Chapter 9. Aspects of realization

Assessed from the standpoint of modern metricists, the analysis of forms in Snorri's *Háttatal* forms a picture of confusion. Where modern metrical theories insist almost axiomatically on the separation of abstract metrical schemes from the planes of realization and performance, Snorri presents us with an analysis which interweaves abstract metrical components with syntactic and lexico-semantic criteria; regulation of metrical recurrence (isosyllabicity, rhyme, alliteration), syntactic relationship (number of utterances per line, interweaving of sentences, regulation of noun and attribute position) and lexico-semantic elements (paradox, proverb, kenning) appear to share equal status in the definition of form.

The Irish tracts are less drastic in this respect, *Dagaisti* in particular alludes constantly to the fact that metre and expected content are closely allied, and the Irish metrical tracts as a whole underpin a system where purely metrical aspects are closely linked with socio-cultural ones.

In the following section I therefore examine some aspects of realization which operate on levels other than those generally subsumed under the category of metrical recurrences, but which nonetheless appear to contribute to the broad concept of metrical form in each culture.

9.1 Cohesion in larger forms

9.1.1 Icelandic

There are only two references to forms larger than a single stanza in *Háttatal*. Both are oblique and occur in the commentary in connection with the use of the refrain *stef*. On the first occasion reference is made to a poem composed by one Þórvaldr veili

Þá orti hann kvæði er kallat er kviðan skjálfhenda eða drápan steflausa[1]

'Then he made the poem that is called the shivering-rhymed ballad or the *drápa* without refrains.'

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[1]   Faulkes 1991 p. 18, my translation.

The second reference is the following:

> Þat er tøgdrápuháttr at stef skal vera til fyrsta vísuorðs ok lúka því máli í inu síðarsta vísuorði kvæðisins, ok er rétt at setja kvæðit með svá mǫrgum stefjamélum sem hann vil[2]

> 'In *tøgdrápu háttr* the refrain shall consist of the first line and that utterance shall be concluded in the last line of the poem[3] and it is correct to compose the poem with as many sections[4] as required.'

The term *drápa* refers to longer compositions in which sections consisting of *dróttkvætt* stanzas are marked off by refrains. These refrains form the essence of the form, *drápa*, so that the expression *drápa inn steflausa* in the above example can be seen as a contradiction in terms. The content of the refrain is not laid down in any tract; in practice it tends to preserve the name of the chieftain being eulogized. Its importance can thus be seen in its effect of pinning down the series of exploits related in the previous set of stanzas specifically to the person eulogized.

Despite the apparent importance of having the right name linked with the right events, however, there appears to be no mechanism in Icelandic for ensuring that stanzas are related in the correct order, and there is no metrical link keying the *stef* into the remaining structure, except in the case of the *tøgdrápa* mentioned above. The drápa appears to have a relatively fixed overall pattern: Introduction (poet's credentials) – series of stanzas describing patron's exploits, separated by *stef* where appropriate – Exordium (poet's request for favour); however, this thematic fixity is not reflected by metrical relationships.

9.1.2   Irish

9.1.2.1   *Dúnadh*

Both Irish and Icelandic make provision for forms larger than the individual stanza, though this, especially in Icelandic, is little more than hinted at in the tracts. In Irish, the structure of these forms is governed by two principles in particular; *dúnadh* 'closure' and *fidrad freccomail*, lit. 'staves of joining', interstanzaic

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[2]   Faulkes 1991 p. 30.

[3]   The description, as I translate it at least, is misleading; the specific characteristic of the metre is that the refrain, which normally consists of two lines dissociated from the remaining stanzas, is in this case incorporated into the stanzas themselves, in such a fashion that the first line of the stanza forms the first line of the refrain, the last line of the stanza the last line of the refrain. As the ensuing text points out, there may be as many refrains as required; there is thus no question of their being linked to the first and last lines of the poem, setting aside the fact that were they exclusively so positioned they would no longer be capable of functioning as a refrain.

