

Identity Poetics among the Icelandic Skalds

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Famously, the skalds of Iceland successfully took over the mantle of court poet in tenth- and particularly eleventh-century Norway (and to an extent in England and other centers of Scandinavian diasporic populations as well). In this way they sustained a partial livelihood. In this paper I am going to propose that we can detect a sense of Icelandic (and to a lesser extent Orkney) identity in some of their verses. These markers might already have been symptomatic of an emerging ideology, to be more explicitly expressed in later prose texts, where “individual Icelanders, especially upwardly mobile young Icelandic men, are, on a case-by-case basis, represented as better, cleverer, and more gifted than any individual Norwegian, except perhaps the Norwegian king, against whom they frequently measure themselves. Their special talent thus enables them as individuals to be successful in Norwegian society, even though they come from the cultural margin.”¹ That the sense of a community identity and the specification of markers for that identity should have evolved comparatively rapidly in the history of the Norse settlement in Iceland is hardly surprising. There might have

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1. Margaret Clunies Ross, “From Iceland to Norway: Essential Rites of Passage for an Early Icelandic Skald,” *alvíssmál* 9 (1999): 57. See also the essays by Guðrún Nordal and Jeffrey Turco in this volume.

been a communal impulse to actively cultivate—even fetishize—the distinctive identity that developed as a reflex of the genetic, cultural, and linguistic heritage of Icelanders and the specific set of livelihoods available for them to pursue. Among wider-world analogues for such rapid developments one could cite the case of settler identity politics in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Australia.

I shall focus on the following textual features:

1. Allusions to and camaraderie with Icelanders;
2. Allusions to distinctive complexion and hair color, often explicitly linked to Icelandic affiliations;
3. Use of distinctive lexical items adopted into Icelandic (and Orkney Norse) from the Irish language.

The composition of settlement in Iceland was distinctive from the outset. While the bulk of the settlers of the main influx ca. 870 to 930 A.D. came from mainland Scandinavia, especially the western coast of Norway, significant numbers also came from the Viking settlements in Britain.² Ari's *Íslendingabók* emphasizes Norwegian settlement, but, as Hermann Pálsson points out, it is clear from *Landnámabók* and the sagas that many settlers must have come directly from the British Isles.³

Genetically speaking, the dominant elements in the population of early Iceland are a mix of Scandinavian and British. Studies of mitochondrial DNA variation indicate that contemporary Icelanders trace about 37 percent of their matrilineal ancestry to Scandinavia, with the remainder coming from the populations of Scotland and Ireland. In contrast, Y-chromosome analyses suggest that 75 to 80 percent of their patrilineal ancestry originated in Scandinavia.⁴ It

2. See Jesse L. Byock et al., "A Viking-age Valley in Iceland: The Mosfell Archaeological Project," *Medieval Archaeology* 49 (2005): 203.

3. *Keltar á Íslandi* (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 1996), 47.

4. See Byock, "A Viking-age Valley," 203; Agnar Helgason et al., "mtDNA and the origin of the Icelanders: Deciphering Signals of Recent Population History," *American Journal of Human Genetics* 66 (2000): 999–1016; Agnar Helgason et al., "Estimating Scandinavian and Gaelic Ancestry in the Male Settlers of Iceland," *American Journal of Human Genetics* 67 (2000): 697–717; Agnar Helgason et al., "mtDNA and the Islands of the North Atlantic: Estimating the Proportions of Norse and Gaelic Ancestry," *American Journal of Human Genetics* 68 (2001): 723–37.

has also been shown that ancient Icelandic mtDNA sequences are more closely related to sequences from contemporary inhabitants of Scotland, Ireland, and Scandinavia (and several other European populations) than to those from the modern Icelandic population: this appears to be due to genetic drift in the Icelandic mtDNA pool during the last 1,100 years.⁵

Irish place and proper names are plentifully attested in Icelandic.⁶ Some proper names are attested only for the earliest phase of settlement whereas others became popular in the Middle Ages and in some cases have remained so down to the present day. Many are known only from Icelandic, not Norwegian,⁷ and must therefore in themselves have been distinctive markers of Icelandic identity: examples are Bekan (Irish *Beccan*), Bresi (Irish *Bress*), Brjänn (Irish *Brían*), Butraldi (Irish *Putrall/Pudarill*—a nickname), Dufan (Irish *Duban*), Dufgus, sometimes partially Icelandicized as Dugfúss (Irish *Dubgus*), Dufþakr (Irish *Dubhthach*), Dungaðr/Dunkaðr (Irish *Donnchad*), Gilli (Irish *Giolla*), Gufa, as nickname of Ketill gufa (Irish *Gubha*), Kaðall (Irish *Cathal*), Kalman (Irish *Colmán*), Kjallakr (Irish *Cellach*), Kjaran (Irish *Ciaran*), Kjartan (cf. Irish *Muirchertach*), Kjarvalr (Irish *Cerball*), Kolka, attested in Icelandic as a nickname in Þorbjörn kolka (Irish *Colca*), Konáll (Irish *Conall*), Kormákr (Irish *Cormac*), Kýlan (Irish *Cuileán*), Melkorka (Irish *Mael Curcaig*), Myríðr (Irish *Muiriath*), Njáll (Irish *Níall*), and Patrekr (Irish *Patraicc*). The list is moderately impressive, even though by William Craigie's count under two percent of the names in *Landnámabók* are of "Gaelic" origin.⁸

The Irish element in the vocabulary of Icelandic, though not large, is equally unmistakable. Some of the lexical items have acquired special affective force, undergone semantic expansion, or entered into distinctive idioms. An instance is *máki/mákur*, which means "calf of the foot, foot, seal's flipper, [clumsy or flabby human] hand," from

5. See Agnar Helgason et al., "Sequences From First Settlers Reveal Rapid Evolution in Icelandic mtDNA Pool," *Public Library of Science Genetics* 5.1 (2009): DOI:10.1371/journal.pgen.1000343.

6. See, e.g., Hermann Pálsson, *Keltar á Íslandi*, 47–102.

7. See Hermann Pálsson, "Keltesk mannanöfn í íslenskum örnefnum," *Skírnir* 126 (1952): 195–202.

8. "Gaelic Words and Names in the Icelandic Sagas," *Zeitschrift für Celtische Philologie* 1 (1897): 441.

Scots Gaelic *màg* “paw, claw, pejorative term for hand, seal’s flipper”; probably the basic meaning “paw” has been extended in both Gaelic and Icelandic. It also occurs in a compound *slyttimákur* “idler,” literally “slack hand” in a probably fourteenth-century verse in *Grettis saga*.⁹ Another loanword, *lámillámr*, from Irish *lám* “hand,”¹⁰ occurs in *Snorra Edda* as a *heiti* for “hand.”¹¹ Its meaning is similar to *máki* and shows a parallel semantic development: in modern Icelandic it can mean “claw, paw, talon.”¹² An exceptionally interesting example, from a cultural standpoint, is *gjalti*, from Irish *geilt* “madman,” in the idiom *verða at gjalti* “go into a frenzy,” especially in battle.¹³ Another loanword that belongs in the context of “battle” is *kesja* “spear,” from Irish *ceis* “spear.”¹⁴ Quite a few loanwords are attested only in later texts¹⁵ but nevertheless were probably brought to Iceland by the first settlers;¹⁶ further instances will be given presently. The notion of a wider Irish influence on Icelandic culture and literature has been extensively canvassed.¹⁷

Beyond these main founding ethnic groups, it has been suggested

9. Finnur Jónsson, *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*, vols. A1–2, Tekst efter håndskrifterne, vols. B1–2, Rettet tekst (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1912–15), henceforth *Skjaldedigtning*, B2:469; *Grettis saga*, ed. Guðni Jónsson, Íslenzk fornrit 7 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1936), 150; Helgi Guðmundsson, “Máki, mákur,” *Íslenzk tunga* 1 (1959): 53.

10. All citations of Irish words are taken from the *Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language*, ed. Gregory Toner et al: <http://www.dil.ie/index.asp>.

11. Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, ed. Anthony Faulkes, 2 vols. (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1998), 1:108.

12. Helgi Guðmundsson, “Máki, mákur,” 50; see George Henderson, *The Norse Influence on Celtic Scotland* (Glasgow: J. Maclehose, 1910), vii.

13. See Einar Ól. Sveinsson, “Vísu úr Hávamálum og írsk saga,” *Skírnir* 126 (1952): 173 and the references there given.

14. Alexander Bugge, *Vesterlandenes Indflydelse paa Nordboernes og særlig Nordmændenes ydre Kultur, Levesæt og Samfundsforhold i Vikingetiden*, Videnskabs-Selskabets Skrifter 2, Historisk-filosofisk Klasse 1 (Kristiania [Oslo]: Dypwad, 1905), 208.

15. See Hermann Pálsson, “Keltnesk mannanöfn,” and *Keltar á Íslandi*, 150–207; Helgi Guðmundsson, *Um haf innan: vestrænir menn og íslensk menning á miðöldum* (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 1997), 121–99; Jan de Vries, *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 3rd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1977), xxi–xxii.

16. See Stefán Karlsson, *The Icelandic Language*, trans. Rory McTurk (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2004), 9.

