

Love Poetry in the ‘Skald Sagas’

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Abstract

The main aim of the article is to analyse skaldic love poetry (mansǫngr), which has not been adequately studied before due to its bad state of preservation. The origin of skaldic love poetry is traced to libellous verse (níð), which is related to mansǫngr through its semantic similarity as well as its contextual role in the saga (the motivation of conflict); its fragmentary nature and deficiency as information, necessitating prose commentary; the complexity and obscurity of language, following from the deliberate aim of concealing meaning, which is usually fictional. An attempt is made to trace the ways in which skaldic love poetry is transformed into lyric (such as the discovery of the verbal means of expressing the poet’s feelings, appearance of a woman, natural landscape).

Key words: skaldic poetry, love poems, libellous verse, lyric, saga, epic poetry.

Love verse (*mansǫngr*) is one of the worst preserved and hence least explored genres in skaldic poetry. This is not surprising because in Icelandic Family Sagas the use of the word *mansǫngr* is hardly ever accompanied by poetic quotations. The only instance when a piece of skaldic poetry is termed *mansǫngr* in a saga (*Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, ch. 56) is Egill Skallagrímsson’s *vísa* on Ásgerðr, the widow of his brother Þórólfr:

Ókynni vensk, ennis,
ung, þorðak vel forðum,
hauka klifs, at hefja,
Hlín, þvergnípur mínar;
verðk í feld, þás, foldar,
faldr kømr í hug skaldi
berg-"óneris", brúna
brátt miðstalli hváta (*Skj.I B, 45, 14*)

Young Hlín of the cliff of the hawk
(=woman) does not seem to know me — before I raised
my eyes boldly;
Now I must hide my nose into my fur cloak, when the
earth of Thorolf (=Ásgerðr) (or “the head-dress of the
land of the giant” =Ásgerðr) comes to the skald’s mind.

The word *mansǫngr* is used by Egill’s friend Arinbjörn, who asks whether Egill has hidden the name of the woman in his *vísa*. Egill replies that the stanza was composed about Ásgerðr, whom he wished to marry (and later succeeded in doing so). In the text of Egill’s poem, Ásgerðr’s name is hidden with the help of a special skaldic device called *ofljóst* (literally: “too clear”): *berg-óneris foldar faldr*. As was suggested, *Ónerir* here denotes Thor, and *Berg-Ónerir* means “Thor of the mountain” and therefore Thorolf, because “the wolf is a beast of the wild” (Guttenbrunner S. 1955: 387). Thus *fold Berg-Óneris* means “Thorolf’s earth or field”, i.e. Thorolf’s wife. It is symptomatic that in the *ofljóst* the skald’s former “rival” is mentioned, Ásgerðr’s deceased husband, whose wedding Egill had failed to attend (*Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, ch. 42).

The poem quoted above makes it possible to reconstruct the meaning of the term *mansǫngr*, which appears to refer to a genre of skaldic poetry, finding formal expression in a *vísa*, its dominant function being pragmatic and its content being the expression of the skald’s feeling for a woman. Most skaldic poems, corresponding to this definition, appear in the so-called “skald sagas” (*skáldasögur*): *Bjarnar saga Hitdælakappa*, *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*, *Hallfreðar saga vandræðaskálds*, *Kormáks saga*.

The plot of these sagas is built around an identical pattern, the rivalry of two skalds. Mutual aggression is verbalised in poems in which the expression of love for the woman is not always distinct from denigration of the rival. The term *mansǫngr* is used in *skáldasögur* only once - in *Hallfreðar saga* (in the manuscript *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*), in which it is not followed by a skaldic *vísa*. Moreover, the absence of poetic text is specially commented on: “When Hallfreðr woke up, he said several *vísur* which do not have to be put here with *mansǫngr* to Kolfinna and indecent words about Grís”, her husband. The skaldic poems known from another manuscript (*Möðruvallabók*) of *Hallfreðar saga* are not classified as *mansǫngr* but are included into the same episode of the saga (the meeting of Hallfreðr and Kolfinna in the absence of her husband Grís) and fully deserve the commentary given to them in the saga:

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| <p>Leggr at lýsibrekku leggjar íss af Grísi, kvǫl þolir hún hjá hönun, heitr ofremðar sveiti, en dreypilig drúpir dýnu Rön hjá hönun, leyfik ljóssa vífa lund, sem ǫlpt á sundi. (<i>Skj.I B, 160, 15</i>)</p> | <p>Hot, stinking sweat is dripping from Grís on the sparkling slope of silver armrings (=woman) — near him she is suffering torture — sorrowfull Rann of the pillow (=woman) is bending her head down near him — I praise the mind of fair women — Like a swan to the water.</p> |
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The stanza quoted above was spoken in the same situation, a lovers' parting at dawn, as two centuries later called for an *alba* in Provence, an *aubade* in France and a *Tagelied* in Germany. It might seem that the same motifs, meeting, wakening and parting, are prefigured, as well as the same characters, including a night guard. In *Hallfreðar saga* (ch. 9) this role is performed by the shepherd (*smalamaðr*), who warns the lovers about the husband's return. However Hallfreðr's poems are as far from corresponding genres as his “stinking seagull, filled with herrings” (*sílafullr fúlmár*) (to quote the words he uses to describe Kolfinna's husband in the stanza immediately following the one given above, *vísa 19*) are from the larks and nightingales found in albas of Romance poets. The relations between the rivals in skaldic poetry are reversed in comparison with continental: the right to be jealous is given not to the husband but to the skald, claiming what belongs to him by right but was taken away. Fear is typical of the troubadour, who is trying to appropriate what is not his own, but not of the skald, who is wishing to reclaim his own. Hallfreðr's denigrating poems, whose aim is to mock and ridicule his rival (Kolfinna's husband Grís), would have been identical to libellous poetry (*níð*) if it had not been for the praise, ironical though it is, explicitly expressed in them.

The theme of these *vísur*, which is quite common in skaldic *mansǫngr*, permits more generous praise than was expressed by Hallfreðr, but mixed with libel and ridicule. Just as Hallfreðr claims that he “ripped the donkey's skin from the swine Grís” (the name Grís means “piglet”), so Björn, the hero of *Bjarnar saga Hítðelakappa*, in his stanzas addressed to Oddný Eykyndill (“the light of the island”), where he assigns to her epithets like *orðsæll* (“happy in words”), *snótr* (“clever”), *nýtr* (“able, worthy”), etc., calls his rival Þórðr “little man” (*lítill sveinn*) and “cowardly lad” (*sveinn enn hvíta*):

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| <p>Snót biðr svein enn hvíta svinn at kvíar innan, (reið esat Rínar glóðar ranglôt) moka ganga; harðla nýt, sú heitir, Hlökk miðs vita Rökkva, sprund biðr út at andar, Eykyndill, mik skynda. (<i>Skj.I B, 277, 3</i>)</p> | <p>The clever woman tells the cowardly lad to go — the support of the heat of the Rein (=woman) is not unfair — and clear the dung from the sheeps' pen; Worthy Hlökk of the fire of the sand-bar of Rökkvi (=woman), who is called the light of the island, tells me quickly to come out to the entrance doors.</p> |
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The existence of poems like those quoted above enabled Jenny Jochens to define *mansǫngr* as “erotic libel” (Jochens J. 1991: 2). However, the problem of the affinity between two skaldic poetic genres, libellous verse (*níð*) and love poetry (*mansǫngr*), has not yet been analysed and therefore will be undertaken here. The collection of Icelandic laws, *Grágás* (P. 392), equates love poems to libellous verse, mentioning them under the same heading, “On Poetry”, and prescribing the same punishment for composing both (outlawry). Thus *mansǫngr* and *níð* appear to be the only poetic compositions persecuted by the laws. Icelandic Family Sagas also show the same hostility to them as Scandinavian laws and they either quote libellous and love poems without calling them *níð* or *mansǫngr*, or, when these terms are used, avoid any quotation.