[4]   *stefjamél*, technically sections bordered on each side by refrains.

linkage. Both appear to have been practised before the onset of stanzaic poetry and to have survived the transition from oral to written preservation.[5] They are defined in part of the Second Metrical Tract, which deals with both stanzaic and non-stanzaic forms. The section of the tract concerned, MV pp. 29-31, lists sixteen sections of the poetic art required of the *fili*:

> Ní filí nad fiasar .ui. hernailí deg na filideachta [6]

> 'there is no fili who does not know the sixteen divisions of poetry'

and enumerates a list in which the purely metrical is combined with prescriptions, in particular concerning content and manner, which would be applicable to any form of composition.[7]

The tract considers three forms of closure; *saighid*, consisting of the repetition of a whole word from the first line in the conclusion, *ascnam*, repetition of half a word, *comindsma* of the first syllable; using the example *donnchadh, donnchadh, donn* and *do* respectively. *Dúnadh* had a legitimate function in poetry of the oral period, especially that of the stricter variety described by Carney, in which a chain of alliteration linked the whole structure. By means of the *dúnadh*, beginning and end joined to form a circle, so that no element of the poem was any less bound to the whole than any other.

Although *dúnadh* appears to originate in the needs of oral transmission, it was retained in the written period, with a change of function. In written texts it is the poet's signal to his learned reader or audience that his poem is now complete and that the following text in the manuscript is a separate entity. The manuscripts generally draw attention to the presence of *dúnadh* by indicating the correspondence at the foot of the final stanza, as in Blathmac's first poem to the Virgin *Tair cucum a Maire boíd* 'come to me loving Mary', with the final stanza:

> Do airchisecht chridi cen on
> con roirem ar ndiäbor
> a chond na creitme glaine
> tair cucum a boídMaire.
>   Tair

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5   cf. Carney 1964 p. xxx.

6   MV 2 p. 29.

7   These are: 1,2,4, types of conclusion; 3, alliterative interstanzaic linking; 5, unity of sense (within a given stanza); 6, (apparently) mastery of alliterative formulas (*brosna suad*); 7, appropriateness of description; 8, alliterative binding within the line; 9, appropriateness of praise; 10, orderly description (esp. in satire, that the person disparaged must be identifiably described by name, origin and lineage); 11, equal-lengthed harmony, i.e. that rhyming units should be of equal length; 12, letters of joining, i.e. interstanzaic alliterative linkage (from the example given I see no distinction between this and 4); 13, avoidance of irrelevancy; 14, beauty of speech; 15, appropriateness of language; 16, mastery of cadences. For further details see MV pp. 121-2.

'Come to me, loving Mary, head of pure faith, that we may hold converse with the compassion of unblemished heart. Come.'[8]

Whether the *dúnadh* had any relevance in performance of works of this length (149 stanzas as preserved) is debatable. On one occasion Blathmac seems to refer to the problem himself:

Ferr dúnn, trá, a Maire mas
no-ráidmis- is huag n-abras!
iarcomarc for coíniud nglan
'Isu ara-roichsisem.

'Better for us then, O Mary mild, that we should speak - it is a complete work - an *íar-comarc* upon the full lament of Jesus whom we have pitied.'[9]

Carney interprets this stanza as being the poet's announcement of "his intention of concluding the poem with an *iarcomarc*", i.e. with a concluding stanza correctly linked to the opening one,[10] an intention that he duly carries out thirty stanzas later. This could be interpreted as a signal to the listener to listen carefully for the formal conclusion. However, this single and not unambiguous reference[11] is insufficient to prove that the *dúnadh* was no longer regarded as orally efficacious at the time of Blathmac.

