

Snorri Sturluson *qua* Fulcrum:

Perspectives on the Cultural Activity of Myth, Mythological Poetry and Narrative in Medieval Iceland*

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The present paper seeks to complement discussions of the social impacts of Snorri Sturluson's (1179–1241) mythography, concentrating on *Edda* and the discourse it generated in medieval Iceland. It sets out to build an overview of Snorri's impact on the cultural activity¹ of mythology in medieval Iceland through a complementary set of specific examples with no pretence of a comprehensive survey. These examples concentrate on sites of probable innovation in Snorri's handling of mythological material as contrasted with broader evidence of the traditions to which they are related. Each example could be presented in a paper-length discussion, but the emphasis here is on the construction of an overview in order to develop a broader frame for further discussion. Although no one example is unequivocally demonstrable, the outline of the broader social pattern presented here is not dependent on the specific details of each case nor on any one case independently. Moreover, the frame of the overview affirms that individual discussions are relevant and warranted when surveying and extending existing research. Of course, the recognition of the social impacts of *Edda* on the cultural activity of mythology does not demonstrate that individual examples are necessarily responses to *Edda*, it nevertheless shows that these would be consistent with a pattern and trend rather than arbitrary. For this reason, in addition to late or statistically demonstrable examples which are

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¹ 'Cultural activity' is used to refer generally to the full spectrum of contexts and modes of expression in which a tradition-phenomenon emerges within a socio-cultural environment.

relatively unequivocal, discussion will also be given to more problematic and equivocal cases such as the connection of the kenning ‘mud of the eagle’ (§4), associations between *Lokasenna* and *Edda* which are nearly contemporary (§5–7), and advancing to the more speculative possibility of influence on *Þrymskviða* (§8).

Snorri Sturluson was born less than two centuries after the legal conversion of Iceland and only decades after the first *ars grammatica* adapted the Latin script to the Old Norse vernacular. This situated him at a critical intersection of circumstances in the history of Old Norse literature. He was a politically aggressive, powerful and respected figure. His vernacular *ars poetica* called *Edda* and his composition and compilation of Norwegian kings’ sagas called *Heimskringla* exhibit a clear political orientation.² This is often forgotten in the case of *Edda*, conventionally dated shortly after his return from the king’s court in 1220,³ and which seems to have emerged around a praise poem to the rulers of Norway in the form of the metrical study.⁴ The scope, magnitude and innovation of his undertakings gave rise to unique and monumental products in an era when conventions of vernacular written literature were just being formed.⁵ *Edda* is a *tour de force* of poetic knowledge, displaying over 400 separate quotations from a remarkable range of vernacular poetry, and it became an authority on vernacular poetic art.⁶ The

² For discussions of these works in broader contexts, see e.g. Carol J. Clover & John Lindow (eds), *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide* (Islandica 45), Cornell University Press: London 1985. For a recent bibliography on *Edda*, see Kevin J. Wanner, *Snorri Sturluson and the Edda: The Conversion of Cultural Capital in Medieval Scandinavia*, University of Toronto Press: Toronto 2008; on its manuscripts and relations to pedagogy and literacy, see e.g. Guðrún Nordal, *Tools of Literacy*, University of Toronto Press: Toronto 2001. *Edda* is cited according to Anthony Faulkes (ed), *Snorri Sturluson, Edda* (3 vol.), Viking Society: London 1982–1999; unless otherwise noted, eddic poetry is cited from Gustav Neckel & Hans Kuhn (eds), *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*, vol. 1, 4th ed., Winter Universitätsverlag: Heidelberg 1963.

³ Margaret Clunies Ross, *A History of Old Norse Poetry and Poetics*, D. S. Brewer: Cambridge 2005, at 157.

⁴ The framing of the praise poem in an *ars poetica* can be connected to the fact that king Hákon Hákonarson was only perhaps thirteen years old when Snorri arrived in Norway. Pedagogical works thus had relevance for the young king, and the king supported writing and the translation of foreign literature, inviting the new written mode of expression. Traditional skaldic verse had difficulty maintaining its status and intelligibility amid these changing aesthetics and alternative entertainments (cf. Stephen A. Mitchell, ‘Performance and Norse Poetry: The Hydromel of Praise and the Effluvia of Scorn’, *Oral Tradition* 16 (2001), 168–202). A pedagogical work on skaldic poetry in this environment emerges like a voice of conservatism in the wake of globalization, yet it may have also been a strategy to promote both the king’s patronage of Snorri as a poet and political support for Snorri’s position in Iceland.

⁵ See e.g. the classic study of Sigurður Nordal, *Snorri Sturluson*, Vikingsprent: Helgafell 1973 (originally 1920).

⁶ For a survey of Snorri’s verse citations, see Frog, ‘Snorri Sturluson and Oral Traditions’, in A. Ney et al. (eds), *Á austrvega: Saga and East Scandinavia*, Gävle University Press: Gävle 2009, 270–278; on the

artful and allusive language and techniques of this vernacular poetry remained dependent on a rich body of cultural knowledge rooted in a pre-Christian milieu. Snorri's *ars poetica* therefore surveys and summarizes a vast range of mythological information which both elucidates circulating verses and provides a resource for the generation of new compositions. It is arguably the most important single source for Old Norse mythology, and perhaps for Germanic mythology more generally. *Edda* is such a rich resource that it is often forgotten that it is a treatise on the art of poetry intended *til fróðleiks ok skemtunar* ('for the scholarly inquiry and entertainment') of young poets⁷ – with an eye for Christian royal patronage – rather than being composed as a treatise on vernacular mythology. Evidence of this work's reception suggests that it was valued in these capacities, with impacts on this area of culture, and although Snorri was not necessarily the 'first' in all he undertook, his works became pillars in the corpus of vernacular literature. However, Snorri's creative genius is not a question of the size or scope of his literary production, but rather in something far more rare: it is in the degree to which these could engage, incite and inspire his own and later generations. Snorri was a product of his times, responding to the contemporary discourse which surrounded him, yet within the intersection of historical circumstances, Snorri emerges as a pivot – a fulcrum – and his creative genius as a lever that could shift the course of history.

1. Old Norse Poetry in Changing Contexts

Early Old Norse poetry is conventionally approached according to two broad categories, 'eddic' and 'skaldic'. The term 'eddic' is a modern adjectival form of *Edda*, used to describe poetry which was originally presumed to have provided the sources for Snorri's knowledge of mythological and heroic traditions. This term has become used by extension to describe similar and other poetry earlier presumed to reflect the anonymous voice of *das Volk*. 'Eddic' is opposed to 'skaldic' verse, 'skaldic' being a modern term derived from *skáld* ('poet') used to designate poetry

position of *Edda* as a (sometimes contested) authority, see Judy Quinn, 'Eddu list: The Emergence of Skaldic Pedagogy in Medieval Iceland', *Alvíssmál* 4 (1994), 69–92.

⁷ *Skáldskaparmál*, ch. 1.

composed by namable poets⁸ ‘Eddic’ and ‘skaldic’ are not useful terms for analysis, but they retain practical value for discussion.

Skaldic verse made extensive use of poetic circumlocutions, and those called kennings⁹ in particular. Skaldic use of (‘pagan’) mythological kennings and references has been statistically measured in the corpus, dropping abruptly with the legal conversion of Iceland to Christianity (999/1000).¹⁰ Use of heroic material rose in the 12th century, when a few ‘Christian’ poets also made use of mythology for æsthetic purposes.¹¹ Nonetheless, the rapid and steady overall decline of mythological reference continued. However, Bjarne Fidjestøl observes that this was followed by an immediate and “notable increase” in the 13th century, “obviously due to the ‘renaissance’ of Snorri Sturluson and his nephews.”¹² Snorri’s engagement of vernacular mythology as an interesting and valuable referent was anticipated by those earlier poets, but in the early hours of vernacular literacy, the combination of his interest with a pedagogical treatise on the art of poetry appears to have resulted in a statistically discernable social and historical impact on the cultural activity of vernacular mythology in skaldic verse.

Eddic poetry requires a slightly fuller introduction owing to its relevance to later discussion. The main corpus of eddic poetry is built around the unified collection often called *The Poetic Edda* or *Elder Edda* which makes up the *Codex Regius* manuscript,¹³ conventionally dated to ca. 1270,¹⁴ from which poems and prose will be addressed below (§5–8). Another

⁸ Discussions of skaldic verse tend to emphasize its complexity and to focus on the meter called *dróttkvætt*, but skaldic verse was also commonly composed in ‘eddic’ meters within a dynamic and coherent system. See E. O. G. Turville-Petre, *Scaldic Poetry*, Clarendon Press: Oxford 1978; Clunies Ross 2005.

⁹ A kenning is a rhetorical figure of a noun modified by another noun referring to a third higher concept. Its correct interpretation is normally dependent on (sometimes specialized) cultural knowledge. Old Norse kennings are formed in a genitive construction (e.g. *dynr geira*, ‘din of spears’ = ‘battle’) or compound (e.g. *dyn-skúr*, ‘din-shower’ = ‘battle’). See Bjarne Fidjestøl, ‘The Kenning System: An Attempt at a Linguistic Analysis’, in Odd Einar Haugen & E. Mundal (eds), *Selected Papers*, Odense University Press: Odense 1997, 16–67.

¹⁰ Jan de Vries, *De Skaldenkenningen met mythologischen Inhoud*, H.D. Tjeenk Willink & Zoon N.V.: Haarlem 1934; Bjarne Fidjestøl, ‘Pagan Beliefs and Christian Impact: The Contribution of Skaldic Studies’, in A. Faulkes & R. Perkins (eds), *Viking Revaluations*, Viking Society: London 1993, 100–120; Bjarne Fidjestøl, *The Dating of Eddic Poetry: A Historical Survey and Methodological Investigation*, Reitzels: Copenhagen 1999, at 270–293; see also Ásdís Egilsdóttir, ‘Pagan Poetry Meets Christianity’, in L. P. Słupecki & J. Morawiec (eds), *Between Paganism and Christianity in the North*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego: Rzeszów 2009, 84–92.

¹¹ See Bjarne Fidjestøl, *Det norrøne fyrstediktet*, Alvheim & Eide: Bergen 1982.

¹² Fidjestøl 1993, 102.

¹³ Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, GKS 2365 4¹⁰.