More importantly, the dominant function of both libellous verse and love poetry can be described as pragmatic, in that it derives from magic. The skald possessed a peculiar, almost magical power of invoking gifts in answer to his verses (Frank R. 1990: 69). Like any skaldic panegyric, a love poem requires a gift in answer from the one to whom it is addressed. By his poetry the skald invariably wins the illicit affection of the addressee. Thus, like magic, *mansǫngr* infallibly precipitates action, which explains the hostility to it of both the Family Sagas and Scandinavian laws.

The contextual roles of love poetry and libelous verse in sagas are connected with the motivation of conflict. Their fragmentary nature and deficiency as information necessitate prose commentary. The complexity and obscurity of their language follows from the deliberate aim of concealing meaning, which is usually fictional. Semantically, they have much in common too: their main aim is to question, attack, or undermine the virility of the enemy or rival. The content of *mansǫngr* is often fictitious; its function is as far from communication and as close to magic as the voluntative function of *níð*. Both genres draw on visual magic: the ritual of erecting *trénið* is common in sagas; love poetry is accompanied by ritual in the episode from *Landnámabók* (part IV, ch.4) about skald Tjǫrvi, who painted the pictures of his beloved Ástriðr and her husband Þórir on the wall of the privy and then kissed her portrait and spat on his, till his uncle Hróarr scraped off his drawings. Skald Tjǫrvi later carved the portraits on the handle of his knife and composed a *vísa* about it, in which he also boasted of having won the affection of his beloved:

Vér hǫfum þar sem Þóri,
þat vas sett við glettu,
auðar unga Þrúði
áðr á vegg of fáða;
nú hefk (rastakarns) ristna
(réðk mart við Syn bjarta)
hauka (skopts) á hepti
Hlín ǫlbækis mínu. (*Skj. I B, 94*)

Before I drew both the young Þrúð of riches
(=woman) and Þórir on the wall;
this was done for mockery;
now I have carved — *I talked a lot with bright-*
haired Syn of the acorns of the see(=woman) —
proud Hlín of the beech-vessel for ale
on my knife-handle.

Tjǫrvi's *vísa* is not called *mansǫngr*, but corresponds to it in function (voluntative), in contents (libel against his rival and praise for his beloved), and in the reaction of the relatives (Ástriðr's brothers killed both Tjǫrvi and his uncle). Like libelous poetry (*níð*), love poetry (*mansǫngr*) signals the end of peace and the onset of hostility: this kind of poetry generates and motivates conflict. In *skáldasögur* the author of *mansǫngr* is usually killed by the rival.

The aim of Tjǫrvi's individual ritual probably coincided with the function of his verse: the purpose of his visual magic was to enhance the pragmatic effect of his poetry. This testifies to the closeness of both genres to the rituals of magic. The functional and semantic affinity of the two genres can be accounted for by their genetic affinity.

Mansǫngr starts from a statement of concrete facts which has the aim of threatening and boasting. It consists of facts related, rather than of feelings described. Praise of the loved one is little more important than defamation of the rival. *Mansǫngr* is thus much closer to love magic than to love lyric (e.g., in the above quoted poems by Tjǫrvi, Hallfreðr, Björn). The examples of libellous-praising *vísur* can be viewed as evidence for the common origin of the two genres and hence typologically the earliest instances of *mansǫngr*. Egill's poem can be seen as the next typological stage in the development of the genre: the rival's name is still mentioned but there is no denigration of him. In Egill's *mansǫngr*, there is description not of the author's feeling but of its outward manifestations, related as an incitement to action. At this stage the pragmatic function still dominates over the informative. The closest parallels to Egill's poem and to some extent to the invective-laudatory verses adduced above are some stanzas composed by Björn Arneirsson hitdælakappi, e.g.:

Hristi handar fasta
hefr drengr gamans fengit;
hrynja hart á dýnur
hlǫð Eykyndils vǫðva,
meðan (víns) stinna vinnum
(veldr nøkkvat því) klökkva,
skeið verðk skriðs at beiða,
(skorða) ôr at borði. (*Skj. I B, 277, 2*)

With Hrist of the fire of hand the warrior
reached delight; heavily drop on the cushion embroidered
clothes (or "tears")
of the light of the island;
whilst I am making the stiff oar bend on board, — *the*
support of wine (=woman) *to some extent caused that* —
I should make my ship run.

The content of the *vísa*, including mention of the rival without denigration, an absence of directly expressed feeling, the possible *double entendre* of the kenning *Hristi handar fasta* and the probable interpretation of the whole stanza *sensu obsceno* (Frank R. 1978: 162), together with its emphatically objective general tone, signals a typological proximity to Egill's *mansǫngr*. This view is supported both by the microstructure of the stanza (in the first *helmingr* a specific situation connected with the woman is stated, and in the second the reaction of the skald is given implicitly, in terms of actions rather than of feelings) and by the circumstances of its composition (Björn says his *vísa* in the absence of his beloved). The typological proximity provides justification for extending use of the term *mansǫngr* beyond the limits set by the sagas.

Victory in poetic craft entails victory over the enemy as well as victory in love (winning the affection of the woman about whom the poem is composed). The motif of "paternity" is fixed in the semantics of *mansǫngr* by the situation itself, as can be proved by comparing poems by Björn Arngeirsson hitðelakappi and Björn Ásbrandsson breiðvíkingakappi, the hero of the *Eyrbyggja saga*:

Þá mun þunnrar blæju
þoll (vestarla und fjöllum,
Rindr vakði mik mundar)
manns þíns getu sanna,
ef gæti son sæta
sunnu mars við runni,
(vǫn lætk réttar raunar)
ríklunduð mér glíkan. (*Skj. I B, 279, 10*)

Þá mun þoll en mjóva
Þórodds aðalbjóra
(Fold unni mér fǫldu)
fannhvít getu sanna,
ef áttgǫfug ætti
auðbrík sonu glíka,
(enn emk gjarn til Gunnar
gjalfrelda) mér sjölfum. (*Skj. I B, 125, 3*)

There the pine of thin cover (=Oddný) —
*Rind of the hand (=woman) in the west at the
foot of the mountain wakes me (i.e. my love)*
— will confirm the suspicions of her
husband,
if the beautifully dressed woman
will give birth to the son, resembling me,
with the bush of the sun of the sea (=her
husband) —

I expect my hope will come true.
Shapely pine of noble ale (or "cover, carpet";
=:Puríðr, Björn's beloved) will confirm
Þórodd's suspicions (=:Puríðr's husband) —
snowwhite earth of dress (=woman) loves me
— if noble-born support of treasure gives
birth to the son, resembling me — *I*
passionately desire
Gunn of the fire of the sea (=woman).

