

Skaldic Flexibility: Discourse Features in Eleventh-Century Encomia

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Introduction: Skaldic Flexibility?

At every level of skaldic composition, the conventions which distance it from the everyday also mitigate its strangeness by guiding audience expectations, and hence guaranteeing intelligibility except where poets are too creative or poetry too corrupt. But the nature and extent of the regulating conventions can be far from clear, and vigorously contested — for instance what constitutes a correct skaldic kenning, and how contorted can word order be? There is consensus in the middle ground but more unusual phenomena raise difficulties, which resist solution partly because of the imperfections of the manuscript transmission; our ignorance of performance style (e.g. whether variations of pitch or voice quality, pausing or gesture clarified the underlying syntax; see Gade 1994); and the hermeneutic problem of establishing what the norms are when existing editions embody individual decisions based on the assumption of certain norms.

The same considerations apply equally well to another challenge of skaldic editing: the reconstruction of extended poems from fragments. In addressing this here, my aim is to explore how flexible a skaldic encomium might be in its configuration of discourse features; especially, can it switch from retrospective narration to historic present, and how much first-person reference to the skald as actor is to be expected alongside praise of the subject? Can a word like *gær* 'yesterday' appear in a formal poem, and if so what does it signify? When is *nú* 'now'? More specifically, I will be proposing some tentative solutions to problems arising from the work of Þjóðólfr Arnórsson; and in order to do this I will review existing methodologies and suggest a supplementary model of analysis which will hopefully be broadly applicable and worthwhile in itself. (Discussions of reconstruction issues include: Fidjestøl 1982, 81-85 *et passim*; Poole, 1991, 3-23 *et passim*; Jesch 2000, 243-56; Whaley 2002, 7-12.)

The 'Magnús verses': Þjóðólfr Arnórsson's poetry about Magnús góði

Thirty-four verses (thirty complete 8-line stanzas, three 4-line *helmingar* and one couplet) are convincingly attributed to Þjóðólfr Arnórsson and have as their subject Magnús Ólafsson inn góði of Norway (1035-46/7): those presented in *Skj* as *Magnúsflokkur* (henceforth *Magnfl*) 1-25 and *Lausavísur* (henceforth *Lv*) 1-9.

Magnúss saga góða in *Heimskringla* is, apart from the derivative *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna*, the only significant source of these verses. There are also five in *Flateyjarbók*, three in *Fagrskinna*, and one each in the 'Great' or 'Separate' *Óláfs saga helga* and in *Codex Wormianus*. Thirty-one are included in the narrative of Magnús's career, especially his campaigns against the Danes: his return as a boy from the east, precipitating the departure of the Danish ruler Sveinn Alfifuson (*Magnfl* 2-3); his voyage south to Denmark (*Magnfl* 4), where he extracts oaths from Sveinn Úlfsson (*Magnfl* 5); his defeat of the Wends near the Skotborg river (Kongea, *Magnfl* 6-7); the

sea-battle off Áróss (Århus, *Magnfl* 8-16); its aftermath: pursuit and harrying on Sjáland and Fjón (Sjælland/Zealand and Fyn, *Lv* 1, *Magnfl* 17-20, *Lv* 2-3); the battle off Helganes (Helgenæs, *Magnfl* 21-22); its aftermath: pursuit and harrying in Skáney (Skåne, *Magnfl* 23-24, *Lv* 4-8); summary of Danish campaigns (*Magnfl* 25). Finally, *Lv* 9 concerns Magnús's encounter with his uncle Haraldr on the latter's return to Scandinavia, and is cited in *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar* (*Heimskringla*) ch. 20. It is hence so detached from the other Magnús verses that I would not consider it likely to belong to *Magnfl*.