Occasionally, *dúnadh* can occur where a poem is not complete, as for example in *Saltair na Rann* and the Babylon poem incorporated into the Irish *Sex Aetates Sunt Mundi*.[12] In some instances intermediate *dúnadh* may be regarded as marking the extent of an original poem added to by a later redactor,[13] but not all instances

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[8]   Text and translation Carney 1964 p. 50. The manuscript adds the opening word of the poem to demonstrate the *dúnadh*; the full stop after "Come" in Carney's translation is therefore misleading.

[9]   Carney 1964 p. 40; I have slightly altered the order of his translation to bring it closer to that in the original.

[10]   Carney 1964 p. xxx.

[11]   There is after all no compelling reason to take the reference literally; the phrase *"ráidmís iarcomarc"* could equally well be interpreted metaphorically as "draw to a conclusion"; Gearóid Mac Eoin warns against overinterpretation, suggesting that the phrase could mean merely "speak a verse" (private communication).

[12]   Tristram 1985 pp. 232-4. The poem consists of 22 stanzas in loose *deibide*; *dúnadh* is explicitly marked (in the customary manner of repeating the first word of the poem after the final word of the section concluded to demonstrate that the two are identical) after stanzas 6, 7, 9, 17 and 22. In each case the *dúnadh* marks the end of a significant phase in the history of the city.

[13]   This would appear to be the case, for example, in the passage in *ochtfhoclach*, TBC1 ll. 2622-85, 2, ll. 2638-714, beginning *Rotfía lóg mór mbuindi* 'For you there will be a great reward of bracelets' in which an apparent conclusion *is uilí rotfía* 'all this will be for you' precedes a quatrain in which Fer Diad is finally promised Findabair, concluding *A Fir Diad, rotfía* '[all this] O Fer Diad, will be for you'. Even this passage shows the difficulty of making categorical statements in this area; it is after all just conceivable that the poet, by setting what would in that respect be a "false" *dúnadh* wished to demonstrate Medb's show of reluctance to offer Findabair

are explicable in this way, the remainder apparently being examples of the feature's being used as a marker to indicate the conclusion of major sections of the work.

9.1.2.2   *Fidrad freccomail*

Fidrad freccomail 'staves of joining', are alliterative interstanzaic links in which generally the last word alliterates with a word in the subsequent stanza. This form of linkage is a regular feature of the *Poems of Blathmac* and *Félire Oengusso*. Again, in these contexts it would appear that a feature appropriate to an oral stage of transmission has been transferred to bookish poetry for no other reason than the sanctity of tradition. This, for example, is Carney's view;

> [...] at times this is so free that it is difficult to see how it fulfilled any mnemonic purpose. Indeed my impression in this matter is that *fidrad freccomail* in such compositions [...] is nothing more than the mechanical retention as a mere literary ornament of a feature that in the earlier oral stage of Irish poetry had a precise and useful function.[14]

This may be so. Even after the advent of writing, there could be some advantage in securing the correct order of stanzas in a panegyric that was to be delivered orally to an unlettered chieftaincy.

9.2   Conventions of appropriateness in subject and diction

9.2.1   Icelandic

The range of subjects expressed through the medium of stanzaic poetry during the period under discussion (700-1160 for Ireland, 850-1260[15] for Iceland) is far greater in Ireland than in Iceland. In Iceland, the presence and active cultivation of a parallel set of forms, the Eddic metres described in Chapter 3, would appear to have left the field free for considerable specialisation of stanzaic poetry. Broadly speaking, we can suggest that the skaldic forms were reserved for description of or comment on contemporary events. Whereas in the many single stanzas contained in sagas, this comment can be of a pithy, blunt or outright disparaging nature, in

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as bait, thus emphasizing the nature of the reward she was offering as a final resort. In this case the feature of *dúnadh* would certainly not be a mere survival from an oral period, but a sign of self-conscious literacy.

[14]   Carney 1964 p. xxx.

[15]   Óláfr Hvítaskáld died in 1259 (J. Kristjánsson 1988 p. 130).

longer collections, whether they be formally organised into *drápur* or more loosely collected, the tone is almost always eulogistic.