It is clear from the prose context of the sagas that the pragmatic function of these *vísur* is retained and the hopes of both skalds are fulfilled. Although the communicative function of the poems remains minimal, they undoubtedly contain some expression of feeling. The description of emotions has not yet developed into emotional description. The expression of feeling is given an insignificant place in both poems, being confined to parenthetical sentences (the first of which is centred on the woman and the second on the skald himself), whereas the bulk of the poem is concerned with the situation itself, as is usual in skaldic poetry. The crucial point, however, is that the situation is the *same* in both of these verses. There is a striking semantic affinity between them, which is unique for skaldic poems, as individual, fragmentary and concrete as the actual situations which had brought them into being.

From the statement of particular facts, determining the individual nature of each *vísa* and excluding any typisation, skaldic poetry for the first time rises to the level of generalisation and transcends the particular. Out of all skaldic genres it was in love poetry, *mansǫngr*, that the step towards describing typical situations and motifs was made.

The dominant form at this stage in the typology of the genre is the short form, an eight line stanza which does not enable the author to get beyond a static description of feeling. However, the prose context quoted above gives an implicit indication that both rival skalds are trying to reach beyond the elementary skaldic structure. The titles of their compositions, *vísur* called *Daggeisla* (stanzas about the Ray of the Day, *Daggeisla* being the nickname of Þórdís, Björn's wife) and *Eykyndilsvísur* (stanzas about the Light of the Island, *Eykyndill* being the nickname of Björn's beloved Oddný) leave scope for supposing that they were not necessarily separate stanzas (*lausavísur*), but connected cycles of stanzas which might have been united by the *stef*. An idea of their content can be arrived at through comparison with the cycle whose title is constructed according to an identical model, *Kolbrúnarvísur* by Þórmóðr kolbrúnarskáld, several times called in *Fostbræðra saga* (ch. XI) "the song of praise" (*lofkvæði*).

The absence of libel probably implied by such denotation (cf. the *mansǫngr* composed by Óttarr svarti and termed *lof* by Ástríðr) enables us to suppose that the insulting character of these compositions consisted in their being addressed to a particular woman and in their expected effect.

Suppositions based on prose contexts can be applied to the only surviving cycle of verses preserved in *Kormáks saga*. Following the pattern in previous cycles, the first ten *vísur* composed by Kormákr about Steingerðr could be called “Stanzas about Steingerðr” (*Steingerðarvísur*):

Nú varðk mér í mínu,
(menreið) jǫtuns leiði,
(réttumk risti) snótar
ramma óst fyr skǫmmu;
þeir munu fœtr á fári
fald-Gerðar mér verða,
(alls ekki veitk ella)
optarr an nú (svarra). (*Skj. I B, 70, 1*)

Brunnu beggja kina
björt ljós á mik drósar
(oss hlægir þat eigi)
eldhúss of við felldan;
enn til ǫkkla svanna
ítrvaxins gatk líta,
(þrô muna oss of ævi
eldask), hjá þreskeldi. (*Skj. I B, 70, 2*)

Brámáni skein brúna
brims und ljósum himni
Hristar, hǫrvi glæstrar
haukfránn á mik lauka,
en sá geisli sýslir
síðan gullmens Fríðar
hvarmatungls ok hringa
Hlínar óþurpt mína. (*Skj. I B, 70, 3*)

Now suddenly strong love arose
in my breath of giant's wife (=breast) —
the support of necklace stretched out her
instep to me recently; these feet of Gerðr
of head-dress (=Steingerðr), I think, will
make me miserable more often than
now— *I know nothing else about this
woman.*

The bright lights of both cheeks (=eyes)
of the woman sparkled at me —
this does not make me laugh — from
behind the wood of the fire-house
(=hall),
the ankles of the beautifully-grown
woman
could I see — *my desire will
never grow old* —
Behind the threshold.

The hawk-sharp moons of the eyelashes
(=eyes) of Hrist of the sea of herbs
(=woman), clad in linen, sparkled to me
from the light sky of the brows
(=forehead); this ray of the sun of the
eyelids (=the glance of the eyes) of Fríðr
of the golden necklace (=woman) brings
misfortune to both me and Hlín of the
rings (=woman).

Comparison of these *vísur* by Kormákr with the poems by Hallfreðr and Björn (to say nothing of Egill) shows structural and semantic transformation of the genre. The main object of description still remains the situation and not the feelings of the author, but in contrast to the preceding stanzas, it is presented not statically, but as developing. The modifications of the situation described in each successive *vísa* correspond to changes in the author's state and thus comprise the first specific signs of the conception and description of feeling. The dynamics of Kormákr's poems are still determined from within the situation, which is conditioned by the facts of the surrounding world. However, contrary to the conventions of skaldic *lausavísur*, to which the whole of *mansǫngr* is sometimes attributed, Kormákr's poems are not self-enclosed, fragmentary or occasional. Each of the poems in this “cycle” is verbally connected with the preceding and the following one, through the unfolding description both of the author's feeling and the woman's, neither of which occurs in typologically earlier poems.

The description of the appearance of the woman is one of the most important innovations of *mansǫngr*. In Old Norse prose the “literary portraits” are very rare and are attributed almost exclusively to male characters. In Icelandic sagas there occur only two relatively detailed descriptions of the appearance of women: a fifty year old sorceress in *Eyrbyggja saga* (“she was a big woman, tall and stout, inclined to fatness. She had black brows and narrow eyes, dark and hard hair”) and Kolbrún, who has already been mentioned and to whom skald Þormóðr addressed his *mansǫngr* in *Fostbræðra saga* (“she was a courteous woman, not very beautiful, with black hair and eyebrows — this is why she was called Kolbrún the ‘Blackbrowed’ — with a clever expression and good complexion, stately, of middle height and a bit pigeon-toed when she walked”).

Scholars have tried to account for the almost total absence from sagas of description of women in terms of the harsh moral standards in Iceland and the equally harsh weather there, as opposed to the Mediterranean where the description of heroines is considerably more widespread (Jochens J. 1991: 247–256). The appearance of women is described not subjectively through the perception of other characters, which could have given them some emotional colouring, but ‘objectively’ in the most detached way by the author of the saga himself. The presence of details, a tendency towards naturalism, the mention of irregular and even ugly appearance, makes these descriptions individualised but not idealised, and thus completely different from the Romance tradition of love poetry going back to Ovid. Even Kolbrún’s engagement in a romantic situation does not lead the author of the saga to focus the description on her physical attractiveness but rather on her objective “external traits”. The highly objective literary portrait is not provided as motive for the feelings of another character and does not acquire an aesthetic function. It is possible to suppose that physical beauty, traditionally associated in continental literature with images of women, has not yet been discovered as an object of literary description by the poetics of the Icelandic saga.