¹⁴ Following Gustav Lindblad, *Studier i Codex Regius af äldre Eddan*, Lund: Gleerup 1954.

collection, dated to the beginning of the 14th century, was compiled in a manuscript with the *Skáldskaparmál* section of *Edda*.¹⁵ This now fragmentary collection (AM 748a I 4^{to}) contains copies of mythological poems belonging to the same manuscript stemma as those in the *Codex Regius* as well as the only early copy of the poem *Baldurs draumar* ('Baldr's Dreams'), addressed below (§3). Snorri quotes from perhaps twenty eddic poems in his *Edda*, of which half are not preserved elsewhere, while additional 'complete' eddic poems became attached to *Edda* in manuscript transmission.¹⁶ *Edda* and eddic poems were clearly connected in the manuscript tradition. The dating of the composition of individual eddic poems in these manuscripts is highly problematic when external points of reference are lacking.¹⁷ They nonetheless remain clearly distinguishable from the language and poetics of versification a few centuries later (cf. §3). Eddic poetry was verbally very stable in oral transmission, but not invariable: the textual entities of poems could be and were 'revised' or adapted and synthesized with other material (cf. §6–7), and could even be brought together in a new composition (cf. §8).¹⁸

Gustav Lindblad demonstrates through orthographic archaeology that the *Codex Regius* and AM 748a I 4^{to} are the outcome of the stratified copying of eddic poetry in the 13th century, arguing that Snorri stimulated rather than initiated (e.g. transcribing or collecting poems for use in writing *Edda*) this process.¹⁹ Lindblad presents strong evidence of a radical increase in the manuscript activity of eddic poetry subsequent to the writing of Snorri's *Edda* paralleling the abrupt increase in mythological references in

¹⁵ These are conventionally distinguished as Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, AM 748a I 4^{to} and AM 748b I 4^{to}, respectively. According to Elias Wessén ('Introduction', in *Fragments of the Elder and the Younger Edda: AM 748 I and II 4o*. Copenhagen 1945, 11–23, at 14), "it seems preponderantly probable" that this collection of eddic poems and *Skáldskaparmál* formed a coherent collection (cf. Frog 2009, 274–276).

¹⁶ On eddic quotation in *Edda*, see Frog 2009, 274–276; on material attached to *Edda*, see Nordal 2001.

¹⁷ See Fidjestøl 1999; for a survey and discussion of later eddic versifying, see Haukur Þorgeirsson, 'Gullkársljóð og Hrafnagaldur: Framlag til sögu fornryðislags', *Gripla* 21 (2010), 229–334.

¹⁸ On stability, variation and recomposition, see e.g. Lars Lönnroth, 'Hjalmar's Death-Song and the Delivery of Eddic Poetry', *Speculum* 46 (1971), 1–20; Joseph Harris, 'Eddic Poetry as Oral Poetry: The Evidence of Parallel Passages in the Helgi Poems for Questions of Composition and Performance', in R. J. Glendinning & Haraldur Bessason (eds), *Edda: A Collection of Essays*, University of Manitoba Press: Manitoba 1983, 210–242; Judy Quinn, 'Völuspá and the Composition of Eddic Verse', in *Poetry in the Scandinavian Middle Ages: Atti del 12° Congresso Internazionale di Studi Sull'Alto Medioevo Spoleto 4–10 Settembre 1988*, Fondazione Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo: Spoleto 1990, 303–320; on 'textual entities', see Frog, 'Distinguishing Continuities: Textual Entities, Extra-Textual Entities and Conceptual Schemas', *RMN Newsletter* 2 (2011), 7–15.

¹⁹ Lindblad 1954, 250–251; Gustav Lindblad, 'Snorre Sturlason och eddadiktningen', *Saga och Sed* (1978), 17–34; cf. Elias Wessén, 'Den isländska eddadiktningen: Dess uppteckning och redigering', *Saga och Sed* (1946), 1–31, who proposed Snorri's work incited the documentation of eddic poems.

kennings. This finds support in eddic poetry being documented in or compiled with *Edda* and evidence of narratives from *Edda* being copied and adapted to accompany eddic poems (§5). Considering that “the natural state of oral poetry is to remain oral and [...] such poetry is rarely written down without a real incitement,”²⁰ *Edda* has become widely viewed as “the necessary condition” and catalyst for the manuscript activity that resulted in the preservation of so many mythological (and heroic) poems in a Christian cultural milieu.²¹

Evidence of change in the general cultural activity of vernacular mythology in Old Norse poetry is different for skaldic verse and for eddic poems. Skaldic verse primarily offers a diachronic perspective in the sense that changes can be mapped according to a chronology, and the production and circulation of *Edda* can be situated as a factor within that chronology. Eddic poems primarily offer a synchronic perspective in the sense that we are presented with the outcomes of diachronic processes, and those outcomes clearly connect the documentation and circulation of eddic poems with *Edda* in the manuscript tradition although the earliest phases of this process remain obscure. The insights offered by each broad class of poetry is complementary, offering different perspectives on a common process, and generating a general frame in which more specific impacts of and reactions to Snorri’s work can be considered.

²⁰ Bengt R. Jonsson, ‘Oral Literature, Written Literature: The Ballad and Old Norse Genres’, in J. Harris (ed), *The Ballad and Oral Literature*, Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA 1991, 139–170, at 145.

²¹ Joseph Harris, ‘Eddic Poetry’, in C. J. Clover & J. Lindow (eds), *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature*, 68–156, at 75–76. It is noteworthy that evidence of a parallel practice of documenting and compiling skaldic poems outside of broader narrative contexts is lacking. This suggests a relationship of the documentation of eddic poems to a use which was different from that of skaldic poems. The mythological eddic poems generally considered to have been documented earliest present monologic or dialogic indices of mythological information within a simple narrative frame rather than describing the narrative situations of the participating mythic figures. This is directly comparable to the dialogic frames employed by Snorri in his surveys of mythological information in *Edda* (cf. §5 and §7 below). Snorri quotes stanzas of three of these poems extensively as resources for the mythological information surveyed in *Gylfaginning* (*Völuspá*, *Vafprúðnismál* and *Grímnismál*; see further Frog 2009, 274–276). It is noteworthy that Snorri never refers to the myths of the narrative frames of these poems in his mythography, yet the stanzas of which they are comprised are clearly presented as central pedagogical resources. Snorri’s heavy use of precisely these poems is unlikely to be coincidental, suggesting that either Snorri’s *Edda* was a response to social interests expressed in the documentation of these particular poems, or (perhaps more likely) *Edda* reflected a social interest in a new medium and mode of expression which incited the transfer of otherwise oral resources to the written medium for the same or parallel (pedagogical) uses. Although heroic poetry was probably already being documented in conjunction with saga (i.e. historical) writing, these observations present a marked probability that documenting mythological poems with a narrative emphasis emerged as a secondary reflex in this process, potentially as a consequence of associating initially pedagogical materials with entertainment.

2. *Lokrur*

In Iceland, *rímur* poetry emerged as a new mode of narrative poetry in the 14th century.²² As such, any *rímur* poem was necessarily composed subsequent to Snorri's *Edda*. This singing tradition can be considered predominantly oral, yet *rímur* poets exhibit a preference for manuscript narratives as their subjects. The *rímur*-cycle *Lokrur*, conventionally dated to ca. 1400, describes the adventure of the god Þórr's visit to Útgarða-Loki, incontestably developed directly from Snorri's account of this adventure in *Gylfaginning*, reflected even on the verbal level of composition. A full discussion and review of scholarship has been recently provided by Haukur Þorgeirsson and will not be repeated here.²³ The adaptation of this particular narrative is striking because rather than a traditional myth, it appears to be a construction by Snorri oriented to (and thus relevant for) a contemporary audience and its worldview (§7–8). This *rímur* presents evidence of the reception of Snorri's work and its influence on narrative traditions of mythology by ca. 1400.²⁴ It suggests that by that time, *Edda* was an authoritative source and resource for this and presumably other mythological narratives.

3. Late Stanzas Added to *Baldrs draumar*

The fourteen-stanza eddic poem *Baldrs draumar* is preserved in AM 748a I 4^{to}. This poem opens with the gods gathering in response to Baldr's ominous dreams. Óðinn (Baldr's father) journeys independently to the realm of the dead in order to summon and interview a dead seeress. The interview outlines the death of Baldr and subsequent revenge-cycle (orchestrated by Óðinn), culminating in a reference to the vernacular apocalypse referred to as *ragna røk* ('fates of the gods') (§6). There were two intersecting cycles of narrative material surrounding the death of Baldr. *Baldrs draumar* is characteristic of one, situating Óðinn as a key figure, displaying his ability to access knowledge of the future and orchestrate the revenge cycle in which Høðr is the central adversary. The other concerns the gods as a community and is the focus of Snorri's account in *Gylfaginning*, where it is the key to his

²² See e.g. Björn K. Þórólfsson, *Rímur fyrir 1600*, Hið íslenska fræðafélag: Kaupmannahöfn 1934.

²³ Haukur Þorgeirsson, 'List í *Lokrur*', *Són* 6 (2008), 25–47.

²⁴ I am thankful to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out *Edda*'s impacts on *Völsungs rímur*'s introduction.

eschatology and is in some sense the heart of his mythography: Frigg (Baldr's mother) is a central protagonist and Loki is the punished adversary. The two cycles intersect but are based on contrasting conceptions of time or fate and do not appear inclined to overlap.²⁵ Late paper manuscripts of *Baldrs draumar* (mid-17th century and later) include several additional, little-known stanzas which introduce the Frigg-cycle into the Óðinn-narrative.²⁶ These stanzas were rarely reproduced even in 19th century editions of the poem and were treated with greater skepticism than other eddic poetry only preserved in paper manuscripts.²⁷ They have hardly even been mentioned since Hugo Gering's incisive statement: "they are without question a late Icelandic fabrication, several centuries younger than the traditional old strophes in" AM 748a I 4^{to} (as evident on both linguistic and metrical grounds).²⁸ Sophus Bugge compares these supplementary stanzas to Snorri's *Edda*.²⁹ Verbal correspondences are identifiable with Snorri's synthesis of Christian conceptual models and idioms into his narrative.³⁰ This suggests

²⁵ See further Frog, *Baldr and Lemminkäinen: Approaching the Evolution of Mythological Narrative through the Activating Power of Expression* (UCL Eprints), University College London: London 2010, <http://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/19428/>, at 26–29, 318–339, 352–364.

