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SKALDIC PRAISE POETRY AS A MARGINAL FORM

In this paper I shall attempt an historicization of skaldic praise poetry. This type of poetry is often regarded as marginal, from either a literary or an historical perspective. Many historians, especially historians of England, will tell you emphatically that skaldic praise poetry "is not history", whereas, working in an English department, I am acutely aware that for most of my colleagues skaldic praise poetry is not literature. I shall discuss first its place in historical discourse, next its place in literary discourse, and finally its relevance to a mode of cultural analysis that claims to subsume both of these disciplines.

Within skaldic praise poetry, I shall be giving special attention to a marginalized sub-genre, characterized by intermittent use of a narrative technique of the "running commentary" type. My chief example will be a brief but rather extraordinary poem, the *Liðsmannaflokkr*, which is preserved in what appears to be a complete state in two of the sagas of Óláfr helgi, the *Legendary Saga* and the fragmentarily preserved saga by Styrmir Kárason. I shall refer more cursorily to *Darraðarljóð* and to a verse sequence by Þjóðólfr Arnórsson which (as I have argued elsewhere) probably represents the section of *Sexstefja* that deals with the Battle of the River Nissa.[1] The text of *Liðsmannaflokkr* is not readily accessible and so I shall reproduce it in full here.[2]

LIÐSMANNAFLOKKR

1. Gǫngum upp, áðr Engla
aettlǫnd farin rǫndu
mǫrðs ok miklar ferðir
malmregns stafar fregni:
verum hugrakkir Hlakkar,
hristum spjót ok skjótum,
leggr fyr órum eggjum
Engla gnótt á flótta.

Let us go ashore, before warriors and large militias learn that the English homelands are being traversed with shields: let us be brave in battle, brandish spears and hurl them; great numbers of the English flee before our swords.

2. Margr ferr Ullr í illan
oddsennu dag þenna
frár, þar's foeddir órum,
fornan serk, ok bornir:
enn á enskra manna
ǫlum gjóð Hnikars blóði;
vart man skald í skyrtu
skreiðask hamri samða.

Many an impetuous warrior puts on today the ugly old shirt, where we were born and bred: once more let us nourish the raven on the blood of Englishmen; the cautious poet will slip into that kind of shirt which the hammer sews.

3. Þollr mun glaums of grímu
gjarn síðarla árna
randar skóð at rjóða
roeðinn, sá's mey foeðir:
berr eigi sá sveigir
sára lauks í ári

That garrulous reveller who brings the girl up will be eager to make no undue haste to redden his sword at night: the warrior does not carry a shield ashore into English territory at this early hour,

reiðr til Rínar glóða
rǫnd upp á Englandi.

4. Þóttut mér, es ek þátta,
Þorkels liðar dvelja--
sǫusk eigi þeir sverða
sǫng--í folk at ganga,
áðr an ?hauðr? á heiði
hríð víkingar kníðu--
vér hlutum vápna skúrir--
varð fylkt liði--harða.

5. Hár þykki mér, hlýra,
hinn jarl, es brá snarla--
maer spyrr vitr ef vaeri
valkǫstr--ara fǫstu:
en þekkjǫndum þykkir
þunnblás meginásar
hǫrð, sú's hilmir gerði
hríð, á Tempsar síðu.

6. Einráðit lét áðan
Ullkell, þar's spjǫr gullu--
hǫrð óx hildar garða
hríð--víkinga at bíða:
ok slíðrhugaðr síðan
sátt á oss hvé mátti
byggs við bitran skeggja
brunns; tveir hugir runnu.

7. Knútr réð ok bað bíða--
baugstalls--Dani alla--
lundr gekk rǫskr und randir
ríkr--vá herr við díki:
naer vas, sveit þar's sóttum,
Syn, með hjalm ok brynju,
elds sem olmum heldi
elg Rennandi kennir.

8. Út mun ekkja líta--
opt glóa vǫpn á lopti
of hjalmtǫmum hilmi--
hrein sú's býr í steini
hvé sigrfíkinn soekir
snarla borgar karla--
dynr á brezkum brynjum
blóðíss--Dana vísi.

9. Hvern morgin sér horna
Hlǫkk á Tempsar bakka--
skalat hanga má hungra--
hjalmskóð roðin blóði:
rýðr eigi sá sveigir
sára lauk í ári,
hinn's Grjótvarar gaetir,
gunnborðs, fyrir Stað norðan.

10. Dag vas hvern þat's Hǫgna
hurð rjóðask nam blóði,
ár þar's úti vórum,
Ilmr, í fǫr með hilmi:
kneigum vér, síz vígum
varð nýlokit hǫrðum,
fyllar dags, í fǫgrum,
fit, Lundúnum sitja.

enraged, in quest of gold.

