising when we come to close readings of some of the kennings in their contexts.

they have in common), then there is reason to believe that listeners were fully conscious of the shared semantics in question. That is, from D and R we can infer the presence of a collocated semantic *habitus* (H), which is constituted of those specific aspects of the determiner that premise the referent, for it is only through the discerning of these aspects that B and D are reconciled in R. Similarly, from the aspects of functionality that permit substitution of R for B, we can infer the specific functionality (F) that those terms notionally share. That the inferences are notional does not of itself make them any different from R, for, as discussed, the referent itself is not textually concrete. A diagram of this extended model, showing inferences 'circularity' from *penningr* and 'shield' at F, and *drótt* from *sal* and 'shield' at H, is my response to these possibilities as the kenning has thrown them up. Nevertheless, I have chosen *salpenningr* as the exemplar on account of the straightforward nature of its elements' connotation within the context of Old Norse verse kennings. I hope most people would not object to the specific interpretations I impose. Figure Two, then, sets out relations of collocation within this semantic field.

Figure 2: The 'semantic map' of the kenning



What we generate in drawing such diagrams is a kind of map, albeit skeletal, of the semantics of the kenning. If the notional points (represented in italic type) are accepted, then their configuration seems to represent something about the relations among themselves and the concrete 'basic

terms' of the kenning: E lies opposite R, F opposite D, and H opposite B. In itself, this may appear to explain little, but if we are assuming that decoding – the process with which traditional kenning scholarship has preoccupied itself – involves relating term to term by conceptual affinities (*penningr* is to E as R is to *sal-*), then we already assume that the notional terms are built into the kenning as text. Each of the added notional points F, H, and E reflects a culturally fixed element of the process through which kennings permit analysis. The 'map', then, illustrates what is demonstrably true: the kenning is invested with an auto-generative supply of concepts, whose relations are more or less firm. Its six illustrated categories and positions are in no way a limit on the possibilities — although they are a logical minimum: from two basic terms and a simple correlative there must be six products. In fact the correlation is rarely simple, just as language rarely permits mathematical reduction.

What we have discussed so far is not the focus of kennings, but their sensibility. The sense in which two variable inputs turn over six and more concepts (and extended kennings serve to compound this) goes some way to explaining the semantic explosiveness of skaldic poetry. When we ponder over two terms, we cognise many more. It does not explain what the kennings were useful for in any real sense, however. For this, we need to turn to examine particular kennings within their contexts and in detail. Out of a desire for regularity, I shall continue to employ the technical terms of this discussion as above, to the exclusion of their usage by others.

The first kennings we examine are those of the beginnings to the poems. In *Ragnarsdrápa* there are two four-line stanzas in the form of separated *helmingar*, however the status of the first four lines is extremely dubious[1]. We begin, then, with the second stanza so called:

> Nema svát góð ens gialla
> giǫld baugnafaðs vildi
> meyiar hióls inn mæri
> mǫgr Sigurðar Hǫgna

There is one extended kenning here: *hióls meyiar Hǫgna* – 'the wheel [shield] of Hǫgni's daughter [Hildr]'. 'Shield' is referenced, strictly speaking, by Hildr's wheel, and Hildr is, by *sannkenningr* (periphrastic but not substitutive expression), a simple matter of knowing who Hǫgni's daughter is. To diagrammatise this kenning according to the principles of the 'semantic map' above, it is worth noting, would require a three-dimensional model. Actually, to discuss the three-part (*tvíkennt*) kenning in strict terms is not an adequate representation of the device itself in any case: to *hióls* the adjectives *gialla* and *baugnafaðs* should be added, since these have been designed to cast *hióls* in a particular light — a light in which we are more likely to be aware of the similarities between a wheel and a shield. Likewise, in referring to

[1] Snorra Edda does not arrange either of these *helmingar* in such a way as to show any particular relationship between it and *Ragnarsdrápa* (see Faulkes, op. cit.). But whereas the link with Hildr (see below) makes it likely that the second stanza is a part of the positively identifiable *Ragnarsdrápa* text, it seems unlikely that the name Hrafnketill in stanza 1 could apply to anyone in the context of that poem.

Hildr by her well-known relation to Hǫgni, Bragi reminds us of the violent and military legend from which we know them, with which stanzas 8 to 12 extensively concern themselves, and of the very irony of the relationship itself – a source of martial references. From both ends, as it were – from its coordinating structure and from its semantic environment – the kenning's elements have been cast in what we might call a pro-shield light. The reverse of this is instructive. Since the analogues to this poem indicate that a praise of the shield is appropriate here[1], the constitutive semantics of the kenning for (*við*) this object of praise have effectively been implicated in the social role of the poem. For the legendary material, this means that the kenning by which we arrive at 'shield' is also a legitimator of that myth's place in the poem. Stanzas 8 to 12, then, are in juxtaposition with stanza 2; the social aspect of stanza 2 is an inevitable collocation with the narrative sequence of those later stanzas. It has been the function of the kenning, armed by the social situation, to bring these meanings into the focus of the poem. The kenning's focus, then, is on semantics, whilst its context is highly rhetorically charged.