A notable exception is the cycle of stanzas attributed to Sighvatr Þórðarson bearing the name *Bersǫglisvísur* 'Outspoken Verses', in which the poet draws attention to faults in Magnús the Good's style of government and urges him to alter them. (Magnus accepted the criticism and mended his ways, hence the soubriquet 'Good'.)[16] Even this poem may be regarded as forming part of the panegyric tradition, being an exception only inasmuch as the poet exhorts the king to become praiseworthy so that he can be eulogized in the future.

It is also arguable that even specifically Christian poetry composed in skaldic metres does not constitute a departure from the panegyric tradition, the only alteration being the addressee; instead of praising the chieftain the poet now praises God. As in secular poetry, however, Christian *lausavísur* are more likely to be direct, or even disparaging, as in certain lsv. attributed to Hallfreðr Vandræðaskáld.[17]

Two major works of the accepted skaldic canon appear to fit less comfortably into the panegyric scheme, the most notable being *Háttalykill*, in which the stanzas relate the exploits of bygone heroes. This exception may possibly be accounted for as the results of the strictures imposed by a metrical demonstration, not that that prevented Snorri from composing *Háttatal* in the best panegyric tradition. Úlfr Uggason's *Ynglingatal*, a poem tracing the genealogy of Haraldr Fairhair back to the hero-kings of old, is possibly to be regarded as more panegyric than genealogical; the point of the poem is arguably not merely to record his descent and thus legitimise his claim to the throne, but to record the exploits of his ancestors and thus associate him in their glory. The case is clearer in the genres of the *Húsdrápa* (House-description) and shield-poems, even though these involve *in extenso* retellings of the stories of figures depicted on the house-walls or the shield. The principle is that by praising the patron's possessions, the poet is in principle praising their owner.

Contrasting with this specialized function of skaldic form we have a considerable range of use for the so-called Eddic metres, ranging from narrative through gnomic to prophetic and eulogistic.[18] Whatever other manifestations may be present within the *genre* of *dróttkvætt*, it seems clear that it evolved primarily as a response to a need for a prestigious, metrically demanding form suitable for the praise of living patrons. The skald required to produce narrative verse for entertainment, on the other hand, had a store of alliterative accentual verse at his dis-

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[16] cf. *Heimskringla, Magnúss saga góða*, ch. 15-6, Aðalbjarnarson 1949 vol. 3 pp. 25-31.

[17] Turville-Petre 1976 pp. 71-73.

[18] The latter in the case of the transitional poems *Hrafnsmál* and *Eiríksmál*. The traditional divide between Eddic and Skaldic forms is convenient, but not always applicable; for its limitations see Pálsson 1988 p. 121.

Pálsson is probably right to warn against an over-rigid application of the skaldic/eddic dichotomy, but he has little to offer by way of replacement except a somewhat imbalanced distinction between narrative and didactic genres. When I use the term *skaldic* it means little more than *rhyming stanzaic-syllabic metre*.

posal; this would appear at least to be the lesson to be learnt from the account of
Þórmóðr Kolbrúnarskáld on the morning of Stiklastaðir, who, when called on to
recite a poem to the arming host, recited the *Bjarkamál in fornu* in *fornyrðislag*.[19]
The historicity of this episode may be debatable; its importance to us at the
present lies in the fact that it was related by Snorri, and obviously accorded with
that poet's picture of the skald's function.

9.2.2   Irish

In Irish, there is hardly any textual category which cannot be expressed through
the medium of stanzaic poetry. The catalogue includes panegyric, dramatic,[20]
didactic and lyrical poetry, sacred and secular. The allocation of specific forms to
specific ranks of poets would suggest that more intricate metres are reserved for
high-ranking panegyric, whereas didactic verse is more likely to be composed in
deibide or *rannaigecht*. The references in *Dagaisti* to *deibide scáilte* as the metre
for *senchas* (historical lore) seems to confirm this impression (the description of
rannaigecht bec as a metre for satire is more ambiguous).