Þorkell's men did not seem to me, as I saw [them], to lose time in joining battle--they did not fear the ringing of swords--before the Vikings fought a hard engagement on hauðr heath; we encountered showers of weapons; the warband was in battle formation.

This earl, who briskly broke the ravens' fast, seems to me outstanding--the clever girl asks if there was carnage--but the battle the king waged, on the bank of the Thames, seems a hard one to the bowmen.

Ulfcetel decided beforehand to await the Vikings, where spears made their din--the fighting grew fierce--and you saw from our appearance afterwards what that remorseless man could achieve against the implacable stone-dweller; dissent arose.

Knútr decided, and commanded the Danes all to wait--the mighty warrior went bravely into battle--the army fought alongside the moat: lady, where we engaged the enemy forces, with helmets and mailcoats, it was almost as if a man held a maddened elk.

The chaste widow who lives in stone will look out--often weapons glitter in the air above the king in his helmet--[to see] how the Danish leader, eager for victory, valiantly assails the city's garrison; the sword rings against British mailcoats.

Each morning, on the bank of the Thames, the lady sees swords stained with blood; the raven must not go hungry: the warrior who watches over Steinvǫr, north of Staðr, does not redden his sword at this early hour.

Every day the shield was stained with blood, lady, where we were out early on our expedition with the king: now that these hard battles have been recently concluded, we can settle down, lady, in beautiful London.

As promised, I shall begin with a discussion of this poem as a source for the writing of documentary history. According to the positivist model

of historiography, we hope to arrive at historical truth by interrogating witnesses and documents, identifying and allowing for their various biases. *Liðsmannaflokkr* is rich in these. Probably composed ca 1017 to commemorate the conquest of England by Knútr, it focuses on the 1016 siege of London, a stratagem directly attributable to the Danish leader. There is reason to doubt that Knútr was quite so convincing a commander as he sounds here, and it has even been claimed that Þorkell, an independent war-lord, won his victories for him. A tacit admission to that effect might be detected in the peculiar form the poem takes, with its initial account of Þorkell's victory at Ringmere in 1010. By contrast, its treatment of Þorkell's role in the 1016 campaign seems evasive, although we cannot say how evasive, because of our uncertainties regarding Þorkell's allegiances in 1015-16. The poem also appears to evade the idea that it was ultimately as much by negotiation as by martial prowess that Knútr conquered England. If we focus on these evident biases we shall reach a highly pessimistic assessment of *Liðsmannaflokkr* as a source of narrative history. Yet we also need to acknowledge that the poem acts as a valuable supplement to our other sources in its references to Ulfcetel and Emma, whose presence near or in London (respectively) has considerable political importance, and to the help given by the Welsh to the defenders of London.

In overcoming a common prejudice against this kind of source we should remember that, as E.H. Carr has pointed out, "no document can tell us more than what the author of the document thought, what he (or she) thought had happened, or would happen, or ought to happen, or perhaps only what he wanted others to think he thought, or even only what he himself thought he thought".[3] In other words, rather than positing a freedom of bias in some historical sources, we should think of all sources as containing degrees of bias.

Our main source for the period covered by *Liðsmannaflokkr*, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, is naturally not immune from these doubts. It is characterized by various demonstrable omissions. It consists most probably of annals written up retrospectively at the end of each year (or thereabouts) and then very substantially revised around the year 1017; in other words, it is a narrative that has been constructed and reconstructed. The lack of other equally full sources and of precise information on the origins and authorship of the relevant section makes the inherent biases very hard to pin down and correct for. Now admittedly the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is quite a full document and we owe all gratitude to its compiler, since historians would have had grave difficulty in constructing any kind of narrative account of the last years of Ethelred without it. Yet we should also recognize that documents that exhibit a consistent, demonstrable bias, as skaldic praise poetry does, cannot be thrown upon the scrap-heap.

So far, as noted, this analysis has kept to a positivist view of historiography. But we have to reckon nowadays with radically sceptical views, like those of Hayden White, who asserts that all history is a species of narrative construct, a discourse whose meaning is actively produced by the tropes and devices employed to make sense of an otherwise inchoate material. Positivist assumptions serve to disguise the way in which competing ideologies work to reorganize the discursive field in pursuit of their own particular ends.[4] If we accept White's logic, we are, I think, compelled at some point to analyse historical narrative in literary terms, using literary techniques to detect these "tropes and devices". The other imperative, to historicize, I shall return to presently.