²⁶ See Sophus Bugge, *Sæmundar Edda hins fróða*. Christiania 1867, at xlv ff., 138–140.

²⁷ They are fully integrated in e.g. Erasmus Christianus Rask's edition (*Edda Sæmundar hinns fróða: Collectio carminum veterum scaldorum Sæmundiana dicta*, Holmiæ 1818, at 93–96); P. A. Munch omitted them and observed "de forekomme os at være en aldeles overflødig Udtværen af Fortællingen, og uforligelige med den korte og fyndige Tone" (*Den ældre Edda: Samling af norrøne oldkvad*, Christiania 1847, at xi, cf. 56–57); integrated in Theodor Möbius's edition with a separate critical edition of the AM 748a I 4^{to} text (*Edda Sæmundar hinns fróða, mit einem Anhang zum Theil bisher ungedruckter Gedichte*, Leipzig 1860, at 68–70, 255–256); Hermann Lüning only describes the content of these stanzas, observing "Schon die sprache bezeichnet diese eingeschalteten strophen als späteren ursprungs, und nach strophen solchen inhaltes erscheine Odins ritt in die unterwelt in jeder beziehung überflüssig" (*Die Edda: Eine Sammlung altnordischer Götter- und Heldenlieder*, Zürich 1859, at 226n); Karl Hildebrand notes them without elucidation (*Die Lieder der älteren Edda (Sæmundar Edda)*, Paderborn 1876, at 18n); they are unmentioned by Svend Grundtvig (*Sæmundar Edda hins fróða: Den ældre Edda*, København 1974, cf. at 10–11, 191–192); and finally presented by Sophus Bugge as an appendix (*Sæmundar Edda*, 138–140; directly reproduced in the commentary of F. Detter & R. Heinzel *Sæmundar Edda mit einem Anhang*, 2 vols., Leipzig 1903, at 2.586–587).

²⁸ *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda*, 2 vols., Halle 1927–1931, at 1.339–340: "sie ohne frage spätes isländisches fabrikat sind, mehrere jahrhunderte jünger als die in [AM 748a I 4^{to}] überlieferten alten strophen." Cf. the few sentences mentioning and dismissing these stanzas in Klaus von See et alia's 99-page critical commentary on this short poem (*Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda*, 7 vols., Heidelberg 1997–, at 3.378).

²⁹ Bugge 1867, 138–140. Cf. st. c.3–6 (correspondences in cursive), "*gríða beiða / granda ei Baldri // vann alls konar / eið at vægja*", and *Gylfaginning*, ch. 49, "ok var þat gert at *beiða gríða Baldri fyrir alls konar háska* [...] Þá mælti Frigg: '*Eigi munu vápn eða viðir granda Baldri. Eiða hefi ek þegit af öllum þeim*'" (RTW manuscripts; cf. the abbreviated rephrasing in the U manuscript). In the verses, double-alliteration and the (arbitrary) parts of speech on which it falls are characteristic of the added stanzas, one of many features identifying their composition as 'late' (cf. Frog 2010, 247n).

³⁰ The expression *alls konar*, (things) 'of all kinds', appears specific to Snorri's narrative as an outcome of his curious conflation of the Christian model of 'all of creation' with the Christian idiom 'the quick and the dead' (*kykvir ok dauðir*) resulting in the conceptual incongruity of identifying stone, metal, etc. as

that *Edda* impacted the cultural activity of this poem in either the manuscript tradition or at some level of oral-written interface.

The interpolated stanzas are compositionally so late that they must have been composed in a milieu where *rímur* poetry was already a vital contemporary tradition, and where drawing directly on manuscript texts in poetic composition was a popular practice. The lateness of the example makes Snorri's influence relatively unequivocal: it presents evidence that Snorri's account was employed as providing an authoritative or central form of traditional mythological narratives with a long and rich history. It also presents evidence that Snorri's work could have impact on eddic poems known in the 13th century. Consequently, this example raises the question of whether Snorri's work may have already been having corresponding effects on specific eddic poems in the period when their manuscript activity seems to have been most vital – in the century when *Edda*'s impact on mythological reference in skaldic verse was most marked.

4. The Theft of the Mead of Poetry

The situation of skaldic verses on a chronology makes skaldic poetry a valuable point of departure, not only for considering the impact of *Edda* on the cultural activity of mythology generally, but also on the cultural activity of individual myths. Perhaps the most central mythological referent for skaldic poets was the so-called 'mead of poetry' and its origins. Snorri presents a synthetic summary of the mythological cycle associated with this mead and its origins in *Skáldskaparmál* (ch. G57–G58), probably exercising his creative genius.³¹ The mead of poetry was a symbolic actualization of poetry as both product and art, correlated with mythic inspiration (as distinct from

belonging to categories of either 'living' or 'dead' and a genre transgression in the unique attribution of anthropomorphic qualities and decision-making ability to these unworked natural materials. See further Frog 2010, 243–250.

³¹ See e.g. E. Mogk, *Novellistische Darstellung mythologischer Stoffe: Snorri und seiner Schule*, Suomalainen Tiedekatemia: Helsinki 1923, at 21–33; Roberta Frank, 'Snorri and the Mead of Poetry', in U. Dronke et al. (eds), *Speculum Norroenum: Studies in Memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre*, Odense University: Odense 1981, 155–170. The episode of the theft appears historically stratified with roots in an ancient tradition of the theft of the water of life; in Old Norse, it has taken a unique form associated with the metaphor of liquid knowledge (Renate Doht, *Der Rauschtrank im germanischen Mythos*, Karl M. Halosar: Wien 1974; Clive Tolley, *Shamanism in Norse Myth and Magic*, 2 vols., Academia Scientiarum Fennica: Helsinki 2009, at 2.434–450). Snorri's narrative is so complex that choice in the selection and organization of material is implicit: exercising his creative genius is a question of degree rather than simply a question of whether he were a creative 'author' or an unthinking quill of *das Volk*.

unmediated divine inspiration).³² This conceptualization in terms of a magical and intoxicating liquid or drink was central to the semiotics of versification, represented in terms of orally consumed and expelled liquid. Judy Quinn shows this conceptual metaphor to be a secondary reflex of the fundamental metaphor of ‘liquid knowledge’ in which it participates.³³

The myth culminates in Óðinn’s acquisition of the mead for use by gods and poets: Óðinn drinks it and flees in the form of an eagle, pursued by the giant Suttungr. According to Snorri, “en honum var þá svá nær komit, at Suttungr myndi ná honum, at hann sendi aptr suman mjöðinn, ok var þess ekki gætt.”³⁴ In three of the four main manuscripts of *Edda*, this is referred to as “skáldfífla hlut” (‘share of poetasters’, lit. ‘poet-fools’), whereas Heimir Pálsson emphasizes that the Codex Upsaliensis (U) reads “ok hafa þat skáldfífl ok heitir arnar leir. En Suttunga mjöðr þeir er yrkja kunna.”³⁵ Óðinn was the cultural model of a poet and god of poetry, as well as provider of that knowledge. Within the semiotics of poetry, mead coming from the mouth of Óðinn is equivalent to uttering verse (culturally appropriate to the situation and potentially magical).³⁶ In this sense, the motif of Óðinn releasing some mead behind him during his escape by flight would be consistent with the tradition and its semiotics, potentially offering an aetiology of the first verse ever uttered. Although a triumphal or provocative verse would be conventional in this circumstance, Snorri suggests that this spillage is a consequence of Óðinn’s fear by noting that it was ignored without reference to which end it came from. According to Snorri, the hapax *arnar leir* (‘mud of the eagle’) is clearly identified as a kenning for this

³² A basic example can be taken from Einar skálaglamm’s *Vellekla*, st. 3: “þýtr Óðrörir alda / [...] hafs við fles galdra”,– ‘a wave of Óðrörir’s sea roars against the flat sea-stone of incantations’; *Óðrörir* = ‘mead of poetry’ or the vessel containing it (‘sea of a cup/vessel’ = ‘poetry’: see §7); ‘flat sea-stone of incantations’ = (probably) ‘tongue’ or (possibly) ‘teeth’ (cf. *gómsker*, ‘gum-skerries’ = ‘teeth’) – the roar of a wave of the mead of poetry crashing over a stone describes the elocution of poetry as a liquid. See Doht 1974, esp. 205–226; Carol Clover, ‘Skaldic Sensibility’, *Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi* 93 (1978), 63–81, at 68–79; on the distinction from divine inspiration, see also Clunies Ross 2005, 83–84; cf. also Rudolf Meissner, *Die Kenningar der Skalden: Ein Beitrag zur skaldischen Poetik*. Kurt Schroeder: Bonn 1921, at 427–430.

³³ Judy Quinn, ‘Liquid Knowledge: Traditional Conceptualisations of Learning in Eddic Poetry’, in S. Rankovič et al. (eds), *Along the Oral–Written Continuum*, Brepols: Turnhout 2010, 183–226.

³⁴ *Skáldskaparmál*, ch. G58; ‘yet for him, it got so close to Suttungr catching him, that he sent some of the mead behind him, and this was not paid attention to.’

³⁵ ‘[A]nd the poetasters have that, and it is called mud of the eagle. And Suttungr’s mead, those who know how to compose poetry’ See Heimir Pálsson, ‘Fyrstu leirskáldin’, *Són* 8 (2010), 25–37, at 30–31, 35; see also Heimir Pálsson, ‘*Tertium vero datur*: A Study of the Text of DG 11 4¹⁰’, preprint manuscript 2010, <http://uu.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?searchId=1&pid=diva2:322558>, at 21–24.

³⁶ Identifying mead regurgitated from the mouth of eagle-Óðinn (as into vats from which it is served among gods) with the knowledge of mortal poets is also symbolically consistent with birds feeding their young (cf. Mitchell 2001, 173–174).

spillage as a (curious) description of ‘Óðinn’s piss’ as the frightened god fled. Roberta Frank proposes that this “is not even a kenning: because its base word *leir* (‘mud, filth’) refers literally to the concept designated by the whole (cf. Eng. *crap*).”³⁷ However, *leir* describes solid waste rather than liquid, yet this opens a different set of issues observing that identification of this ‘mead’ as *leir* clearly marks it as (solid) excrement.