9.3   The stanza and lesser units

9.3.1   Icelandic

In *Háttatal* the most frequent unit in sense and syntax is the eight-line stanza, half
and quarter stanzas also appearing as syntactic units. Single-line units are a char-
acteristic of specially regulated forms such as *áttmælt*. This mirrors standard
poetic practice; the sagas frequently quote independent half-stanza units, less fre-
quently couplets.[21] Single lines, though appearing as independent syntactical units
in *Háttatal*, are only quoted in sagas as the first lines of longer poems which the
scribe of a given manuscript assumes are well enough known not to require
writing in full. Though defined by the term *vísuorð* in *Háttatal* as single units,
these lines are metrically so closely linked to a second half by the *stuðlar-
hǫfuðstafr* pattern of alliteration that they cannot be used in isolation. It is signifi-
cant in this context that *Grágás*, laying down sanctions against the use of satirical

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[19]   Aðalbjarnarson 1941-51 vol. 2 p. 361.

[20]   In the form of dialogue inserted within prose narrative, as happens frequently in the
        sagas.

[21]   The classic case is the exchange of insults in *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða*: these start as
        couplets, as feelings rise it is quatrains that are exchanged, while the final, deadly
        insult is a full stanza. (Jóhannesson 1946 p. 25.)

verse, prescribes outlawry or equivalent compensation for anything from a quarter verse onwards; a single line appears not to have been considered capable of bearing satire.[22]

Two specific aspects of *Háttatal* suggest that the consistent use of single-line syntactic units was regarded as inappropriate to poetic style. The first is the presence of metres differentiated from standard form (in this *Háttatal* follows *Háttalykill*) by consistent end-stopping. *Áttmælt* and *sextánmælt* are both end-stopped, the latter being distinguished by mid-line stopping. The fact that end-stopping can be regarded as distinctive suggests that it was not general practice. The second is the use of *kenningar* as a differentiating and therefore metrically prescribed factor. Once *kenningar* of three elements or more are introduced, *enjambement*, between individual lines at least, becomes more or less inevitable; cf. *Háttatal* stanza 2:

> Fellr of fúra stilli
> fleinbraks, limu axla,
> Hamðis fang, þar er hringum
> hylr ættstuðill skylja.[23]

Here the three-element kenning *stilli fúra fleinbraks* 'quietener of the fire of arrow-clash' forms the prepositional object of 'fellr', and thus, (even in the convoluted syntax of the skaldic stanza) follows the main-verb *fellr*. As the verb in this position is fully stressed (the alliteration makes this clear beyond all doubt), and each nominal element must carry at least one stress (the composite *fleinbraks*, as the combination of rhyme and alliteration shows, carries two) there is no way in which they can be encompassed together with a verb within a single three-stressed line of *dróttkvætt*.

Enjambement is most frequent at the juncture between the odd and the even line in *dróttkvætt*, where the metrical linkage is closest, and not uncommon between *fjórðungar*. On the other hand, there is not one instance of Snorri's using it at the break between the *helmingar*. Even syntactical linkage between the two halves by use of a conjunction or a back-referring pronoun is rare,[24] though frequently *helmingar* which are syntactically independent contain other cohesive devices to make them into complementary units.

A specific form of *enjambement* is that created when the metre prescribes parenthetical semantic structure, as in st. 12 *(stælt)*. In this instance a form of tmesis is created, with one syntactic unit being forcibly held apart by the parenthesis, and an *enjambement* demanded by the sense being prevented by the exigencies of the form. So in the first *helmingr* of st. 12, the sentence *Hákun veldr teitr þjóðkonungs heiti ok hǫlðum* 'Hákon the glad wields (i.e. possesses) the name of king and (wields, i.e. controls, [zeugma]) men' is split by the parenthesis *guð lér harðráðum tiggja jarðar með tíri* 'God gives the stern leader lands with glory' as follows:

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22   See Tranter 1991 pp. 178, 183-5.