The thirty-one *Heimskringla* verses are often widely separated and interrupted by citations from Arnórr jarlaskáld and others, but since only the introduction to *Magnfl* 2 names the source poem as *Magnúsflokk* (the sole record of the title), should we assume that all thirty-three/four verses belong to it? This might be supported by the fact that all but one of the verses are introduced with a citation tag such *svá/sem segir Þjóðólfr*, *Þess getr Þjóðólfr*, or *svá kvað Þjóðólfr* — a type normally associated with verses taken from extended poems and used to authenticate details in the preceding prose. The exception is that in all manuscripts except Frissbók *Lv* 8 is introduced with *Þá kvað Þjóðólfr*, a formula often associated with *lausavísur*, freestanding occasional verses attributed to speakers involved in the action, although in this case Þjóðólfr's presence is not 'staged' in any way. However, as this instance shows, scribes are not always unanimous about citation tags, and the tags, or our understanding of them, are perhaps not absolutely reliable evidence for the skaldic reconstructor. Just as recent scholarship has shown that many verses introduced with a *Þá* tag and staged as if *lausavísur* may have originated in longer poems, it is not impossible that a prose writer might have opted not to stage original *lausavísur* if doing so would be a distraction, as a Þjóðólfr-centred narrative would have been within the rather sparse account of Magnús's campaigns. As to the fact that no poetic source other than *Magnúsf* is named, this could well be significant, though Snorri Sturluson (taking his authorship of *Heimskringla* on trust) does vary in the scrupulousness with which he signals source poems, and in the opening of *Magnúss saga* he alternates verses from Arnórr's *Hrynhenda* and *Magnúsdrápa* without ever naming *Hrynhenda*, though arguably it needs no other identification than its octosyllabic metre. Overall, then, the external evidence points to a likelihood, but not a certainty, that Þjóðólfr's Magnús verses all belonged to a single encomiastic poem.

Alternative reconstructions of *Magnúsflokk*

There has been widespread consensus that nineteen verses (1-14, 19-22 and 25) belong to *Magnfl*, and these I will refer to as the 'core', but beyond that there have been widely differing views. Guðbrandur Vigfússon admitted only these nineteen to the poem, regarding the other Magnús verses as *lausavísur*, and Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson in his *Heimskringla* edition took the same line, adding *Magnfl* 17 with a query. Finnur Jónsson envisaged a poem of twenty-five verses — the core and six more —, then Fidjestøl accepted the twenty-five and added a further nine (*Corpus Poeticum Boreale* II, 199-202; ÍF 28, 7n.; *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar* III, 580-2 and *Stj*; and Fidjestøl (1982), 133-34, 172, respectively).

The nub of the problem is the relative weight given to different external and internal criteria, and especially to the manner of citation in prose works as against the evidence of verb tenses. Guðbrandur and Bjarni did not articulate the reasons for their decisions, but it is notable that the verses they exclude from *Magnfl* all contain present-tense verbs. Finnur Jónsson rejected certain verses about Magnús (presumably *Lv* 1-9) from *Magnfl* because he was not convinced that Þjóðólfr used historic present (*Edda Snorra Sturlusonar* III, 582), although without applying the principle uniformly (see *Conclusions* below). The marked presence of Þjóðólfr himself in many verses doubtless also encouraged their exclusion from *Magnfl* by some scholars.

Fidjestøl's main criterion was not the incidence of present tense or first person, for he believed in the possibility of historic present and relatively flexible skaldic structures, but rather the manner of citation (1982, 81-85, 133). And since this is the same for virtually all the Magnús verses in *Heimskringla*, he counts all thirty-four as part of *Magnfl*; this entails a slight overriding of his normal methodology, given that *Lv* 8 is introduced with a *Þá* tag (1982, 133-4, 172).

Internal evidence: discourse modes

The contentious features of historic present and autobiographical references need, I believe, to be examined against a background of skaldic norms, and especially of what I will call, in a non-traditional application of the term, 'discourse modes' — types of utterance that make up the fabric of skaldic poetry. The modes combine characteristic types of content with particular temporal stances taken by the skald in relation to his material; the linguistic markers associated with them are especially tense and person of verbs, pronouns and deictic adverbials. I begin by illustrating from *Magnfl* 6 (verbs in bold):

Minn vá sigr fyr sunnan
snjallr Heiðabý spjalli;
nær frásk skarpa skæru
Skotborgaró gotna.
Unði ótal Vinða
Ellu konr at fella;
hvar hæfl gumnar görva
geirhríð fregit meiri?

My valiant confidant won victory
south of Heiðabý;
I learned of a bitter conflict
of men near the Skotborg river.
Ella's descendant [Magnús]
relished cutting down countless Wends;
where might men have learned of a
greater spear-storm [battle] being made?

