

Roberta Frank

Hand Tools and Power Tools in Eilífr's Thórsdrápa

The Thórsdrápa of Eilífr Goðrúnarson is conceded to be the most difficult of all skaldic compositions; it is also--perhaps for the same reason--among the most moving and haunting, an illustration of Wallace Stevens' dictum that "the poem must resist the intelligence/ Almost successfully."¹ The drápa depicts Thor's journey to the home of the giant Geirrþócr, the crossing of a hostile river, and the harrowing of enemy headquarters. According to the prose account prefacing Thórsdrápa in Snorra Edda, Thor made the trip in order to recover his stolen hammer; Margaret Clunies Ross has recently argued the reverse, that the young god wins his divine attribute by wresting it from its owner-maker.² In either case, recovery or invention, it is remarkable that the hammer is mentioned only once in the poem. The rest of the time, Thor's hands are fully occupied with a variety of staff-like objects: when crossing a turbulent river, he wields in succession a rod, a metal file, and a giantess' staff (stanzas 1-10); in his contest with the giants, his tools of trade include a walking stick, a glowing iron missile, a bolt, and a slender switch (stanzas 11-20).

All these instruments, with the exception of the giantess' staff (stanza 9) and the hammer itself (stanza 19), are expressed by two-part kennings, each of which is metaphorical in nature: every base word--snake, file, seaweed, branch, needle, or whatever--is related to the designated object through analogy. Another unusual feature is that each weapon-kennings is paired with a second, congruent

kenning that extends the analogy, making it more obvious. The two base words construed with the verb give one meaning; the two full kennings taken with the same verb, another. The pictures presented by successive base words inevitably shape an audience's response to Thor's instrument.

These days, batons, staffs, and wand-like objects are mainly in the hands of orchestra conductors, drum majorettes, and good fairies. Things were different in the tenth century. In pagan and Christian iconography of the first millennium, the staff or virga was a symbol of divine strength and protection, a means of defense against chthonic powers.³ Moses, Christ, Hercules, Jove, emperors and Germanic rulers, even Thor, were portrayed, wood in hand, the first two on the walls of the catacombs, the last on the Gosforth and Altuna stones.⁴ According to Adam of Bremen, an image of Thor with a scepter, "like Jove," stood in the temple at Uppsala.⁵ Amulets resembling hammers were widespread in the North, and Thor's sign appeared on runestones and coins, a symbol of power, of protection, a talisman and a blessing.⁶ Like the cross, rosette, or swastika, the hammer must have meant many different things to many men. If Eilífr allowed the form and nature of the object carried by Thor to shift from stanza to stanza, first one, then another facet catching the light, kennings flashing this way, then that, perhaps it was because the truth he was trying to catch was many-sided too.

Skalds and the medieval treatises devoted to their art are silent about the function of kennings. Snorri, like Rudolf Meissner seven centuries later, provided interested students with a kind of

Roget's Thesaurus of skaldic kennings.⁷ But the end to which this store of synonymy was to be put is never mentioned.⁸ That kennings gave the skald a way of commenting indirectly upon the persons, actions, and situations he presented for inspection was observed some fifty years ago by Wolfgang Mohr;⁹ subsequent scholars have noted the associative power of the kenning, its ability to underline the mythical, legendary, or political dimensions of a subject.¹⁰ My goal in burdening the kenning with yet another, and specifically religious, function is not to break the ship-of-the-desert's back, but to illustrate how educated pagans of the tenth century and their Christian counterparts used similar modes of allusion in advertising the promise held out by their respective camps. Sophisticated analogical tropes were employed by poets on both sides to prove that theirs was the superior and more comprehensive supernaturalism.

An oddity of Eilífr's weapon-kennings is that their metaphorical thrust is not, as one would expect, in the direction of death and destruction but rather towards the delights of life: sex, food, and the hunt. The phallic nature of Thor's instrument is revealed in the first helming of stanza 6 when the god and his human companion Thjalfi set skotnaðra 'darting snakes' (=rods, staves) in a (female) háfs mork 'forest of the fish-weir' (=river); in the second helming, Thor's hlvmpél 'clashing file' (=rod, staff) is heard hammering against the worn stones on the riverbed, Eilífr's kenning for which is Feðju steði 'anvil of the river Feðja' (=rocks). An image from zoology (snake put into woods) is succeeded by one from the smithy (file on anvil); and each pair of kennings forms a double entendre, the first expression (snake, file) connoting phallus, the second (woods, anvil) vulva.¹¹

Later, in stanza 9, when Thor and Thjalfi successfully ford the river "hostile to the sword", the god has in hand the vqlr Gríðar 'staff of (the g'iantess) Gríðr'. The usefulness of a giantess' vqlr may in part have resided in its length, long enough to project above a rising flood, like the lopped pine with which Polyphemus steadied himself on the mountaintop;¹² but such a staff was also a source of magic and magical protection, like the rod of Moses and Aeneas' branch of gold.¹³