The appearance of women does not constitute a distinct object of description in the lays of the Poetic Edda either. Such typically folklore devices as epithets like *ljós* (“light”, Vkv. 3.4, 8.3; Sg. 52.2; Am. 28.5; Háv. 92.3; Grp. 21, 28, 29, 30), *hvítarm* (“with white hands”, Háv. 162.3), *horsk* (“clever”, Háv. 102.5; Am. 3.1; 10.4), or *svinnhugub* (“clever”, HHII. 10.2) can hardly be regarded as means of describing appearance. Because they are reproduced as parts of epic formulas, such epithets lack individual referential meaning. The hair of the heroine is mentioned only in formulas (*bjart haddat man* [Grp. 33], *enn hvít hadd* [Ghv. 16]), as are her hands (*armr* [Skm. 6,3; Háv. 108,4]) and her fingers (*mjófingrad* [Rp. 40,3], *mæfingr* [Hm. 10,2]). From the functional point of view, these Eddic formulas and epithets are not logical but rather ornamental attributes. The prevailing traditionalism of such epic formulas and ornamental epithets, whose role is restricted to emphasis, is subordinated to one of the general purposes of Eddic poetry, its idealisation of heroic images. In Eddic lays, just as in sagas, the appearance of a woman does not become the object of poetic description. In Eddic poetry physical beauty is idealised, and the associations connected with images of women become obligatory, whereas in the sagas appearance is detailed and concrete.

Uniquely for Old Norse culture skaldic *mansöngur* unites the description of physical beauty with the provision of specific detail, dwelling on the attractiveness of individual features. Kormákr definitely notices the beauty of his beloved: “Each eye of the Saga of beer (=woman), which lies on the bright face of Nanna of bed (=woman), I estimate three hundred, the hair, which Sif of linen (=woman) is brushing, I estimate five hundred”. In Kormákr’s poems Steingerðr’s eyes are described through kennings as the bright “lights of cheeks”, “hawk-sharp moons of eyelashes”, “the stars of eyelids”, and her forehead as “the sky of brows”. The use in one context of the words denoting the sky, the stars and the moon helps to convey the feeling that for the skald his beloved is the whole universe. In other stanzas Kormákr mentions Steingerðr’s hands, *handfögr kona* (63), her feet, *þeir fætr* (1), her ankles, *þkla svanna* (2), her teeth, *tanna silki-Nanna* (32). Details of her clothing and decorations are given, in keeping with *Snorra Edda* (“a woman should be denoted ‘*kenna*’ through all women’s clothes, gold and precious stones. . .”, *Skáldskaparmál*, 31), through innumerable kennings: *hringa Hlín*, “Hlín of rings” (3), *gollmens Frið*, “Frið of golden necklace” (3), *Hörn hrings*, “Hörn of rings” (6), *baugsæm lind*, “Lime of ring” (4), *men-Grund*, “Earth of necklace” (6). The skald’s eye picks out the scarf, *dúk* (*Rindr hordúks* [Hallfr. 27]), the seam, *saumr* (*Saga saums* [Hallfr. 24]), the band, *band* (*björk bands* [Ól. h. 4]), the silk, *silki* (*silki-Nanna* [K. 32]), or the linen of her dress, *horr* (*horrvi glæstrar* [K. 3]), *lin* (*Hlín skapfrömuð línu* [K. 19], *Hlín skrautligrar línu* [K. 33]), and her head-dress, *faldr*, the symbol of marriage.

If words denoting articles of clothing or decoration are used as attributes in kennings, they cannot be regarded as means of describing appearance. However, as is shown by recent analysis of skaldic vocabulary, the components in kennings for women are not entirely arbitrary (Frank R. 1970: 7–37). Thus, in kennings denoting Steingerðr (*Steinn* “stone”, *Gerðr*, the name of a goddess, “patroness”) words with the meaning “stone” are often used: *steinn* (17), *sörvi* (37, 39, 56) “stone necklace”, *sigli* (56) “stone necklace”, *handar skers* (50) “hand stone”, *hals myils* (55) “neck stone”. The base of a kenning usually comprises the name of goddesses or valkyries, which has the meaning “patroness”: Gerðr (twice), Hlín (six times), Eir (five times). If these kennings in Kormákr’s poems are not arbitrary (and this is confirmed by the fact that some of the attributes [*sörvi*, *sigli*] are *hapax legomena* in the kennings of woman), then it is difficult to deny that they come close to a means of individualisation. Even when the means of describing a woman extend beyond kennings, they are usually confined to naming, as can be seen in the examples quoted.

The only devices approaching description are epithets, which remain occasional in skaldic poetry: *itrvaðinn*, “beautifully grown”, *ljós*, “light” [K. 2], *allhvít*, “all white” [K. 5], *handfögr*, “with beautiful hands” [K. 63], *ríklunduð*, “beautifully dressed” [Björn Hit. 10], *hörvi glæst*, “dressed in linen” [K. 3], *fannhvít*, “all white” [Björn Br. 3], *fagr* “beautiful” [Magnus Berf. 4, Gunnlaugr 9], *litfagra*, “with beautiful face” [Gunnlaugr 10], *væn*, “stately” [Gunnlaugr 9], *en mjóva*, “shapely” [Björn Br. 3].

So far the skald’s eye has dwelt on outward appearance, and the beloved’s mind has only been mentioned a few times: *konan svinna* “clever woman” [K. 63; cf. 8], *svinn snót* “clever woman” [Björn Hit. 3], *orðsæll*, “happy with words” [Björn Hit. 2]. Several times her noble descent is referred to: *vel borinn* [K. 5; cf. *attgóð*, Hallfr. 3, *attgöfug*, Björn Br. 3] and her “strength of spirit”, *hugstarkr* [K. 8].

Although epithets are used in *mansöngur* only occasionally and are very rarely repeated, they do not usually carry individual reference in the same way as skaldic kennings. For the skald, the only means of full individualisation are personal names (“I would rather hold long talks with Steingerðr than chase brown sheep in the field” [K. 9]; “I am glad to remember about Kolfinna” [Hallfr. 3, 23]; “Ormstungu was not happy a single whole day after Helga the Fair got the name of Hrafn’s wife” [Gunnlaugr 8]) or nicknames (“The Light of Island is sighing” [Björn Hit. 5]) or patronymics (“I remember Þórketill’s daughter” = Steingerðr [K. 35]; “I did not propose to the only daughter of Alvaldi” = Kolfinna [Hallfr. 2]). Despite widespread belief (going back to Eugen Mogk 1904: 660), nothing like Provençal *senhal* is used in skaldic poetry: in all poems belonging to this genre the name of the heroine is given more or less openly and fully identifies her. Thus skaldic love poetry brings together the individualisation of images, achieved by the poetics of the sagas, and the idealisation of beauty inherited from eddic poetry (and probably going back to folklore). It is possible to claim that the individual beauty of a woman is noticed and appreciated by the skald, because for the first time in Scandinavian culture it becomes the object of description and motivates feeling.