The dominant mode here is retrospective narration and description: the skald relates one-off, past actions in the preterite tense (whichever way the syntactic and geographical problems in the first *helmingr* are resolved). There is, however, a fleeting 'framing' device pointing to the skald's activity as skald in *frásk* 'I learned of', and the final couplet includes a laudatory general comment in the form of a rhetorical question.

The viewpoint is more immediate in *Magnfl* 16, with its present and perfect narration and description:

Misst hafa Sveins at sínu,
onsverð-Gautr, fõrunautar
(hõrð es heldr of orðin)
heimkvõmu (fõr beima).

Sveinn's comrades have clearly lost out
their home-coming, sword-Gautr [warrior];
the men's expedition
has turned out rather harsh.

Hrœrir hausa þeira,
hreggi cest, ok leggi
— sær Þýtr auðs of örurum —
unnr á sanda grunni.

The wave, stirred up by the storm,
tosses their skulls and limbs
on the sands' floor [sea]; the sea roars
over the envoys of wealth [(generous) men].

Finally, Lv 3, about the aftermath of the battle of Áróss, offers a retrospective summary of three battles (*vǫru* 'were'), but *sízt* 'since' locates them in the psychologically recent past, and the rest of the verse contains present statement and anticipation, while *dugir ... rjóða* 'it's good to redden' seems to be a generalisation with disturbingly immediate relevance:

Menn elgu þess minnask
manna Sveins at kanna,
víga Freyr, sízt vǫru,
vef-Gefn, Þriar stefnur.
Vǫn es fagrs á Fjóni
fljóðs; dugir vǫpn at rjóða;
verum með fylkðu folki
framm í vápna glammi.

Men have to remember,
Freyr of battles [warrior], to get to know
the weaving-Gefn [woman] of Sveinn's men,
since there were three encounters.
There is a prospect of a lovely woman
on Fjón; it's good to redden weapons;
let's take our place with the ranked troop,
forward in the tumult of weapons [battle].

(In l. 3, the *Hulda-Hrökkinskinna* variant, *Freys*, produces a reading of the first *helmingr* which lacks the apostrophe; this is adopted in *Skj B.*)

A wider survey of skaldic compositions suggests that the main possibilities are represented here, and they are distinguished in what follows as: Retrospective Narration and Description (R*); General Comment (G*); Framing (F*); Present Narration and Description (P*); and Anticipation (A*).

R*: *Retrospective Narration and Description.* This mode, usually realized with preterite verbs in the third person (or second where a living ruler is addressed), forms the backbone of most skaldic encomia, including *Magnfl*, however its exact length and structure are envisaged. Magnús launched a vessel out *Þann tíð* 'at that time' (*Magnfl* 2); Sveinn pledged fine oaths *Þar* 'there', east at the Elfr (*Magnfl* 5), etc. Thus the events are situated in the 'there and then', not the 'here and now', with deictic adverbials matching preterite verbs.

G*: *General Comment.* G* statements concern ongoing, habitual or enduring situations, and can be cast in present tense, preterite, perfect or future; e.g. *Magnfl* 25: *Brand rauð buðlungr Þrænda* 'the prince of the Þrændir reddened the sword' (R*); *berr iðula síðan / hann ept hervig Þrennin / hæra skjöld* 'after three pitched battles he carries ever afterward the higher shield' (G*). (*iðula* 'often, ever' is construed with the *rauð* clause in *Skj B.*)

Other types of G* statement include the laudatory (*ort gat hilmir hjarta* 'the prince had a valiant heart', Arnórr, *Magnússdrápa* 18), the sententious (*hugr væðr hǫlfum sigri ... manna* 'men's courage determines half the victory', Þjóðólfr, *Sexstefja* 23) or the factual (*hizig ... es heitir / Helganes* 'where it is called Helganes', Þjóðólfr, *Magnfl* 21).

An important sub-category of G* concerns habitual, consuetudinal or typical action, as when Hallvarðr háreksblei asserts that Knútr inn ríki diminishes the hunger of the ravens (implicitly, by making carrion of his enemies) in *Knútsdrápa* 6, but in the absence of generalising adverbials (or, as in this case, of other clear G* utterances)

such statements could refer to a particular battle, and hence classification as G* or P* (below) can be difficult.