But first, what are the literary dimensions of our text? Literature seems not to yield to essentialist definitions, and in fact one of the usefulnesses of skaldic praise poetry in general, never mind the eccentric text presented here, is that it would test any such definition to the limit. But literary critics are resourceful people and there is a temptation nowadays, among the doubly resourceful few who read skaldic praise poetry, to praise its literary excellence without resolving the question

of where it belongs as literature. In part, this is perhaps in reaction to the opprobrium heaped on the genre by earlier generations of critics. Also, skaldic praise poetry has a very decided ludic element which attracts the present generation of critics. It is easy to submit the genre to an appreciation based on supposedly universalist criteria for poetic excellence, forgetting that these criteria are extrapolated, depending on our taste, from (for example) "Metaphysical" or Romantic or modern or postmodern poetry. Or one seeks after analogies with, for example, the plastic arts, which in their turn are all too easily assimilated to the modernism or postmodernism of this century. With a poem like *Liðsmannaflokkr* the danger is twofold; either we might dismiss the poem on account of its lack of unity and continuity, as these attributes are prescribed by New Criticism, or we might prematurely accept it, assimilating its salient features to modernist or postmodernist anti-narrativity. The need to historicize the form seems to emerge as clearly from literary as from historical considerations.

On the other hand, as Bjarne Fidjestøl and others have pointed out, historicization is beset with problems.[5] How are we to isolate the crucially significant formative impulses operating in the social dynamic at a particular time or place? How can we distinguish them from earlier impulses which may have "sedimented" themselves in skaldic poetics? Even in the case of modern genres, whose place in the general mode of production is well documented, such attempts may fail to convince us as the uniquely appropriate solution; the sheer variety of attempts to historicize a work like Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* stands as a warning here. The problems can only be still more acute with a poorly documented genre in a poorly documented epoch. Fredric Jameson, writing from a Marxist perspective in his *The Political Unconscious*,[6] contends, with considerable pessimism, that capitalism has effectively dissolved all the older forms of collective relations, leaving their cultural expressions and their myths as incomprehensible to us as so many dead languages or indecipherable codices (p.69).

Nonetheless, skaldic poetry is so very singular in its formal attributes that the attempt at decipherment will probably continue to seem worth making. A historical theorization, using inter alia the insights of the Frankfurt School, has recently been attempted by Hermann Engster.[7] His endeavour is to locate skaldic poetry within the social dynamic of its time. I would suggest that although a precise understanding of chronologically and geographically localized impulses or "transformations" is probably beyond our reach, given the limitations and intractability of our material, nevertheless analysis can hope to isolate some of the longer-term oscillations or fluctuations of ideology.

To look at *Liðsmannaflokkr* or comparable poems solely for either truth or beauty is, then, to look at them too narrowly. They are a tissue of the ideologies prevailing in their period, and the challenge for us is to try to unpick this tissue. One type of ideology, that of the hegemony, is explicit in *Liðsmannaflokkr* in the praise of Knútr and Þorkell, and a simple sociological-cum-historical approach to the poem might rest content with that. E.H. Carr identified the limitations of such an approach with an example from ancient history: our picture of Greece in the fifth century BC, though at first sight rather a full one, is nonetheless defective because--quite aside from the loss of sources--it is by and large that formed by a tiny group of people in the city of Athens. We know a lot, he says, about what fifth-century Greece looked like to an Athenian citizen, but hardly anything about what it looked like to a Spartan, a Corinthian or a Theban, not to mention, extending his list somewhat, a woman, or a slave, or a Persian (pp.7-8).

How do we get beyond the restrictions imposed on us by texts composed from an élite viewpoint? Jameson argues that they cannot be properly assigned their relational place in a dialogical system without the restor-

ation or artificial reconstruction of the voice to which they were initially opposed. For the most part this voice has been reduced to silence, or marginalized, or reappropriated in its turn by the hegemonic culture (p.85). Interpretation (in particular ideological analysis) must therefore reckon with a text's gaps and absences or hints and clues as much as with that which it expressly tells us.

One striking example of latent content, where ideology is concerned, in *Liðsmannaflokkr* is the treatment of gender roles and stereotypes. Emma, by 1017 Knútr's wife, is decidedly marginalized in the poem, being subordinated to her future husband's perhaps rather specious heroism. She is not identified by name or by any of her initiatives of this period; the mention of a widow in v.8 is the only hint of her existence. To pinpoint our poem's suppressions or exclusions here is a little difficult, because the other sources are also reticent on the topic of Emma. We can, however, deduce from them that Knútr's need for her support (to secure a stable rule of England) was as great as her need for him (to perpetuate her position of dominance, after the death of Ethelred, her previous husband). In our text, the presence of two types of women, one protected (the Norwegian girlfriend with the watchful guardian) and the other evidently not protected (the widow, watching the progress of the conqueror), seems to imply some resolution of Emma's position in terms of current Viking ideology; she is tacitly assimilated to the type of woman that requires protection.