17. See Gísli Sigurðsson, *Gaelic Influence in Iceland: Historical and Literary Contacts—A Survey of Research* (Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press, 2000), and “Þögnin um gelísk áhrif á Íslandi,” in *Greppaminni: Rit til heiðurs Vésteini Ólasyni sjötugum*, ed. Margrét Eggertsdóttir et al. (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 2009), 153–64.

that Icelandic settlement probably contained a diversity of significant minority groups or singleton settlers. Most significantly for the purposes of this essay, Hermann Pálsson pointed to the importance of a group of immigrants stemming from Hålogaland, some of them apparently from north of the Arctic circle, and argued that there would have been a Saami element among them.¹⁸ Close ties between Scandinavian and aboriginal inhabitants of Hålogaland are testified to by *Historia Norwegiae*.¹⁹ Hermann also posited a contribution on the part of the related people of Permian/Bjarmaland, citing the *Landnámabók* episode where Hjorr konungr Hálfsson of Hordaland has twins by the daughter of the king of Bjarmaland: “Hét annarr Geirmundr en annarr Hámundr. Þeir váru svartir mjök” (One was called Geirmundr and the other Hámundr; they were very dark).²⁰ From their dark coloring they acquired the nickname *heljarskinn*. Geirmundr settled in Iceland, where he lived in grand style, and later Icelanders were evidently proud to number him among their ancestors. Hermann further suggests that the Þórólfr heljarskinn galdramaðr mentioned in *Vatnsdæla saga* took both his complexion and his occult knowledge from Permian or perhaps Saami ancestry.²¹ Evidently settlers with Hålogaland and Bjarmaland origins and affiliations could assume positions of prestige and centrality in the newly forming network of Icelandic society.

Iceland was a challenging location in which to forge a livelihood. The archaeology indicates that settler livelihoods were predominantly at no higher level than mere subsistence.²² In the formation of Icelandic livelihoods the prevailing contacts with Norway and the experience settlers had with exploitation of the North Atlantic

18. See *Úr landnorðri: Samar og ystu rætur íslenskrar menningar*, *Studia Islandica* 54 (Reykjavík: Bókmenntafræðistofnun Háskóla Íslands, 1997).

19. Gustav Storm, ed., *Monumenta historica Norvegiae latine conscripta: Latinske kildeskrifter til Norges historie i middelalderen* (Kristiania: Brøgger, 1880), 78.

20. *Íslendingabók, Landnámabók*, ed. Jakob Benediktsson, *Íslenzk fornrit* 1 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1968), 150. See *Geirmundar þáttur heljarskins* in *Sturlunga saga*.

21. *Úr landnorðri*, 24; *Vatnsdæla saga*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Íslenzk fornrit* 8 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1939), 46.

22. See Orri Vésteinsson, “Archaeology of Economy and Society,” in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. Rory McTurk (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 11–15.

environment played a dominant role. Where pastoralism was concerned, the settlers used the Norwegian transhumance model of cattle and sheep-raising.²³ Nevertheless, input from the British Isles also contributed, as indirectly indicated by the loanword *erg* (from Irish *airghe* “summer-grazing location”)²⁴ for precisely the concept of “transhumance pasture” denoted by modern Norwegian *sæter*. Other loanwords in this semantic field are *tarfr* “bull” (from Irish *tarb* “bull”),²⁵ *des* “haystack” (from Irish *daiss* “heap, pile, rick, stack, especially of corn”),²⁶ and *kró* “enclosure” (from Irish *cró* “enclosure, fold, pen”). Gathering practices brought by colonists from the British Isles centered upon edible types of sea-weed: *slafak* “sea-lettuce” (from a Scots Gaelic form *slabhach*)²⁷ and *myrikjarni* (with by-forms) “badderlock, alaria esculentia” (from Scots Gaelic *mirceann* or similar).²⁸ Some related economic activities have their designations from Icelandic adaptations of Irish lexis: Modern Icelandic *sofn* (*hús*) “kiln for drying corn, lyme-grass,” although formed in analogy with *ofn* “oven” (contrast Faroese *sornur*, with identical meaning), presupposes adoption of Irish *sorn* “oven, furnace, kiln.”²⁹ The word *korki* “cudbear, lichen used for dying wool red” appears to represent an adaptation of Irish *corcair* “dye-plant, lichen (giving crimson dye),” ultimately from Latin *purpura*.³⁰

Even when the privations of settlement are fully reckoned with and saga accounts that speak of settler affluence and munificence are subjected to all due skepticism, there do appear to have been some substantial magnates such as Óláfr pá (himself a classic example of mixed Norwegian/Irish descent) who practiced the kind of conspicuous consumption and patronage glimpsed in the *Húsdrápa* of Úlfr Uggason.³¹ The sources of their wealth have remained somewhat of

23. See Byock, “A Viking-age Valley,” 204.

24. Craigie, “Gaelic Words and Names,” 442.

25. Bugge, *Vesterlandenes Indflydelse paa Nordboernes*, 259.

26. *Ibid.*, 157.

27. *s.v.* “slabhacán” in Carl Marstrander, *Ranbemerkinger til det norsk-irske spørsmål* (Oslo: Dybwad, 1928), 4n.

28. Oskar Bandle et al., *The Nordic Languages: An International Handbook of the History of the North Germanic Languages* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002), 328.

29. Stefán Karlsson, *The Icelandic Language*, 9.

30. *Ibid.*

31. *Skjaldedigtning* A1:136–39, B1:128–30. See also *Laxdæla saga*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Íslensk fornrit* 5 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1934), 80.

an enigma.³² This may be in part because scholarship has taken its cue from Commonwealth-era Icelandic resentment of the Norwegian kings and thereby been blinded to the important contribution to the Icelandic economy made by mainland-based sources of income. From the outset a significant part of the social mix on Iceland were those who sailed there not as enemies of King Haraldr hárfagri but as his “envoys.”³³ Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr Haraldsson are two subsequent kings who, despite never having Iceland within their power, could nevertheless keep it within their sphere of influence by dint of cultivating clients and agents.

A special case of this mix of clientship and agency was what has often been loosely termed the “profession” of the skald. It is a matter of record that *skáldskapr* had become firmly established in Norway somewhat prior to the time of the Icelandic settlement. If we are to put our trust in a stanza conventionally associated with the *Haraldskvæði* of Þorbjörn hornklofi,³⁴ we see Haraldr hárfagri as early as the ninth century cultivating a large entourage of poets and presenting them with gifts of distinction and affluence.³⁵ Most probably the stanza in question represents a late addition to the poem,³⁶ but it is clear that by the time of the tenth-century Norwegian kings and earls, with Hákon Hlaðajarl being perhaps the clearest example,³⁷ the practice of skaldic poetry had come to constitute a genuine “earner.” From the era of the reigns of Sigurðr and Hákon, jarls of Hlaðir, and Haraldr gráfeldr, a king over part of Norway, we see a series of visits to the courts of Norwegian leaders on the part of Icelandic poets. Within a hundred years or so of the settlement, Icelanders had established themselves,

32. Jesse L. Byock, *Medieval Iceland: Society, Sagas, and Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 77–78.

33. Przemysław Urbańczyk, “Ethnic Aspects of the Settlement of Iceland,” *Collegium Medievale* 15 (2002): 155–66.

34. Numbered as 19 in the standard edition: *Skjaldedigtning* A1:28, B1:24–25.

35. See Kari Ellen Gade, “Poetry and Its Changing Importance in Medieval Icelandic Culture,” in *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 76.

36. See Klaus von See, “Studien zum Haraldskvæði,” *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 76 (1961): 96–111; Bjarne Fidjestøl, “‘Have you heard a poem worth more?’ A Note on the Economic Background of Early Skaldic Praise-Poetry,” in *Selected Papers*, ed. Odd Einar Haugen (Odense: Odense University Press, 1997), 126–27, and “Kongsskalden frå Kvinesdal og diktninga hans,” in *Rikssamlingstid på Agder: historie, diktning, arkeologi*, ed. Hans Try (Kristiansand: Studentbokhandelen, 1976), 7–31.

37. Fidjestøl, “Economic Background,” 128.

in the words of Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, as “a kind of literary Swiss Guard”³⁸ and a communal pride was building up around this function.³⁹

What these Icelanders stood to gain was probably twofold. One gain lay in an income stream that was not available or at least not so lucrative in their home base of Iceland, where kingship was non-existent and early chieftaincies may not, for the most part, have been particularly affluent. If these skalds could capitalize on their “intellectual property,” to put it in modern terms, so as to make themselves a living embodiment of tradition and their poetics the poetics “of record,” then the gifts and rewards in kind disbursed by Norwegian and other leaders would enable them and their families, and perhaps even their descendants back home, to obtain a variety of goods and services on a comparatively long-term basis. Strangely, Byock’s study of Icelandic livelihoods does not take cognizance of this type of income, but contrast Bjarne Fidjestøl’s study, where it is shown that Óláfr Haraldsson and Knútr inn ríki, among others, had the resources to fund skaldic incomes not merely on a piece-meal basis but sometimes even on a continuing one—a very expensive proposition.⁴⁰ A second gain for the skald and ultimately for Icelandic culture more broadly lay in the immaterials and intangibles of cultural capital and distinction formulated for modern times by Pierre Bourdieu and applied recently to Snorri Sturluson by Kevin Wanner.⁴¹ Icelanders became the treasure house of tradition celebrated by Saxo Grammaticus, who states that he gathered a substantial part of his materials from Icelandic informants.⁴²

38. Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, “Social Institutions and Belief Systems of Medieval Iceland (ca. 870–1400) and their Relations to Literary Production,” in Clunies Ross, *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, 13. See Margaret Clunies Ross, *A History of Old Norse Poetry and Poetics* (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 2005), 104, and “Poets and Ethnicity,” in *Á austrvega: Saga and East Scandinavia, Preprint papers of the 14th International Saga Conference Uppsala 9th-15th August 2009*, ed. Agneta Ney et al., 2 vols. (Gävle: University of Gävle Press, 2009), 1:186, 192.

39. See Margaret Clunies Ross, “From Iceland to Norway,” and *History of Old Norse Poetry*, 96.

40. See Byock, *Medieval Iceland*; cf. Fidjestøl, “Economic Background.”

41. Kevin Wanner, *Snorri Sturluson and the Edda: The Conversion of Cultural Capital in Medieval Scandinavia*, Toronto Old Norse-Icelandic Series 4 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 7–15.

42. Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum/Danmarkshistorien*, ed. Karsten Friis-Jensen

Although some of the skalds may have been itinerant on a fairly long-term basis⁴³ and invited to make longish stays at one or other mainland political and cultural center,⁴⁴ none of them has the kind of corpus attached to his name that would suggest anything like a “full-time” occupation as a poet, and notoriously it could be a chancy livelihood. More plausibly, when Icelanders mounted intermittent forays overseas from their permanent home base, it was in the pursuance of a variety of income streams simultaneously or alternately, as opportunity arose and resources offered themselves. Activities as a trader could be particularly conveniently combined with functioning on an occasion-driven basis as a court eulogist. Trading ports were often also prestige centers. A telling example is Hlaðir (modern Lade), the location presided over by Hákon jarl and other Hlaðajarlar and probably the venue for some poetic performances in praise of the earl. The name means “loading place”; it was from there that the *finnskattr* “Saami tribute” was exported and trade conducted.⁴⁵ The Icelandic skald Einarr Skálaglamr puns on the name in such a way as to hint at the kind of luxury commodity traded or gifted there:⁴⁶

Sjau fylkjum kom silkis
(snúnaðr vas þat) brúna
geymir grundar síma
grandvarr und sik (landi).⁴⁷

“The guardian of the laces of silk of the ground of the eye-brows [HLAÐA (genitive plural form of *Hlaðir*) = *blaða* (genitive plural form of *hløð* “ribbons”)], wary of detriment, brought seven districts under him; that was an enhancement for the land.”

and Peter Zeeberg, 2 vols. (Copenhagen: Det Danske Sprog- og Litteraturselskab & Gads Forlag, 2005), 1:74–77.

43. See Gade, “Poetry and its Changing Importance,” 88.

44. See Fjeldstøl, “Economic Background,” 120.

45. Ibid., 131.

46. See Magnus Olsen, “Eldste forekomst av navnet Hlaðir (*Vellekla* str. 14),” *Maal og minne* (1942): 154–56.

47. *Vellekla*, st. 13, in Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, 3 vols., Íslenzk fornrit 26–28 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1941–51), henceforth *Heimskringla*, 1:241.

In a stanza to be cited later, Kormákr Qgmundarson records receiving a gift of just such a ribbon from Sigurðr jarl, doubtless for poetic services rendered.

The other obviously convenient “earner” for a skald was mercenary service. This activity has perhaps been insufficiently taken into account in analyses of the Icelandic economy before union with Norway, but would have combined nicely with the production of praise poetry for the war leader, since eyewitness accounts were at a premium, and could also link onwards to diplomacy and other forms of lieutenantship to the ruler, Sigvatr Þórðarson being the classic example. Saxo’s listing of the war-bands that participated in the Battle of Brávellir, though no doubt anachronistic, shows that Icelanders could be regarded as contributing to overseas military expeditions: “A Tyle autem uenere Mar Ruffus, eo uidelicet pago, qui Mithfirthi dicitur, ortus educatusque, Grombar Annosus, Grani Brundelicus, Grim ex oppido Skerium apud Scaha Fyrthi quidem provinciam satus. Deinde Berhgar vates advertitur, cui Brahi et Rankil comites adhibentur” (From Iceland came Mar the Red, born and bred in the district called Miðfjörðr; Grombar the Aged, Grani from Brynjudalr, Grim from the town of Skerjum in the district of Skagafjörðr. Next came Bergr the poet/priest/seer, accompanied by Bragi and Hrafnkell).⁴⁸ The *Berhgar vates* mentioned here could conceivably be a skald. On the other hand, the Brahi and Rankil mentioned by Saxo are suspiciously reminiscent of the Bragi and Hrafnkell associated with *Ragnarsdrápa*, warning us that we cannot place too much reliance on this testimony.

Fortunately, there is plentiful testimony from the Icelandic skalds themselves, an early instance being Vigfúss Víga-Glúmsson, who composed two verses placing himself among the combatants at the Battle of Hjörungavágr:

Oss es leikr, en lauka
liggr heima vinr feimu –
þryngr at Viðris veðri
vandar – góðr fyr hǫndum.

48. *Gesta Danorum*, Friis-Jensen, 1:514–15; Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum: The history of the Danes*, ed. Hilda Ellis Davidson and trans. Peter Fisher (Cambridge: Brewer, 1979–80), 240 (modified).

Hlýs kveðk hælís bósa –
 hann væntir sér annars –
 vífs und vörðum bægi –
 vér skreytum spjör – neyta.⁴⁹

“We have a good play on our hands, but the friend of the woman of leeks⁵⁰ lies at home; the storm of Viðrir’s staff [BATTLE] crowds in. I say that the scoundrel is enjoying cosy shelter under the woman’s warm arm; he expects something different; we polish our spears.”

Varðat hægt, þás hurðir
 hjörklofnar sák rofna
 – hátt sǫng Hǫgna – Geitis,
 – hregg – til Vagns at leggja.
 Þar gingum vér, þrǫngvir
 þunníss, í bǫð, Gunnar
 – strǫng vas danskra drengja
 darra flaug – til knarrar. (*Skjaldedigtning* A1:120, B1:115; *Ágrip*, Bjarni Einarsson, 134)

“It was not easy to attack Vagn, when I saw the hurdles of Geitir [SHIELDS] broken, cleft by the sword. Loud rang the storm of Hǫgni [BATTLE]. There we went, thruster of the thin ice of Gunnr [SWORD], in the battle to the ship. Strong was the flight of spears of Danish lads.”

Also in the tenth century, some of this poetry by itinerant skalds is beginning to foreground the poet’s affiliation with the Icelandic community. *Sonatorrek* (st. 15) contains an early example:

Mjök’s torfyndr,
 sás trúa knegum,
 of alþjóð
 elgjar galga,

49. *Skjaldedigtning* A1:121, B1:115; *Ágrip af Nóregskonunga sögum, Fagrskinna – Nóregs konunga tal*, ed. Bjarni Einarsson, Íslensk fornrit 29 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1984), 132.

50. The exact workings of this kenning resist analysis but there may be obscene connotations.

þvít niflgóðr
 niðja steypir
 bróður hrør
 við baugum selr.⁵¹

“It is hard to find anyone whom I can trust among all the people of the gallows of the elk [ICELANDERS], since a traitor to his kinsfolk, good [only] for Niflheim, sells his brother’s corpse for rings.”

The allusion comes in the shape of the riddle-like kenning *alþjóð elgjar gálga* (all people of the gallows of the elk), where the gallows of the elk is “ice” and the people of ice are Icelanders.⁵² The *ofljóst*—a veiling of the referent via synonym substitution—depends upon the observation that elk can fall through weak ice and become suspended in the water below, thus becoming easy prey to wolves and other scavengers. By a typically skaldic flight of fancy, this plight is envisaged as analogous to the fate of the hanged man on the gallows, who becomes a source of food for ravens and other scavengers. Egill’s “signature” on the stanza is twofold: play on the gallows motif, a favorite with him, combines with the allusion to Iceland.

A late allusion to not merely the ice of Iceland but also the fire occurs in a pair of stanzas in praise of an axe composed by the twelfth-century Icelandic skald Einarr Skúlason and tentatively grouped with other stanzas in the standard skaldic edition as *Øxarflokkr*.⁵³ The audience is presumed to be the Norwegian ruler who is presenting the poet with the axe. Einarr chooses base-words for his kennings so as to play on imagery of fire and snow, thus conjuring up the distinctively volcanic landscape of Iceland.⁵⁴

51. *Egils saga*, ed. Bjarni Einarsson (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2003), 151.

52. Einarbjörn Egilsson, *Lexicon poetikum antiquæ linguæ septentrionalis* (Copenhagen: Societas regia antiquariorum septentrionalium, 1860), s.v. “elgr.” For other more conjectural interpretations see *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, ed. Sigurður Nordal, Íslenzk fornrit 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1933), 252, and *Egils saga*, Bjarni Einarsson, 151.

53. *Skjaldedigtning* A1:478, B1:450–51, vv. 7 and 8.

54. See Russell Poole, “Ormr Steinþórsson and the *Snjófríðardrápa*,” *Arkiv för nordisk Filologi* 97 (1982): 129–30.

Blóðeisu liggr bæði
 bjargs tveim megin geima
 sjóðs (ák sökva stríði)
 snær ok eldr (at mæra). (*Skjaldedigtning* B1:450–51, v. 7)

“Both gold and silver cover each side of the mountain of the blood-ember [BACK OF THE AXE]; I have reason to praise my benefactor.”

The combination of a gold kenning *geima eldr* “fire of the ocean,” a silver kenning *sjóðs snær* “snow of the purse,” and the punning substitution of *bjarg* “crag” for *hamarr* (which can mean either “crag” or “back of an axe”) builds up within the stanza a sequence of words—*liggr bjargs tveim megin snær ok eldr* (snow and fire lie on both sides of the rock)—that conjures up the image of a mountain enveloped in both snow and fire. In the fragment that follows Einarr continues the same line of imagery.

Dægr þrymr hvert, en hjarta
 hlýrskildir ræðr mildu
 Heita blakks, of hvítum
 hafleygr digulskafli.
 Aldri má fyr eldi
 áls hrynbrautar skála
 – ǥll viðr folka fellir
 framræði – snæ bræða. (*Ibid.*, 451, v. 8)

“The gold is in its place there every day above the white silver—but the king has a generous heart. Never can the silver be melted by the gold; the warrior-prince performs every illustrious deed.”

Here again a volcanic image is conjured up by the base-words of the kennings: *dægr hvert þrymr leygr of hvítum skafli* (the fire is there every day above the white snow-drift).