A number of incongruities suggest that this was neither a conventional kenning nor a conventional conception. The use of *leir* presents a complete discontinuity with the central conceptual metaphor of poetry as liquid. Its interpretation as ‘piss’ would also be inconsistent with the model of oral production and ingestion. Inversions of the liquid metaphor are otherwise accomplished through ‘contamination’ by ‘mixing’ drink with other elements or substances.³⁸ Metaphors of ‘pissing poetry’ or drinking urine (or even mixing beer and urine) are absent from the Old Norse corpus. This reduces the likelihood that the motif of Óðinn pissing poetry was conventional. Explicit cowardice (let alone the humiliation of losing bladder control) is contradictory to Óðinn’s character or “semantic center”³⁹ as a mythic figure, nor is this cowardice mentioned in insult exchanges with other figures (cf. §8). Moreover, a humiliating portrayal of Óðinn in the origin of the mead of poetry is contextually inconsistent with Óðinn’s directly associated role as the cultural archetype and identity model for a poet. The connotation that poets were cowards (like Óðinn) would make it improbable that poets would maintain this element in a milieu where Óðinn’s role as an identity model was vital.

Snorri’s interpretation of this motif is only supported by three skaldic examples of the ‘mud of the eagle’ kenning.⁴⁰ All three examples use the base-word *leir* without exhibiting the verbal variation characteristic of traditional circumlocutions. One of these mocks Snorri personally in a

³⁷ Frank 1981, 169.

³⁸ Quinn 2010, 187–190; cf. the poet Egill Skállagrímsson forcibly vomiting the inappropriate drink which has been served in the face of his stingy host so that vomit goes into the other man’s eyes, nose and mouth, causing him to choke on it (*Egils saga*, ch. 73). This may also be a symbolic inversion, implicitly contrasting this oral effusion of foul fluid with Egill’s potential to produce praise poetry (cf. Richard North, *Pagan Words and Christian Meanings*, Editions Rodopi: Amsterdam 1991, at 58).

³⁹ On the resistance of a figure’s semantic center to contradiction, see Jens Peter Schjødt, ‘Diversity and Its Consequences for the Study of Old Norse Religion: What Is It We Are Trying to Reconstruct?’, in L. P. Słupecki & J. Morawiec (eds), *Between Paganism*, 9–22, at 17, 20. Óðinn may commit injustices and social improprieties, but even these actions occur in contexts expressing power, authority and also bravery.

⁴⁰ Cf. Sveinbjörn Egilsson & Finnur Jónsson, *Lexicon poeticum antiquæ linguæ septentrionalis: Ordbog over det norsk-islandske skjaldesprog (LP)*, 2nd ed., København 1931, s.v. ‘leir’.

parody of his praise poem in *Edda*. A second does so accompanied by an explicit reference to *Edda* in a manner which “makes clear, poetics had come to be defined by [Snorri’s] book”.⁴¹ In a corpus of well over five thousand stanzas of skaldic verse, the occurrence of two of these three examples in direct responses to Snorri or *Edda* is unlikely to be coincidental. This led Frank to propose that the third is also attributable to Snorri’s influence, although it is attributed to an earlier poet.⁴² If authentic, the earlier kenning would nevertheless appear to be attributable to an inversion from ‘drink’ to ‘waste’, engaging an unrelated metaphor of ‘throwing shit’ as a description of ‘bad poetry’, completely divorced from the conceptual metaphor (and myth) underlying the mead of poetry. It would thus not support Snorri’s account, although it could have inspired it. The inconsistencies of Snorri’s narrative with the conceptual metaphor of poetry as drink and with Óðinn as a god of poetry suggest a reinterpretation of motifs in a manner which compromises Óðinn’s power and authority (Óðinn comically wets himself) generating a new ætiology of ‘bad poetry’. However this is viewed, it remains apparent that this interpretation did not have a conventional place in the mythology, and it shows that Snorri’s presentation caught the attention of other poets: his account of this particular myth stimulated use of the kenning in a way particularly attached to *Edda* and Snorri himself. This example presents the possibility that Snorri’s narratives stimulated or provided the referent for other near-contemporary skaldic references, such as a parodic skaldic reference to the tragedy of Baldr’s death appearing within a few decades of *Edda*,⁴³ and it increases the probability that Snorri’s work had corresponding impacts on oral or written eddic poetry in this period, although eddic poems do not present the same possibilities for dating as skaldic verse.

5. *Edda* and the So-Called ‘Prose Frame’ of *Lokasenna*

Lokasenna (‘Loki’s Insult Exchange’) is a dialogic eddic poem preserved in the *Codex Regius*. The poetic text is comprised of bladed remarks which the troublesome figure Loki exchanges with all of the gods at the sea-god Ægir’s drinking party. In the *Codex Regius*, the poem is preceded by a prose text

⁴¹ Frank 1981, 168; Wanner 2008, 87–89; Quinn 1994 (quotation at 88).

⁴² Frank 1981, 168–170; see also Heimir Pálsson’s (2010) more thorough treatment, which leaves open the question of the earlier stanza’s authenticity.

⁴³ Cf. Frog 2010, 46, 219.

conventionally called *Frá Ægi ok goðum* ('Of Ægir and the Gods') which (unusually) relates this poem to the preceding poem *Hymiskviða*. *Hymiskviða* appears without this prose and independent of *Lokasenna* in AM 748a I 4^{to}, presenting a high probability that *Frá Ægi* has been revised or introduced in the organization of the *Codex Regius* manuscript, or in an earlier exemplar connecting these poems. The poetic text is followed by a second prose passage conventionally called *Frá Loka* ('Of Loki'). Neither prose text can be assumed to have been originally transcribed with the verse text as a coherent entity, and although together these are commonly referred to as a 'prose frame' of the poem, it is not even certain that both were added at the same time.

Snorri quotes one stanza of the poetic text in a form different from the *Codex Regius* version (comparable to *Lokasenna*, st. 21.1–2 + 47.3 + 29.4–6) and attributes it to a different figure.⁴⁴ No other eddic quotation in *Edda* shows such great variation from examples appearing in documented versions of a whole poem. The handling of formulae suggests competence in the oral tradition rather than passive reading knowledge, conscious memorization, or the incompetence of a careless manuscript copyist. Snorri clearly knew this poem, and the handling of verse suggests this knowledge derives from the oral tradition. His attribution of the verse to a different figure presents the possibility that he was familiar with the poetic narrative in a slightly different form, as is the case with some other eddic poems.⁴⁵

In *Skáldskaparmál*, ch. 33, Snorri summarizes a narrative about the gods visiting Ægir's feast after they had hosted Ægir. Ægir's initial attendance of the gods' feast, where he is awed by their stories and illusions, provides the narrative frame for the dialogic portion of *Skáldskaparmál*, and seems to have provided the basic model for Snorri's construction of the similar dialogic narrative frame of *Gylfaginning* ('The Deluding of Gylfi') (the outsider visiting the gods) and its parallel in Þórr's visit to Útgarða-Loki (the gods visiting the other's feast; §7). Snorri clearly found this narrative interesting and compelling, although we perceive it largely through these references and adaptations. In ch. 33, it is introduced to elucidate the kenning 'fire of the sea' (= 'gold'), which Snorri derives from the *lýsigull* ('luster-gold') used to light Ægir's hall.⁴⁶ Snorri mentions Loki's *senna* and

⁴⁴ *Gylfaginning*, ch. 20; outside of three central poems, single- or paired-stanza quotation is a consistent pattern in *Gylfaginning* and does not indicate lack of knowledge of individual poems (see further Frog 2009, 274–277).

⁴⁵ On evidence of Snorri's knowledge of oral poetry, see Frog 2009.

⁴⁶ The kenning is simply mentioned without narrative elaboration in *Codex Upsaliensis*.

the slaying of one servant at the feast. However, rather than recounting these, he digresses from the narrative into a genealogy and attributes. *Frá Ægi* opens with the observation that Ægir was also called Gymir. This has no discernible bearing on the preceding poem *Hymiskviða* and is inconsistent with the use of Gymir in the poetic text of *Lokasenna* (st. 42), whereas it is consistent with Snorri's assertion that Gymir was used by poets in this way (*Skáldskaparmál*, ch. 25). The prose then connects the adventure of *Hymiskviða* to *Lokasenna*, before a section paralleling Snorri's summary, but shorter and without mention that the feasting was reciprocal, followed by a brief description of how the gods drove Loki from the hall after he killed the servant. This last accommodates Loki's arrival at the beginning of the poetic text, although there is an inconsistency in that Loki appears to be arriving at Ægir's feast for the first time.⁴⁷

Suggestions that Snorri was familiar with an earlier common manuscript exemplar of this text⁴⁸ are not consistent with more probable oral familiarity with the poetic text, his general emphasis on the reciprocal feasting between Ægir and the gods (absent from the *Frá Ægi*), or with

⁴⁷ Terry Gunnell, *The Origins of Scandinavian Drama*, D. S. Brewer: Woodbridge 1995, at 225–226.