In stanza 14, as the two companions establish a temporary beachhead inside the entrance to Geirrðr's cave, their staves become clubs that shatter rock. Hallfylvingar vallar 'slanting sticks of the plain' (=staves) press the hór himinn loga 'high heaven of the flame' (=roof of the cave), so that the tungls brásalir 'halls of the brows' sun' (=heads) of the giantesses below are crushed against the tréfi 'wooden sticks underneath the thatch'.¹⁴ The dominant image, twice invoked, is of wood uniting earth and heaven, but with the relative positions of earth and heaven reversed: the god of the sky is in the underworld. As Thor penetrates the mouth of the cave (stanzas 15-17), a new kind of weapon-kennning is introduced, related perhaps to the god's reputation as a trencherman. Geirrðr nurls a glowing ingot at his visitor; Thor catches the iron and flings it back. Eilfr's kennings turn this culminating scene into a deadly banquet, with the host offering his guest fortified food and drink. Thor swallows the "cooked-in-forge tong-silver" (15), the "heavy red bits of the seaweed of the tongs" (16), the "airborne beverage of molten metal" (17) with his "mouth of the lower arm" (16), his "quick-grasping mouths of the hands" (17), before regurgitating the morsels most effectively out of the "breast of his grip" (17). The base words

maintain the digestive metaphor; the determinants place Geirrǫðr with his blacksmith tongs in a demonic setting of fire, sparks, and furnace. Geirrǫðr is killed with his own iron instrument when Thor thrusts the nesta meina 'needle of harms' into the giant's bígyrðill 'girde' (18), neatly sewing up the fight.

The glowing missile undergoes its final transformation in stanza 19: a victorious Thor goes after the remaining giants með dreyrgum hamri 'with a bloody hammer'. Two kennings for Thor in the second hemling of the stanza--tollurr tvíviðar 'tree of the double wood' and túr karms 'god of the chariot'—seem (if we only knew what the former meant) to portray divinity in triumph, the god endowed at last with his characteristic iconography.¹⁵ The rod of discipline is hauled out for the last time in stanza 20; it is a hógbrotningr skógar 'handy splinter of the woods' with which the god has slaughtered kalfa undirfjalfrs bliku alfheims 'calves of the underside of the sheen of the elf-world' (calves of the underground refuge=giants). The poem ends with this glimpse of sacrificed beasts. All commentators seem agreed that the first word of this stanza, helblótinn, describing Thor, is impossible; they emend the manuscripts either to herblótinn 'honored with sacrifices by men' or hœlblótinn 'sacrificed to with wooden supports', both suggestions hapax legomena.¹⁶ But helblótinn 'honored with sacrifices in hell (or by Hel)' is surely what the poet intended: Geirrǫðr's sunless kingdom—later portrayed by Saxo as the pagan underworld—has offered up its calves on the altar of the conquering Thor.¹⁷ Even adjectives in Eilífr's poem harmonize with the dominant base-word image.

Congruent kennings like those in Thórsdrápa can be used to suggest change, to trace the development through time of the objects so designated. The skald Markús Skeggjason, for example, composed a stanza that says--four times--"the ship sailed over the sea."¹⁸ The underlying image is that of a bear--base word in four expressions for 'ship'--wading through snowdrifts, leaping over mountain peaks, traversing old tracks, and breaking his fetters--base words in four expressions for 'sea'. Markús' sea-kennings are like clues in a detective story: they reveal at what season the trip took place and in what direction the ship sailed; and the changing base words for the ship reveal its passage through time, the cub gradually growing into a grizzled old bear leaning wearily on a wooden stick (the roller supporting it in dry dock). In a similar way, the man- and earth-kennings in Hallfreðr's poem on Earl Hákon, portraying his conquest of Norway in mythological terms, as the marriage of a ruler to his land, indicate the various stages of a courtship.¹⁹ The underlying image in the first quatrain is that of a sailor who has seduced a broadfaced peasant girl with his smooth talk; in the second quatrain, the bold seaman, speaking forcefully, has little trouble persuading the woman to yield to him; by the third half-stanza, the king's counselor has taken her in marriage; in the fourth, Hallfreðr reflects how reluctant the warrior, the distributor of treasure, will be to abandon his noble bride. There is no comparable progression in the weapon-kennings of Thórsdrápa. Eilífr's base-word image does not develop from stanza to stanza in any organic (young to old, thin to thick, liquid to solid) or evolutionary way (sailor to ruler, servant

to master, reptile to mammal). His metaphors for what are at most two items--Grífr's staff and Geirrþór's bolt--seem bewilderingly varied: in the space of sixteen stanzas the god's weapon is described as a snake in woods, a file on anvil, wood reaching to heaven, seaweed in mouth, drink in breast, a needle in girdle, and a branch for flogging calves. The staff does not grow consistently in any direction: its material changes within a single stanza from wood to iron and back. The movement in stanzas 15-19 from molten metal through iron bolt to hammer comes closest, perhaps, to a linear sequence, but even in this series the weapon is seen first as solid food (15-16) and only later as liquid nourishment (17). Eilífr seems to have gone out of his way to frustrate narrative expectations: Thor, endowed at last with Geirrþór's iron missile in stanza 19, is still swinging his wooden branch to and fro in stanza 20. Clearly, neither ontogeny or phylogeny was uppermost in the skald's mind.

What the weapon-kennings of Thórsdrápa do well is to communicate a sense of simultaneity. Just as the two chief structural divisions of the poem, Thor's trial by water (the river crossing) and trial by fire (Geirrþór's forge), seem reversible, the two descents interchangeable, so Thor's weapon striking the anvil in stanza 6--the characteristic gesture of metallurgy--has no chronological relation to the image in the same stanza of the fertilizing male god striking the forested earth with his (thunder)bolt, a gesture signalling the sexual union of heaven and earth. One paradigm is behind both acts; neither has a natural priority and either may be seen as imitating or foreshadowing the other. Eilífr's kennings for Thor's weapon seem to be telling and retelling

the same mythical event in different terms. The cosmological upheavals of stanza 14, with their topsy-turvy positioning of up (wood) and down (heaven, sun), characterize Geirrþór's netherworld as unformed chaos, awaiting the order of creation. The poet's mineral metaphors for Thor's weapon envisage the same underworld as a furnace where ores are smelted, a source of transformation, of life-preserving treasure for those on the god's side. Eilífr's food metaphors define the giant's cave anthropomorphically as a huge womb, a belly, the part of his anatomy in which Geirrþór is slain but, for the two journeymen within, also a place of gestation and growth. The poet's agricultural analogy for Thor's weapon--a fresh twig suitable for striking calves--views the same battleground as earth, the soil from which, after it is harrowed, plants grow. These kennings all "mean" the same thing: god smites giant, thereby giving life to men; they seem to generate and satisfy a habit of mind that seeks the archetype behind the flux. History itself in such a system becomes a pattern of prefiguration and fulfillment.