In these words Einarr evokes what was probably in the Middle Ages, as now, the most salient aspect of his native land from the point of view of outsiders. Of Norwegian works, both *Historia Norwegiae* and *Konungs skuggsjá* make prominent mention of volcanism in their descriptions of the island.

In the verses of Sigvatr, in contrast with the apparently pejorative reference by Egill cited above, we notice a cozy camaraderie with fellow-Icelanders (*Nesjavísur*, st. 5):

Teitr, sák okkr í ítru
allvalds liði falla
(gerðisk harðr) of herðar
(hjörðynr) svalar brynjur;
en mín at flug fleina
falsk und hjalm enn valska
(okkr vissak svá, sessi)
svört skör (við her görva).⁵⁵ (*Heimskringla* 2:62)

“Teitr, I saw chill mailshirts fall over the shoulders of us both in the all-powerful one’s noble war-band; a hard sword-din [BATTLE] was waged; and my black hair hid itself under the French helmet at the flight of javelins [BATTLE]; benchmate, I knew us both to be thus prepared against the opposing force.”

In this verse Sigvatr apparently addresses or apostrophizes not his broader audience (with the king as its most eminent member) but instead an individual called Teitr, evidently one of Sigvatr’s comrades, using the dual pronoun (*okkr*) rather than the plural seen consistently elsewhere in the poem. This Teitr is otherwise unknown. Erik Lind notes that the name is extremely common in Iceland from the earliest times but seldom encountered in Norway, except in very early attestations.⁵⁶ Sigvatr’s benchmate was therefore probably a fellow Icelandic. The poet’s evident special empathy with him may be implied in his specification of his own dark hair color, a point to which I shall return presently. Another instance of Sigvatr addressing a specific comrade occurs in *Vestrfararvísur* (st. 1):

Bergr, hǫfum minzk, hvé, margan
morgin Rúðuborgar,

55. See Russell Poole, “The *Nesjavísur* of Sigvatr Þórðarson,” *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 15 (2005): 173–74.

56. *Norsk-isländska dopnamn och fingerade namn från medeltiden* (Uppsala: Lundequist, 1905–15), s.v. “Teitr.”

bqrð létk í fqr fyrða
fest við arm enn vestra. (*Heimskringla* 2:271)

“Bergr, we have recalled how on many a morning I left the ship secured
in the path of men at the western arm of Rouen.”

This address to Bergr comes within a poem principally addressed to the king and is again somewhat conspicuous, though it must be noted that the poet addresses another man in stanza 5, using the nickname *Húnn*, “Bear-cub.” Information on Bergr is very limited; we have the following from the prose narrative of *Heimskringla*: “Sigvatr skáld kom þat sumar til Englands vestan ór Rúðu af Vallandi ok sá maðr með honum, er Bergr hét” (Sigvatr the skald came west that summer from Rouen in France to England and that man with him, who was called Bergr).⁵⁷ Lind documents a similar distribution for the name Bergr as for Teitr: highly prevalent in Iceland from the beginning of the tenth century, whereas it apparently died out early in Norway.⁵⁸ Bergr’s father, according to *Landnámabók*, was Vigfúss Víga-Glúmsson.⁵⁹ Stylistic and verbal resemblances between Vigfúss’s two verses cited earlier and Sigvatr’s, particularly *Nesjavísur*, make it likely that Sigvatr was aware of Vigfúss’s narrative technique: Vigfúss’s verses may have encouraged Sigvatr in his self-presentation as a participant in battle. We might infer that Sigvatr’s special association with Bergr arose as part of his wider affiliation, through his father Þórðr Sigvaldaskáld, with Vigfúss and perhaps other poets attached to Sigvaldi Strút-Haraldsson, jarl of Jónsborg. *Liðsmannaflokkur*, a poem associated with Sigvaldi’s brother Þorkell inn hávi, is the example par excellence of a poem that appears to emanate from the actively campaigning section of the *drótt* and represent their point of view.⁶⁰

In another verse Sigvatr addresses his fellow-poet and indeed nephew Óttarr svarti (“the black”—note this probably significant nickname) on the subject of a gift of nuts they have received from King Óláfr Haraldsson (*lausavísa* 10):

57. *Heimskringla* 2:271.

58. *Norsk-isländska dopnamn*, s.v. “Bergr.”

59. *Íslendingabók*, *Landnámabók*, Jakob Benediktsson, 253, 268–69n4.

60. Russell Poole, *Viking Poems on War and Peace* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 86–115.

Sendi mér enn mæri
 – man þengill sá drengi –
 síð munk heldr at hróðri –
 hnytr þjóðkonungr – snytrask.
 Opt, en okkr bað skipta,
 Óttarr, í tvau dróttinn –
 endask mál – sem myndim
 manndjarfr fǫðurarfi.⁶¹

“To me the renowned high-king sent nuts; this king is mindful of his men; it will be a long time before I devote more artistry to praise-poetry. But the lord, bold towards men, often bade us divide them in two, Óttarr, just as we would a father’s legacy: my speeches are ended.”

In a final example of this show of familiarity with a fellow-Icelander, and, as the verbal parallels would suggest, perhaps with a reminiscence of the Sigvatr *lausavísa* just cited, Arnórr Þórðarson in his praise-poem *Magnússdrápa* (st. 4) addresses or apostrophizes a man called Gellir:

Flæði fylkir reiði
 framr þjóðkonungs ramma;
 stókk fyr auðvin okkrum
 armsvells hati, Gellir.
 Léttat Nóregs njóta
 nýtr þengill gram lengi;
 hann rak Svein af sínum
 sókndjarfr fǫður-arfi.⁶²

61. *Skjaldedigtning* A1:268, B1:248; Ernst Albin Kock, ed., *Den norsk-isländska skaldediktningen*, 2 vols. (Lund: Gleerup, 1946–50), 1:128. See Russell Poole, “Claiming Kin, Skaldic-style,” in *Verbal Encounters: Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse Studies for Roberta Frank*, ed. Antonina Harbus and Russell Poole (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 273.

62. *Skjaldedigtning* A1:339, B1:311–12; Ágrip af Nóregskonunga sögum, Bjarni Einarsson, 210; Diana Whaley, *The Poetry of Arnórr jarlaskáld: An Edition and Study* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998), 119, and “Arnórr jarlaskáld Þórðarson, *Magnússdrápa*,” in *Poetry from the Kings’ Sagas 2*, ed. Kari Ellen Gade, *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 2* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 212.

“The bold leader fled the mighty rage of the high-king; the hater of the arm-ice [GENEROUS MAN] bolted from the treasure-friend of us both, Gellir. The doughty prince did not let the lord enjoy Norway for long; daring in assault, he drove Sveinn from his father’s legacy.”⁶³

Other construals of the word *gellir* have been proposed,⁶⁴ but the present one is by far the most sensible and straightforward. The notion of the stanza containing a common noun *gellir* meaning “yeller” is far-fetched, whereas a proper name Gellir, deriving ultimately from a nickname, is both firmly attested and readily assignable to an appropriate historical personage. Aside from a couple of dubious attestations in place-names, the name occurs solely in Iceland, not in Norway.⁶⁵ The combination “Gellir Þorkelsson” appears three times: Arnórr reputedly composed a poem in memory of a man of that name; a man of that name is said in *Laxdæla saga* to have visited Magnús Ólafsson’s court and to have received lavish gifts from him; a man of that name was the paternal grandfather of Ari Þorgilsson.⁶⁶ Considerations of chronology and the relative rarity of the given name combine to suggest that these three are identical and that the Gellir invoked by Arnórr in the stanza must surely also be the same individual: the expression *auðvin* “treasure-friend” can be taken as a pointed allusion to the gifts that both Arnórr and Gellir have received from the king. As with Sigvatr and Teitr, here is a pair of comrades who can testify to royal munificence. Given that Gellir Þorkelsson was clearly a well-known magnate, *logsögumaðr*, and personality and that Bergr has a skaldic lineage, the likelihood increases that Sigvatr’s Teitr was also a person from a prominent Icelandic family, and in that case quite conceivably a member of the kindred that produced the Teitr referred to by Ari Þorgilsson in his list of informants for *Íslendingabók*.⁶⁷ We might envisage a group of aristocratic families that played an instrumental part in the developing Christian institutionalization of Iceland. The address to Gellir, in the midst of an encomium to

63. Translation modified from Whaley, *Poetry of Arnórr jarlaskáld* (see previous note).

64. See *ibid.*, 191.

65. Lind, *Norsk-isländska dopnamn*, s.v. “Gellir.”

66. See, respectively, Whaley, *Poetry of Arnórr jarlaskáld*, 191–92; *Laxdæla saga*, Einar Ól. Sveinsson, 227–28; *Íslendingabók*, *Landnámabók*, Jakob Benediktsson, 20.

67. *Íslendingabók*, *Landnámabók*, Jakob Benediktsson, 1, 5, 7, 15, 17, 21.

the king, seems obtrusive to modern ears,⁶⁸ and that very feature of the rhetoric in itself may indicate how significant this kind of bond between Icelanders must have been. It may, *inter alia*, have served as an unmissable signal, transmitted via the poetic format, that Icelanders looked after each other as they pursued livelihoods abroad and had no need to rely exclusively on royal protection.