⁴⁸ E.g. Preben Meulengracht Sørensen ('Loki's *senna* in Ægir's Hall', in G. W. Weber (ed), *Idee, Gestalt, Geschichte: Festschrift Klaus von See*, Odense University Press: Odense 1988, 239–259, at 245) proposes that Snorri's mention of Þórr's absence from the feast indicates manuscript dependence because this is only relevant to *Lokasenna*. This is unfounded and assumes Snorri's truncated narrative was all he knew or that he was not sensitive to the broader frame of the narrative summarized. The proposal that textual correspondence between Snorri's statement in *Skáldskaparmál*, ch. 33 (correspondences in cursive), "*Þórr var ekki þar. Hann var farinn í austrveg at drepa tröll*" ('Þórr was not there. He had gone into the east-(road) to kill trolls') and *Lokasenna*'s "*Þórr kom eigi, þvíat hann var í austrvegi*" ('Þórr did not come because he had gone in the east-(road)') reflects Snorri's use of an exemplar is unconvincing. Snorri's use is consistent with his use of this prose narrative formulae elsewhere: when Óðinn creates trouble with the giant Hrungnir in *Skáldskaparmál*, ch. 17 ("*Þórr var farinn í austrvega at berja tröll*", 'Þórr had gone into the east-(roads) to smite trolls'); and in the Masterbuilder Tale in *Gylfaginning*, ch. 42 ('[...] ef Þórr kvæmi heim; en þá var hann farinn í austrveg at berja tröll', '... if Þórr came home; but at that time he had gone into the east-(road) to smite trolls'). This is more consistent with a unified narrative style rather than manuscript copying and also anticipates Þórr's appearance at the narrative climax. The use of the prepositional phrase *í austrvegi* ('in the east-(roads)', i.e. east of the Baltic Sea) rather than the adverb *austr* ('in the east') otherwise appears idiomatic for journeys related to trade in the real world (see *A Dictionary of Old Norse Prose (DONP)*, <http://dataonp.hum.ku.dk/index.html>, accessed 20.09.2011, s.v. 'austrvegr'). It only appears in a mythological context in *Edda* and in *Frá Ægi*, where it contrasts with the *Lokasenna* verse text (st. 59.4–5 presents *á austrvega*, 'on east-roads'; although cf. *Hárbarðsljóð* 1). This is more suggestive of *Edda* providing a model text paraphrased and abbreviated in *Frá Ægi* rather than a hypothetical manuscript exemplar of *Lokasenna* (or an antecedent text from which it drew) shaping formulaic expression in Snorri's prose style. Cf. also von See et al. (*Kommentar*, 2.382–384), who are sceptical that Snorri would have attached the narrative material related to visual deception to the *senna* without an exemplar; however, its centrality for Snorri and his emphasis on visual deception in its use make *Edda* the more probable context of innovation with magical motifs, if these are not considered traditional; on evidence corroborating Loki's initial slaying of Ægir's servant at the feast as a traditional element, see Frog 2010, esp. 274; for a discussion of the expression *gríðstaðr mikill* across these texts, see Frog 2010, esp. 164–165, 324–325.

evidence that Snorri drew on this narrative as a model and referent precisely for its relationship to visual deceptions (i.e. in the broader narrative contexts reflected in the prose) rather than insults of the *senna*. It draws attention to the hapax *lýsigull*, which is only found in these two sources. Margaret Clunies Ross shows that this term and motif most probably derive from the learned Latin lapidary tradition, presumably adapted by Snorri specifically to explain an obscure but central kenning, whereas it is irrelevant to both *Frá Ægi* and *Lokasenna*.⁴⁹ These features support the probability that *Frá Ægi* has been influenced by or adapted from Snorri's summary.

Frá Loka describes the binding of Loki in a manner corresponding to Snorri's description in *Gylfaginning*, ch. 50, without a clear transition or relation to the preceding text. This may simply be an appendix of unrelated information about Loki much as *Frá dauða Sinfjǫlta* ('Of the Death of Sinfjǫlti') appears between poems in the heroic section of the *Codex Regius* collection. It exhibits a degree of verbal correspondence indicative of textual dependence in what has been generally considered a summary of Snorri description of this event in *Edda*.⁵⁰ The relationships between *Frá Ægi* and *Frá Loka* and corresponding passages of *Edda* present a probable scenario that Snorri was adapting his knowledge of these traditions and *Edda* impacted the documentation or manuscript transmission of this poem within decades of being written.⁵¹ This is consistent with Lindblad's argument that the prose texts were added to an earlier transcribed poetic text in ca. 1250.⁵² Even if Lindblad's specific dating is questioned, it is based on evidence that the prose texts were not originally orthographically consistent with the poem and these were brought together in the process of manuscript transmission: even if the poetic text of *Lokasenna* is proposed to have been in written circulation by 1220, it remains more probable that these prose sections were added in response to Snorri's *Edda* rather than in anticipation of it. If *Edda* impacted the prose associated with early recordings of eddic poems, this presents the possibility that those impacts may have extended to the poetic text, even if this was only in the process of copying

⁴⁹ Margaret Clunies Ross, *Skáldskaparmál: Snorri Sturluson's ars poetica and Medieval Theories of Language*, Odense University Press: Odense 1987, at 139–150.

⁵⁰ Wessén 1945; Lindblad 1954, 227–228; Gunnell 1995, 227–228; Frog 2010, 42–43.

⁵¹ The scribe does not seem to have been a slave to Snorri's version (Frog 2010, 42–43, 324–325), yet Heimir Pálsson (2010, 27–30) opens the possibility that the brief and paraphrased account of the binding of the wolf Fenrir attached to copies of *Skáldskaparmál* is representative of an unpreserved redaction of the *Gylfaginning* text. This presents at least the possibility that *Frá Loka* could reflect part of the same or a similar redaction.

⁵² Lindblad 1954, esp. 286.

earlier manuscripts, as was the case in the example of *Baldrs draumar* above, or perhaps in the initial documentation of orally derived verses.

6. *Edda*, *Lokasenna* and the Lexicon of Myth

The poetic text of *Lokasenna* has the character of a parody of a wisdom poem, and its composition is marked by a striking number of words otherwise only known from prose.⁵³ The *senna* appears centrally concerned with humorous entertainment over any specific concern for referring to conventionally understood or recognizable myths. Some verse material seems not to have been understood while other verses were very possibly unfounded fabrications.⁵⁴ As Rudolf Simek has put it, “hardly any of the accusations in *Lokasenna* can be verified through other sources, and some [...] seem intended as mere slanderous jibes.”⁵⁵ Caution is required when using *Lokasenna* as a source for mythology, and correspondences between *Lokasenna* and *Edda* not attested elsewhere warrant scrutiny.

The vernacular apocalypse was referred to in verse with the alliterating collocation and kenning *ragna røk* ((final) fates of the gods’).⁵⁶ Snorri consistently refers to this event with the metaphorical expression *ragna røk(k)r* (‘twilight of the gods’).⁵⁷ *Ragna røk* is treated by scholarship as the common noun for the vernacular apocalypse of Old Norse mythology, but the genitive modifier was flexible, allowing different patterns of alliteration such as “aldar røk” ((final) fates of the age’) (*Vm* 39.4–5).⁵⁸ Snorri deploys *ragna røk(k)r* systematically in spite of a clear familiarity with a broad range of poems and their conventions, and he paraphrases rather than quotes verses in which *ragna røk* or its equivalent occur. The use of *røk(k)r* as a base-word in this construction is otherwise only found in *Lokasenna*, st. 39,

⁵³ von See et al., *Kommentar*, 2.379–380, 381.

⁵⁴ Barbro Söderberg, ‘Till tolknigen av några dunkla passager i *Lokasenna*’, *Scripta Islandica* 35 (1984), 43–86; John McKinnell, ‘Motivation in *Lokasenna*’, *Saga-Book* 22 (1986–1989), 234–262.

⁵⁵ Rudolf Simek, ‘Mythological Poetry in Medieval Iceland and France in the 12th Century’, in L. P. Słupecki & J. Morawiec (eds), *Between Paganism*, 76–84, at 78; cf. von See et al., *Kommentar*, 2.369.

⁵⁶ Cf. von See et al., *Kommentar*, 2.465; the *DONP* lists no examples of *ragna røk/røk(k)r* in prose outside of *Edda*; on verse material, see *LP*, s.v. ‘røk’.

⁵⁷ Haraldur Bernharðsson has recently reviewed the etymological relationship of these terms in ‘Old Icelandic *ragnarök* and *ragnarökkr*’, in A. J. Nussbaum (ed), *Verba Docenti: Studies in Historical and Indo-European Linguistics*, Beech Stave Press: Ann Arbor, MI 2007, 25–38.

⁵⁸ Cf. *tíva røk* [‘fates of the gods’], *þjóða røk* [‘fates of peoples’]; Hugo Gering, *Vollständiges Wörterbuch zu den Liedern der Edda*, Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses: Halle 1903, at 837–838; on synonymic variation for accomplishing metrical alliteration, cf. Frog & Jonathan Roper, ‘Verses versus the ‘Vanir’: Response to Simek’s “Vanir Obituary”’, *RMN Newsletter* 2 (2011), 29–37, at 29–31.

in the expression *ragna røkkr* (although *røk* is used in st. 25).⁵⁹ Some manuscripts of Snorri's *Edda* exhibit scribal variation of *røk* for *røk(k)r*. The terms have clearly distinct semantic fields and variation between them is not exhibited elsewhere, while they are so phonetically similar that *ragna røk(k)r* and *ragna røk* could not remain distinct in oral circulation (and could easily appear as a misspelling in a manuscript text). The scribal variation suggests interference from *ragna røk* as the more conventional and familiar form although *røk* has been considered an opaque archaism leading to the use of the more familiar *røk(k)r*.⁶⁰ The term *røk(k)r* is also generally very rare in verse and was not commonly used metaphorically for 'fate, doom',⁶¹ as would be expected if it were a conventional base-word in the expression *ragna røk*.⁶² This significantly reduces any likelihood that Snorri's usage is orally based, while variation in Snorri's quotation of *Lokasenna* verse problematizes any suggestion that he has modeled his use on the basis of one line in a manuscript copy of this poem. As there is nothing to support that use of *røk(k)r* was ever conventional in the poetry, the appearance of *ragna røkkr* in *Lokasenna* st. 39 is likely attributable to Snorri's influence. This possibility and the probable influence of *Edda* on *Lokasenna*'s prose (§5) are reciprocally reinforcing, particularly considering *Edda*'s impacts more generally. Although this may be little more than a subtle copyist's emendation, it opens the possibility that more significant emendations may have been introduced by the same copyist, if not in the process of transcription or even in the oral circulation of the poem, observing that Snorri's impacts on skaldic verse appear to have been primarily at the level of oral culture.

⁵⁹ Von See et al., *Kommentar*, 2.436, 465.

⁶⁰ See Haraldur Bernharðsson 2007, although his suggestion that this variation was free and synonymic (at 33) does not consider that, outside of *Lokasenna*, it only occurs within the phrase *ragna røk(k)r* > *ragna røk* rather than discretely in *røk(k)r* > *røk* or *røk* > *røk(k)r*.

⁶¹ Cf. *LP*, s.v. 'røkr'.