Man is the animal that perceives analogies, and Eilífr's kennings seem devised to foster such perception, encouraging past, present, and future to converge. The future, or anagogical sphere, raises its head in the first sentence of the poem, which brings together Loki, "father of the sea-string" (=the world-serpent), and Thor, "killer of the gods of the earth-net's steep ledges" (=giants). The interaction of the two kennings, the string/net parallelism, evokes Thor's fishing for the terrible serpent and their battle to the death at Ragnarök. The god's contest with leviathan was treated early and often in viking poetry and sculpture, probably because it predicted man's own survival.²⁰

At the very end of Thórsdrápa, in the final stanza that alludes to another offspring of Loki, his daughter Hella, the poet's metaphoric focus has little to do with future last things. His kennings seem rather to evoke the present, the tropological sphere, grounding the action and the moral prescription it embodies in the poet's own world and time. The last half-stanza runs: "The Rogalanders of the Lister (region in southern Norway) of the hawk-lair (people of rocky slopes=giants) could not hurt the support-firm life-diminisher of the people of stone-Ella (killer of giants=Thor)." Several scholars have commented on a peculiarity of Eilífr's giant-kennings, their tendency to localize Geirrðr's troops in terms of tenth-century Norwegian geopolitics.²¹ The little external evidence we have suggests that Thórsdrápa was composed for Earl Hákon the Great of Lade (d. 995), the pagan leader from the Trøndelag district in northern Norway who had driven out the sons of Eric Bloodaxe and rebuilt the heathen temples.²² The base word in Eilífr's first giant-kenning above--"Rogalanders"--identifies Thor's opponents with the contemporary inhabitants of a district in southern Norway, a region far from Hákon's political base and in which the kings of Norway, beginning with Harald Fairhair, resided.²³ The skald probably intended his audience to recognize in Thor's incessant hammering upon his giant opponents a figure for Hákon's own sexual and disciplinary instincts;²⁴ and in the god's weapon a symbol of the benefits--fertility, order, treasure, growth, redemption--accruing to those supporting Hákon's standard. The poet's kennings transfer the pattern of conquest from a divine setting to a historical one, a humanization of myth and a confirmation

of legitimacy at the same time. What happened once can happen again: Hákon's overcoming of Hordalanders (11), Swedes and Danes (12), and Rogalanders (20) is in consonance with the cosmos.

The second giant-kennning in this final half-stanza associates Thor's enemies with the people of Ella, the Northumbrian king whose name in tenth- and eleventh-century skaldic verse was synonymous with the English nation (Ellu kind), royal line (Ellu niðr, Ellu konr), and kingdom (Ellu ættleifð).²⁵ If Eilífr found the English, along with the inhabitants of Scotland (2/6), Wales (11/7), and Cumberland (13/3), a force threatening enough to warrant commemoration in his giant-kennings, it was probably because Hákon's political opponents--the Christian descendants of Harald Fairhair--had such close ties with the British Isles. There is evidence for Anglo-Saxon missionary activity in Norway from the reign of Hákon the Good, fosterson of Athelstan, through that of the sons of Eric Bloodaxe, king of Northumbria, and down to the renewal of the royal line in Olaf Tryggvason, confirmed in the church by the Bishop of Canterbury and Winchester, with Ethelred of England as sponsor.²⁶ Christianity and the politics of conversion would have been familiar to many tenth-century Norwegians. Baptized king or pagan earl: worldly success depended on making the right choice. Eilífr's kennings, by associating the giants vanquished by Thor with the peoples of the West-Saxon imperium, heralded the end of English meddling in Hákon's Norway--prematurely as it turned out.

If the confrontation of hammer and cross in the tenth century, the matching of Thor with Christ, prompted poets on both sides to

discover their common ground, their motivation was less to reconcile differences than to steal the other's thunder.²⁷ Christianity won its converts from paganism, and these converts were not alone among pagans in finding attractive the idea of a more personal god, a guide and comrade strong enough to protect his supporter from hostile forces. Pagan myths, such as the story of Thor's journey to and devastation of Geirrþór's hall, could be reactivated and restructured to contest pivotal acts in Christian history, such as the Harrowing of Hell.²⁸ If Christ's battle-standard beat down Satan, asserting life against death, then Thor's staff and hammer would have to do equal duty against Geirrþór and his demonic crew. The halo of metaphoric equations surrounding the god's instrument in Thórsdrápa—anthropomorphic, cosmological, mineral, and agricultural—suggests that the other god's symbol was taken very seriously indeed. Two supernaturalisms, two signs of victory, were in competition, and the magic of one had to be met, lock step, with the magic of the other. A reflex of this "syncretism" is the uncanny resemblance that can exist between the literary productions of the two rivals, works revealing many of the same twitches and mannerisms, the way, after years of cohabitation, husband and wife or man and dog start to look alike.