The expression of feeling is closely connected with the appearance of landscape in skaldic love poetry. In contrast to the rest of Old Norse literature, where there is almost no description of landscape (except for the exclamation of Gunnar of Hlíðarendi in *Njáls saga*: “How beautiful is this slope! I have never seen it so beautiful - yellow fields and cut meadows”), in skaldic love poetry landscape is included into a statement about a situation (e.g. in *vísa* 3 by Hallfreðr: “Quickly whirls Mari’s horse (=ship). I am glad to remember about Kolfinna, when with the nose of my ship I cut across the land of blackheads (=sea)”). It is in Kormákr’s verses, where the first steps are taken towards the description of women that more detailed descriptions of landscape also first appear (*vísa* 53):

Brim gnýr, brattir hamrar
blálands Haka standa,
alt gjalfr eyja þjalfa
út líðr í stað, víðis;
mér kveðk heldr of Hildi
hrannbliks, an þér, miklu
svefnfátt; sörva Gefnar
sakna mank, es ek vakna. (*Skj. I B*, 78, 37)

The sea roars, steep waves of the blue land of
Haki stand upright, all the breakers by the isles
of Þjalfi swing back into depth.
I am saying that I sleep a lot less than you,
because of Hildr of the sparkle of the sea (-
=woman); I will seek Gefn of necklaces (= *woman*) when I wake up.

The metre of this stanza is not common: most of the lines have three heavily stressed syllables at the beginning. Each line contains four accents instead of the usual three, and the alliterating syllables in odd lines (*stuðlar*) clash against each other, divided only by one syllable. In all lines except the first and the fifth, full rhymes (*aðalhendingar*) are used, though this is not required by skaldic metrical canons, where consonance is enough. This heavy metre, overburdened with superfluous accents and vibrant consonant clusters, becomes an excellent means of representing the roar and the rhythm of the sea storm. In Snorri’s *Háttatal* [Ht. 35] this metre is called *en forna skjálfhenda* (“the old trembling metre”) and its invention is attributed to the Icelandic skald Þórvaldr veili (d. 999), “who had a shipwreck in the storm and was trembling from cold on a rock”. Kormákr’s *vísa*, if it is authentic, is older than Þórvaldr’s, although it was composed in similar circumstances. It is known from the saga that during his sea voyage to Ireland, Kormákr could not sleep at all and was constantly thinking of Steingerðr. Apart from the astonishingly “semanticised” metre of this stanza, with a rhythm conveying the measured movement of waves and a sound organisation reproducing the roar of the tide, there is a striking and unique correspondence of phraseology (the kenning “Hildr of the sparkle of the sea”) with the context of the whole stanza (“the sea roars <...>, the waves stand upright <...>, swing back into depth”).

“Hildir of the sparkle of the sea” blinds the skald both when he is awake and when he is asleep, and he is woken by the roar and glitter of the waves, only to feel how much he “misses Gefn of (*glittering*) necklaces”. In this *vísu* landscape description has not yet developed into image. There is no distinction between the real world and the imaginary: there can be no doubt that Kormákr is describing only the real world. But the first signs of imagery, consisting in the destruction of the conventional nature of a kenning, have already appeared. The landscape in Kormákr’s poems, as well as the description of appearance, becomes motivated: it develops into the correlative of feeling.

Making emotion the object of poetic expression is one of Kormákr’s main achievements. Most of Kormákr’s *vísur* are composed about his feelings, which are described very subjectively: “The woman went out of the hall. Why did the whole room look different? I desire Gunn of the fire of the sea”, “I will love Eir of the fire of the water forever”, “I love Gunn of the sea-weed (or “of the necklace”, *sorvi*, if we accept the conjecture of Roberta Frank), “I love Saga of the necklace twice as much as myself”, “the one who was of all women the most desirable for me”, “love arose in my breast”, “my desire will never grow old”, “this does not make me glad” “her glance brings me misfortune”, “these feet <...> cause my grief”, “this sorrow is tormenting me”, etc.

The feelings described by Kormákr are characteristic of skaldic *mansöngur* which from Egill onwards never expresses joy or happiness. Its tone is in deep contrast with the concept of *joie* in troubadour poetry or *hoher muot* in minnesang. The contextual synonyms of the word *óst*, “love”, mentioned in *mansöngur* only five times (twice by Kormákr, twice by Hallfreðr and once by Björn Ásbrandsson) become such words as *ópurft*, “misfortune”; *sótt*, “illness, longing”; *angr*, “grief”; *ból*, “pain”; *harmr*, “grief”; *sorg*, “sorrow”; *þrá*, “desire”; *ekki*, “longing”; *stríð*, *hildir*, *óteiti*, *sút*, “grief”; *óttá*, “longing”. Even when thinking of his former happiness, Hallfreðr exclaims: *áðr vask ungu fljóði at sútum*, “in the past I lived for the grief of the young woman”. For Kormákr his feeling *hvöss sótt angrar sú*, “makes longing bitterer, brings grief”, and similar emotions are expressed by Gunnlaugr: his love *nemr flaum af skáldi*, “takes joy from the skald”.

The premonition of grief and death fills the whole of skaldic *mansöngur*, whose composition prefigures a tragic end: “Tender Rind of canvas scarf (= *woman*) will wipe her tears from her eyelashes with her white arm <...> if warriors bring me dead from the ship” (*Hallfreðr* 27), “Little I care though I will be killed in the arms of the woman — I, sailor, risked my life to reach her. If I can fall asleep in the arms of Sif of silk covers (= *woman*), I will not restrain my desires with the light lime-tree of the folds of the dress (= *woman*)” (*Hallfreðr* 19).

The quoted lines show that in contrast to continental poetry, the skald’s grief cannot be caused by the indifference of his beloved. When Kormákr asks Steingerðr “Who would you choose for your husband, Hlín of linen?”, she answers: “The breaker of rings, I would be ready to unite with Fróði’s brother (*Fróði* = *Kormákr’s brother*), even if he were blind, if only fate allowed it and gods did this good deed for me”. Fate, full of wrath and powerful (*riksköp*), is mentioned in Kormákr’s verses as well: “We are lying, Hlín of the fire of the hand, on two sides of the partition. The powerful fate wrathfully is doing her deed to us. We can see they are hostile. Never will it happen that we, the tree of the snowfall of the swords (= *warrior*) and Freyja of the fire of the hand (= *woman*), who is dear to him, go to one bed without grief” (*Kormákr* 59).

To try to account for the general tone of *mansöngur*, its sense of doom, despair and tormenting hopelessness, in terms of the trivial contradiction between feeling and social structure (which plays a certain role in continental lyric) would be anachronistic. This can be shown by taking *Kormákssaga* as an example, because the events of the hero’s life determine the dynamics of his *vísur*. After meeting Steingerðr, Kormákr becomes engaged to her, but he fails to arrive at the appointed time, and Steingerðr marries Bersi. Kormákr fights with him in single combat, and Steingerðr divorces him, but Kormákr misses his chance to marry her again. Steingerðr marries Þorvaldr, who in the end is prepared to give her to Kormákr, but then she renounces him. Kormákr explains this last misfortune as ill fate (*ósköpp*, *Kormákssaga*, ch.25) and leaves Iceland forever. He composes a few other poems about Steingerðr and dies in Scotland. The love of Kormákr and Steingerðr is doomed to be unfortunate in the saga through the curse of the witch Þorveig: *þú skalt Steingerðar aldri njóta*, “you will never get Steingerðr” (*Kormákssaga*, ch.5). The aim of Kormákr’s verses can be defined in his own words as: “to break the curse, to cancel the effectiveness of the words”, *sköpp of vinna*, “to win the fate”. The undoubtedly dominant pragmatic function does not exclude the appearance in Kormákr’s verses of the first traces of imagery, in the description of landscape, of Steingerðr’s appearance and of the hero’s personal feeling.