Verse 2 probably contains ideological freight of a different kind, although it too is unfortunately very hard to interpret. The difficulty consists in identifying the men who put on the "ugly old shirt". It might be suggested that the "shirt" being donned is mentioned purely in irony, being none other than their bare skin, and that the men in question propose to fight as *berserkar*. Alternatively, Anne Holtsmark tried to show that they are relying on a talisman consisting of a caul.[8]

In either case, an instance of implicit ideology can be detected in the distance which the speaker sets up between himself and these men. Where the *berserkar* are concerned there are problems in documenting their activities and role from the Scandinavian sources, but recourse can be had to comparative material, notably from early Ireland.[9] They seem to have been an anarchic, marginalized element in society, useful to it and yet also threatening to its stability; this would account for their marginalization in the poem. Or, looking at the other possible interpretation, trust in a talisman would imply a type of unchristian superstition which may have been stigmatized in certain circles. Indeed, a decided repression in the text is that of the supernatural. No credit is given to either Thor or Christ; if anything, one is left with an impression of a sufficient trust in the collective *máttr ok megin*. In *Vellekla*, composed somewhat earlier in a more definitely heathen milieu, a pattern has been traced where, through the kenning conventions, the victorious king and his adversaries are made homologous with Thor and the giants.[10] In *Liðsmannaflokkr*, by contrast, only half of this pattern is in evidence, namely the equation of the enemy with giants, which occurs when the phrase *brunns byggs skeggja*, a regular giant-kenning, is used of Ulfcetel. Emma is referred to rather similarly but more ambiguously as one who "lives in stone". The missing element is the equation of Knútr or Þorkell with Thor. The ideological repression here is immediately apparent.

Although the text is not altogether decipherable, at least in the present state of our knowledge, we gain the impression that, looking past the more or less predictable privileging of male over female, deeds over words, and self-reliance over supernatural belief, we can detect gaps and stray hints that indicate the existence of countervailing ideologies. Most interestingly, although the text celebrates the deeds of a king and an earl, your standard "great men", its hegemonic viewpoint is unusual in being a collective one, what could be termed a "warriors'-eye point of view". In *Darraðarljóð*, as in *Liðsmannaflokkr*, especial, though not ex-

clusive, emphasis is lent to collective action and a collective viewpoint. This emerges very simply from the heavy use of the first person plural pronouns, for the valkyries in one poem and the *lið* in the other. Furthermore, the attribution of *Liðsmannaflokkr* to the *liðsmenn* in *Knýtlinga saga* assumes collective composition, even if the basis of this attribution in tradition is unclear. *Njáls saga*, introducing *Darraðarljóð*, likewise speaks of collective authorship, an interpretation which suggests a tenacious life for the collective point of view even in relatively late saga production. (I shall return to this topic presently.) Now I am of course not presenting our texts as ideally collectivist ones, in the Utopian sense of embodying the unfragmented consciousness of the entire community. Nobody except an outright believer in the Vikings as noble savages would hold such grandiose expectations. What we might realistically expect to find, however, is, as in later forms of discourse, a particular expression of the competition between individualist and collectivist impulses in society. Such a competition is, I believe, expressed in the formal characteristics of *Liðsmannaflokkr* and comparable poems.

The poem is characterized by an apparent lack of narrative unity, in three respects: tense, *dramatis personae*, and cohesion. (I use the term "cohesion" as defined for pragmatics by Halliday and Hasan.[11]) A consistent implied context or situation for the speaker's words cannot be imagined, and this is in contravention, as I have already noted, of orthodox New Critical aesthetic, which tends to demand consistency in these matters. I shall deal with these three aspects of the poem's narrative discontinuity one by one, starting with the handling of time.

We find a use of the present tense in vv.1 to 3 to represent action in the idealized immediate present. But the meaning of the tense is slippery, because some of the events or actions it denotes are evidently anticipated, as where the present has virtual future meaning, or are in the imperative rather than the indicative mood. Chronologically this is the beginning of the story, with the initial landing in England. In v.4 the forward movement in the chronology to the battle at Ringmere (in 1010) is paradoxically accompanied by a shift from present tense to preterite; from a modern viewpoint it is natural to assume at first reading that we are here confronted with a "flashback". With v.5 the poem returns to present tense, and again the use of this tense is slippery. It now denotes the time at which the speaker of the poem boasts of his comrades' exploits to a listening girlfriend, evidently after the campaign has reached its conclusion, late in 1016. Chronologically, we are at the end of the story, though not at the end of the poem. Here and in vv.6 and 7 the actions during the campaign are described in the preterite, but in vv.8 and 9 we have a return to the description of these actions in the present tense. In v.10, the final stanza, the use of tenses is as in v.5. Analysis of the portion of *Sexstefja* mentioned above reveals a rather similar alternation of tenses. We find, for example, the phrases *glóar fax* "the mane glistens" and *svírar bǫ́ru brunnit gull* "the ornamented stem bore pure gold", describing the same feature of the king's ship, in the same stanza.