⁶² In *Lokasenna*, this appears in the stanza attributed to the god Týr, in which he taunts Loki with the binding of (his son) the wolf Fenrir. This narrative is given prominence in *Gylfaginning* and seems to have held special interest for poets, as implied by its attachment to copies of *Skáldslaparmál* without the rest of *Gylfaginning* (cf. Pálsson 2010, 27–30). Influence of *Edda* in this particular stanza would thus be less surprising.

7. Þórr's Visit to Útgarða-Loki and the Climactic Insults of *Lokasenna*

Loki's final insults directed against Þórr in *Lokasenna* stanzas 60 and 62 exhibit correspondences to Snorri's account of Þórr's visit to Útgarða-Loki. In order to address these stanzas and their potential relationship to Snorri's work, it is first necessary to introduce Snorri's narrative and outline the high probability that Snorri has manipulated traditional material for specific ends directly related to his composition of a vernacular *ars poetica*. The story is composed as a cycle of three adventures: *a*) the laming of Þórr's goats; *b*) travelling with the giant Skrímir; and *c*) games in Útgarða-Loki's hall. This is the longest narrative in the *Gylfaginning* section of *Edda*, constituting approximately one sixth of the whole. *Gylfaginning* is *Edda*'s survey of the mythological system, its figures with their names, attributes and genealogies, from the cosmogony to the eschatology. This information is presented in a dialogic narrative frame where the visiting Gylfi is deceived by magic and tales of the pagan gods told by a three-fold (Trinity) representation of Óðinn.⁶³ This frame is developed from vernacular mythological wisdom competitions, Christian pedagogical texts, and, as Christopher Abram has recently discussed, Christian dialogic conversion strategies oriented to challenging and undermining vernacular belief traditions.⁶⁴ Þórr's visit to Útgarða-Loki can be considered the heart of *Gylfaginning*, carefully constructed to reflect and comment on the narrative frame.⁶⁵ Snorri's conscious manipulation of material is implicit in this narration. When situated in relation to broader evidence of Þórr's adventures, this becomes a site in *Edda* where it is possible to see Snorri's uses of tradition as an interesting and valuable resource and referent. The three episodes all appear to be developed from traditional material, although Snorri has interwoven them with themes related to food and hospitality, and the ineffectiveness of Þórr's hammer.⁶⁶ The narrative is

⁶³ Heinz Klingenberg, 'Gylfaginning: Tres vidit unum adoravit', in B. Brogyanyi & T. Krömmelbein (eds), *Germanic Dialects: Linguistic and Philological Investigations*, John Benjamins Publishing Company: Amsterdam 1986, 627–689, esp. at 637–641.

⁶⁴ Christopher Abram 'Gylfaginning and Early Medieval Conversion Theory', *Saga-Book* 33 (2009), 5–25.

⁶⁵ John Lindow, 'Thor's Visit to Útgarðaloki', *Oral Tradition* 15 (2000), 170–186.

⁶⁶ On the theme of food and hospitality, see Lindow 2000, 176–177. The ineffectiveness of Þórr's hammer is in adventure *a*: the hammer is used to resurrect Þórr's goats, but one rises lame; adventure *b*: Þórr strikes the giant Skrímir three times without effect; adventure *c*: Þórr strikes at Útgarða-Loki but hits nothing but air. The narrative of the laming of Þórr's goat and his servants are attested elsewhere, but only here is the laming connected with a 'feast' and his servants identified with a human community (cf.

developed on a story-pattern of Þórr's visit to a giant's hall, of which it can be recognized as a parody.⁶⁷ Most notably, Snorri's presentation is the only example in which Þórr is defeated and humiliated by his giant adversary without redemption.

The encounter in the hall is constructed as an allegory concerning the interpretation of poetic language.⁶⁸ Each of Þórr's (male) companions is presented with a challenge, and Þórr is presented with three. Rosemary Power points out that the allegorical nature of these challenges is generally exceptional in Old Norse prose literature.⁶⁹ The opponents in these encounters are beings and forces veiled behind transparent names (Logi, 'Wildfire', Hugi, 'Thought', Elli, 'Old Age') and more complex visual kennings (a giant grey cat = 'the world serpent';⁷⁰ a drinking horn filled with the sea = 'the mead of poetry'⁷¹). Snorri uses allegorical techniques within the context of his treatise on the art of poetry to transform an adventure-narrative of Þórr into a parable on poetic language and language use: Þórr is duped and humiliated because he does not correctly interpret what things are called (*heiti*, to use Snorri's term) or their representations (kennings). Þórr's failure to empty the horn filled with the sea in three drinks implicitly contrasts him with Óðinn's successful draining of three containers of the mead of poetry in one drink each (§4). Mythological traditions appear to be consciously employed and manipulated as a resource and referent in this account.

The play between language, image and referent already emerges in the adventure with the giant Skrymir. This adventure opens with Þórr and

ibid. 173–175). Snorri's representation may potentially be intended to parody human ritual activity (sharing the god's animal in a ritual feast), emphasizing Þórr's failure as a worshipped god.

⁶⁷ For a survey of this story-pattern, see John McKinnell, *Both One and Many: Essays on Change and Variety in Late Norse Heathenism*, II Calamo: Roma 1994, at 57–86; cf. Frog, 'Circum-Baltic Mythology? – The Strange Case of the Theft of the Thunder-Instrument (ATU 1148b)', in *Archaeologia Baltica* 15 (2011, in press; hereafter Frog 2011b), 78–98, at 88–90.

⁶⁸ The following is based on Kaaren Grimstad's discussion and explication of the Útgarda-Loki episode and its images, which I was lucky enough to hear as an undergraduate in her lectures on Old Norse mythology at the University of Minnesota.

⁶⁹ Rosemary Power, 'An Óige, an Saol agus an Bás,' Feis Tighe Chónain and 'Þórr's Visit to Útgarda-Loki', *Bealoideas* 53 (1985), 217–294. Rudolf Simek (2009, 81–82) points out that allegory was essential to the skaldic poetic tradition and conventional to the medieval intellectual climate; cf. Klingenberg 1986.

⁷⁰ 'Grey-back' = snake (cf. *LP*, s.v. 'grábakr', 'grár') + 'cat' = giant (*ibid.*, s.v. 'kqtrr') → 'snake giant' = world serpent.

⁷¹ Quinn 2010, 224–225; the 'drink' or 'cup' of Óðinn, the gods, a giant or dwarf was a central conceptual metaphor for 'poetry'; poetic synonyms for 'sea' (e.g. *brim*, *unnr*, *vágr*) functioned in an equivalence class for 'drink' (see Meissner 1921, 429); thus the sea in the drinking-horn of the giant-host = 'mead of poetry' (cf. the kenning *hornstraum Hrímnis*, 'horn-stream of the giant' = 'poetry', in a verse from a poem about Þórr quoted by Snorri in *Skáldskaparmál*, ch. 4); see also Clover 1978; Frank 1981.

his companions finding a great hall in which they spend the night. Owing to earthquakes and thunderous roaring, the companions retreat into the side-room and Þórr stands watch. In the morning, they discover that the hall is a mitten and the side-room is its thumb (*þumlungr*); the disturbance was the giant's snoring. Seth Lerer has proposed that Þórr's misrecognition of Skrímir's 'mitten' as a 'hall' is a play on an incomplete kenning, *'hall of the hand' (= 'mitten').⁷² Thereafter, Þórr's activities are also otherwise forestalled by fixation on surface representations without recognizing or accessing the content or referent. Skrímir becomes a travelling companion and all of the food is placed in a common sack; in the evening, the giant goes to sleep and Þórr is unable to open the sack (owing to unseen magic iron fastenings) leaving him and his companions without supper. Þórr then angrily attempts to strike the sleeping giant three times, unaware that he is striking hills (!) rather than the giant. When the giant 'wakes' after each blow, Þórr retreats. This final display of Þórr's ineffectiveness is more peculiar because Skrímir appears as nothing less than a helpful travelling companion (who in fact directs Þórr to Útgarða-Loki's hall), neither threatening nor attempting to cause any actual harm. The illusions appear to have no greater purpose than to mock and annoy, which makes them unique in the corpus.

The term *þumlungr* referring to the 'thumb of a mitten or glove' is only found in *Edda*, its direct adaptation into *Lokrur* (II, 23.4), and in *Lokasenna*, where it is used in an insult against Þórr: "sízt í hanzca þumlungi / hnúçþir þú, einheri // oc þóttisca þú þá Þórr vera".⁷³ This clearly refers to the night in Skrímir's glove. A parallel insult is leveled against Þórr by Óðinn in *Hárbarðsljóð*, suggesting it was conventional (verbal correspondences in cursive): "af hrozlo oc hugbleyði / þér var í hanzca troðit // oc þóttisca þú þá Þórr vera".⁷⁴ The insult in *Hárbarðsljóð* uses the verb *troða* ('to step, tread; to stomp, stuff, cram'). This indicates *a*) that Þórr was physically forced with effort into the mitten, and *b*) that the mitten was a tight, cramped space, into which Þórr could only be gotten with effort. It does not correlate with Snorri's description or the insult in *Lokasenna*. It aligns instead with the description of the *glov* ('glove') in which Grendel kept his victims in *Beowulf* (2085b–2090), and the mittens or gloves in which victims are stuffed in later

⁷² Seth Lerer, 'Grendel's Glove', *ELH* 61 (1994), 721–751.

⁷³ *Lokasenna*, st. 60.4–6. 'since in the thumb of a mitten / you sat cowering, Óðinn-warrior // and you did not then seem to be Þórr'.

⁷⁴ *Hárbarðsljóð*, st. 26.3–5. 'in fear and cowardice / you were cramped in a mitten // and you did not then seem to be Þórr'.

troll-lore.⁷⁵ This suggests that the insult was denigrating an otherwise heroic or mythically significant act in which Þórr was threatened and nevertheless overcame his adversary. In relation to these traditions, Snorri's narrative assumes the quality of parody: Þórr is not trapped and under duress, captured by a giant; he wilfully enters his adversary's 'mitten' and stays there for the night. Rather than being threatened, incapacitated or even failing in an explicit challenge, there is no adversary and he simply fails to correctly identify what he sees. The contrast with a broader Germanic pattern makes it probable that Snorri is manipulating tradition as a referent here much as in the challenges of Útgarða-Loki's hall, with which it is united through the theme of misrecognition. If this is correct, *Lokasenna* would be adapting verses of a conventional insult (normally denigrating a mythologically significant event) to reflect Snorri's parody, which is itself already intended simply to poke fun at Þórr.