Skaldic *mansöngur* begins to describe explicitly the inner world of the heroes, which Icelandic Family Sagas convey only through outward manifestations. It is well-known that the feelings of characters are not the object of direct description in *Íslendingasögur*, which concentrate primarily on external events. The laconic fragments which can be taken for expressions of emotions are minimal: for example, the famous confession made by Guðrún in *Laxdæla saga* (ch. 78): *Þeim var ek verst, er ek unna mest* (“I was the worst to the one I loved most!”), or Þórdís’s exclamation in *Ljósvetninga saga* (ch.5): *Nú er mikit um sólskin ok sunnanvind, ok ríðr Sörli í garð* (“How much sunlight, and the wind is from the south, and Sörli is riding into the yard”). One of the problems which scholars have long discussed is whether the so-called “understatement” (or rather passing over in silence) in the sagas can be regarded as a conscious literary device. In critical episodes of narration, when the characters reach the highest peaks of feeling and their emotional excitement is at a maximum, the author of the saga becomes most reticent, restrained and laconic. But this is not at all the case with the hero of the saga, the skald. It is exactly in these extreme situations that the skald composes a *vísa*, his overpowering feelings bursting from him in the form of libellous or love verses.

Skaldic poems and the sagas in which they are quoted function as a single literary organism, as was aptly noticed by Einarr Ól. Sveinsson: “a *saga* lives by its *vísur*” (Einarr Ól. Sveinsson 1966: 38). If the saga “symptomatically” (to use Einarr Ól. Sveinsson’s term) shows what is already been discovered by skaldic *mansöngur*, this means of literary expression can be considered highly conscious. Any kind of content must first acquire a verbal expression before it becomes possible to pass over it in silence. The discovery of feeling as an object of literary description is precisely that verbal expression which is necessary for its transformation into the object of implicit, “symptomatic” treatment in sagas. The saga in effect allows the hero to proclaim his feelings himself by composing his own skaldic verses.

It is possible to suggest that at this stage in the development of verbal art, the subject of description can only be the poet’s own feelings. To describe somebody else’s inner world explicitly is unusual both for the author of a saga, who rather implies the feelings of the characters by their actions, and for the composer of skaldic poems, who never notices the emotions of his rival and who takes the affection of the addressee of *mansöngur* for granted. This assumption of reciprocity of feeling, which is by definition inherent in *mansöngur*, can probably account for the stereotypical nature of the expressions: *Fold unni mér fólðu*, “the earth of the dress (= woman) loved me” [Björn Asbr. 3], *unni mér*, “loved me” (*unni mér manna mest*, “loved me more than any man” [Kormákr 21]). In deliberately anti-formulaic skaldic verse, where the means of expressing the author’s feelings are constantly varied and thus create a sense of their subjectivity, this unique formula, expressing the aim it achieves, is conspicuous also because it is connected with eddic poetry through convergence or borrowing (cf. *Sigurðarkviða in skamma*, 28: *mér unni mæðr fyr mann hvern* “the maiden loved me above other men”).

The magic aim of winning the affection of the addressee of a love poem is retained and ensures the effectiveness of *mansöngur* in *Gunnlaugs saga Ormstungu*, where the hero is “a big skald and capable of *níð*” (*skáld mikit ok heldr níðskár*, ch. 4). Thus libellous verse and love poetry are once again brought together in the saga. The theme of rivalry is realised in the verbal combat which lasts throughout the saga: Gunnlaugr and Hrafn are fighting each other with (*ættisk við*) their *vísur* and only at the end does poetry give way to physical weapons. Before they start fighting with their swords, both rivals “strike a blow” with their *dróttkvætt* poems (cf. in Kormákr’s *vísa* 25: *beitat vápn at vísu* — “weapon strikes against a *vísa*”). Before the combat Hrafn says a *vísa* (15), in which he asks Gunnlaugr to leave Helga alone: *Mjök eru margar slíkar <...> fyr haf sunnan <...> konur góðar...* (*Skj. I B*, 189, 2), “There are many more such good women in the south behind the sea”. Gunnlaugr retorts: *Gefin vas Eir til aura ormdags en litfagra <...> Hrafn* (*Skj. I B*, 187, 10), “Beautiful Eir of the light of the serpent (= woman, Helga) was given to Hrafn for gold” (*vísa* 16). The saga comments: “Afterwards both rode back home <...> but Hrafn lost Helgi’s love after she had seen Gunnlaugr again”. What should be especially noted here is the expressiveness of Gunnlaugr’s *vísa*, which derives from the unusual kenning *Eir ormdags*, “Eir of the light of the serpent”, which even invited conjectures such as Finnur Jónsson’s *Eir armdags*, and which could be compared to the nickname of the skald himself *Ormstungu*, “Serpent’s tongue”.

The name of Gunnlaugr’s rival is also usually present in his poems (cf. *vísa* 13):

Ormsungu varð engi
allr dagr und sal fjalla
hægr, síz Helga en fagra
Hrafns kvánar réð nafni ;
lítt sá Høðr enn hvíti
hjørpeys faðir meyjar
(gefin vas Eir til aura
ung) við minni tungu. (*Skj. I B, 187, 8*)

Serpent's tongue was not glad even one whole day under the hall of the mountains (=sky), since Helga the Fair had the name of Hrafn's wife. The white man (possible reference to the appearance of Helga's father Þorsteinn or "cowardly, ignoble") of the noise of the swords, the maiden's father, — *young Eir was given for gold* — took little notice of my tongue.

In the *vísa* quoted above all three main characters of the saga are referred to by name or nickname, Hrafn, Helga and Gunnlaugr Ormsungu. In his other poems the same characters, constantly present in his verses, are mentioned in kennings and *heiti* (*vísa 19*):

Alin vas rýgr at rógi,
runnr olli því Gunnar,
(lóg vask au^os at eiga
ó^ogjarn) fira þornum;
nú's svanmærrar (svi^oa
svört augu mér) bauga
lands til lýsi-Gunnar
lítill þorþ at líta. (*Skj. I B, 188, 12*)

This woman was born to make strife between sons of men. The tree of Gunn (=warrior) became the cause of it (or "owned her"). *I wanted to possess the log of treasures (=woman, Helga) passionately.* I have little need to look — it becomes black in my eyes — at the swan-beautiful Gunn of the light of the land of the rings (=woman, or "shining Gunn of the land of the rings").

As can be seen, there is no denigration of the rival in these verses, though reference to him is retained as a kind of "signal" of the genre. The names of characters or devices of denotation functioning as names are given in connection with a certain situation, and only in relation to direct expression of the emotional reaction of the skald. There is no need to guess the feelings of the author from the situation (as was the case in Egill's *mansöngur*): they are stated quite explicitly, "was not glad even one day", "wanted to possess the tree of treasures (=woman, Helga) too passionately", "have little need to look" at her. Emotions are described not only through their external manifestation, but through the internal state of the author ("it becomes black in my eyes"). The acuteness of perception and the power with which emotions are expressed create the impression of extreme inner tension: Gunnlaugr's verse achieves a representation of feeling unprecedented in *mansöngur*. Skaldic poetry turns from constation of fact and begins to address itself to the personal feelings of the author. The inner world of the skald becomes more important than external heroic feats, the topics of love develop complexity, and emotions begin to be expressed naturally and powerfully.