Generalizing from these data, we can say that in *Liðsmannaflokkr* and similar poems the tense of narration, instead of being handled uniformly according to some convention, is decomposed into two tenses, the present (representing an idealized immediacy of experience, together with the near future) and the preterite (representing the speaker's reconstitution of experience). I speak of an "idealized" present because deconstructive theory and empirical psychology appear to be agreed in asserting that sensory data are never purely present. This is to say that our so-called immediate sensory experience is in terms of a present perfect: e.g. "I have been running", "I have been thinking", even as the process of running or thinking continues. Attempts have of course been made to privilege certain types of sensory data, as by Bergson and Husserl, the latter of whom set out to show how the "living present" of awareness is the privi-

leged point from which memories, both long- and short-term, are organized and given their due sequential meaning. Among Husserl's most important distinctions is that between retention and representation, the former having to do with immediate (sensory) traces, the latter with experiences recalled over a greater period of time. His arguments have however been rebutted by Derrida, who has pointed out that Husserl is constantly obliged, by the logic of his own argument, to treat the present as a moment compounded of manifold retentions and anticipations, never existing in the isolated instant of awareness.[12] The skaldic sub-genre I am discussing is therefore characterized by the presence in one poem of two temporal perspectives, one corresponding to Husserl's "retention" and the other to his "representation". By contrast, in literature where individualism is dominant, for example the British nineteenth-century novel, the handling of time is usually organized so as to secure consistency from the perspective of a key individual, whether reader, narrator, or character.

A second peculiarity of the narration in *Lidsmannaflokkr* is the constant and disconcerting movement from one actant to another. This is probably a greater obstacle to today's reader than the temporal sequence already discussed. In v.1 the first person plural imperative leaves the status of the speaker open; the collectivity may be addressing each other, in mutual harangue to join the battle, or an individual speaker may be urging on his comrades. In v.2 the collective is apparently defined as those who were born and brought up in England (but perhaps expelled thence by Ethelred in the Lindsey campaign of 1014). Individuation of the speaker has occurred through the use of the first person pronoun. The *lið* is seen doubly, as a collective and as fragmented into two subsets, those who wear armour like the speaker and those who do not. In v.3 attention shifts without transition or connective tissue to a Norwegian who seems to be guarding his daughter (perhaps from the *lið* or a member of the *lið*, but this is not stated). In v.4 the topic is Þorkell's following, presumably largely the same *lið*. The perspective is again fluctuating, because this group of men is first *þeir* (i.e. separate from the speaker) and then *vér* (presumably including the speaker). In v.5 the initial focus is Þorkell, as one would expect from the previous stanza, but there is a shift in the parenthesis to a *maer*, presumably the girlfriend of somebody in the *lið*, perhaps the speaker. She thus emerges unannounced and unexplained to become the implied audience for the poem, contrary to the situation in vv.1 to 3. With the second half of the stanza a second shift of topic occurs, to Knútr, who has not previously been mentioned. Simultaneously there is a contrast of substance between the opinion held by the *lið* in general, that the king fought a hard battle, and the opinion held by the speaker, that Þorkell's men made no delays and that the earl is outstanding, but whether these opinions clash or are complementary is not made clear, so non-committal is the conjunction *en* joining the two expressions of opinion. In v.6 Ulfcetel enters the scene about as abruptly as the previous *dramatis personae*; we are left to infer somehow that the "remorseless man" is Knútr and the "implacable stone-dweller" Ulfcetel. An interlocutor and observer, presumably the *maer*, is brought back into the picture via the second person verb *sátt* "you saw". Then there is a very brief and tantalizing mention of dissent in the *lið*. In v.7 the topic continues to be Knútr and the female interlocutor (Syn) continues to be invoked. In v.8 some of this continuity is preserved, but it is left unclear whether the *ekkja* observing the heroism of Knútr is the same as the woman addressed previously. In v.9 there are rapid shifts of topic, from the woman (*horna Hlǫkk*) to the stereotype raven to the Norwegian guardian, whose ward is now identified as [Stein]vǫr. In v.10, as noted, the girlfriend, Ilmr, is again being addressed. Perhaps traditionally this type of poem was the speaker's report to the *horna Hlǫkk*, i.e. the female inciter of battle, or valkyrie, who carried a drinking horn to reward the returning warrior (or plural horns, as in the kenning, I suppose for plural warriors).