*F**: *Framing*. Here the focus is not the central matter of the hero's deeds but instead the skald's activity as skald: the acquisition of material, or the composition or performance of the poem. F* utterances can be cast in various grammatical persons and tenses, and range from the terse *frák* 'I learned, I heard' to the self-proclaiming swagger so characteristic of the skaldic art — not found in Þjóðólfr's Magnús poem but in both of Arnórr's, e.g. *Magnús, hlýð til máttigs óðar* 'Magnús, hear a mighty poem', *Hrynhenda* 1.

*P**: *Present Narration and Description*. This is the present-tense, or occasionally perfect, counterpart of R*; both tenses are illustrated in *Magnfl* 16 above. It differs from G* in its specificity and from F* in its focus on the events narrated rather than the poetry. It includes historic present, but for the moment no attempt is made to identify instances of this. Þjóðólfr's P* utterances are typical in relating mainly to the aftermath of battles. Fire rages in five present-tense verbs as the civilian population is subdued on Fjón (*Lv* 2; cf. *Lv* 6), and the surviving enemy are pursued (*Lv* 4-7); the adverb *nú* underlines the 'presentness' in *Lv* 4, 5, 7 and 9, and contrasts with *fiçrð* 'last year' in *Lv* 7.

*A**: *Anticipation*. There being no inflectional future tense in Germanic languages, futures are signalled by such means as present tense with future adverbials or other lexical indicators; modal auxiliary verbs; imperatives; or certain subjunctive constructions. Þjóðólfr assures his audience that Sveinn will not be able to defend (*muna varða*) the land with words alone (*Lv* 1), and that it will be amazing if Magnús does not hold out (*undr's nema ... fyrir haldi*, *Magnfl* 18); further examples are found in *Lv* 3 above.

Combinations of discourse modes. The discourse modes thus involve applications of the various grammatical tenses, and present tense can be found in all of them except for the retrospective R*. The more or less unbounded present tense in G* utterances ('X is the best warrior-prince ever') and the poem-focussed F* utterances ('I declaim a poem') are unproblematic, and freely co-occur with R* in skaldic poems, often as intercalated clauses. Also unproblematic is the special case of direct speech, which can involve free switching of discourse modes, e.g. '*Gakkat inn*', *kvað ekkja*, "'Don't go in", said the woman' (*Sigvatr, Austrfararvisur* 5); A* and R*.

The historic present

Having established some norms, then, it is time to grasp the nettle and investigate the question, crucial to skaldic reconstruction, whether, or how far, encomia may switch from a retrospective view of events (R*) to a simultaneous one (historic present as a sub-type of P*) in which events known to be in the past are narrated *as if* happening at the time of utterance. As seen above, the recent scholarship has been more open to this possibility than the earlier (and Åkerblom 1917 found alternative explanations for most of the potential instances). The 'present' quality of the historic present is clearly marked by grammatical inflections, but its 'historic' aspect is often a matter of interpretation. Enemy corpses washing up against a beach as he crafted his lines ('true present' in a *lausavisa*), still there long after a battle (true present, within a formal encomium), or else as past-

as-if-present (historic present, within a formal encomium). Thus the possibility of both *lausavisur* and formal praise-poems, and our imperfect knowledge of actual performance situations, make the historic present especially elusive in the context of early Nordic culture. Further, there is potential for ambiguity between P* and G*, noted under G* above, and the ambiguity does not stop with P* utterances, since A* can represent speculation about situations at the time of utterance ('true future' perhaps), or else evoke anticipation experienced in the past ('historic future').