The Old English Exodus is a strange and powerful poem, the product of a school from which, in the judgment of one critic, nothing else has survived;²⁹ Thórsdrápa, too, stands alone. Yet the two works share a common metaphoric inventory, a "lingua franca of religious symbolism" that attests to the possibility of interchange between pagans and Christians.³⁰ An emblem for this community of imagery in Scandinavia might be the jeweller's mould from Trendgaarden, Denmark, that was made to cast hammers and crosses at the same time.³¹

A major source of coherence, intellectual and structural, in both poems is this common language of values, associative clusters that form a bond between poets who almost certainly never met or heard of each other, as well as between poet and audience. Truth, beauty, and goodness in this lingua franca are associated not with Grecian urns or purple mountains but with the sea; their opposites, the forces of negation and sterility, inhabit the prison-house of land. In Þórsdrápa, as in Exodus, those on the god's side are seafarers; those against him are landlubbers. Thor and Thjalfi are "vikings" (of Odin's seat, 8/3); Moses' troops are "sea-vikings" (sæwicingas, 333), "seamen" (sæmen, 105, 179), and "sailors" (flotan, 133, 223, 331). Thor's opponents, like all giants, live on stone and shingle, on rockribbed earth;³² Moses' enemies, the Egyptians, are also landlocked, dusky stay-at-home dwellers in the interior (landmenn, 179; inlande, 136; ingefolc, 142; ingemen, 170; ingeðeod, 144). Movement, change, however revolutionary, are good; stagnancy, entrenchment are bad. Both poets explore the meaning of these oppositions in metaphoric runs. Because Thor in stanza 14 is a sea-captain, the "steerer of the temple of the jerking fish of the battle storm" (sword's temple = shield), Eilífr presents the torso of the giantess crushed by the god as a high-pooped ship, "the very old keel of the laughter-vessel" (breast's keel = backbone).³³ In both narratives, when water becomes a path, earth is viewed as sea: Thor and Thjalfi in stanza 5 walk through "the broad way of the staked path" (the swollen river), rolling with "hail from the sea of the lynx" (boulders from the mountain); Moses' vikings sail over the "flood-way" (the desert, 105-6), then walk through the Red Sea, visualized as

herestræta 'army roads' (283), feldas 'fields' (287), a grene grund 'green ground' (312), and a sealt mersc 'salt marsh' (333). Grœnar brautir 'green roads' are also found in Thórsdrápa, the path to Ge'rrrþr's vaggiar vigg 'steed of the wall' (=home, lair), a pivotal kenning that gets the god on his way in stanza 1 by predicting the intersection of two topographies, the grassy tracks of steeds and the barren rocks of giantworld. The laughter of the enemy is also mentioned in Exodus, where it is linked to a vision of Egypt as the furnace of iron (1 Kings 8:51) and expressed through congruent metaphors that evoke the Harrowing of Hell: "The hands of the laughter-smiths were shackled" (13). The poet shows how the fitting together of harmonious words can fathom the secret significances of things, pinpointing the moments at which his story is a shadow, a figure, of events to come.

This is the very technique used by Eilífr in developing his congruent weapon-kennings. Every choice of base word—animal, vegetable, mineral, raw or cooked—posed new problems and demanded new solutions. The snake had to discover its woods, the file its anvil, food and drink its moutns, a needle its cloth, and a switch some stubborn calves: in effecting these reunions the skald exposed his audience to a wide area of experience and to a symbol of life and death strong enough to conquer any kind of danger, break any barrier. He followed the laws of his mythic structure and of his symbolic code and found himself making unexpected discoveries as if by accident, by the coincidences of his language.

The Exodus poet similarly extended the range of his redeeming word through suggestive and reverberating transformations. Just as

Thor's staff kept hammering at menacing giants, the stupid powers of unworked desert and rock, and reached to the depths of the earth's bloodstream to secure a path, so Moses in the Old English scriptural narrative binds the Egyptians with "rod punishment" (15), strikes the depths of the Red Sea with his "green symbol" (261), and secures a path; heaven itself "lashes" the drowning Egyptians (464); a "rod of punishment" falls from the skies (492); and God finishes the job with his "ancient sword" (495).³⁴ While the rod flogs on, the Old English poet puts the pillar of fire and cloud through a series of metamorphoses: the column guiding the Israelites becomes a roof-beam, a net, a cloud, a sail (veiling mastropes and crossbar), and a tent, symbols of protection and enclosure (73-85); later, with victory in Moses' grasp, the pillar becomes a battle-standard (127), a banner (248), and, finally, a wuldres beam 'staff of glory' (566), symbols of military conquest and spiritual triumph. Metaphors like these, recalling the mast of the cross, the young Hero's vexillum and signum, the tree of glory itself, bring the Old English poem to the brink of Christological statement.³⁵ And perhaps, once, over the edge.

As the Israelites reach shore, their long struggle over, the "tree of glory" is seen, a sign of victory: the pillar suddenly identified by a formula used elsewhere only of the cross.³⁶ There is a similar recognition scene in Thórsdrápa at the moment of victory: the hammer, sign of expanded energy, of liberation, of deliverance, appears, as if by magic, in Thor's hand. And when the crisis is passed, all fear removed, both poets use their final words to provide a last look at the losing side: Eilífr turns from the god and his hard-won hammer to gloat at the "calves" of the dark cave, slain by

his hand; the Exodus poet turns from the victors on the beach, adorning themselves with Egyptian treasure, to cast scorn upon the "treasure-defenders" beneath the waves, struck down by God's punishing hand.