The opening eight lines of *Haustlǫng*, are not so historically dubious as those of *Ragnarsdrápa*, although they contain the obvious challenge of missing material. Again, it is the second *helmingr* that is the more reliable:

> Týframra sék tíva
> trigglaust of far þriggia
> á hreingǫru hlýri
> hildar fats ok þjaza.

Here too, the kenning is clearly conditioned by environment: *hreingǫru hlyri hildar fats* – 'the livid-rendered uppermost surface of the battle's clothes [shield-covering]'. So, although we strictly decode only *hildar fats*, it is nonetheless a *fatr [með] hreingǫru hlyri*[2], which makes the reference much less ambiguous. The kenning performs the same sort of role as in the previous example. By referring to þiazi's place on the shield-covering, Þjóðólfr sets out the conditions of relevancy between the tale of that giant's encounter with the Æsir (expounded at length in stanzas 2 to 14) and the poem's rhetorical imperatives, namely that the narrative in turn serves to reflect on the quality of the shield. But by making the reference, as he does, to an instrumental and active life of the covering – as the 'clothing of battle' – he implicates it in the adversarial drama and narrative tension of the tale to be unfolded. The relationship between the 'three divinely bold gods' and þiazi is immediately brought into focus, with explication to come. Again, then,

[1] Cf. *Haustlǫng*, as discussed below.
[2] Cf. *Ragnarsdrápa*, stanza 1:

> Vitið, Hrafnketill, heyra
> hvé hreingróit steini
> þrúðar skalk ok þengil
> þiófs ilia blað leyfa.

Hreingróit steini, similarly, is an epithetic environment for the shield kenning *blað ilia þiófs þrúðar*.

the kenning functions in two similar directions: the 'content' of the poem is brought to bear on that social situation which motivates the exercise, and the semantic collocations and connotations are brought into focus. Or, looking at it from a different angle, the semantic and rhetorical properties of the kenning have been paired off with, respectively, the focus and situation of the poetics. There are many more kennings for shields we could analyse in this way, and four more of them will be examined in detail here.

It serves us well to compare the kennings of the repeated *stef* (refrain) in each of these poems. The refrain of *Ragnarsdrápa* occurs twice, in stanzas 7:

> Þat sék fall á fǫgrum
> flotna randar botni.
> Ræs gǫfumk reiðar mána
> Ragnarr ok fiǫlð sagna.

and 12:

> Þá má sókn á Svǫlnis
> salpenningi kenna.
> Ræs gǫfumk reiðar mána
> Ragnarr ok fiǫlð sagna.

Within these eight lines there are three instances of shield kenning, of which two are the repeated *Ræs reiðar mána*, alongside *Svǫlnis salpenningi*. We have already observed the constitution of the latter kenning, which is, as Clunies Ross has pointed out, of a fairly straightforward kind[1], and so I do not propose to examine it in detail here, except to note that it is in an equivalent position to the *randar botni* of stanza 7, which is poetical diction but not *kennt við* anything unstated. This distinction suggests, if anything, that stanza 12 is most probably correctly placed after stanzas 3 to 7. The repeated *Ræs reiðar mána*, however, is of particular interest because it is connected to the only sure mentions of Bragi's patron in the poem. The moon of Rær's chariot is a shield because Rær is a 'sea king', which appears to mean that he was an impressive figure; it certainly means that his *habitus* was oceanic, and so the carriage of his road-substitute must be a sea-going vessel – a ship – whose moon, marking the poetical function of circularity (as was the case with *-penningr*), must by dint of referential necessity be a shield. The mythic learning required to unpick this kenning makes it an ideal image with which to preface the *fiǫlð sagna*. More than that, it is exemplary of the inspirational properties of the shield to which the *helmingr* alludes, implicating as it does the very shape of the object in the nature of narrative. In this sense the juxtaposition acts as a conflationary technique: *ok* is invested with the grammatical significance of copula as semantics are connected and augmented, with the kenning as focal point.

The *stef* of *Haustlǫng* occurs in the second *helmingar* of stanzas 13:

[1] Op. cit., p. 259. This is notwithstanding earlier caveats regarding the need to contextualise our reading of what is undoubtedly a contextually composed kenning.

Þat's of fátt á fjalla
Finns ilja brú minni.
Baugs þák bifum fáða
bifkleif at Þórleifi.

and 20:

Gǫrla lítk á Geitis
garði þær of farðir.
Baugs þák bifum fáða
bifkleif at Þórleifi.