Characteristic of these verses is the use of the dual pronoun, seen for instance in Arnórr's phrase *auðvin okkrum* (our wealthy friend). Relating to two comrades as it does, it seems to carry some kind of affective load—companionability, coziness, intimacy. The implication of an identical social level can be paralleled in affective uses of the word *drengr*.⁶⁹ The emerging rhetoric of "Icelander-talking-to-Icelander" intimacy may have prompted a special adaptation of dual pronoun usage. Ultimately this adaptation developed so vigorously that the historical dual number of the first and second person is now used consistently in Icelandic at the expense of the plural, whose use is now confined to honorifics. Indeed Helgi Guðmundsson sees its honorific use in the medieval language as underlying this virtual extinction in the modern language.⁷⁰

This developing sense of Icelandic identity also finds expression in the singling out of bodily characteristics that are purportedly distinctive of Icelanders. The references already seen in the stanza cited from Sigvatr's *Nesjavísur* have their precursor in the highly dramatic diction of Egill Skalla-Grímsson's *Arinbjarnarkviða*:

Hafðak endr
Ynglings burar,
ríks konungs,
reiði fengna.
Drók djarfhøtt
of dökkva skor,
létk hersi
heim of sóttan. (*Egils saga*, Bjarni Einarsson, 156, st. 3)

68. See Whaley, *The Poetry of Arnórr jarlaskáld*, 119 and 191–92, and "Arnórr jarlaskáld Þórðarson, *Magnússdrápa*," 213.

69. See Judith Jesch, *Ships and Men in the Late Viking Age: The Vocabulary of Runic Inscriptions and Skaldic Verse* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2001), 221.

70. *The Pronominal Dual in Icelandic* (Reykjavík: Institute of Nordic Linguistics, 1972), 98.

“In former times I had incurred the wrath of the son of the Ynglings, a powerful king. I put on the hat of courage over my dark hair and visited the war-leader.”

Né hamfagrt
 hǫlðum þótti
 skaldfé mitt
 at skata húsum,
 þás ulfgrátt
 við Yggjar miði
 hattar staup
 at hilmí þák. (Ibid., 157, st. 7)

“Nor did my reward for the poem at the abode of the munificent lord seem attractive to men, when I received from the king a wolf-grey stump of the hat [HEAD] in exchange for the mead of Óðinn [POETRY].”

Við því tók,
 en tvau fylgðu
 sök sámlit
 síðra brúna
 ok sá muðr,
 es mína bar
 hǫfuðlausn
 fyr hilmis kné. (Ibid., st. 8)

“I took it and there came with it two black-colored gemstones of broad brows [EYES] and the mouth that delivered my head-ransom at the king’s knee.”

Þar tannfjöld
 með tungu þák
 ok hlertjöld
 hlustum gøfguð,
 en sú gjøf
 golli betri
 hróðugs konungs
 of heitin vas. (Ibid., 157–58, st. 9)

“There I received a multitude of teeth with a tongue and listening tapestries [EARS], endowed with hearing, and that gift of the glorious king was deemed better than gold.”

Thus the Egill who expresses a sense of betrayal on the part of fellow-Icelanders in *Sonatorrek* self-describes as “dark” in *Arinbjarnarkviða*. Particularly vivid and semiotically significant is the cluster of words constituting the kenning for “eyes” in st. 8/3–4: *sökk sámleit / síðra brúna* (literally, “black-colored gemstones of broad brows”). The element *sám-* appears in the version of this stanza contained in ms. W of *Snorra Edda* (Codex Wormianus); the other witness, ms. AM 132, reads *svart-* (“black”).⁷¹ While in principle *sökk* could instead be glossed as “cavities” (literally “sinkings”), in practice this is ruled out by the context in Wormianus.⁷² As Sigurður Nordal points out, description of the speaker’s eyes as *sökk sámleit*, “black-colored gemstones,” serves to emphasize their rarity and value.⁷³ The comparison indicated by this base-word can only be with jet, a lustrous black semi-precious stone. It has nice local appropriateness to the setting for the episode in *Arinbjarnarkviða*, since the raw resource is found in Yorkshire near Whitby⁷⁴ and tenth-century working of jet has been detected at York.⁷⁵ The worked form of jet most closely similar to eyes would be beads, which can take eye-like shapes.⁷⁶ A prestigious Anglo-Scandinavian burial on St. Patrick’s Isle at Peel, Isle of Man, included a wealthy female with necklace featuring Whitby jet beads among other stones.⁷⁷ Given the material-culture context, Egill may

71. *Skjaldedigtning* A1:44.

72. *Egils saga*, Sigurður Nordal, 261.

73. *Ibid.*, 260–61n8.

74. See Barbara E. Crawford and Beverley Ballin Smith, *The Biggings, Papa Stour, Shetland: The History and Excavation of a Royal Norwegian Farm* (Edinburgh: Society Antiquaries Scotland, 1999), 173.

75. See D. M. Hadley, *The Vikings in England: Settlement, Society and Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 151.

76. See Johan Callmer, “Trade Beads and Bead Trade in Scandinavia, c.800–1000 A.D.” *Acta Archaeologica Lundensia* 11 (Lund: Gleerup, 1971), 33–35.

77. See James Graham-Campbell and Colleen E. Batey, *Vikings in Scotland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 111; David M. Wilson, *The Vikings in the Isle of Man* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2008), 49. For finds in Norwegian contexts see Signe Horn Fuglesang, “Viking and Medieval Amulets in Scandinavia,” *Fornvännen* 84 (1989): 20, and Charlotte Blindheim, “Kaupang,” in *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Phillip Pulsiano and Kirsten Wolf (New York: Garland, 1993), 350.

be conferring on the deep black color of his eyes connotations of preciousness and prestige. Meanwhile, the “broad brows” noted in the kenning are reminiscent of descriptions of Saami features as *breiðleit* and synonyms thereof.⁷⁸

A *lausavísa* (no. 6) ascribed to the Icelandic poet Kormákr (but not necessarily authentic) also elaborates on his dark complexion:

Svört augu berk sveiga
 snyrtigrund til fundar
 (þykkik erma Ilmi
 allfölr) ok lá sölva.
 Þó hefk mér hjá meyjum,
 mengrund, komit stundum
 hrings við Hǫrn at manga
 hagr sem drengr enn fagri. (*Vatnsdæla saga*, Einar Ól. Sveinsson, 211)

“I bring dark eyes to the meeting with the tidying-land of the head-dress [WOMAN]—I seem quite pale to the goddess of sleeves [WOMAN]—and a sallow appearance. Yet on occasion, land of the necklace [LADY], I have acquitted myself with maidens, to drive a bargain with a goddess of the ring [WOMAN], like a handsome warrior.”

The characterization of the flirtatious speaker, as someone who in the past has successfully driven a bargain with a woman (or possibly women) and who now brings himself and his dark features to a new encounter, contains overtones of trading that we can recognize as neatly suited to the composite livelihood of skalds.⁷⁹ The word *manga* often carries a commercial meaning, in line with its ultimate source in Medieval Latin *mangonare*.⁸⁰ Guðbrandur Vigfússon’s main gloss is “to barter, chaffer.”⁸¹ In Modern Icelandic *manga* equates to “bargain,

78. See Hermann Pálsson, *Úr landnordri*, 164.

79. See Russell Poole, “Composition Transmission Performance: The First Ten *Lausavísur* in *Kormáks saga*,” *alvissmál* 7 (1997): 53.

80. de Vries, *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, s.v. See Johann Fritzner, *Ordbog over det gamle norske sprog*, 4th ed., 3 vols. (Kristiania [Oslo]: Den norske forlagsforening, 1883–96; repr. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1973), s.v.

81. Richard Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1957), s.v. See Finnur Jónsson, *Lexicon Poeticum Antiquae linguae septentrionalis: Ordbog over det norsk-islandske skjadesprog oprindelig forfattet af Sveinbjörn Egilsson*, 2nd ed. (Copenhagen: Möller, 1931), 126.

haggle, deal, hawk, peddle,” though with an additional specialized sense of courting or wooing.⁸²

Sigvatr, as we have already seen, rather dwells on his own dark complexion. A telling example comes from *Austrfararvísur* (st. 15), his account of a diplomatic journey to Götaland and Sweden:

Oss hafa augu þessi
 íslenzk, kona, vísat
 brattan stíg at baugi
 björtum langt in svörtu.
 Sjá hefr, mjöð-Nanna, manni
 mín ókunnar þínum
 fótr á fornar brautir
 fulldregila gengit. (*Skjaldedigtning* B1:224; *Heimskringla* 2:140)

“These dark Icelandic eyes have shown us, woman, a steep path a long way to the bright ring. This my foot, mead-Nanna [WOMAN], has gone most gallantly along ancient routes unknown to your man.”

Here Sigvatr offers a self-characterization as a dark-eyed addresser of a woman and also as a guest whose performance as a traveler has qualities of the stereotypical *drengr*. The Kormákr and Sigvatr verses correspond in detailed lexis: *svartr*, *auga*, and *drengr*. Sigvatr’s address to the unnamed woman, in collocation with the words *mjöð* “mead” and *stíg* “path,” contains key elements of the classic vignette of the woman of the hall awaiting the arrival of the warrior with horn of mead in hand: compare the Old English poetic compound *medostig* “mead-path.”⁸³ In an extension of this playfulness, the reference to Nanna in Sigvatr’s address might imply an alignment of her husband with Baldr, who is said in *Gylfaginning* to be quintessentially fair, bright, and white in complexion.⁸⁴ The speaker’s reference to his foot (*fótr*) might trigger associations, in such a context, with the episode

82. Árni Böðvarsson, ed., *Íslensk orðabók*, 2nd ed. (Reykjavík: Bókauktgáfa Menn-ingarsjóðs, 1983), s.v. My translation.

83. Seamus Heaney, trans., *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation* (New York: Norton, 2000), line 924.

84. Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, ed. Anthony Faulkes, 2nd ed. (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1988), 23.

in *Skáldskaparmál* (ch. 1) where Skaði hopes to identify and select Baldr on the basis of his fine feet but instead picks Njörðr. While such proposed associations are in their nature elusive and difficult to verify, we can infer that a witty play on the distinction between “dark” (the Icelandic skald) and “blond” (the Swedish husband) is going on in the verse.