Tenth-century Anglo-Saxons knew that Thor was the god the Danes loved most;³⁷ Eilífr knew that Christ was making inroads in the North. Two half-stanzas, apparently unrelated to Thórsdrápa or each other, are attributed to the poet in Skáldskaparmál.³⁸ The first quatrain, cited by Snorri as an example of how ancient skalds paraphrased Christ, reports matter-of-factly that the King of Rome has now firmly established himself in the homeland of the heathen gods; no patron is named, the original context of the lines is unknown, and the kennings so abundant in Thórsdrápa are absent.³⁹ The second quatrain, probably composed for Hákon and cited by Snorri as evidence that poetry can be called logr Sónar 'sea of Són', boasts a pair of congruent kennings in the style of Thórsdrápa:⁴⁰

Verðit ér, alls orða
oss gróer of kon móeran
á sefreinu sónar
sátt, vingjofum ráða.

You must--since the seed of words grows
on my mind-land of reconciliation
concerning the illustrious scion--
govern friendly gifts.

⁴⁰ The basic image, whether són 'reconciliation' is seen as a vat-name, mead-name, or common noun, is of 'seed' sprouting on 'land'.⁴¹ The notion of the "seed of words" growing in spiritual soil occurs in Old Norse religious prose, in Plato's Phaedrus, where it is used to

prove the immortality of an artist's words, and in an essay on research in the humanities by Northrop Frye, where it becomes a metaphor for literary influences of an alien kind, "vagrant seeds blown toward a responsive soil."⁴² Eilifr's "land of reconciliation" --his heart, breast, or poetic inspiration--is just the sort of eclectic ground to provide sustenance for all manner of stray concerns and figures, as long as they could be directed towards promoting the authority of Hákon's god and governance. The instinctive, self-defensive "Christianization" of pagan narrative in late tenth-century Norway is reminiscent of the "Germanization" of scriptural narrative that had taken and was taking place in Anglo-Saxon England. The "aggressive and worldly Christianity" of Exodus, its "barbarian sensibility," has not gone unnoted;⁴³ the "Romanizing sensibility" of Thórsdrápa is more difficult, and perhaps impossible, to gauge, for there is no earlier version of the story, no "pure" pagan narrative, with which the work can be compared. Just Exodus. The compatibility of these two solitary poems, down to the congruency of their respective instruments of power, provide--if not a marriage made in heaven--at least a preliminary answer to E. M. Forster's query: "Everything must be like something, so what is this like?"⁴⁴

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Footnotes

- ¹ This sentence from "Man Carrying Thing" in The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens (New York, 1955), p. 350, is a direct quotation from Stevens' Adagia: see Opus Posthumous, ed. Samuel French Morse (New York, 1957), p. 171.
- ² "An Interpretation of the Myth of Þórr's Encounter with Geirrþór and his Daughters" in Speculum Norroenum: Norse Studies in Memory of Gaoriel Turville-Petre, ed. Ursula Dronke, Guðrún P. Helgadóttir, Gerd Wolfgang Weber, and Hans Bekker-Nielsen (Odense, 1961), pp. 369-391. Snorri's introduction is in Skáldskaparmál, ch. 27, ed. Finnur Jónsson, Edda Snorra Sturlusonar (Copenhagen, 1931), pp. 104-107; the poem itself, pp. 107-110; stanza 21, which occurs in ch. 12 of Skáldskaparmál, p. 95, is usually placed at the end of the drápa. All quotations from Thórsdrápa in this essay are from Konstantin Reichardt, "Die Thórsdrápa des Ellífr Goðrúnarson: Textinterpretation," PMLA, 63 (1948), 329-391. See also Finnur Jónsson, ed., Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning (Copenhagen, 1912-15; rpt. 1967-73), IA, 148-152; IB, 139-144 (hereafter abbrev. Skjd.).
- ³ Martine Dulaey, "Le symbole de la baguette dans l'art paléochrétien," Revue des études Augustiniennes, 19 (1973), 3-38, covers the early period; on the use of staff and scepter in royal and imperial contexts, see Harald Kleinschmidt, Untersuchungen über das englische Königtum im 10. Jahrhundert, Göttinger Bausteine zur Geschichtswissenschaft, 49 (Göttingen, 1979), pp. 130-145.
- ⁴ The Altuna (Norland) stone is illustrated in Peter Foote and David M. Wilson, The Viking Achievement (London, 1970), pl. 26b; the Gosforth (Cumberland) "fishing stone" in H. A. Ellis Davidson, Scandinavian Mythology (London, 1969), p. 6^R, and in Richard Bailey, Viking Age Sculpture in Northern England (London, 1980), pl. 36.

- ⁵ Magistri Adam Bremensis Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum, ed. B. Schneidler, Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum ex Monumentis Germaniae historicis recusi (Hanover and Leipzig, 1917), iv.26; History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen, trans. Francis J. Tschan (New York, 1959), p. 207. P. H. Sawyer, Kings and Vikings (London, 1982), p. 134, notes that at the time Adam was writing most of the landowners in the vicinity of the temple were Christian.
- ⁶ On the hammer amulet, see H. A. Ellis Davidson, "Thor's Hammer," Folklore, 76 (1965), 1-15; Peter Paulsen, Art und Kreuz in Nord- und Osteuropa (2nd ed., Bonn, 1956), pp. 205-221. For Thor's hammer on coins, see A. H. M. Dolley, Viking Coins of the Danelaw and of Dublin (London, 1965), p. 22; a silver penny from the viking kingdom of York (c. 910) that combines a reference to St. Peter with a depiction of Thor's hammer is illustrated in James Graham-Campbell and Dafydd Kidd, The Vikings (London, 1980), p. 110, pl. 67a, and in The Anglo-Saxons, ed. James Campbell (Ithaca, N. Y., 1982), p. 131, pl. Edith Marold, "Thor weihe diese Runen," Frühmittelalterliche Studien, 8 (1974), 195-222, reports on the use of the hammer sign on runestones and discusses the probability that tenth-century paganism was reacting to Christianity.
- ⁷ Rudolf Weissner, Die Kenningar der Skalden: Ein Beitrag zur skaldischen Poetik, Rheinische Beiträge und Hilfsbücher zur germanischen Philologie und Volkskunde, I (Bonn, etc., 1921).
- ⁸ Snorri notes only that young poets should learn old kennings in order to increase their vocabulary and to understand the hidden meanings of earlier skalds: Skáldskaparmál, ch. 8, p. 86.
- ⁹ Kenningstudien. Beiträge zur Stilgeschichte der altgermanischen Dichtung, Tübinger germanistische Arbeiten: Studien zur nordischen Philologie, 19 (Stuttgart, 1933).