A similar, though not quite so confusing, discontinuity can be seen in *Darraðarljóð*. Some of this poem reads as a dramatic monologue on the part of the various valkyries who help an unnamed "young king" to victory over the Irish; the narrative is therefore naturally cast in the first person. Other parts, by contrast, are in the third person, as if an anonymous narrator is describing the events. At the end of the poem, the valkyries enjoin an anonymous male listener to commit their song to memory and recite it for the entertainment of other people. In one stanza of *Darraðarljóð*, which I shall quote, the alternation in point of view seems to be combined with an alternation of tense, as in *Liðsmannaflokkr* (though the manuscript evidence is not absolutely secure):

Vindum vindum	*Let us wind, let us wind,*
vef darraðar	*the weaving of the pennant*
ok siklingi	*and follow the prince*
síðan fylgjum:	*afterwards: there Gunnr and*
þar sá ?bragna?	*Gǫndul, who protected the*
blóðgar randir	*king, saw ?men's? shields*
Gunnr ok Gǫndul,	*covered in blood.*
þær er grami hlífðu.	

From our modern standpoint, there is a radical inconsistency here as to point of view. A generally comparable example in Old English is *The Wanderer*, where again we find a strange alternation of first and third person, such that some commentators have tried to distinguish different speakers or *dramatis personae* in the poem.[13] In *Beowulf* there is a lack of connectivity in numerous contexts, including the stories of Heremod, Finnesburh, and Hrethel.[14]

Thirdly and finally, cohesion is disrupted by the use of kennings and *heiti* and the intercalation of clauses in *Liðsmannaflokkr*. The disruption caused by intercalation is conspicuous in vv.5 and 7; kenning elements seem to hang in mid-air, bereft of settled associations or identities. Throughout the poem, the identity of the poem's women-figures is especially elusive. One woman is addressed as, inter alia, Syn and Ilmr, and the peculiarity here is that these two goddess *heiti* are not "corrected" by a defining element. In this so-called "half-kenning" structure the human status of the actant is never fully defined. Conversely, we have also seen that Ulfcetel and perhaps even Emma are referred in terms conventionally appropriate for a giant. In the stanza which contains the goddess name Syn the other kenning elements further complicate the pattern of elusiveness; the element *elds* could belong with *Syn* but is pulled away from it at the last minute by the arrival of the words *Rennandi kennir*, which require it to complete a kenning for "man". Furthermore, if it were not for the introduction of the word *kennir* the adjacent words *ǫlg Rennandi* would naturally be construed together to mean "ship". The result is a series of words that seem to change in application, and therefore in semantic value, as the stanza progresses. Other instances of the tendency to avoid firm definition of an actant's or object's identity can be seen with the kenning *glaums þollr* in v.3, which might or might not require to be supplemented by the element *randar*, and probably with the mention of *Grjótvǫr* in v.9, since the name is elsewhere recorded as Steinvǫr.

But even in *Liðsmannaflokkr*, where most types of unity, including the Aristotelian ones, fail to materialize, one type of unity is very strongly present. The formalistic devices of versification, the refrain, concatenation, and linking of beginning to end (cf. *dag[r]* in vv.2 and 10, *Hlǫkk* in vv.1 and 9) bring together the scattered and discontinuous narrative elements into a phonologically and lexically based continuity. The same pattern can be traced in other poems of the sub-genre I have been commenting on. This type of unity is one whose value comes in strengthening the relationship between skald and audience; at one and the same time, it furnishes sheer pleasure in the phonic patterning of the words and it enhances their memorability.

The result of the foregoing analysis has been to show that although a special sort of unity can be detected, the collective viewpoint occurs chiefly in association with marked discontinuities. You cannot extract unity from these two texts by looking at them from the perspective of any of the individual *dramatis personae*, whether the leaders, or the *maer*, or even the speaker. All these individual actants are de-centered in some way. The resulting discontinuities are therefore best termed non-individualist traits, moving to the next corner of a "semiotic square" which can be diagrammed as below:[15]

individualist	collectivist
non-collectivist	non-individualist

In the sub-genre of skaldic praise poetry discussed in this paper it is the collectivist and non-individualist antinomies that are asserting themselves.

In terms of narrative technique the fourfold opposition diagrammed in the square can be given content as follows:

individualist: unity from the point of view of a central actant

collectivist: unity from the point of view of a common body of actants.

non-individualist: a succession of mutually irreconcileable perspectives.

non-collectivist: a succession of perspectives involving negativity or absence.