Like Kormákr's verse, Gunnlaugr's poems usually contain description of the woman. Apart from traditional epithets, such as *ungr*, "young", *fagr*, "beautiful", *vænn*, "stately", we also find *svanmærr*, "swan-beautiful" ("svan" is here a substantival epithet signifying intensification). The object of description tends to become an image: Helga is called *lýsi-Guðr*, "Gunn of light" in a half-stanza, in which it is stated that because of her "it becomes black in the eyes" (*svört augu*) of the skald and that he has "little need to look at her" (*lítill þorþ at líta*). The connections between the sound and meaning, which were apparently forever lost by skaldic poetry, are restored in Gunnlaug's verse: semantic relevance is acquired by alliteration and rhyme, which are usually quite meaningless in skaldic verse: *rýgr* — *að rógi*, "woman — for strife"; *lóg* — *eiga* — *óðgjarn*, "log [of treasures] (=woman) — possess — too passionately"; *lýsi-Gunnar* — *lítill þorþ* — *líta*, "Gunn of light — little need — to look". The process of semantic "attraction" absorbs even such semantically void units as proper names: *hægr* — *Helga en fagra*, "glad — Helga the Fair"; *Helga* — *Hrafns* — *nafni*, "Helga — Hrafn's name"; *Eir* — *aura* — *ung*, "Eir — treasure — young".

A semantic function is also acquired by the structure of the whole *vísa* itself, in which parallelism is ousted by mirror organisation. The ring composition (i.e., the coincidence of the beginning, *Ormsungu varð engi*, "Serpent's Tongue was not <glad even for a day>", and the end, *við minni tungu*, "to my tongue <Helga's father did not pay attention >") helps to draw attention to the cause of Gunnlaugr's grief and also creates a play on the hero's nickname "Serpent's Tongue" (*Ormsungu*). It is worth remembering that Gunnlaug received his nickname because he was *níðskár*, "capable of composing *níð*", and it was this skill that had been ignored by Helga's father, when he gave her to Hrafn. It is noteworthy that the change in structural organisation of the *vísa* enables the author to achieve maximum expressiveness.

Parallel to the semantic relevance bestowed on structure and canonised sound repetition, we can observe in typologically late *mansǫngr* the minutest attention to metre: Gunnlaugr's verse does not tolerate any deviation from metrical or prosodic patterns, in contrast, for example, to Kormákr's verse. Excellence of versification and precisely calculated devices are characteristic of all Gunnlaugr's poems, for example *vísa 11*:

Munat háðvǫrum hyrjar
 hríðmundaði Þundar
 hafnar hǫrvi drifna
 hlýða Jǫrð at þýðask ;
 því lautsíkjar lékum
 lyngs, es várum yngri,
 alnar gims á ýmsum
 andnesjum því landi. (*Skj. IB, 186, 7*)

The ruler of the storm of the fire of Þundr (kenning for man, where “the fire of Þundr”= *weapon*, “the storm of weapon” = *fight*, “ruler of fight”=*man*) will not be able to gain the affection of Jǫrð of the fire of the sea, snow-driven with linen (=woman in white linen).

Because when we were younger, I played on the capes of the fire of the arm (the fire of the arm =*gold*, capes of gold =*fingers or hands*) of this land of the hollow of the fish of the waste ground (kenning for woman, where “the fish of waste ground” = *serpent*, “the hollow of serpent” = *gold*, “the earth of gold”= *woman*).

The main “communicative” sense of the stanza, concealed through the interwoven kennings and inserted clauses, is limited to the expression of the skald's confidence that Hrafn will be unable to keep Helga, because she will never forget Gunnlaugr. Thus the skald gives his rival implicit advice to leave Helga alone: this is the “pragmatic” function of the *vísa*. However, in contrast to most of the poems of *mansǫngr* analysed above, Gunnlaugr's verse cannot be confined either to pragmatics, or to communication. Although the functional syncretism of *mansǫngr*, which is an archaic feature, is still retained, there occur changes within the system of functions: the pragmatic function is weakened and the communicative function is subordinated to the aesthetic function which prevails not only in this poem but also in all the verses by Gunnlaugr mentioned previously. Multiple kennings are intertwined in the same way as the lines on Germanic zoomorphic ornament (the “animal style”), which are preserved on wooden burial objects, jewelry, prows of ships (cf. a most distinctive union of verbal and graphic art on Scandinavian stones of the eleventh century, where runic inscriptions are written inside the bodies of intricately twisted serpentine animals). As has often been noticed, graphic and verbal ornament must have arisen from the need to satisfy the same aesthetic desires. The perfection of the stanza is achieved through an artistic use of word arrangement which might at first sight seem fanciful or over-fastidious, but which is in fact meticulously designed by the skald, against the background of an intricate and precisely organised metre. However, the image, created and hidden beneath all this complexity, is clear: Hrafn, whose valour and courage in battle (“the storm of the fire of Þundr”) is emphasised by the kenning, “the rejecting enemies ruler of the storm of the fire of Þundr”, will be unable to make Helga stay with him. The kenning used to describe Helga, “the earth of the hollow of the *serpent* (fish of the waste ground)” is highly significant in relation to Gunnlaugr's own nickname.

So far the use of chronological facts has been avoided and the choice was made in favour of typology not only because there can be no philologically strict criteria of authenticity, but also because all the poems analysed above were composed in the second half of the tenth or at the beginning of the eleventh century. Although the authors of love poetry are contemporaries, it is sometimes possible to complement typology with facts of relative chronology. For instance, it is known that Gunnlaugr's beloved, Helga the Fair, is the granddaughter of Egill Skallagrímsson, with whose *mansǫngr* we began this paper. Thus these two skalds are separated by two generations and comparison of their poems shows the development of the genre.

Gunnlaug's poems are impressive not only for their artistic imagery, achieved through means traditional in skaldic phraseology, but also for their technical virtuosity, which is not new in *dróttkvætt*, where every stanza is aimed at demonstrating the poetic skill (and thus the superiority) of the author. *Dróttkvætt*, which is based on the canonised tradition, is more suitable for enumerating and eulogising the heroic feats of warriors than for expressing the author's feelings and thus is seldom used for truly lyrical poetry. It is surprising that in the poetry of some skalds contemporary with Gunnlaugr we find rare but genuine expressions of a lyrical spirit. In *Eyrbyggjasaga* (ch.29), when Björn Ásbrandsson is in a situation of extreme danger, and his beloved Þuríðr is warning him of the ambush prepared for him by her husband Þóroddr, he composes a stanza unique in skaldic poetry (*vísa 24*):

Guls mundum vit vilja
viðar ok blás í miðli
(grand fæk af stoð stundum
strengs) þenna dag lengstan,
alls í aptan, þella,
ek tegumk sjalfr at drekka
opt horfinnar erfi,
armlinns, gleði minnar. (*Skj. I B, 125, 1*)

We shall both wish this day to be the longest between
the golden and blue woods (or “the blue sea”, or “the
sky”, i.e. the dawn and sunset), — I sometimes receive
grief (or “danger) from the support of necklace
(=woman, *Þuríðr*) — as in the evening, the young pine
of the snakes of the arm (=woman, *Þuríðr*), should I
often have to drink at the funeral of my lost happiness.