Loki's next insult in *Lokasenna* (st. 62) would then follow directly from the same narrative in *Edda*: Þórr went unharmed but hungry when he could not open Skrímir's sack. This insult clearly refers to the prank described by Snorri. The giant-name *Skrímir* ('Frightener') is only found in *Edda*, this stanza of *Lokasenna* and the late *Samsons saga fagra* ('The Saga of Samson the Fair'). In *Lokrur*, the medial /m/ changes to /mn/ (*Skrimnir* / *Skrymnir*) although this song is adapted directly from Snorri's text, as addressed above, and does not support this as a conventional giant-name and adversary or companion of Þórr.⁷⁶ The adversary with the glove in *Hárbarðsljóð* 26 is called Fjalarr. In *Lokasenna*, the prank of the food-sack is the final insult in the 65-stanza poem, and the third consecutive insult addressed to Þórr. In some sense, this insult is the climax of Loki's verbal assaults on the gods and on Þórr in particular, yet the progression seems anticlimactic from a modern perspective:

Insulting Þórr's wife Sif:

St. 54. Loki slept with her. (Sexual/social impropriety)

Insulting Þórr:

St. 58. Þórr will fail to avenge his father's (Óðinn's) death. (Social impropriety)

⁷⁵ C.W. von Sydow, 'Tors färd till Utgård', *Danske Studier* 7 (1910), 65–105 and 145–182, at 145–158; Laborde, 'Grendel's Glove and His Immunity to Weapons', *Modern Language Review* 18 (1923), 202–204, at 202; Lerer 1994; cf. the Sámic traditions surveyed in Frog 2011b, 81.

⁷⁶ In *Egils saga* and *Kormáks saga*, *Skrímir* is used as a sword-name, and also listed elsewhere among poetic synonyms for 'sword'.

St. 60. Þórr spent the night cowering in a mitten-hall. (Cowardice = social impropriety)

St. 62. Þórr could not open Skrímir's food-sack and went hungry. (Stupidity?)

Insults in *Lokasenna* are primarily on themes of social and sexual impropriety.⁷⁷ Before Þórr arrives, Loki insults Þórr's wife Sif with the provocative claim that he slept with her, cuckolding Þórr (st. 54). Loki's first remark to Þórr (st. 58) is also strong: Þórr will not avenge his father's murder. This refers to Óðinn being slain by the wolf Fenrir (Loki's son) at *ragna røk*, and implicitly to Þórr's simultaneous battle and death with the world serpent (Loki's son), preventing his taking revenge. This insult is heavily loaded with mythological significance. The insults go downhill from there. *Lokasenna* dispels the threat and mythic significance of the insult in *Hárbarðsljóð* st. 26 by following Snorri's version: rather than the god having been under duress, he mistook a large mitten for a hall. The final insult is hollow, lacking any dimension of social impropriety: Þórr was tricked by an adversary with a silly prank that seems rather paltry as an independent event. However, it may be mistaken to presume that the insult should be mythologically or socially significant, especially if it refers to *Edda*: the progression may reflect the reception of Snorri's burlesque and the popularity of his humour at Þórr's expense. Internal and contextual evidence suggests that Snorri has consciously developed a parody of mythological narratives about Þórr which contrast sharply with the broader tradition; correspondences of *Lokasenna* with *Edda* also contrast with the broader tradition in manners suggestive of referring to Snorri's parody rather than parodying the tradition itself. In *Lokasenna*, the probability that *Edda* supplied models for the surrounding prose texts in the manuscript was complimented by the probability that the use of *ragna røkkr* in *Lokasenna*, st. 39, occurred under the ægis of *Edda*. These support the possibility that *Edda*'s impact may have extended to whole stanzas and mythological narratives referred to in the stanzas of the poetic text, as in the present examples which appear to reflect a narrative as it was adapted and manipulated by Snorri within strategies and priorities specific to his *Edda*. Such impacts could have already occurred in oral circulation, but they may also be attributable to manuscript transmission – for example, complimenting a single climactic

⁷⁷ See e.g. McKinnell 1986–1989.

insult of stanza 58 with two more developed from Snorri's narrative, much as stanzas were added to *Baldrs draumar*, discussed above (§3). Snorri's work seems to have echoed through the *Codex Regius* version of this text, and the progression of the three insults against Þórr may reflect their value as entertainment for a 13th century audience without meaningful relation to a belief tradition, much as other insults in the poem may be little more than "slandrous jibes" at the pagan gods intended for the entertainment of a Christian audience without foundation in conventional or earlier myths.⁷⁸

8. *Edda* and *Brymskviða*?

The evidence of the *Lokasenna* poem suggests that the rapid popularity of Snorri's *Edda* not only enlivened mythological discourses generally but also – within decades of being written – it impacted popular forms and understandings of myths in circulating poetry. This is consistent with the immediate increase in mythological references in skaldic poetry and their reinterpretation, as discussed in the myth of the mead of poetry (§4). The poem *Brymskviða*, preserved in the *Codex Regius* collection, is a version or adaptation of a Circum-Baltic myth, The Theft of the Thunder-Instrument (ATU 1148b).⁷⁹ *Brymskviða* diverges from these traditions in several significant respects: *a*) the god does not orchestrate the action (the plan is not Þórr's; he objects to it but remains passive); *b*) the stolen instrument (Þórr's hammer) is not connected to rain or thunder; *c*) the adversaries do not fear thunder, lightning, the instrument or the god; *d*) the god's disguise (as Freyja and bride rather than as a servant) is sexually compromising. Like Skrímir, the giant-adversary is not attested in other early sources. The poem is constituted of mythological motifs and story-patterns, but these appear removed from the belief tradition: mythological material is used as a social resource subordinated to style (e.g. Heimdallr is referred to as an *æsir*-god and a *vanir*-god in parallel lines) and rhetoric (e.g. Freyja's mythic necklace, her identity marker, bursts as a hyperbolic representation of outrage, yet this should be an event of cosmological proportions no less than breaking

⁷⁸ Simek 2009, 78.

⁷⁹ The following is summarized from the analytical survey in Frog 2011b. For earlier surveys and studies of this tradition, its sources and literature, see e.g. J. Balys, *Griaustinis ir velnias baltoskandijos kraštu tautosakos studija*, Tautosakos Darbų: Kaunas 1939, at 33–52 and 206–209; William Hansen, *Ariadne's Thread: A Guide to International Tales Found in Classical Literature*, Cornell University Press: Ithaca, NY 2002, at 305–314.

Óðinn's spear).⁸⁰ The poem appears to be a burlesque⁸¹ oriented to the humiliation of Þórr in the fashion of the visit to Útgarða-Loki (§7). Neither the overall adventure nor individual mythic 'events' specific to it (e.g. the breaking, loan or repair/reconstitution of Freyja's necklace) are attested in other early sources.⁸² Although Þórr explicitly states that the gods will use his transvestite act to insult him, it is neither encountered in insult exchanges nor elsewhere. This lack of early evidence for the myth contrasts sharply with the narrative's later popularity in a Christian cultural milieu: it is one of only three mythological narratives known to be translated into the *rímur* tradition (the others being *Lokrur* and *Skíðaríma*, a mythological burlesque on a Christian's visionary journey to pagan Valhöll),⁸³ and the only known mythological narrative translated into the ballad tradition, where it was clearly popular: the ballad-form was recorded throughout the Scandinavian world.⁸⁴ If *Þrymskviða* were composed for a Christian audience

⁸⁰ This use of mythological material as well as unusual features in the metrics and poetics of this poem have been extensively discussed. See especially Jan de Vries, 'Over de Datering der *Þrymskviða*', *Tijdschrift voor nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde* 47 (1928), 251–322, and the expanded discussion of textual parallels in Alfred Jakobsen, '*Þrymskviða* som allusjonsdikt', *Edda* (1984), 75–80. Bernt Øyvind Thorvaldsen has resituated and overthrown early text-loan models with Oral-Formulaic Theory in 'Om *Þrymskviða*, tekstlån og tradisjon', *Maal og Minne* (2008), 142–166. However, Oral-Formulaic Theory is not equipped to address intertextual referential practice, although this played a significant role in Old Norse poetics (Harris 1983 121; on intertextuality in oral cultures, see further cf. Frog 2010, 197–222, 238–317). Opponents to the 'authenticity' of *Þrymskviða* as a pre-Christian myth have tended to focus on evidence of late composition while advocates of its authenticity have focused on explanations or justifications for the humiliation of Þórr through sexual transgression presented in the poem (e.g. John McKinnell 'Eddic Poetry in Anglo-Saxon Northern England', in J. Graham-Cambell et al. (eds), *Vikings and the Danelaw*, Oxbow: Exeter 2001, 327–344, at 334–338). The Circum-Baltic context supports that the *Þrymskviða* presentation is a parody of a widespread mythological narrative, independent evidence for the Germanic form of the narrative being parodied becoming apparent in that frame (Frog 2011b, 88–91). At the same time, the handling of mythologically significant elements in *Þrymskviða* appears consistently divorced from belief traditions. There is nothing to support Þórr's cross-dressing as any more connected to belief traditions than the bursting of Freyja's necklace.

⁸¹ The burlesque quality of the poem is not disputed; cf. John McKinnell, 'Myth as Therapy: The Usefulness of *Þrymskviða*', *Medium Ævum* 69 (2000), 1–20; Margaret Clunies Ross 'Reading *Þrymskviða*', in P. Acker & C. Larrington (eds), *The Poetic Edda: Essays on Old Norse Mythology*, Routledge: New York 2002, 180–194.

⁸² Erik Noreen (*Den norrsk-isländska Poesien*, Norstedt & Söners Förlag: Stockholm 1926, at 80) observes, "Alla detaljer, däribland även namnet *Þrymr*, kunna vara nyskapade av *Þrymskviðaskalden*". Cf. Peter Hallberg, 'Om *Þrymskviða*', *Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi* 69 (1954), 51–77.