Þjóðólfr Arnórsson's Magnús poetry presents an unusual array of potentially disorientating combinations of R*, P* and A*, above all in the seven verses on the pursuit of the Danes after Helganes embedded in *Magnúss saga* ch. 33. In *Magnfl* 23 the skald celebrates in R* mode the rich booty he gained (as he predicted before, *fyr*, to a woman) through Magnús's triumph over the Danes. *Magnfl* 24 then asserts in R* that Magnús previously (*dóan*) commanded an advance ashore, disembarked with his troop, and ordered ravaging, before switching into P* with 'there is tumult here; the horse charges east across the hills'; Denmark and Skáney are named. *Lv* 4 which follows is pure P*, as the skald and his comrades follow the banners south towards Lund. *Lv* 5 then contrasts immediate past with present action, amounting to, 'we fought; now the Skónungar are losing hope; fire blazes'. *Lv* 6 is mainly P*, a present-tense description of the torching of Denmark, but a single R* statement again makes a rhetorical contrast: 'We won (*hlutum*) victory, but Sveinn's men run (*renna*) wounded away'. *Lv* 7 explicitly highlights the parallel between past and present events: a pursuit across Fjón last year (*fjórð*), and the present chase, with Sveinn's men running now (*Þeirs nú renna*). The banners are fluttering this morning (*upp fara morg i morgin merki*). In *Lv* 8 the skald then uses P* clauses to bemoan drinking sea-water in the king's cause as they anchor off Skáney.

Which mode, then, dominates and guides the perception of the other? If P*, then the R* clauses are flashbacks to the recent past, for there are degrees of retrospection, while the P* clauses are true present, uttered from the temporal stance of the event as the horse heads east (or whatever), and the verses are best thought of as *lausavisur*. (Whether the skald really versified as he rode along is immaterial for present purposes.) If R* dominates, and the events are anchored in the past, then the P* is historic present, momentarily bringing them alive to the audience of a formal praise-poem. And when A* utterances are added to the discourse cocktail, they add a further dimension, a projection into the future, as we see in Þjóðólfr's *Lv* 3 above. The most striking impression here is that if this is historic present discourse, it is not straightforward ('weapons are flying, buildings are burning'), but supple and complex, involving the adoption of a whole new viewpoint in which the 'here and now' is that of the events. The speaker is not in a royal hall recalling distant events, but, at least imaginatively, there amidst the action, poised between recent past and future. If the non-core Magnús verses belong in *Magnfl*, then the poem alternates dramatically between this type of discourse and the more straightforward R*, and we are required to assume considerable flexibility on the part of skald and audience.

The case for believing in such flexibility might be strengthened or weakened by comparative evidence, but unfortunately space permits only a brief summary of this. The historic present is rare in eleventh-century skaldic poems, mainly characteristic of *flokkr* or sets of *vísur* arising from special circumstances, and despite the mental

agility of skaldic aficionados they would not have been accustomed to follow extreme fluctuations in temporal viewpoint in the way that, for instance, Chrétien de Troyes's audience would. On the other hand, most of the putative instances of casual historic present in standard encomia share with Þjóðólfr's non-core verses a focus on the aftermath of battles, and there are other precedents, such as *Austrfararvísur* and *Liðsmannaflokkur*, for major shifts of temporal viewpoint.

Person

The various discourse modes do not systematically map onto any particular grammatical person, but person is another discourse feature which shapes skaldic structures and is an important tool in the attempt to reconstruct them. Like many skaldic panegyrics addressed to living rulers, Þjóðólfr's *Magnfl* praises its subject through an alternation of third-person utterance with second-person verbs and apostrophes. Direct address to Magnús appears in verses 1, 2, 3, 4 (on the return to Norway and expedition to Denmark), 10, 19, 20 (Áróss and aftermath), and 21 (Helganes), and possibly (depending on variant chosen) in 12, but it is noticeably absent from the non-core verses, and meanwhile the non-core *Magnfl* 16 and *Lv* 3, cited above, seemingly address someone other than Magnús. This would be rather extraordinary in an encomium, though there are possible precedents: Sigvatr's *Nesjavísur* is a eulogy to King Óláfr, but it refers to one Sveinn in st. 9 and addresses him in st. 12, and his *Lv* 5 apostrophizes Teitr, but, as the prose evidence suggests, may belong in *Nesjavísur*. The same poet's *Vestrfararvísur* apostrophize Bergr (st. 1) and Húnn (5) alongside clear addresses to King Óláfr.

