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Reflections on Genre and Intertextuality in Eddic Poetry

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The traditional literature on Eddic poetry does not examine its assumptions about genre. A fresh start should be rooted in the extensive contemporary theoretical literature, but one must not expect precise definitions or a perfect system in this murky field. The second concept in my title, intertextuality, has not been employed by name in Eddic studies, but we will see that it has not escaped an, at least rudimentary, discussion in the literature. Genre and intertextuality are closely related, in fact interdependent, but the paper (1) will begin with genre, (2) go on to the concept of intertextuality, and (3) conclude with two main examples, Sigdrífumál and Grottesongr.

The discussion of genre, after a very brief Forschungsbericht, will touch on incompatible systems and the clarification often offered by the folkloristic concepts of ethnic and analytic genre (Ben-Amos). This distinction, however, will be undermined in the interest of a gradation from simple to complex which is arguably both ethnic and analytic. Simple forms (Jalles) arise in specific speech acts (Todorov) and to that extent are ethnic and traceable in Old Norse (Harris, "The senng"). Bakhtin's essay on "speech genres," anticipating the American ethnographers of communication, emphasizes the element he calls "dialogue."

The many "voices" Bakhtin finds in literature in general are comprehended under the concept of intertextuality as expounded by post-

structuralist theorists (Kristeva, Culler). This includes the familiar notions of source and influence but goes much further: every text is "a tissue of quotations," "a mirage of citations" (Barthes). The emphasis of the theorists is either on the infinite regress of texts or on the contributions of prior texts to the codes that make a work intelligible, but critical studies tend to narrow the conception (Culler). Studies of oral literature (Lord) and traditional eddic source studies, different as they are (Magoun, Genzmer), anticipate and agree with some aspects of these contemporary theorists; but while intertextuality so understood throws in doubt the real existence of simple forms, the simple-to-complex axis can still rank and group texts.

Old Norse scholarship has been pragmatically working toward this point of view for some time (Klingenberg, von See). At the literate level intertextuality often takes the form of interpolation, but the implicit equation of oral forms with generic purity seems erroneous. In Sigrdrífumál it is easy to see examples of agglutination, compounding, mixing, and quoting, but one of the apparently more unified compositions of the Eddic corpus, Grottesongr, yields a subtler understanding of Eddic intertextuality and generic mixtures.