Looking at the same square in terms relevant to pre-Christian Viking culture we can give it social content by inserting the following items:

hero	warband
exile	*seiðkona*/shaman

This is of course a highly simplified picture; I am not trying to identify all possible occupants of the corners of the square, let alone the possible mediations between them, among which one of the most interesting would be the skald. Instead I want to concentrate on the non-individualist position filled by the *seiðkona* or shaman figure. Both the *seiðkona* and her opposite number, the exile, operate outside the collectivity. The exile does so permanently, because he has been excluded; the *seiðkona* does so intermittently, because she can thus serve the collectivity, of which, until the arrival of Christianity, she is an accepted member. The exile takes on a certain alienated individualism and so is best termed non-collectivist. The *seiðkona* for her part was traditionally regarded as undergoing multiple transformations, and so can be called non-individualist.[16]

This diagramming reveals that the changes and uncertainties concerning identity that we noted in textual or stylistic practice occupy the same corner of the square as the *seiðkona* does in social practice. In this position belong also the other examples of shape-changing actants in Viking culture and myth, among them Odinn in his aspect of presider over *seiðr* and the theft and gift of the poetic mead. Internationally, similar shape-changing actants crowd the episodes of myth, wondertale, and other types of de-centered and non-individual narratives. Commenting on the narratives summarized in Lévi-Strauss's *Mythologiques*, Jameson points out their bewildering fluidity: human actants are ceaselessly transformed into animals or objects and back again; nothing like narrative "point of view", let alone "identification" or "empathy" with this or that protagonist, emerges; not even the position of an individual storyteller or "sender" can be conceptualized without contradiction (p.124). Jameson argues that narratives like these emerge from a social world in which the psychological subject has not yet been constituted as such and where later cate-

gories of the subject, such as the "character", are not relevant (p.113). Hence fragmentation of what we conceive of as "story-line", "character", "point of view", etc. is natural in genuinely non-individualist narration.

It is very tempting, in the light of this, to integrate the kenning system into a non-individualist poetics. With their protean prodigality of elements, kennings belong naturally in a pattern of shifting and uncertain identities. But here we must pause to take stock of the fact that similar play with kennings and *heiti* is found in most skaldic poems, whether or not they contain other putatively non-individualist traits. To ascribe the use of kennings to non-individualist impulses might therefore seem reductive. One way out of this difficulty might be to argue that in many texts kennings were ideologically a relic from a past social formation or, in other words, purely a stylism, bereft of current ideological significance. Another, more active, model is, however, also thinkable. Jameson proposes that when a text contains structurally contradictory or heterogeneous elements we should see them as indicative of a synchronic "uneven development"; he posits an older deep-structural form which seeks to inscribe and to reassert itself within contemporary materials and generic systems (p.141). This idea comes close to the Janus motif employed by Engster. All four elements of the semiotic square could then be seen as "always already" co-existing. We cannot set up a simple chronological or typological sequence, where "collectivist" and "non-individualist" equal "early", whereas "individualist" and "non-collectivist" equal "later". Poems with collective and non-individual traits exist alongside poems such as *Ynglingatal*, *Þórsdrápa*, and *Haustlǫng*, which exhibit these traits more weakly. Individualism and non-collectivism have presumably "always already" been in existence in human consciousness. This is necessarily so where, for example, the leader or hero is the topic; the hero in traditional societies is sometimes a problematic figure, neither fully within nor fully outside the collectivity. The individualism inherent in the notion of the hero was no doubt accompanied from time immemorial by some unification of perspective around that central actant in some poetic forms.

A wavering from one position in the semiotic square to another can be detected widely in early Scandinavian literature. For instance, whereas *Knýtlinga saga* attributes *Liðsmannaflokkr* to the collective *lið*, the two sagas of Óláfr helgi attribute it to their hero. In *Snorra Edda* we find a vast compilation of kenning language but also disparaging comments on *nykrat*, a figure of language where the succession of kennings cumulatively suggests a shape-changing monster and which is therefore par excellence an example of stylistic non-individualism.[17]

Hrólfs saga kraka contains an interesting case of this vacillation where Bǫðvarr bjarki and the bear are concerned. The narrative leaves undefined whether man and bear are one actant or two. In Gwyn Jones's translation, "King Hjorvarth and his men saw how a huge bear advanced before king Hrolf's men, and ... killed more men with paw of his than any five of the king's champions ... Now Hjalti looked about him and could not see Bothvar his comrade ... [He goes inside and rebukes Bothvar.] After this egging of Hjalti's Bothvar stood up and went outside to the battle. The bear had now vanished away from their host ..."[18] Here we witness a conflict between individualist and non-individualist perspectives.

All four positions diagrammed in the semiotic square appear, then, to be co-present and competing in the mode of production and hence in the literature. In thinking about the role of literature in this competition, a resort to anthropological methods might be fruitful. I have in mind Lévi-Strauss's techniques in interpreting the facial painting of the Caduveo. He posits a traditional society perplexed enough by the dynamics and contradictions of its tribal organization to project decorative or mythic resolutions of issues that it is unable to articulate conceptually.[19] Similarly, in early Scandinavian society the conflict of social im-

pulses could be regarded as being bodied forth verbally, in skaldic poetics. Looking at the matter with Engster's Janus motif in mind, it could be suggested that the genre I have been analysing privileges that subset of impulses that elsewhere in the culture is normally becoming subordinate by this period.