23   Faulkes 1991 p. 5.

24   Linkage by conjunction occurs once, in st. 54 (*en*, adversative); by pronoun in 71 (*hinn's*, relative), 80 (*hans*, possessive), 84 (*hinn er*, relative).

Hákun veldr ok hǫlðum
(harðráðum guð jarðar
tiggja lér með tíri)
teitr þjóðkonungs heiti.[25]

9.3.2   Irish

Syntax of such a convoluted nature as the above is by no means abnormal in Ice-
landic poetry; in Irish it would appear to be highly unusual. This is suggested by
the existence of a specific metre *deibide docheil a chubaid* 'deibide that conceals
its rhyme', in which regular *enjambement* is the distinguishing feature, as in the
following satirical verse found in MV 1:

Mac Con Aba
noco déni mada
acht críathrad mine la mac
Móenaig ocus doirséoracht.

'Mac Con Aba
doesn't do anything useless
except sieving meal with Mac
Móenaig and portering.'[26]

9.4   Style and lexis

9.4.1   Introductory

When prescriptions regulate individual semantic units, we are justified in speaking
of poetic lexis; when they govern the admissibility of syntactic constructions, we
may speak of poetic style. However, it is not always possible to draw an absolute
distinction.

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[25]   Faulkes 1991 p. 10.

[26]   Ó hAodha 1991 p. 242, my translation. It is notable that both this and the example
        given by Thurneysen, MV p. 20, are satirical; the concealment of rhyme which gives
        the form its name takes place on the acoustic plane. This, like the form *deibide
        baisse fri thóin,* seems to suggest that lay poets were not above playing with clerical
        metres and adapting them to their own purposes.

9.4.2   Lexis

9.4.2.1   Icelandic

That Icelandic had a specialised poetic lexis at its disposal is amply demonstrated by the *þula* concluding *Skáldskaparmál*. This metrical list contains 101 stanzas of variable length (8 lines is the commonest) in loosely alliterative metre. Each stanza consists of a series of synonyms:

> Eg mun seigia
> suerda heiti.
> hior.hrotti.
> haugudr.draguandill.
> groa.gramr.gellir.
> giallr ok nedan scardr.
> sigdr.snyrtir.
> sciomi.somi[27]

The lists frequently extend over several stanzas; the synonyms for *sword*, for example take up nine stanzas including that quoted above. The majority of synonyms given are of the single-element type; where compounds are used, they are formed by apposition. It has become customary to refer to these synonyms as *heiti* (cf. l.2 of the above list), in opposition to *kenningar*; Snorri distinguishes between *ókennd heiti* and *kennd heiti* respectively.

Lists of *heiti* such as the one given above suggest that they were intended to be learned by heart and used to overcome the exigencies of the alliterative metre; given sufficient synonyms, the skald could be reasonably sure of having one of the correct number of syllables and fitting the alliteration required. This at least seems to be suggested by the Icelandic Rune Poem,[28] which to each verse appends a synonym for 'king', giving in effect a synonym for each stave of the runic alphabet. A *þula* was a closed system; it was intended to contain all the acceptable synonyms for its head-word. Similarly, by compiling a collection of such lists for all those terms from the life of the *comitatus* of sufficient frequency that collections of synonyms were desirable, one could arrive at a closed corpus of *skáldskaparmál*, of poetic diction. This closed corpus contrasts with the open-ended system of *kenningar* discussed below.

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[27]   'I will say / the names of swords'; the following lines consist of synonyms that English, lacking this specific poetic lexis, cannot adequately render; cf. Finnur Jónsson *Lex. Poet.* for interpretations of specific terms.

[28]   Halsall 1981, Appendix.