In semiotic terms, black is the “marked” descriptor, as contrasted with fair, which is unmarked in virtue of the fact that fairness or blondness has traditionally been seen as a distinctive attribute of Nordic peoples. The Icelandic construction of identity evident here constitutes itself on the basis of the marked feature, perhaps in a gesture of exceptionalism. That could have happened as a cultural phenomenon, irrespective of the actual incidence of fair versus dark persons in the Icelandic population. In saga descriptions, one of the distinctive features of Saami people and people from Hålogaland and Arctic Norway more broadly is their possession of a dark complexion. The name of the founder of the dynasty of the earls of Hlaðir, Sæmingr, is most straightforwardly taken to mean “descendant of Sámr,”⁸⁵ and in turn *sámr*, “dark-colored,” was liable to association with the ethnic descriptor *Saami*,⁸⁶ whether or not it was historically cognate with it.

How are we to explain this “cultural phenomenon”? It can be suggested that Hålogaland might have had a natural attractiveness and prestige for Icelanders in virtue of its long-enduring independence from the Norwegian kings. The tenth-century Hålogalanders were not Norwegians—a point vouched for inter alia by Sturla Þórðarson’s mentions of Hålogaland as a separate entity in his redaction of *Landnámabók*—and they helped to galvanize opposition against the territorial ambitions of Norwegian rulers.⁸⁷ Representative of them, it seems, was Eyvindr skáldaspillir. Aside from his very public resistance to Haraldr gráfeldr, he had high-status Hålogaland affiliations⁸⁸ and

85. de Vries, *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, s.v. “sámr,” “Sæmingr”; see Gro Steinsland, *Det hellige bryllup og norrøn kongeideologi: en analyse av hierogami-myten i Skírnismál, Ynglingatal, Háleygjatal, og Hyndluljóð* (Oslo: Solum, 1991), 217.

86. Hermann Pálsson, *Úr landnordri*, 164, 57, and 68.

87. See Urbańczyk, “Ethnic Aspects,” 159.

88. See Folke Ström, “Poetry as an Instrument of Propaganda: Jarl Hákon and his Poets,” in *Speculum Norroenum: Norse Studies in Memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre*, ed. Ursula Dronke et al. (Odense: Odense University Press, 1981), 447.

spoke for those in the north who found themselves adversely affected by the reign of the Christian *Gunnbildarsynir*. When he records in a verse that the Icelanders have presented him with a cloak pin the implication is that he held significance for Icelanders, as someone whose favor they needed to gain or repay. He refers to his Icelandic benefactors by an *ofljóst*, like Egill before him in *Sonatorrek* (st. 15), as noted, and in this there is possibly an element of emulation or at least textual continuity:

Fengum feldarstinga
fjörð ok galt við hjörðu,
þanns álhimins útan
oss lendingar sendu.
Mest selda ek mínar
við mævörum sævar
(hallæri veldr hváru)
hlaupsildr Egils gaupna. (*Skjaldedigtning* A1:74, B1:65; Kock, *Den norsk-isländska skaldediktningen*, 1:40; *Heimskringla* 1:223–24)

“I received last year a cloak pin, which the channel-heaven’s [ICE-] landsmen [ICELANDERS] sent to me from across the sea, and I spent it on livestock. For the most part I sold my leaping herrings of the palms of Egill [ARROWS] for the slender arrows of the sea [= HERRINGS]; the famine causes both things.”

Additionally, as mentioned earlier, some leading settlers of Iceland in the ninth and tenth centuries had Hålogaland origins, notably the *heljarskinn* twins. It would hardly be surprising, in view of all this, if the marked feature of dark complexion associated with them likewise became prestigious in early Iceland. The emphasis on the dark coloring exhibited by some of the early skalds, described to some extent by themselves (as we have seen) and with great amplification in the sagas, might be consistent with respect and regard for the skalds as among the pivotal members and earners within their society. The ascription to them of melancholic and hostile personalities—dark minds to fit dark bodies—a topic extensively discussed by Margaret Clunies Ross,⁸⁹

89. See, e.g., “The Art of Poetry and the Figure of the Poet in Egils saga,” *Parergon* 22 (1978): 2–12; repr. in *Sagas of Icelanders*, ed. John Tucker (New York: Garland, 1989), 126–49.

may represent a secondary semiotic development of this distinctive feature, perhaps especially influenced by the malign self-presentation of Egill.

As already pointed out, the Icelandic skalds incorporated a number of special rhetorical and linguistic features in their work, namely direct address to and inclusion (via the first person dual pronoun) of individual comrades (who seem to be uniformly of Icelandic background), along with a tendency to Icelandic self-identification. As a further linguistic feature, we find a number of Irish lexical items that figure exclusively in attributions to early Icelandic and Orkney skalds, as distinct from Norwegian skalds, who do not appear on the available evidence to use them at all. In a loose analogy, we might be reminded of Seamus Heaney's application in his *Beowulf* rendering of the Anglo-Irish word *bawn* to refer to Hrothgar's hall. Heaney explains that in Elizabethan English *bawn* (from Irish *bó-dhún* "fort for cattle") referred specifically to the fortified dwellings that the English planters built in Ireland to keep the dispossessed natives at bay.⁹⁰ Putting a *bawn* into *Beowulf* appealed to him as a means by which an Irish poet could inscribe his signature on a composition and hint at a complex set of attitudes revolving around enforced colonial status.

One of these distinctive items is *gagarr* "dog." It appears to be linked to Old Irish *gaghar/gadhar* (where *gadhar* is the later form), "dog, hunting-dog, beagle." A frequent collocate is *milchu* "greyhound." That the sense in Icelandic and Orkney Norse was also primarily "hunting-dog" is suggested by three of the attestations to be considered below, where *gagarr* occurs as a base-word in kennings for weaponry, a slot normally occupied by synonyms for "wolf." In this instance, Irish has conventionally been seen as the borrower, not the lender.⁹¹ That explanation to some extent has been encouraged by Finnur Jónsson's proposed etymology of ON *gaga*, for which, following Cleasby-Vigfússon (*s.v.*), he posits the meaning "to throw the neck back,"⁹² comparing *gaghals* "with neck bent

90. Heaney, *Beowulf*, xxx.

91. See, e.g., George Henderson, *Norse Influence*, 130; Carl J. S. Marstrander, *Bidrag til det norske sprogs historie i Irland* (Kristiania: Dybwad, 1915), 112, 158; de Vries, *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, *s.v.* "gagarr."

92. *Lexicon Poeticum*, *s.v.* "gagarr."

back.”⁹³ Finnur’s logic is that the dog throws its neck back in order to bark or howl, making this an appropriate etymon, but in the one attestation of *gaga* the likelier gloss is “laugh, mock” (in accordance with Fritzner, *s.v.*), and altogether this suggestion smacks of over-ingenuity. More plausible would be an onomatopoeic origin, partly in view of the Orkney and Icelandic usage of the word to be discussed presently, but more broadly because it would be unsurprising for the name to be onomatopoeic when hunting dogs, including beagles, are specifically selected and bred for their barking propensities, which are functional for intimidating the prey and for communicating to hunters and other dogs over long distances or without a clear line of sight. Onomatopoeic words in the relevant semantic field, including *geyja*, *gagga*, *gaga*, and others, occur in the various dialects of Norse. On the other hand, attestations of *gaghar/gagarr* are richer and more widely distributed in Irish, and *gagarr* could readily be explained as a cultural or economic adoption into Icelandic and Orkney Norse, parallel to the pastoral and gathering terminology considered earlier in this essay. We may, on balance, have not so much a loanword here as a word that was more or less at home in both Irish and Norse parlance on the Atlantic islands.

The word is found in a series of poems, the anonymous *Darraðarljóð* possibly being the oldest:

Gengr Hildr vefa
ok Hjörþrimul,
Sanngríðr, Svipul
sverðum tognum;
skapt mun gnesta,
skjöldr mun bresta,
mun hjalmgagarr
í hlíf koma.⁹⁴

“Hildr goes to weave, and Hjörþrimul, Sanngríðr, Svipul, with drawn swords; the shaft will snap, the shield will break, the helmet hunting-dog [SWORD] will penetrate the armor.”

93. *Norsk-islandske Kultur- og Sprogforhold i det 9. og 10. Århundrede* (Copenhagen: Høst, 1921), 60.

94. *Brennu-Njáls saga*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, Íslenzk fornrit 12 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1954), 455; Poole, *Viking Poems*, 116–17, st. 3.

Darraðarljóð is uniquely preserved in an Orkney context in *Njáls saga*, which links it with the Battle of Clontarf, datable to 1014;⁹⁵ but the true occasion may be the Battle of Dublin of 919.⁹⁶ The image of weaving that provides the central trope for the poem appears to have been prompted by the expression *mórenglaím* “great weft,” used in collocation with *claidib* “sword” in an Irish poem composed about 909 in praise of Cerbhall of Leinster, the king who expelled the Norse from the Dublin region in 902.⁹⁷ Equally, the occurrence of *gagarr* in *Darraðarljóð* may point to Viking contact with Irish-speaking communities under the aegis of the kingdom of Dublin.

Additional attestations occur in Tindr Hallkelsson’s *Hákonardrápa*, a *lausavísa* attributed to [pseudo-] Egill Skalla-Grímsson (both authors are assumed to be Icelandic),⁹⁸ and *Málsháttakvæði* and *Krákumál* (both these anonymous poems are assumed to be of Orkney provenance).⁹⁹ Additionally, the word occurs as the nickname of one Þorgrímr gagarr Ljótsson, an Icelander.¹⁰⁰ This set of attestations is therefore exclusively Icelandic and Orkney. Competing for chronological first place with *Darraðarljóð* is Tindr’s *Hákonardrápa*:

Vann á Vinða sinni
verðbjóðr Hugins ferðar,
– beit sólgagarr seilar –
sverðs eggja spor – leggi,
áðr hjörmeiðir hrjóða
– hætting var þat – mætti –
leiðar – langra skeiða –
liðs – hálfan tög þriðia. (*Heimskringla* 1:286)

95. *Njáls saga*, Einar Ól. Sveinsson, 454–59.