I am of course not proposing to attribute the origins of kennings to a non-individualist impulse in the social formation. They too, in a rudimentary form, doubtless date from time immemorial. If we are looking for a concomitant of the non-individualist impulse it is more probably to be found in the sudden hypertrophication, in Viking culture, of the rudimentary array of kennings whose existence we can infer by comparison with early English, Irish, Greek, and other literatures. Such a spectacular development, entailing the growth of a very complex system, very sharply demarcated in time and space, is not necessarily an embarrassment to the literary historian. The possibility of its occurrence could be demonstrated by mathematical modelling, in particular via catastrophe theory.[20]

The result of the line of inquiry tentatively followed in this paper has been to question the marginal status normally accorded to skaldic praise poetry and the doubly marginal status enjoyed by my particular subgenre. Its conspicuous privileging of collectivist and non-individualist forms may make it central to an understanding of the distinctive features of skaldic poetry in general.

1 Russell Poole, "The Cooperative Principle in Medieval Interpretations of Skaldic Verse ...", *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 87 (1988).
2 The text and translation are taken, with slight modifications, from my article "Skaldic Verse and Anglo-Saxon History: Some Aspects of the Period 1009-1016", *Speculum*, 62 (1987), pp.265-98, in which fuller documentation and discussion of the poem's historical content may be found.
3 E.H. Carr, *What is History?*, second edition, ed. R.W. Davies, London: Macmillan, 1986, p.10.
4 Christopher Norris, *The Contest of Faculties*, London: Methuen, 1985, p.19.
5 "Skaldestudiar. Eit Forskingsoversyn", *Maal og Minne*, 1985, pp.67-68.
6 Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1981: I shall be making frequent reference to this valuable study in the rest of this paper.
7 *Poesie einer Achsenzeit. Der Ursprung der Skaldik im gesellschaftlichen Systemwandel der Wikingerzeit*, Europäische Hochschulschriften, Reihe 1 Deutsche Sprache und Literatur, Bd. 667, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1983.
8 "Olav den Hellige og 'Seierskjorten'", *Maal og Minne*, 1954, pp.104-08.
9 Klaus von See, "Exkurs zum Haraldskvaedi: Berserker", *Zeitschrift für deutsche Wortforschung*, 17 (1961), 129-35, reprinted in Klaus von See, *Edda, Saga, Skaldendichtung*, Heidelberg: Winter, 1981, pp.311-17 expresses a sceptical view; but cf. Kim McCone, "Werewolves, Cyclopes, *Díberga*, and *Fíanna*: Juvenile Delinquency in Early Ireland", *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 12 (1986), 1-22.
10 *Skj.* B 119 v.15; see Margaret Clunies Ross, "Style and Authorial Presence in Skaldic Mythological Poetry", *Saga-Book*, 20 (1981), 285-86; also Roberta Frank, "Hand Tools and Power Tools in Eilífr's *Þórsdrápa*", in *Structure and Meaning in Old Norse Literature...*, ed John Lindow et al., Odense: Odense University Press, 1986, p.102, and references there given.
11 M.A.K. Halliday and R. Hasan, *Cohesion in English*, London: Longman, 1976.
12 Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice*, London: Methuen, 1982, p.47.
13 John C. Pope, "Dramatic Voices in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*", in *Medieval and Linguistic Studies in Honor of F.P. Magoun, Jr.*, ed. J.B. Bessinger and R.P. Creed, New York, 1965.
14 Linda Georgianna, "King Hrethel's Sorrow and the Limits of Heroic Action in *Beowulf*", *Speculum*, 62 (1987), 833 and 840, and references there given.

15 For a discussion of this concept see Steven Connor, *Charles Dickens*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1985, pp.20–43, and references there given.
16 On the *seiðkona* see Dag Strömbäck, "Sejd", *KLNM*, and references there given.
17 Finnur Jónsson ed., *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1931, p.217.
18 Gwyn Jones, tr. *Eirik the Red and other Icelandic sagas*, London: Oxford University Press, 1961, pp.313–14.
19 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, tr. John and Doreen Weightman, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976, pp.247–56; cf. Jameson p.79.
20 *Transformations: Mathematical Approaches to Cultural Change*, ed. Colin Renfrew and Kenneth L. Cooke, New York: Academic Press, 1979: see especially E.C. Zeeman, "A Geometrical Model of Ideologies", and Colin Renfrew, "Systems Collapse as Social Transformation: Catastrophe and Anastrophe in Early State Societies".