9.4.2.2   Irish

The Irish tracts do not indicate the existence of a specifically poetic lexis in syl-
labic-stanzaic metres; the verse examples in the text do not show a significant
divergence in lexis from prose of a comparable period. The forms known vari-
ously as *roscad* or *retoiric* exhibit a high degree of abstruseness in their vocabu-
lary. Scholars are not agreed as to whether this represents genuine archaism or an
arcane lexis similar to that displayed in the *Hisperica Famina.*

9.5   Style - *kenningar* and *chevilles*

Kenningar, in the sense of multi-element periphrases, are present in both lan-
guages, as has been observed by W. Krause (1930). Indeed, if one accepts their
origin in *noa*-language,[29] they are widespread enough to be regarded as universal.
Their occurrence in Irish (and for that matter in Old English) was sporadic; in Ice-
land they had evolved into a highly sophisticated form of poetic style.

The *kenning* in Irish is an occasional ornament; in skaldic poetry its frequency
is such that it can be considered one of the distinguishing features of the genre.

Kenningar do not constitute a closed system, as do arguably *heiti.*[30] There is no
question of their being listed and these lists being learned and re-used by sub-
sequent poets; it was rather a point of honour that a skald should not use the *ken-
ningar* of his predecessors. This was no insurmountable problem, bearing in mind
that Snorri considers *kenningar* of up to five elements to be permissible.[31] Clearly,
with *kenningar* of this complexity, the range of possible permutations borders on
the infinite.

Nonetheless, the illusion still appears to persist among some comparativists that
the use of the *kenning* can be explained on grounds of metrical exigency, and is
thus comparable with the Irish *cheville*, an illusion which has been nourished by
the tendency of editions of sagas, notably *Íslenzk Fornrit,* to follow Finnur
Jónsson's practise of providing "plain text translations" of *kenningar* and thus

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[29]   Perkins 1985 pp. 169-70.

[30]   Here I follow Bjarne Fidjestøl 1974, whose argument can be summarized as follows:
        the kenning system can be analysed as a language by analogy with principles of lin-
        guistic analysis:

        Language: limited inventory of phonemes/morphemes to produce near-infinite vari-
        ants,

        Kenning-system: limited inventory of individual lexical elements to produce near-
        infinite number of *kenningar* (pp. 27-9).

[31]   Use of five elements is considered 'license', more than five 'irregularity'; Faulkes
        1991 p. 8. The judgement is endorsed by Óláfr Hvítaskáld, quoting Snorri.

reducing them to banality.[32] Recent scholarship[33] has done much to correct this view among scholars of Scandinavian, but it seems reasonable to stress the point once more in the interdisciplinary context.

9.5.1   *Kenningar* as thematically integrated components

In his discussion of *nýgjǫrving*,[34] Snorri points out the desirability of paying strict attention to the semantic content of *kenningar*. The extent to which this can form an integral part of the overall statement of a stanza is particularly well illustrated by the following example:[35]

> Brim gnýr, brattir hamrar
> blálands Haka strandar;
> allt gjalfr eyja þjalfa
> út líðr í stað víðis;
> mér kveð ek heldr of Hildi
> hrannbliks en þér miklu
> svefnfátt; sǫrva Gefnar
> sakna man ek ef ek vakna.[36]

The message of the poem is banal enough, translated into *kenning*-less language; Kormákr lies awake in a ship, sleepless, thinking of his beloved Steingerðr[37] ashore. It thus follows the time-worn contrast-pattern of the sailor's complaint, a pattern founded on the fundamental opposition: at sea - ashore.[38] Kormákr applies this structure of oppositions to his own state of mind, as a prose translation that did justice to the semantic comment of the *kenningar* would reveal:

> 'The surf grinds the steep cliffs of the strand of the sea-king Haki,
> The surge of the islands' belt flows out into the place of spaciousness.

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32   cf. Vígfússon's condemnation of skaldic poetry in Corpus Poeticum p. 449 "[…] so it comes that the ornament, which Bragi and Thiodwolf wisely restricted to the main subjects of their poem, their ingenuity on it *there*, is now spread over every noun in every line, till the hearer gives up all idea of tracking down the poor little thought under its gorgeous garniture, and is content to listen to the babble of sweet sound."