First-person verbs and pronouns are another leading feature of skaldic poetry (and skalds frequently refer to themselves in the third person). The skald can figure in two capacities, often within the same poem: as narrator (highlighted in F* utterances), and as actor, usually warrior, participating in events (highlighted in R*, P* or A* utterances). Looking at the first-person component in Þjóðólfr's Magnús poetry, we find that the nineteen core verses contain five narrator utterances (*Magnfl* 3, 6, 7, 9, 25) and two actor utterances, both in first person plural and both attached to the battle of Áróss (*Magnfl* 9, 12; in st. 12 GKS 1010 fol., Hrokkinskinna, has a third-person variant *gerði*, which is adopted in *Skj* B). The fifteen non-core verses contain no narrator utterances but twenty actor utterances (one each in *Lv* 3, 5, 6, 7, two in *Lv* 1, three in *Lv* 4, five in *Magnfl* 23 and six in *Lv* 8).

Could Þjóðólfr have put so much of himself into a eulogy on Magnús? The answer is not necessarily no: *Magnfl* 23, boasting to a lady of winning war booty 'where the valiant ruler thrashed the Danes' (*es hilmir / harðfengr Dani barði*), may be seen as indirect gratitude and praise, while *Lv* 8 contains two references to the king amidst reminders (in five first-person verbs) of how much the speaker has gone through for him — quenching his thirst with nothing but sea-water. But the sheer volume of reference to the skald's part in campaigns, if the non-core verses are read as part of *Magnfl*, would seem to infringe decorum by comparison, for instance, with Sigvatr's tactful *Nesjavísur* 7, 8, 10. Arnórr's *Hrynhenda* for Magnús opens with the skald's own voyages, but the abnormality of this was at least felt by thirteenth-century prose compilers, for st. 3 is cited as an example of *macrologia*, the inclusion of

irrelevant material, in the *Third Grammatical Treatise* (*Den tredje*, 19, 81-82) and is the subject of a grumbling protest from Haraldr Sigurðarson in the *Morkinskinna* account of its first performance (p. 116). We may thus conclude overall that, despite some precedents, the handling of person in the non-core Magnús verses goes beyond anything in known skaldic encomia.

Conclusion: Reconstructing Þjóðólfr's Magnús poetry

In seeking to recover the original status of verses we find that the external and internal evidence seem to point in opposite directions, and if both seem less categorical on closer inspection, this does not help our reconstruction attempt. Nor do certain considerations that could cut either way in the argument. Þjóðólfr was renowned as an extemporizer, was evidently present at much or all of the action, and must have enjoyed the one-upmanship of proclaiming this in his poetry, since his (presumed) rival Arnórr had to content himself with a more remote account of the pursuit and harrying after the battle of Helganes (*Magnúsdrápa* 16-18), but none of this indicates whether verses were *lausavísur* or formed part of the *Magnfl*. The historic present remains a thorny problem. Then there are points on which we will never have sufficient illumination. The texts are incomplete and their situation and manner of performance unrecoverable.

Although a compromise *Magnfl* is in principle attractive, I would like to rule out the twenty-five verse scenario adopted in *Skj*, because of its lack of consistency. *Lv* 1, for example, is presumably classified as a *lausavísa* because of its signs of immediacy: the adverb *gær* 'yesterday', P* and A* utterances and first-person references. But there is P* also in *Magnfl* 16 and 24, *gær* and A* in *Magnfl* 18, and a stronger first-person element in *Magnfl* 23. For me, therefore, the vital question is the relation of the core and non-core verses taken as a whole.

The maximal solution, a single poem of thirty-three/four verses, seems to have the external evidence on its side: the attachment, virtually undifferentiated, of most of them to a coherent sequence of events in *Magnúss saga* (*Heimskringla*) and *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna*. We know that prose writers could be wrong about skaldic poetry, and suspect that we do not always interpret their signals correctly, but these are minor reservations and it is reassuring in this case that the compilers and scribes show virtually no signs of unease at the temporal and stylistic variety of the Magnús verses, for example by creating staging that would account for P* and first-person utterances, or changing verb tenses into preterite. *Fagrskinna* and *Flateyjarbók* do not cite any non-core Magnús verses, but they are so selective that this is not necessarily significant.

A maximal *Magnfl* also has the practical merit of avoiding the necessity for awkward surgical cuts, especially in the series *Magnfl* 15-16, *Lv* 1, *Magnfl* 17-20, and *Lv* 2-3, which seemingly describe the aftermath of Áróss from a viewpoint co-temporal with events except for *Magnfl* 19-20, which address Magnús in exclusively R* clauses. It should also be noted that the wholly R* *Magnfl* 17 belongs closely with the more diverse *Magnfl* 18, since they both depict overland flight and the beating of trails, mention banners or standards, and employ the matching topographical phrases *of skóg* 'through the forest', *of hauga* 'over the hills'.