- ¹⁰ For example, Hallvard Lie, "Skaldestil-studier," ML (1952), pp. 1-92, rpt. in Lie, Om sagakunst og skaldskap: Utvalgte avhandlinger (Øvre Ervik, 1952), 109-200; Klaus von See, "Skop und Skald. Zur auffassung des Dichters bei den Germanen," GfM, 45, new ser. 14 (1964), 1-14, rpt. in von See, Edda, Saga, Skaldendichtung: Aufsätze zur skandinavischen Literatur des Mittelalters, Skandinavistische Arbeiten, 6 (Heidelberg, 1981), 347-360; Margaret Clunies Ross, "Style and Authorial Presence in Skaldic Mythological Poetry," SEVS, 20 (1981), 276-304; Edith Marold, Kenningkunst. Ein Beitrag zu einer Poetik der Skaldendichtung, Quellen und Forschungen zur Sprach- und Kulturgeschichte der germanischen Völker, 80 (Berlin, 1983).
- ¹¹ For more on the obscene kennings of stanza 6 see Clunies Ross, "An Interpretation," pp. 374-377; Wilhelm Kiil, "Eilífr Goðrúnarson's Þórsdrápa," ANF, 71 (1952), 106-109
- ¹² Aeneid, 3. 656-659.
- ¹³ Aeneid, 6. 125-188. On the magic of Moses' rod in folk tradition, see Rudolf Meissner, "Das Rote Meer," ZdA, 73 (1936), 233; Keith Thomas, Religion and Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England: the Decline of Magic (London, 1971), pp. 185, 236.
- ¹⁴ The interpretation of this half-stanza and the precise meaning of fylvingr remain uncertain. See Meinhardt, "Die Þórsdrápa," pp. 374-376; Kiil, "Eilífr Goðrúnarson's Þórsdrápa," pp. 143-144; Clunies Ross, "An Interpretation," p. 382. Ernst A. Kock, Notationes Norroenae: Anteckningar till Edda och skaldediktning, Lund's Universitets Årsskrift, new ser., sec. 1 (Lund, 1923-44), §348, took vallar hallfylvingar as a stave-kennig, the reading adopted here; no awkward change of pronoun subject occurs in the half-stanza as long as this kenning is made the subject and MS þer (line 3) read as þar (not þær). Kiil's efforts to eliminate all rods and staves from Þórsdrápa are exceptionally strained; even a skeptical Wolfgang Mohr, "Thor im Fluss: zur Form der

- altnorðisken mytologisken Überlieferung," PBB, 64 (1940), 227, grants both the presence and antiquity of Grífr's staff.
- 15 Reichardt, "Die Þórsdrápa," pp. 387-389; Kiil, "Eilífr Goðrúnarson's Þórsdrápa," pp. 163-164.
- 16 Herblótinn was first suggested by Theodor Wisén, Emendationer och exegeser till norröna dikter (Lund, 1886-91) and adopted by everyone but Kiil, who emends to hóelblótinn (p. 164).
- 17 Saxon's Gesta Danorum, ed. C. Knabe and Paul Herrmann, rev. Jørgen Olrik and Hans Raeder (Copenhagen, 1931), I, 239-243; Eng. trans. by Peter Fisher, Saxo Grammaticus, History of the Danes (Totowa, N. J., 1979), I, 262-267. The golden calf shattered by Moses (Exodus 32) is called a blótkálfur in Stjórn: Gammelnorsk Bibelhistorie fra Verdens Skabelse til det babyloniske Fangenskab, ed. C. R. Unger (Oslo, 1862), p. 312.
- 18 Skjld. IA, 452; IB, 421. The stanza is analyzed in Frank, Old Norse Court Poetry: The Dróttkvætt Stanza, Islandica, 42 (Ithaca, N. Y., 1970), pp. 46-49, 75-76.
- 19 Skjld. IA, 155-156; IB, 147-148. Old Norse Court Poetry, pp. 03-05, 05-06.
- 20 See fn. 4. Thor's contest with the world-serpent is told by the author of the Hvám'skviða, by Bragi Boddason and his near-contemporary Ólfr hnúfa, and by the tenth-century poet Eysteinn Valdason. See Aage Kacell, "Der Fischfang Þórs," ANF, 91 (1976), 123-129.
- 21 See especially Hallvard Lie, "Þórsdrápa," KLNN, 20 (1976), cols. 37-400; and M. Clunies Ross, "Style and Authorial Presence," pp. 207-208, who notes that Eilífr's kennings "incorporate the names of actual Norwegian rivers like Feðja and Norn in such a way that a Norwegian audience

would immediately place Þórr's taming of this unruly female force of nature in their own country."