96. See Nora Kershaw, ed. and trans., *Anglo-Saxon and Norse poems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), 116; Poole, *Viking Poems*, 122–25; but cf. Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, *Brian Boru: Ireland’s Greatest King?* (Stroud: Tempus, 2007), 92–93.

97. See Kershaw, *Anglo-Saxon and Norse poems*, 116.

98. *Skjaldedigtning* A1:603; B1:603.

99. See, respectively, Roberta Frank, *Sex, Lies and Málsháttakvæði: A Norse Poem from Medieval Orkney* (Nottingham: Centre for the Study of the Viking Age, University of Nottingham, 2004), 4, and Anne Heinrichs, “*Krákumál*,” in Pulsiano, *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, 368–69.

100. *Íslendingabók, Landnámabók*, Jakob Benediktsson, 184–85; Erik Henrik Lind, *Norsk-isländska personbinamn från medeltiden* (Uppsala: Lundequist, 1920–21), 96. I owe this reference to Richard L. Harris, fellow contributor to this volume.

“The offerer of a banquet of the company of Huginn [WARRIOR] set the mark of the [sword’s] edges on the forces of the Wends—the hunting-dog of the sun of the strap [SHIELD > SWORD] bit their legs—before the mast of swords [FIGHTER] could clear twenty-five of the longships; that was a risk for the men of the expedition.”

Here the skald plays upon the literal meaning of the base-word, to create the image of a biting dog. The example attributed to Egill Skallagrímsson (*lausavísa* 2) in *Egils saga* comes from a pair of stanzas that are treated as dubious by most if not all scholars,¹⁰¹ and is in principle undatable (although see the suggestions made below):

Síþøgla gaf sǫglum
 sárgagls þría Agli
 hirðimeidr við hróðri
 hagr brimrótar gagra,
 ok bekkþiðurs blakka
 borðvallar gaf fjórða
 kennimeidr, sás kunni,
 kǫrbeð, Egil gleðja.

(*Skjaldedigtning* A1:603, B1:602; *Egils saga*, Sigurður Nordal, 82, v. 5; *Egils saga*, Bjarni Einarsson, 44 and note)

“The adroit tending-tree of the wound-gosling [MAN] gave the talkative Egill three perpetually silent hunting-dogs of the sea-root [SEA-SNAILS] for his praise, and the knowing tree of the horses of the plank-plain [SEA-FARER], who knew how to make Egill glad, gave as the fourth gift the sickbed of the capercaillie of the stream [EGG].”

Here *gagarr* figures as the base-word in a whimsical circumlocution for “sea snail” that depicts this creature in riddle-style as a silent barker (compare the attestation from *Málsháttakvæði*). The verse as a whole describes the rewards—sea snails and duck eggs—presented to three-year-old Egill by his maternal grandfather in return for precocious skaldic virtuosity. The generic gifts it parodically alludes to are eggs and shells. Among eggs, the item of highest

101. Cf. *Egils saga*, Sigurður Nordal, vii.

prestige was the Resurrection egg, an Easter gift which stems from the East, with their center of production in Kiev. Eleventh-century examples are found at Sigtuna and on Gotland.¹⁰² Among shells, the type of greatest prestige and thus the likeliest candidate for presentation was the cowrie, ultimately sourced from the Indian Ocean and widely distributed across the Viking world. Gotlanders brought whole shells back to their island and often placed them with the deceased in graves.¹⁰³ The name of Egill's benefactor, Yngvarr, coincides with that of the famed mid-eleventh-century expeditionary leader Yngvarr/Ingvarr, whose ventures on the "eastern way" are commemorated on numerous Swedish runestones¹⁰⁴ and form the subject of *Yngvars saga víðförla*. These distinctive motifs might point to composition of the stanza late in the eleventh century, consistent with the probabilities for other generic Viking stanzas in *Egils saga*.¹⁰⁵

Málsháttakvæði provides our unique example of *gagarr* outside a kenning construction:

Ró skyldu menn reiði gefa,
 raunlítit kǫmsk opt á þrefa,
 gagarr er skaptr, þvít geyja skal,
 gera ætlak mér létt of tal.
 Verit hafði mér verra í hug,
 var þat nær sem kveisu flug,
 jafnan fagnar kvíkr maðr kú,
 kennir hins, at gleðjumk nú. (*Skjaldedigtning* B2:138–14, v. 4)

"Men should give their wrath a rest. Often a mere trifle leads to strife.
 A hunting-dog is formed because it must bark. I intend to make this
 recital light work for me. Worse intentions had been in my mind. It

102. See Margareta Attius Sohlmann, "Testimony from Gotland island of Viking Journeys East," Special issue, *Historiska Nyheter, Statens Historiska Museum: Olga & Ingegerd—Vikingafurstinnor i öst / Viking Princesses* (2004–05): 8–9.

103. See Gun Westholm, "Gotland and the Surrounding World," in *The Spillings Hoard: Gotland's Role in Viking Age World Trade*, ed. Ann-Marie Pettersson (Visby: Gotlands Museum, 2009), 146.

104. Jesch, *Ships and Men*, 102–04.

105. *Egils saga*, Sigurður Nordal, 81–82, v. 4; 100–101, v. 7; 119, v. 12.

was almost like the pain of a boil. The living man rejoices in a cow. It is apparent that I am enjoying myself now.”¹⁰⁶

Roberta Frank draws attention to the cheerful eclecticism, both stylistic and motivic, of this poem.¹⁰⁷ The choice of the word *gagarr* may have added to that sense of eclecticism.

The final attestation comes from *Krákumál*, a late pastiche supposedly spoken by Ragnarr loðbrók:

Hjoggum vér með hjörvi.
Herr kastaði skjöldum,
þás rægagarr rendi
ræstr at gumna brjóstum;
beit í Skarpa-skerjum
skæru-bíldr at hjaldri;
roðinn vas randar máni,
áðr Rafn konungr felli;
dreif ór hólða hausum
heitr á brynjur sveiti. (*Skjaldedigtning* B1:649–56, st. 6)

“We strike with the sword. The army threw down their shields when the unleashed hunting-dog of the corpse [SWORD] dashed at men’s breasts. In the Skarpa-skerries the war-iron [SWORD] bit in battle. The moon of the rim [SHIELD] was reddened before King Hrafn fell. Out from men’s skulls the hot blood spurted on to the mailshirts.”

Another distinctive word, *díar*, occurs in a stanza from Kormákr’s *Sigurðardrápa* (st. 3), mentioned above, where the poet acknowledges the earl’s gift of a headband:

Eykr með ennidúki
jarðhljótr día fjarðar
breyti, hún sás beinan
bindr; seið Yggr til Rindar. (*Skjaldedigtning* A1:79; *Skáldskaparmál*, Faulkes, 1:9)

106. Cf. Frank, *Sex, Lies and Málsháttakvæði*, 24.

107. *Ibid.*, 17.

“The land-getter, who fastens the ?mast-top straight?, honors the provider of the deities’ fiord [POET?] with a headband. Yggr laid spells for Rindr.”¹⁰⁸

Here, despite the irregularity of the kenning and the overall obscurity of the *helmingr*, *díar* “gods, priests” is accepted by scholars as a loanword from Irish *día*, also *dea*.¹⁰⁹ Senses of *día* are “[the Christian] God” and “god, goddess, supernatural being, object of worship,” the latter often used of the pre-Christian gods in formulas such as *tongu do dia toingthe hUlaíd* “I swear by the gods whom the Ulstermen swear by” and *atbiursa mo dee* “I swear by my gods.”

The word *kelli* occurs as an apparent *hapax legomenon* in another verse linked to Kormákr—albeit only in *Kormáks saga* and hence a less reliable attribution. The relevant clause is as follows: *Fjöll eru fjarðar kelli / faldin* “The mountains are draped with the veil of the fiord [ICE].”¹¹⁰ A very similar word *kellir* occurs in a *þula* as a *heiti* for “helmet.”¹¹¹ Sophus Bugge saw the two words as independent of each other, arguing that Kormákr’s *kelli* lacks nominative *-r* and originates in Irish *caille* “veil,” ultimately from Latin *pallium*.¹¹² Most scholars, however, have preferred to take them together, as derived forms from ON *kollr* “head.”¹¹³ Falk went a different route, citing alleged Irish *celbir*,¹¹⁴ but as best I can determine the attested form is actually *celbarr* (gen. sg. *celbairr*) “headpiece, helmet.” Against the majority viewpoint, it must be borne in mind that evidence from *þulur* is not necessarily decisive: the *þulur* contain various layers of accretion and are not necessarily representative of pre-thirteenth-century

108. Cf. Anthony Faulkes, trans., *Edda* (London: Dent, 1987), 68.

109. Bugge, *Vesterlandenes Indflydelse paa Nordboernes*, 133; de Vries, *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, s.v. “diar.”

110. *Skjaldedigtning* BI:77–78, v. 34; *Vatnsdæla saga*, Einar Ól. Sveinsson, 266–67, v. 53.

111. *Hjálms heiti* 2; *Skjaldedigtning* AI:667–68, BI:665–66.

112. “Om Versene i *Kormáks saga*,” *Aarbøger for nordisk oldkyndighed og historie* (Copenhagen: Thieles bogtrykkeri, 1889), 9; see also A. Bugge, *Vesterlandenes Indflydelse paa Nordboernes*, 150.