⁸³ The opening sequence of *Völsungs rímur* also includes narrative material involving Óðinn and the divine community in a curious partially euhemerized history. This parallels the epic cycle's inclusion of opening events involving Óðinn and other gods in the earlier eddic and saga versions of the narrative. *Þrymlur* and *Lokrur* are, however, solely concerned with the mythological sphere. Although *Skíðaríma* is modelled on a Christian visionary experience, it is also centrally concerned with a portrayal of the 'pagan' mythological sphere.

⁸⁴ See e.g. Knut Liestøl, *Den norrøne arven*, Universitetsforlaget: Oslo 1970, at 15–18.

after Snorri was writing,⁸⁵ it is reasonable to consider that Snorri's handling of mythology as burlesque may have provided a model for the construction of a new poem rather than simply referring to Snorri's new myths or new interpretations.

If this hypothesis is correct, it would reflect one more dimension of *Edda's* role as an exemplar and model for uses of mythology as a referent: just as his impact on uses of vernacular mythology in skaldic verse was dynamic and generative, rather than simply providing a fixed list of expressions for poets to employ, Snorri may have presented generative models for eddic poetry as well. Unlike the stanzas added to *Baldurs draumar* composed in a milieu where *rímur* poetry was vital (§3), *Þrymskviða* was composed in the period before the generation of new poems directly from established texts had become fashionable. This may be a factor in its emergence in a transitional period of radical cultural change when *Edda* exerted tremendous influence over oral poetry. The long-term popularity of this narrative in a Christian cultural milieu, surviving even into 20th century ballad traditions, would then both parallel and outstrip the popularity of Snorri's account of Þórr's visit to Útgarða-Loki, which similarly seems to have found its place precisely as a reworking of traditional material in a way that made it interesting and relevant to emerging Christian frames of reference.

9. Princess 'Edda' and *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*

Bósa saga ok Herrauðs ('The Saga of Bósi and Herrauður') is a burlesque saga composed in the 14th century or later.⁸⁶ Stephen Mitchell has emphasized that the Old Norse mytho-heroic sagas are grounded "in traditional heroic themes" qualifying them through their "lengthy continuity within the Nordic context."⁸⁷ Although *Bósa saga* may participate in Mitchell's "lengthy continuity", its handling of strategies and contents is "characterized by an absence of this continuity" in the generation of a new and dynamic literary

⁸⁵ This does not mean that *Þrymskviða* cannot manifest genuine archaic features. This has been suggested for "[V]Reiðr var þá Vingbór" (*Þrymskviða*, st. 1.1) as an archaic alliteration, but this should not be conflated with the period of the poem's origin: cf. "Reið varð þá Freyia" (*Þrymskviða*, st. 13.1) where alliteration is carried in /f/: *reiðr* need not alliterate in *Þrymskviða* (Vries 1928, 260–261, 270–271). On the use of expletive particles (cf. McKinnell 2000, 1), see Frog 2011b, 88n.18; cf. Fidjestøl 1999, 228.

⁸⁶ Otto Luitpold Jiriczek (ed), *Die Bósa-Saga in zwei Fassungen nebst Proben aus den Bósa-Rímur*, Trübner: Strassburg 1893. The comical and burlesque nature of this saga is not contested.

⁸⁷ Stephen A. Mitchell, *Heroic Sagas and Ballads*, Cornell University Press: Ithaca, NY 1991, at 26–27.

construction.⁸⁸ The saga engages names, narratives, genealogies, motifs and narrative patterns in order to situate the burlesque in relation to traditional mytho-heroic sagas. ‘Tradition’ is used as a referent in the generation of parody and comic effect.⁸⁹ In this respect, *Bósa saga* is similar to Þórr’s visit to Útgarða-Loki and *Þrymskviða*. *Bósa saga* is exceptional for the range of traditional material which it engages, from a runic inscription formula⁹⁰ to bawdy *fabliaux*.⁹¹ *Bósa saga* both manipulates tradition for comic effect and draws on a much broader range of traditions in circulation than was conventional.

Lars van Wezel points out that *Bósa saga* appears to make direct reference to Snorri’s *Edda*.⁹² “Edda” appears as the name of a princess kidnapped by Bósi, but was not otherwise a personal name.⁹³ The common noun *edda* (‘great-grandmother’) was already archaic and falling out of use in Snorri’s time,⁹⁴ and may not have been recognized by the author of *Bósa saga* a century or two later. ‘Edda’ appears better attested in both verse and prose as a name for Snorri’s *ars poetica*.⁹⁵ The narrative episode in which Bósi kidnaps Edda is developed as a probable intertextual play on the rape of the goddess Iðunn, employing the episode of the Deception of the Tree, which I have discussed elsewhere.⁹⁶ This is only one of several mythological narratives engaged as an intertextual referent in the saga.⁹⁷ The use of the name “Edda” within the frame of an episode paralleling the opening narrative of *Skáldskaparmál* reinforces the probability of a conscious intertextual play, not simply with a mythological narrative, but with

⁸⁸ Lars van Wezel, ‘Myths to Play with: *Bósa saga ok Herraúðs*’, in J. McKinnell et al. (eds), *The Fantastic in Old Norse / Icelandic Literature*, Durham University: Durham 2006, 1034–1043, at 1034–1035.

⁸⁹ See e.g. Vésteinn Ólason, ‘The Marvellous North and Authorial Presence in the Icelandic *fornaldarsögur*’, in R. Erikson (ed), *Contexts of Pre-Novel Narrative*, Mouton de Gruyter: Berlin 1994, 101–134.

⁹⁰ See e.g. John McKinnell & Rudolf Simek with Klaus Düwel, *Runes, Magic and Religion: A Sourcebook*, Fassbaender: Wien 2004, at 134–140.

⁹¹ See e.g. Sverrir Tómasson ‘Hugleiðingar um horfna bókmenntagrein’, *Tímarit Máls og Menningar* 50 (1989), 211–226, at 218–220.

⁹² Van Wezel 2006, 1042.

⁹³ Erik Henrik Lind, *Norsk-Isländska dopnamn ock fingerade namn från medeltiden*, Uppsala: Lundequistska Bokhandeln 1905–1915, at 208. In the eddic poem *Rígsþula*, *edda* [‘great-grandmother’] is used among allegorical designations for figures (like ‘Father’, ‘Mother’), with nothing to suggest that they would be interesting or recognizable as ‘names’ outside that context, or that the saga-author was familiar with that poem.

⁹⁴ Anatoly Liberman, ‘Ten Scandinavian and North English Etymologies’, *Alvíssmál* 6 (1996), 63–98, at 63–70.

⁹⁵ Cf. *DONP*, s.v. ‘edda’; *LP*, s.v. ‘edda’.

⁹⁶ See further Frog 2010, 34, 123–126.

⁹⁷ Van Wezel 2006; Frog 2011b, 90.

conscious reference to Snorri's work. Van Wezel suggests that the appropriation of "Edda" by the hero reflects an acknowledgement of appropriating strategies and techniques of Snorri's work – that *Edda* was an "inspirational source"⁹⁸ for *Bósa saga*. Whereas references to *Edda* in verse assert its role as an authority in vernacular poetics, the reference in *Bósa saga* appears to acknowledge *Edda*'s authority as a model for narrative burlesque and entertainment. Just as initial discussions of uses of *Edda* in *Lokrur* (§2) and the late stanzas of *Baldur's draumar* (§3) support the probable role of narratives in *Edda* as a referent in contemporary or near-contemporary skaldic (§4) and eddic poetry (§6–7), the relatively unequivocal example of *Bósa saga*, which belongs to that same later milieu, supports the potential if not probable possibility that *Edda* may have supplied a model for handling mythological narratives in the generation of new eddic compositions – or radical recompositions – as may be the case of *Brymskviða* (§8).

10. Snorri, *Edda*, Mythology and Poetics

Snorri presumably learned his gods as well as verses with the education of his own upbringing.⁹⁹ He effectively validated eddic poetry and mythological narrative through asserting their relevance and significance (if not their centrality) to the education of young poets, while affirming their value as entertainment. The uniqueness of Snorri's work appears directly related to the interface of oral and written cultures in the early phases of vernacular literature. The centrality of knowledge of mythology for the still-valued high rhetoric of vernacular oral poetics seems to have presented conditions which allowed – or even demanded – the presentation and discussion of vernacular mythology in a pedagogical work.

This work emerged in a Christian cultural milieu using technologies and pedagogical models imported with the Church before culturally relevant conventions for vernacular writing had become established. It appears to have had immediate impacts on the cultural activity of mythological narratives. This is reflected in the statistical rise of mythological references in skaldic verse, manuscript activity of eddic poems (§1, §5), and immediate impacts on conceptions and interpretations of myths

⁹⁸ Van Wezel 2006, 1042.

⁹⁹ Hermann Pálsson, *Úr Landnorðri: Samar og ystru rætur íslenskrar menningar*, Bókmenntafræðistofnun Háskóla Íslands: Reykjavík 1997, at 134. It is unlikely that Snorri's pedagogical emphasis lacked vernacular precedent in a poetry where mythological references are so essential to poetic practice.

reflected in both skaldic (§4) and eddic verse (§7). The role of *Edda* as a resource and authority for narrative material and its treatment is clearly evident in *rímur* poetry (§2) and later traditions of eddic poems (§3), yet this seems to have already been happening in the earliest phases of their manuscript documentation and circulation (§6–7). Moreover, Snorri's handling of mythological narrative material may have provided a model for utilizing mythology and poetry more generally – strategies which made vernacular mythology a valuable and interesting social resource in a Christian cultural milieu, leading to the generation of new poems (§8) and even impacting prose literature (§9). Rather than being constrained by conventions for the attitudes and approaches to vernacular mythology in written literature, *Edda* shaped those models with impacts resounding for generations to come. Although no one influence can be strictly demonstrated, their relative probabilities increase with the extension of the horizons of this overview. This directly parallels the increasing relative probability of individual impacts on *Lokasenna* as these are situated within the cumulative context of multiple influences (§5–7). By situating individual probable and potential cases in a broader pattern of socio-historical processes, each potential case is lifted from isolation into the context of a broader phenomenon. Amid the ebb and flow of these waves of impact, Snorri recedes, as just a man – one man whose interests and undertakings resonated through his community, and whose name was only fleetingly attached to *Edda*. In contrast, *Edda* emerged as a work, a voice carrying an authority far beyond the reach of any one man – a voice echoing through history and reshaping Old Norse mythology into the imaginal world we recognize today.

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