In the line *grand fæk af stoð*, “I receive grief from the support”, as was noticed by Roberta Frank, there appears a play on words (perhaps unintentional) based on the oxymoronic contact of the lexemes *grand*, “grief” and *stoð*, “support”, because in the kenning denoting *Þuríðr*, *stoð strengs*, “the support of necklace”, the attribute *strengs*, “necklace”, is torn from the base word and put into the next line (Frank R. 1978: 172). The second kenning for *Þuríðr*, *þella armlinns*, “the pine of the snakes of the arm”, could also be charged with expressive overtones in the context of the *vísa*, where the sparkling “snakes of the arm” (=rings), the “golden” ridge of the woods, on which the setting sun is shining, and the “golden and blue (*blár*) woods” are mentioned. It is difficult to know how conscious the play on the polysemy of the word *blár* might have been, a word which can be understood as a noun with the meaning “sea”, as well as an adjective functioning as an attribute of the word *viðar*, “woods”, and thus conveying the sense, “blue trees at dusk”. In any case, in Germanic poetry, the word *blár* is associated with what is ominous, fatal, foretelling death, and this becomes significant in the context both of the stanza (where the expression *drekka erfi*, “to drink at the funeral” is used) and of the situation in which this *vísa* was composed.

Björn’s *vísa* undoubtedly belongs to the situation in which it was composed, but the skald’s desire to “make the moment stay on” can hardly be regarded as an attempt to affect the actual state of affairs. Rather than influencing the actual situation, skaldic *mansǫngr* becomes means of giving it a poetic expression. In spite of its laconic style, the description of landscape compressed into a detail is astonishingly expressive, as if transforming a pencilled landscape into a colour painting: “woods golden” before dawn and Blue Sea (or woods) at dusk threatening inevitable parting; a brief gleam of light before “the pine of rings” disappears into the darkness, perhaps forever. For the first time in the history of skaldic poetry, nature becomes an object of deeply felt aesthetic experience. The dominance of an artistic purpose and the fact that functional syncretism appears optional even though not entirely discarded, support the claim that this stanza is one of the closest to lyric in the whole corpus of skaldic poetry.

The expressiveness, imagery and proximity to lyric in their love verses are unique in the poetry composed by skalds. This is because the authors of *mansǫngr* are the most outstanding skalds, the most creative individuals. It is symptomatic that they addressed themselves to the expression of feeling, and to the assertion not only of the individuality of the author, but also of his right to individual emotional life. They are singled out by the sagas and presented as extraordinary, unique. As is well-known, Egill, for example, a descendant of Kveldúlfur (=Evening Wolf), who received his name because he was *hamrammr*, “capable of changing appearance”, is an odinic type in the conventional, literary sense of this word (Clunies Ross M. 1989: 128). He resembles Odin through his poetic gift (the saga calls Egill *orðvís*, “wise with words”), through his withcraft (*seiðr*) and runic magic. Kormákr is described by the saga as *áhlaupamaðr í skapi*, “a quick-tempered man in character” (literally “leaping up”); of Hallfreðr the saga says that “he was a good skald, capable of composing *níð* and quarrelsome (unpredictable, difficult to get on with); he was not happy with friends” (ch. 2).

Of Gunnlaugr it is said that “he was of pleasant face, with slender waist and broad shoulders; he was very well set up, thoroughly obstreperous in disposition, ambitious already at an early age, unyielding in everything, ruthless and an able poet, but rather a scurrilous one; he was called Gunnlaug Serpent-Tongue” (*ch.4, translated by R. Quirk*). Thus these outstanding skalds are described in the sagas as singled out, isolated from the rest of society, endowed with a specific type of behaviour and peculiar psycho-physical characteristics (cf. the description of Egill’s appearance, *Egils saga*, ch. 55). The peculiar strategy of their behaviour is presented in the saga as a violation of accepted social norms (it is not accidental that the ability of a skald to compose *níð*, the type of poetry reversing social status (Markey T. 1972: 7–18), is so often stressed) and presupposes that they are liminal characters.

The rise of interest in the personality of the author is confirmed by the phenomenon of the *skáldasögur*, which differ from the rest of *Islendingasögur* in that the theme of love is dominant in them.

Yet the skalds have not yet discovered the notion of high feeling: Old Norse lexis expresses physical desire but not spiritual love, and this leads some scholars to claim that the very notion of love was absent. The emotions are relatively simple: even such topics as the attempt to overcome one's own feeling and the ambiguity of love which existed in ancient times (as in Catullus, *odi et amo*, "love and hate") are unknown to skaldic *mansǫngr*.

Skaldic poetry, belonging to the initial stage of individual authorship at which the author's creative activities are restricted to the level of form, is typologically much earlier than the poetry of the troubadours. If, instead of making unsystematic extra-literary attempts to trace parallels between particular phenomena, we try to base our conclusions on a typological study of *mansǫngr*, it becomes clear that the arguments for suggesting the possibility of influence while at the same time admitting its absence (i.e., "convergency", to use the term of Russian formalism) are highly hypothetical. Taking individual skaldic stanzas and viewing them as "purely lyrical", or treating them as if they had appeared suddenly *ex nihilo*, one may be tempted to draw parallels from other cultures. But having reconstructed the typology of love poetry, going back to the love magic of incantations almost indistinguishable from *níð*, we can see that *mansǫngr* is an Old Norse literary genre in the proper sense of the word. It developed, from libel against the rival and the expression of desire to possess the beloved, to the point where one may catch the first glimpses of lyric poetry. However, even in the most lyrical poems, where the aesthetic aim prevails, the pragmatic function, as proved by the prose contexts, does not fully disappear. As lyric, *mansǫngr* remains defective: the underdevelopment of its artistic function is manifested in the retention of functional syncretism which is an archaic feature. The typology of *mansǫngr* is a process of freeing itself from a magical function, but even *mansǫngr* in *rímur*, which had developed into a lyrical commonplace, contains invocations recalling its utilitarian origin.

The emergence of proto-lyric became possible at the early stage of poetic development reflected in skaldic poetry, since there, for the first time in European literature, a unique fact of the present became the subject of high poetry, and the individual self-consciousness of the author, sometimes asserting itself almost aggressively, made creative activity highly subjective and evaluative. Although the appearance of poetic self-assertion is usually considered to have occurred in the twelfth century, the skalds saw themselves as the authors of a highly valued poetic form two centuries earlier. In prose this resulted in the 'skald sagas' our main source of love poetry, confirming the transition from an epic singer to poet. The anonymous singer of epic tales is ousted by a poet. His life-story is no longer related in legends (like Homer's or Hesiod's): he has his own biography, in effect implied hints of an autobiography. Thus the 'skald sagas' testify to the appearance of interest in the personality of the poet.

The 'skald-sagas', Eddic poetry and Old Scandinavian laws are used as synchronic context for skaldic *mansǫngr*, whose hypothetical typology can be used to establish the laws of the natural development of individually authored poetry and its transformation into lyric. But only skaldic poetry allows us to observe the full process of the conception and birth of lyric poetry in Europe.

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