113. See Frank Fischer, *Die Lehnwörter des Altwestnordischen* (Berlin: Mayer und Müller, 1909), 198; Finnur Jónsson, *Norsk-islandske Kultur- og Sprogforhold*, 69; Jónsson, *Lexicon Poeticum*, s.v. “kellir”; de Vries, *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, s.v. “kellir.”

114. Hjalmar Falk, *Altnordische Waffenkunde* (Kristiania: Dybwad, 1914), 162.

skaldic usage;¹¹⁵ indeed they may incorporate mistaken inferences from older skaldic usage. In light of this, derivation of *kelli* from *caille* remains the clearly most plausible solution. As the citations in the *Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language* show, the reference is predominantly to a veil over the head: e.g., *sith-lais in uisci isin cuach tria chailli* “strained the water in the cup through her veil.” The ecclesiastical content of this word, often used in funerary contexts in the original Irish, makes it a type of lexis especially likely to remain in active use in Iceland among people of Christian background, parallel with *bagall* “crozier” (from Irish *bachall* “crozier, pastoral staff,” ultimately from Latin *baculum*), *kross* “cross” (from Irish *cros*, ultimately from Latin *crux*), *bjannak* “blessing” (from Irish *bennacht* “blessing,” ultimately from Latin *benedictum* or *benedictio*), and of course *díar* “gods, priests.”¹¹⁶ These two attestations of Irish vocabulary in association with Kormákr are naturally all the more intriguing in view of Kormákr’s transparently Irish name. Striking, but hard to explain, is the fact that both *kelli* and *día* occur in collocation with the Icelandic word *fjörðr* in their respective stanzas.

The lexeme *méil* is found uniquely in two stanzas by Icelandic skalds. The first is from *Vellekla* (st.10), ascribed to Einarr skálaglam:

Rigndi hjörs á hersa
 hríðremmirs fjör víða
 – þrimlundr of jók Þundi
 þegns gnótt – méilregni,
 ok hald-Viðurr hǫlða
 haffaxa lét vaxa
 Laufa veðr at lífi
 lífkǫld Háars drífu. (*Heimskringla* 1:210–11, v. 99)

“The empowerer of the storm of the sword [WAR-LEADER] rained with a crushing rain far and wide upon the bodies of the chieftains; the bush of the battle [WARRIOR] added plenty of retainers for Óðinn. And the holding-Óðinn of the ocean-horses [SHIP-BORNE

115. See Elena Gurevich, “Zur Genealogie der *þula*,” *alvíssmál* 1 (1992): 90–94, and “*Þulur* in *Skáldskaparmál*: An Attempt at Skaldic Lexicology,” *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 107 (1992): 36–37.

116. On these lexical items, see Fischer, *Die Lehnwörter des Altwestnordischen*, 18–19.

WARRIOR] caused the life-chilling tempest of Laufi (Boðvar-Bjarki's sword) [BATTLE] to swell with Óðinn's blizzard [SHOOTING OF SPEARS] to the detriment of their lives."

With this attestation we can compare the following from *Hákonardrápa* (st. 9), attributed to Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld:

Þaðan verða fót fyrða
(fregnk gǫrla þat) Sǫrla
– rjóðask bjǫrt í blóði
benfúr – méilskúrum.¹¹⁷ (*Skáldskaparmál*, Faulkes, 68, v. 230)

"Thence men's garments of Sǫrli [ARMOR] are destroyed by crushing showers; bright fires of the wound [SWORDS] are reddened in blood."

Quite probably, as Marius Kristensen suggests, Hallfreðr is here borrowing from Einarr, who is fond of unusual kennings based on spears, arrows, and other thrown weapons.¹¹⁸ Whatever the case, *mél* has proved rather a mystery.¹¹⁹ Sveinbjörn Egilsson (followed by Finnur Jónsson) glosses it as "ferrum, telum,"¹²⁰ the sole unequivocal attestation being *mél* in Ingjaldr Geirmundarson's *Atlöguflokkur* 6,¹²¹ and compares it with OE *mæl*. Kristensen instead links with ON *-mal*, *melr*, *mælr* and glosses as "quiver."¹²² Falk proposes that *mél* is synonymous with ON *malmr* "ore, metal" and posits an origin in **mihila*, a derived form of Latin *mica* "crumb," in the sense of "gravel."¹²³ Holthausen posits linkage with Pers. *mex* (< **maixa*-) "stake."¹²⁴ Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson identifies with *mél* "bridle-bit" and

117. See Konstantin Reichardt, *Studien zu den Skalden des 9. und 10. Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig: Mayer & Müller, 1928), 61–63.

118. "Skjaldenes sprog: Nogle småbemærkninger," *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 23 (1907): 236.

119. See Reichardt, *Studien zu den Skalden*, 59–64.

120. *Lexicon poetikum antiquæ linguae septentrionalis* (Copenhagen: Societas regia antiquariorum septentrionalium, 1860), s.v. "mél"; see also Finnur Jónsson, *Lexicon Poeticum*, s.v.

121. *Skjaldedigtning* B2:100.

122. "Skjaldenes sprog: Nogle småbemærkninger," 240.

123. *Altnordische Waffenkunde*, 76.

124. Ferdinand Holthausen, *Vergleichendes und etymologisches Wörterbuch des*

glosses as “missiles” (*skotvopn*).¹²⁵ De Vries dismisses Falk’s explanation but does not otherwise commit himself.¹²⁶

All the above explanations seem strained or literally far-fetched. Could *méil* instead be connected with a disyllabic form of Irish *meilid* “to grind”? The entry for *meilid* in the *Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language* includes the following: (a) of grain, etc., “grinds, crushes”; (b) of weapons, “grinds, sharpens”: *ná melta riss . . . acht gaí* “that only spears should be whetted against it”; (c) of a person, “crushing, bruising,” hence “overcomes, destroys”; III With abstract object and for of person, “wreaks, inflicts (on)”: *a muilinn . . . ni bo chomailt far serbainn* | [a] *ro milt for uibh Cerbhaill* “it was not the grinding of oats thou didst grind on Cerbhaill’s descendants”; *nicon-mela in fer-sa a baraind for Ultu* “that man shall not wreak his wrath on the Ulstermen.” With object omitted: *amal melis milchu for mbil* “as a greyhound falls on a hare.”¹²⁷

As we see, *meilid* is often used in association with onslaughts and attacks involving weapons. If there is a relationship between this word and Icelandic *méil*, the two compounds with this element would mean respectively “grinding/sharp rain” and “grinding/sharp showers,” or more broadly “destructive rain/showers,” implying showers of weapons such as spears that are ground or sharpened or whetted and moreover have a grinding or mincing effect upon those whom they strike. Similar concepts are seen in OE poetry, e.g., *mylenscearpum* “sharp from the grinder,” used of weapons, and *wundum forgrunden* “minced up with wounds” (of a person), both attested in *The Battle of Brunanburh*. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that the precise phonological relationship between the Irish and Icelandic forms of this word remains a difficulty.

Taking the four lexical items discussed above together, and admitting an element of uncertainty, it does look as if a select number of the most prominent of the *höfuðskáld* of Iceland, along with anonymous imitators in Iceland and Orkney, availed themselves of a small dash of distinctive Irish-derived vocabulary. While some Irish words did

Altwestnordischen, Altnorwegisch-isländischen, einschliesslich der Lehn- und Fremdwörter sowie der Eigennamen (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1948), 193.

125. *Heimskringla* I:211n.

126. de Vries, *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, s.v. “méilregn.”

127. See <http://edil.qub.ac.uk/dictionary/search.php>.

percolate into early Norwegian dialects, the uptake by Norwegian skalds on the basis of the available evidence is virtually nil: Bragi, for example, used the ship-*heiti lung*. The conspicuous piece of Irish lexis in a stanza (*lausavísa* 6) ascribed to the twelfth-century Norwegian king Magnús berfœttr Ólafsson probably owes its inspiration to a topical allusion:

Hvat skulum heimfœr kvitta?
 hugr's minn í Dyflinni,
 enn til Kaupangs kvinna
 kœmkat austr í hausti.
 Unik, þvít eigi synjar
 ingjan gamans þinga;
 œrskan veldr því's írskum
 annk betr an mér svanna.¹²⁸

"Why should we talk of a homeward voyage? My heart is in Dublin; I will yet again this autumn not return eastwards to the women of Kaupangr. I am enjoying myself because the girl does not deny me pleasurable trysts; youth is the cause that I love the Irish maiden better than myself."¹²⁹

Here the word *ingjan* "girl, maiden" is a conspicuous cultural borrowing from Irish *ingen* "a daughter, girl, maiden, virgin; also frequently used of a (married) woman." While the identity of the particular *ingen* referred to remains uncertain, a plausible suggestion makes her the mother of Haraldr gilli, a claimant to be son of Magnús berfœttr.¹³⁰

Camaraderie, complexion, lexis: these features combine to suggest an impulse on the part of some Icelandic (and Orkney) skalds, most prominently Egill, Kormákr, and Sigvatr, to individuate their poetic product by "branding" it with what were perceived as distinctive

128. *Skjaldedigtning* A1:433, B1:403; *Morkinskinna*, ed. Finnur Jónsson (Copenhagen: Jørgensen, 1928–32), 334; *Ágrip af Nóregskonunga sögum*, Bjarni Einarsson, 313–14.

129. Theodore M. Andersson and Kari Ellen Gade, trans., *Morkinskinna: The Earliest Icelandic Chronicle of the Norwegian Kings* (1030–1157), *Islandica* 51 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 311.

130. *Ibid.*, 488.

features of their insular communities. Indications of such a tendency show up a few decades after the initial settlement, with a cluster of instances in the decades immediately preceding and following the turn of the eleventh century and sporadic further imitations down into the thirteenth century.

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