- 22 Eilífr is listed among Hákon's court poets in Skáldatal: see Edda Snorra Sturlusonar, Sumtibus Legati Arnarnagmæani (Copenhagen, 1852-67), III.1, 256. A half-stanza by Eilífr, cited in Skáldskaparmál (Jónsson, Edda Snorra Sturlusonar, p. 93), may indicate Hákon as recipient (see fn. 40).
- 23 Heimskringla, Haralds saga gráfældar, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, Íslensk Fornrit, 26 (Reykjavík, 1941), ch. 7, p. 211: "King Harald most often had his seat in Hordaland and Rogaland." Foote and Wilson, The Viking Achievement, p. 42.
- 24 Paired kennings in Einnarr skálaglamm's Vellekla similarly equate Thor's way with giants and Hákon's with his enemies (the only time that a pagan skald uses a Thor-name as base word in a man-kennning). See Hans Kuhn, "Aund um die Völuspá" in Medievalia Litteraria: Festschrift für Helmut de Boor zum 80. Geburtstag, ed. Ursula Hennig and Herbert Kolb (Munich, 1971), pp. 1-14; rpt. in Kuhn, Kleine Schriften: Aufsätzen und Rezensionen aus den Gebieten der germanischen und nordischen Sprach-, Literatur- und Kulturgeschichte, ed. Dietrich Hofmann (Berlin, 1969-78), IV, 139. Also Kuhn, "Das nordgermanische Heidentum in den ersten christlichen Jahrhunderten," ZdA, 79 (1942), 137; rpt. Kleine Schriften, II, 300. See, too, Clunies Ross, "Style and Authorial Presence," pp. 285-286. On Hákon's reputation as a womanizer, see Frank, Old Norse Court Poetry, p. 86, and Theodore K. Andersson, "Ari's konunga ævi and the Earliest Accounts of Hákon Jarl's Death," Opuscula, 6 (Bibliotheca Arnarnagmæana, 33, 1979), 1-17; also Clunies Ross, "Style and Authorial Presence," p. 285.
- 25 See Finnur Jónsson, Lexicon Fœsticum: Antiquae Linguae Septentrionalis.

Ordbog over det norsk-islandske skjaldesprog oprindelig forfattet af Sveinbjörn Egilsson (Copenhagen, 1913-16; 2nd ed., 1931), s.v. Élla. Éllu niðr 'descendant of Élla' identifies Atnelstan; Éllu konnr 'scion of Élla' is Magnus the Good, king of Norway and Denmark, but also claimant to the English throne of Hørtha-Knútr.

- 26 See Fridtjov Birkeli, "Hadde Håkon Adalsteinsfostre likevel en biskop Sigfrid hos seg?" Historisk Tidsskrift (Oslo), 40 (1961), 113-36, and "The Earliest Missionary Activity from England to Norway," Nottingham Medieval Studies, 15 (1971), 27-37, who finds evidence for some Christian proselytizing in western Norway before the Olafs. He puts most of the early Norwegian Christian crosses in these same western districts: Norske Steinkors i tidlig Middelalder, Skrifter utg. av det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi i Oslo, II Hist. filos. kl., n. s., 10 (Oslo, 1973). On Olaf at Andover, see Frank M. Stenton Anglo-Saxon England, 3rd ed. (Oxford, 1971), p. 373 (The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle s. a. 993). There may even be an Anglicism or two in Eilífr's final stanzas holl (18/1) and bígrifill (18/8). See Hans Kuhn, Das Dróttkvætt (Heidelberg 1983), p. 294.
- 27 On hammer vs. cross, see Johannes Steenstrup, "Hammer og Kors" in Studier tillägnade Axel Kock, ANF, LÖA (1929), 44-61; Sune Lindqvist, "Den hellige Eskils biskopsdöme," Antikvarisk tidskrift, 22/1 (1917), esp. 120-122; and Heimskringla. Håkonar saga góða, ch. 17 (ÍF, 26, p. 171) for Snorri's famous account of how Håkon's making the sign of the cross was explained away as the sign of the hammer. On Thor vs. Christ, see Otto Gschwantler, "Christus, Thor, und die Midgardschlange" in Festschrift für Otto Höfler (Vienna, 1966), 145-168; Marold, "Thor weihe diese nunen," pp. 195-222; and Henry Mavr-Harting, The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England (London, 1972), p. 30. Two stanzas attributed to Steinnunn nefsiðttir (c. 10

pits Thor's might against Christ's to the latter's discredit: Skjld. IA, 135-136; IB, 127-128.