On the other hand, this solution assumes an extremely unusual *flokkr*: over thirty-three stanzas long, allowing for some loss, and more concerned with pursuits than battles.

Meanwhile, the nineteen-verse *Magnfl* envisaged in the minimalist view is fairly coherent, and the remaining, non-core, verses stand out from it. They gain immediacy through present-tense narrative and description and first-person references to the skald as actor: twenty of these, supported by adverbials such as *nú* 'now' (four times), *hér* 'here' and *hingat* '(to) here'. The focus all but leaves Magnús, even to the extent that someone else is addressed in *Lv* 1 and 3. The style of the non-core verses also tends to be more naturalistic; for instance *Lv* 4-8 contain no kennings.

A more fruitful kind of compromise than the twenty-five verse *Magnfl* rejected above might recognize both the separateness and the unity of the core and non-core verses. We will never know whether Þjóðólfr really composed the non-core verses as he squelched through Danish bogs, watched houses burn or drank salt water, but whenever and wherever composed, they have the spontaneity of *lausavísur*. Yet they are not *lausavísur* of the 'loosest' kind, but rather create quite coherent sequences through subject-matter and echoes such as Sveinn's men running (*renna*) in *Lv* 6 and 7. The tradition of composing a verse sequence on a journey is known from Hofgarðar-Ref's *Ferðarvísur* and from Haraldr Sigurðarson's *gamavísur* (which find verbal parallels in Þjóðólfr's *Sexsteffa*, Fidjestøl 1982, 241-42), and Þjóðólfr's verses might have been incorporated into the encomium either by himself (rather as Sigvatr might have built up the *Austrfararvísur*) or during the subsequent transmission.

Having reviewed the evidence, I am left not quite persuaded that verses such as *Magnfl* 6 and 16 and *Lv* 3 above could all have been designed as part of one and the same encomiastic poem, and in my view the solution that fits the facts best is to print a minimal *Magnfl* of nineteen verses (1-14, 19-22, 25), together with short sequences of *vísur* under such a heading as 'Verses about campaigns in Danish territory under Magnús Ólafsson, possibly attached to *Magnúsflokkr*: (i) *Magnfl* 15-16, *Lv* 1, *Magnfl* 17-18; *Lv* 2-3 (sequel to Áróss); (ii) *Magnfl* 23-24, *Lv* 4-8 (sequel to Helganes)'. *Lv* 9 I would treat as a 'Fragment, possibly from *Magnúsflokkr*'. Limits on space have not permitted discussion of Þjóðólfr's verses on Haraldr Sigurðarson, but within those *Lv* 18-24, describing a *leiðangr* or seaborne expedition, present remarkably similar problems to the non-core Magnús verses. (They are edited and discussed, as a potential part of the great encomium *Sexsteffa*, by Poole, 1991, 59-72). Their content and prose context seem to align them with *Sexsteffa*, yet if a part of that they are disproportionately detailed, there would be a dramatic shift of temporal viewpoint, and there are addresses to women in *Lv* 18 and 20. I would therefore favour a similar, semi-detached solution there. The resulting presentation is regrettably fragmented, but this to me is preferable to an illusory appearance of certainty, and I hope it may do justice to verbal artefacts which gleam like multi-faceted jewels even if their original setting is lost to us. It is the great poets who cause most trouble, and Þjóðólfr is a poet of skill and panache whose art epitomises skaldic flexibility. I hope too that the model of 'discourse modes' and the observations on temporal viewpoints above may suggest

useful ways of capturing the splendid diversity of other items in the skaldic treasure-chest.¹

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¹ Part of the material above was presented at the Skaldic Symposium: New Interpretations of Skaldic Verse, Reykjavík, August 11th, 2005; I am grateful to participants for feedback. Some of the issues touched on here will be explored more fully in a forthcoming article, and the poetry of Þjóðólfr will be edited in the vol. 2 of the forthcoming Brepols skaldic edition, *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages*. I would like to record with gratitude a major research grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council, which has supported my ongoing work on skaldic editing.