As with the refrains of *Ragnarsdrápa*, the repeated shield kenning here, *Baugs bifkleif*, is placed alongside another shield reference in both of the *helmingar*. We should note that this placement of the refrain's shield-kenning ('the moving cliff of the ring') is in itself a significant reflection of the role of the device. Within these 'shield poems', it is only in the refrain-*helmingar* that there are two shield kennings side-by-side. In each of our examples from *Haustlǫng* the repeated phrase comes after a mythically referential kenning, and it appears to announce the closure of a narrative sequence[1]. As with *Ragnarsdrápa*, the shield is given an 'adornment' – *bifum fáða* – that, as well as paying homage to the patron, deals pointedly with the representative art of the shield — pointedly, that is, because at what is a turning-point of the poem's narrative, it points to the aspect of the shield (graphic depiction) which is closely equivalent to that narrative. The kenning's focus is on representational semantics, while its rhetorical effect is to highlight the context, both of the poem and of the kenning as a moment within the poem.

In broadening our discussion to shield-kennings whose positions are not so conventionally significant as those in the introduction or refrain, we might presumably be quick to find any significant differences. With the exception of certain obvious distinguishing-marks[2], these are remarkably few. Turning to the first *helmingr* of stanza 17, the immediate difference is a more tortured syntax, making its kenning's elementary terms harder to assemble.

Brátt fló bjarga gæti
— bǫnd ollu því — randa
(ímun) fǫlr und iljar
íss (vildu svá dísir)

A subtler difference is the apparently humorous undertones of the kenning in relation to the passage. The reference of *randa fǫlr íss* is to a shield-surface — the 'pale ice of shield-rims' must be a shiny and hard circular surface —

[1] Assuming, of course, that Snorri's excerpts do not mislead us on this.
[2] Repetition of the *stef* being the most obvious of all. Other distinctions, such as the initial addressing question, are more correctly matters of concern for the poems' diction than for the kennings, although these could certainly have consequences for the kennings in turn.

but discerning the referent does not divest it of its component significances. In this case, Hrungnir, whom the previous stanza reported going into violent convulsions when he perceived his warlike slayer, has been duped by Þialfi into giving himself cold feet — not that he of stone heart and stone brain would likely register this indictment-by-substitution of the kenning, but Þjóðólfr's audiences were probably somewhat more alert. The analogies from stanza 13 and the rather dubious first stanza of *Ragnarsdrápa* suggest that this particular legend was a popular source of reference for its absurdity. Moreover there is an incontrovertibly ridiculous compound, ***hraundrengr***, in the second ***helmingr*** of the stanza, which suggests a pro-humour environment. Perhaps Þjóðólfr was prepared to present a more playful sensibility in the main body of the poem. Importantly, he did not go so far as to ridicule the shield itself, however. The sense of the kenning also works significantly at the level of narrative semantics. It depicts an elemental counterpoint to the 'guardian of rocks', under whose footsoles the shield-surface 'swiftly flew'. Whether or not ridicule is a valid inference (I think it is), this particular arrangement of rock – Hrungnir – and ice – his shield – is one that, we are told, the binding-gods and fight-goddesses are very happy about. There is comparable irony in the first stanza of *Ragnarsdrápa* (which, whatever doubt we may have about its status, is almost certainly an opening *helmingr* to a 'shield-poem'). More remarkable than the differences from earlier examples, then, are the fundamental similarities: the kenning 'focuses on' its extensive semantics, whilst it brings the context, within the poem and without, 'into focus'.

The last example we examine here is from stanza 4 of *Ragnarsdrápa*.

> Flaut of set við sveita
> sóknar alfs á golfi
> hræva dǫgg, þars hǫggnar
> hendr sem fœtr of kendusk.
> Fell í blóði blandinn
> brunn ólskála — runna
> þats á Leifa landa
> laufi fáff — at haufði.

The kenning, *laufi runna landa Leifa* (leaf of the trees of the lands of Leifi), is a *rekit* (greater than three-term) reference to the shield. Leifi being a sea-king, his lands are the oceans, whose trees are the masted ships, whose leaves are the shields that hang from the gunwales. In the context of the stanza, it draws an exceptionally evocative imagery, contrasting the surrounding violence of the narrative with picturesque allusion to the relative serenities of open seas and swaying leaves. At the same time, there is a correspondence between the liquid quality of the shield-kenning on the one hand and the quality of the liquid that dominates the rest of this stanza — 'blood mixed with the well-spring of ale-cups'. There is also the echo of a standard kenning correspondence between 'trees' and warriors. Although any 'semantic map' of a *rekit* kenning such as this would be too convoluted to permit of modelling, that fact illustrates how this compounded device can build up an extraordinary wealth of significances, some distinctive and

others incorporative. This rather neatly captures the two-way process of the kenning as we have seen it: the semantics in the poetic environment are aligned, integrated, and to some extent conflated — this is one rhetorical process — while the kenning-as-device draws focus towards the semantic wealth of the poetics — and this, too, is a rhetorical process.