- 28 See Kurt Schier, "Zur Mythologie der Snorra Edda: Einige Quellenprobleme" in Speculum Norroenum: Norse Studies in Memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre, ed. Ursula Dronke et al. (Odense, 1981), 405-420 (esp. 419-420). On new currents in late tenth-century pagan religion, see Helmut de Boor, "Die religiöse Sprache der Völuspá und verwandter Denkmäler" in Deutsche Islandforschung, I. Kultur (Breslau, 1930), pp. 68-142; rpt. in his Kleine Schriften (Berlin, 1964), I. 209-283. Peter Foote, "Observations on 'syncretism' in early Icelandic Christianity," Árbók Vísindafélags Íslendinga 1974, pp. 69-86, rpt. in his Aurvandilstá: Norse Studies (Odense, 1984), pp. 84-100, notes "the real age of syncretism in western Scandinavia and Iceland must have been precisely the tenth century . . . when Christian elements could be introduced unopposed into pagan life" (pp. 94-95).
- 29 Levin L. Schücking, Untersuchungen zur Bedeutungslehre der angelsächsischen Dichtersprache, Germanische Bibliothek, 11 (Heidelberg, 1915), p. 16. All quotations from the poem are from Exodus, ed. Peter J. Lucas, Methuen's Old English Library (London, 1977). See also E. B. Irving, The Old English Exodus, Yale Studies in English, 122 (New Haven, 1953), and "New Notes on the Old English Exodus," Anglia, 90 (1972), 289-324. Opinions on the date of the poem range from c. 700 to the middle of the tenth century: see E. B. Irving, "On the Dating of the Old English Poems Genesis and Exodus," Anglia, 77 (1959), 1-11; Dietrich Hofmann, "Untersuchungen zu den altenglischen Gedichten Genesis und Exodus," Anglia, 75 (1957), 1-34. For a discussion of the methods, past and present, used to date Old English texts, see Asnley Crandell Amos, Linguistic Means of Determining the Dates of Old English Literary Texts, Medieval Academy Books, No. 90 (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), and The Dating of Beowulf, ed. Colin Chase, Toronto Old English Series, 6 (Toronto, 1961).

- 30 The phrase is from E. R. Goodenough, Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period (Princeton, 1954), IV, 37. On the development of a shared vocabulary of theological terms comprehensible to both pagans and Christians in the fourth century, see H. A. Drake, In Praise of Constantine: A Historical Study and New Translation of Eusebius' Tricennial Orations (Berkeley, 1976), pp. 46-73; also R. H. Storch, "The Trophy and the Cross: Pagan and Christian Symbolism in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries," Byzantion, 40 (1970) 105-118.
- 31 Graham-Campbell and Kidd, The Vikings, p. 179.
- 32 Meissner, Die Kennningar, pp. 256-257.
- 33 Lexicon poeticum, s.v. elliði; Hjalmar Falk, "Altnordisches Seewesen," Wörter und Sachen, 4 (Heidelberg, 1912), 68. Almost every half-stanza in Þórsdrápa reveals a similar pairing: in the first helming of stanza 15, for example, the giants—"men of the lair of the fjord-apple's land"—are said to keep up their "ale party" as battle threatens, a metaphoric turn that is reminiscent of the Beowulf and Andreas poets' ironic ealuscerwen (70) and neoduscerwen (1526) and that leads into Eilífr's vision of weapons as food and drink in the next four helmings.
- 34 A valuable discussion of this image-sequence and of much else is in Thomas D. Hill, "The Virga of Moses and the Old English Exodus," in Old English Literature in Context, ed. John D. Niles (Cambridge and Totowa, N. J., 1980) pp. 57-65, 165-167. See also John P. Hermann, "The Green Rod of Moses in the Old English Exodus," ELN, 12 (1975), 241-243; Maxwell Luria, "Why Moses' Rod is Green," ELN, 17 (1980), 161-163.
- 35 See among others Peter J. Lucas, "Old English Christian Poetry: The Cross is

- Exodus" in Famulus Christi: Essays in Commemoration of the Thirteenth Centenary of the Birth of the Venerable Bede, ed. Gerald Bonner (London, 1976), pp. 193-209; J. E. Cross and S. I. Tucker, "Allegorical Tradition and the Old English Exodus," Neophilologus, 44 (1960), 122-127; J. W. Earl, "Christian Tradition in the Old English Exodus," NM, 71 (1970), 541-570; John F. Vickrey, "Exodus and the Battle in the Sea," Traditio, 28 (1972), 119-140.
- 36 The Dream of the Rood, line 97, and Elene, line 217, in The Vercelli Book, ed. George P. Krapp, The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records, 2 (New York, 1932), pp. 64, 71.
- 37 See, for example, Ælfric, De Falsis Diis, line 125, in John C. Pope, ed., The Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection, The Early English Text Society, 259-260 (Oxford, 1967-68), II, 683.
- 38 Skáliskaparmál in Jónsson, ed., Edda Snorra Sturlusonar, pp. 93, 158.
- 39 Skjld. IA. 152; 1B. 144. See Gerd Wolfgang Weber, "Die Christus-Strophes Eilífr Goðrúnarson," ZdA, 99 (1970), 87-90.
- 40 Skjld. IA, 148; IB, 139. The name Hákon may be hidden in the phrase of kon mœran: konr designates 'man, scion'; the adjective mœrr means 'illustrious'. With a substitution of synonyms, mœrr konr becomes hǫr konr 'glorious man', compounded as Hǫ-kon. But see Hallvard Lie, KLNE, 20 (1976), 399, for the persuasive reading of kon mœrar 'descendant of Jǫrð (earth) = Thor.
- 41 Snorra takes són as a vat-name; Ursula Dronke, "Omínnis hegri," (1984), 57, as a mead-name; and H. Frank, "Snorri and the Mead of Poetry" in Speculum Norroenum, pp. 162-163, as a common noun.

- l2 Homilíu-bók, ed. Theodor Wisén (Lund, 1872), p. 36; Postola Sögur, ed. C. R. Unger (Oslo, 1874), p. 296. Northrop Frye, "The Search for Acceptable Words," Daedalus (Spring, 1973), rpt. in his Spiritus Mundi: Essays on Literature, Myth, and Society (Bloomington, Ind., 1976), p. 11.
- l3 T. A. Shippey, Old English Verse (London, 1972), p. 143; Hill, "The Virga of Moses," p. 64.
- l4 E. M. Forster, Our Diversions, 3. "The Doll Souse" (first publ. 1924); rpt. in Abinger Harvest (New York, 1936), p. 49.