33   Fidjestøl 1974, Marold 1983, Krömmelbein 1983.

34   Faulkes 1991 pp. 6-7.

35   cf. Turville-Petre 1976 pp. 48-9.

36   Text from Turville-Petre 1976 pp. 48-9. The verse is attributed to a skald with the enticingly Irish name of Kormákr, hero of the eponymous saga.

37   The name *Steingerðr*, as Sigurður Haraldsson pointed out, is concealed in the phrase *sǫrva Gefnar*; both Gefn and Gerðr are by-names for Freyja, and the necklace is made of precious stones.

38   cf. Perkins 1985 pp. 162-3.

I claim that I, because of the Valkyrie of the wave's sparkle, far more than you
am sleepless; I will miss the Gefn of necklaces if I awaken.'

The turbulence of the poet's mind is reflected, conventionally enough, in the
turbulence of the waves, breaking in the first *fjórðungr* and receding in the second.
The *kenningar* used, on the other hand, reinforce the fundamental opposition,
referring to sea in terms of land in the first *fjórðungr* and drawing the contrast
between broken, inshore water and open sea in the second. With the beginning of
the second *helmingr* we see the opposition between external and internal
turbulence, while the link between the two is made through the first kenning, in
which the effect of the beloved's beauty on the lover's eye is conveyed through the
metaphor of the sailor dazzled by the sparkling of the sunlight on the wave. The
whole concludes with a paradox; thoughts of the beloved are keeping him awake,
but only if he sleeps (and dreams) can his longing be satisfied. The sequence of
kenningar conforms strictly with the requirements of *nýgjǫrving* as outlined by
Snorri.[39] The plain-text and the encoded text of the *kenning* are interwoven,[40] not
merely metrically, but semantically, without either, a substantial portion of the
poem would be lost. This highly integrated status sets the *kenning* clearly apart
from the Irish *cheville*.

9.5.2   The *cheville*

The *cheville* in Irish metres is, as the French word (*cheville* 'plug, stop-gap, etc.')
suggests, an insertion, found frequently in syllabic metres. In its most common
form it is a three-syllable phrase bearing two stress-accents to be found at the line-
ending of stanzaic metres. The second stress-accent generally bears rhyme, while
the first frequently contributes to the alliterative scheme of the verse, as illustrated
by the folllowing:

A Chú Chulaind, *comall ngaíth,*
A firánraith, a fírlaích...

'O C.C, wise fulfilment,
O great hero, O great warrior'[41]

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39   To complete the picture, the poet has portrayed the whole in a metre which would
      have been known to the initiate as *skjálfhent*, 'shivering rhyme', the story being that
      it had been composed by a shipwrecked mariner, lying on a rock awaiting rescue.
      This at least is the account given in the commentary to *Háttatal*, Faulkes 1991 p. 18;
      the term also occurs in *tvískelft* (p. 16) and *skjálfhenda in nyja*, suggesting that an
      onomastic tale had become current about a term which derived from the shivering
      effect of the closely positioned alliterations characteristic of these metres.

40   The concept of weaving for the introduction of metrical complexity is present in the
      Irish term *trebraid*, as well as occurring in Old English.

41   cf. O' Rahilly, ed., *Táin Bó Cúalnge,* Dublin 1967, p. 88.

in which the first stress of the *cheville: co,* provides alliteration with *Chulaind,* the second: *ngaíth,* rhymes with the second line. The semantic vagueness of the whole allows it to be inserted in a multitude of situations.

An examination of *chevilles* reveals a fundamental difference between them and the *kenning.* The cheville can generally be removed without detriment to syntactic or semantic content of the verse, in other words it functions at a purely metrical level. The *kenning,* on the other hand, shows no intrinsic pattern of metrical regularity, but functions at a syntactic level. The *cheville* enables the poet to gain metrical complexity, the *kenning* is an instrument for increasing semantic compression.