Clunies Ross has described a 'dual focus' of skaldic verse: a focus on the poetics and on the situation of the poem.[1] If this is not identical to the nature of kenning-poetics as outlined above, there is nonetheless a sort of congruence between the social-and-poetical model of her discussion and the rhetorical-and-semantic model I have presented. Where the two differ is largely, I suggest, a matter of scope. Whereas she looks at the content and performance of the poems in general, this discussion, of course, has been concerned specifically with kennings. We have seen that the kenning's intrinsic nature is to manipulate the semantic focus of a poem. We have also seen that this is geared to the rhetorical ends of relevance and of comparison. The shield kennings, as the focal devices for the 'shield-poems', are remarkable in the degree to which they can be held to stand for the texts. That is, so infused are they with all the significatory richness of the poems, and so greatly do they implicate all the narrative turns, that the poems may in fact be *kennt við* the devices themselves:

> ✱Verses of the kennings of the battle-wall's bridge

Scholars have attributed other rhetorical purposes to the kenning, such as inclusion and exclusion of certain social groups. But whereas we can speak with some confidence of the textual effects of the kennings — and, from this, we can tentatively infer the rhetorical motives that appear to motivate them directly — we are far from a true sociological understanding of the skaldic kennings in their political environments. The shield kennings of the 'shield poems' exemplify all this: despite ambiguities of their poetics and history, they positively explode with meaning at the critical prod.

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JOURNEYS TO NORWAY (AND OTHER FOREIGN PARTS) IN *NJÁLS SAGA*

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> Hrútr gekk fyrir konung ok kvaddi hann. Konungr mælti: Hvat villt þú nú, Hrútr?" "Ek vil beiðask, herra," sagði Hrútr, "at þér gefið mér orlof til Íslands." "Mun þinn sómi þar meiri en hér?" segir konungr. "Eigi er þat," sagði Hrútr, "en þat verðr hverr at vinna, er ætlat er." (*Njáls saga* 6.20)

> Konungr mælti vel til hans ok bað hann vel fara ok kvað Hrút vera inn roskvasta mann ok vel kunna at vera með tignum mǫnnum. (6.21)

> [Njal to Gunnar:] "Gerðu svá vel, félagi, at þú halt sætt þessa ok mun, hvat vit hǫfum við mælzk," segir hann. "Ok svá sem þér varð in fyrri utanferð þín mikil til sœmðar, þá mun þér þó sjá verða miklu meir til sœmðar; muntú koma út með mannvirðingu mikilli ok verða maðr gamall, ok mun engi maðr hér þá á sporði þér standa." (74.181)

> Forsetinn [Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson] lýsti þar mikilli ánægju með heimsóknina og sagði ljóst að í Noregi væru Íslendingar meðal vina og frændfólks. (*Morgunblaðið* 15. febrúar 1997, bls. 6)

From the first three of these passages we learn several things about the way the author of *Njála*– and perhaps saga authors in general – ideally regarded the trips abroad undertaken by their heroes. On their journeys Icelanders learned to behave in the "polite society" of foreign, especially Norwegian, courts; they enjoyed much prestige abroad; and on their return home – which arose from a longing as inevitable as that which draws modern Icelanders to return home, sometimes to the bewilderment of outsiders – they commanded great respect.

The journey abroad is a fixed element in the Icelandic family sagas and tales, with its accompanying set of stereotyped motifs. Anna Kersbergen (118-145) studied many of the motifs connected with overseas journeys in *Njáls saga* – such as visits from Norwegians, fetching of timber, claiming an inheritance, romance with a noble lady, shipwrecks, fights with vikings – and showed them to have frequent parallels in other sagas. Lars Lönnroth (71-76), extending Joseph Harris's work on the structure of the tales, showed that there was a three-part "action pattern" underlying these motifs in the sagas, consisting of the departure and the various motifs associated with it; a series of tests while abroad, which included visits to the court and viking adventures; and finally the homecoming, comprising details such as the leave-taking and the return to Iceland.

There was clearly a historical background for such journeys. Although their forebears eagerly left Norway in large numbers in the late ninth and early tenth centuries, young Icelanders of the saga age were drawn in large numbers to the royal centers of the ancestral homeland. The reception given to young Icelanders by the Norwegian king was generally warm: in some cases the king could look forward to hearing a *drápa* or other poem composed about himself; in others, perhaps because of familiarity with the visitor's family, he could look forward to seeing or hearing of heroic deeds. There may also be a literary source for the journey abroad as we see it in some of the sagas, namely the