

Zeitschrift: Beiträge zur nordischen Philologie
Herausgeber: Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Skandinavische Studien
Band: 72 (2022)

Artikel: Þuríður Barkardóttir and the poetry of Eyrbyggja saga
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-976348>

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Puríðr Barkardóttir and the Poetry of *Eyrbyggja saga*

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Keywords: *Eyrbyggja saga*, Old Norse literature, saga prosimetrum, women in the *Íslendingasögur*, Puríðr Barkardóttir

In her classification of *Íslendingasögur* according to the way in which they use poetry, Guðrún Nordal (2007: 231) put *Eyrbyggja saga* into her final group 6, sagas which “use poetic citations as an integral part of the narrative [but in which] the poetry is neither the platform on which the main hero gives memorable soliloquies nor is the verse spread thinly in the narrative”.¹ The saga’s bedfellows in this group, *Njáls saga*, *Heiðarvíga saga* and *Svarfdæla saga* are all rather different, underlining Guðrún’s (2007: 237) point that the style of prosimetrum across the corpus seems to depend on the saga author’s thematic or narratological preferences. The slightly miscellaneous quality of the characteristics of this group highlights the non-conformity of their prosimetric style, with *Eyrbyggja* distinguished by its quotation of poetry by figures who are not part of the story: namely, the praise poetry by Þormóðr Trefilsson and Oddr skáld. This mode of corroboration, characteristic of the *konungasögur*, is relatively rare in the *Íslendingasögur*. In this essay I will analyse the quoted verse as an interconnected set, in order to adumbrate the inherited traditions the saga narrator was working with; to try to connect plot lines across the verse with a view to discerning the preoccupations and recurrent ideas expressed in the poetry. This is an approach I have experimented with in order to make sense of the generically unexpected appearance of the eddic poem *Darraðarljóð* in *Njáls saga* (see Quinn 2017); considering the poem not solely in the context of its immediate prosimetric setting, but in relation to the other poetry quoted by the saga narrator.²

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- 1 The research for this essay was first presented at the Seventeenth International Saga Conference in Reykjavík in 2018. I am grateful for discussions with colleagues at the conference session and later about the prosimetrum of the *Íslendingasögur*. Stefanie Gropper and I have since been awarded bilateral funding from the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council [AH/T012757/1] and the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft [GR 3613/5-1] for the collaborative project ‘The *Íslendingasögur* as Prosimetrum’.
 - 2 The scholarship on *Eb* is extensive, particularly with regard to the structure of the saga and the role in the saga of Snorri goði Þorgrímsson: see, among others, Ásdís Egilsdóttir (2015), Torfi Tulinius (2007), Rory McTurk (1986), Forrest Scott (1985 and 2003), Carol Clover (1982), Einar Ól Sveinsson (1968), Theodore Andersson (1967), and Lee M. Hollander (1959). The prosimetrum of the saga has also been the subject of analysis: see in particular the thorough treatment by Heather O’Donoghue (2005) and the earlier analysis by Paul Bibire (1973).

The stanzas quoted in *Eyrbyggja saga*

In the Table below, the stanzas quoted in *Eyrbyggja saga* are listed along with the chapter/s they are quoted in, the poet who is said to have composed them and the manner in which each stanza is introduced in the prose.³ The inquit to quotations by the narrator of stanzas from praise poems are distinctive in style: they always name the poet (Oddr is in fact identified not by his family name, but by his status as a *skáld*) and sometimes the title of the poem; they often deploy the adverb *svá* (“just as”) as a way of asserting that the quotation will corroborate what has just been advanced in the prose, with that link occasionally elaborated in a phrase beginning *um* ... (“about [this] ...”). In some of these inquit, the act of poetic composition is foregrounded by the use of the verb *yrkja* (“to compose”), wording which nonetheless draws attention to the passage of time between composition and quotation. Yet this could be offset by shifting the tense of the verb in the inquit into the present, as happens with one of the quoted stanzas from *Hrafnsmál*: “*Svá segir Þormóður Trefilsson í Hrafnsmálum*” (*Eb*: 124; “Just as Þormóður Trefilsson says in *Hrafnsmál*”). Here, the poet is conjured up as a contemporary participant in the telling of the saga. That the saga narrator has selected a particular stanza for a specific moment in the narrative is suggested by the use of demonstrative adjectives, such as in the line “*kvað Þormóður Trefilsson vísu þessa*” (*Eb*: 67; “Þormóður Trefilsson recited this verse”), indicating that a precise stanza has been plucked out of its traditional context for redeployment in the saga. While the use of a demonstrative adjective is relatively common in the quotation of stanzas from praise poems – where the stanzas are explicitly excerpted – it also occurs in the inquit to stanzas recited by figures in the narrative, emphasising the particularity of the utterance that the narrator is staging as he quotes Halli, Björn, an unnamed old woman and a severed head. Many of the stanzas recited by figures in the saga are woven into the temporal flow of the narrative by the adverb *þá* (“then”), a feature that is absent from the inquit to praise poems.

Chapter	Poet number of stanzas	Poem	Recited by	Inquit
Ch. 17	Oddr skáld 2 stanzas : <i>Eb</i> sts. 1–2	<i>Illuga- drápa</i>	narrator	<i>Svá kvað/segir Oddr skáld í Illugadrápu</i> “Just as the poet Oddr recited/says in his <i>drápa</i> about Illugi”
Chs 18–22	Þórarinn svarti Þórólfs- son 17 stanzas : <i>Eb</i> sts. 3–19		Þórarinn	<i>Þórarinn kvað þá vísu/Þórarinn kvað/Þá kvað Þórarinn/... kvað Þórarinn</i> “Þórarinn recited this verse/then Þórarinn recited”
Ch. 26	Þormóður Trefilsson 1 stanza : <i>Eb</i> st. 20	<i>Hrafnsmál</i>	narrator	<i>Þormóður Trefilsson kvað vísu þessa um ...</i> “Þormóður Trefilsson recited this verse about ...”

3 Quotations of the prose text of *Eb* are from the Íslenzk fornrit edition, with translations based on Quinn (2003). References to the quoted stanzas of *Eb* are to the forthcoming edition *Poetry in the Íslendingasögur* (= Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 5) and follow the numbering there (for example, *Eb*: st. 1); see Heslop (forthcoming) and Quinn (forthcoming).

Chapter	Poet number of stanzas	Poem	Recited by	Inquit
Ch. 28	Halli <i>berserkr</i> 1 stanza: <i>Eb</i> st. 21		Halli	<i>Þá kvað Halli vísu þessa</i> “Then Halli recited this verse”
Ch. 28	Leiknir <i>berserkr</i> 1 stanza: <i>Eb</i> st. 22		Leiknir	<i>Þá kvað Leiknir</i> “Then Leiknir recited”
Ch. 28	Víga-Styrr Þorgrímsson 1 stanza: <i>Eb</i> st. 23		Styrr	<i>... kvað Styrr vísu</i> “Styrr recited a verse”
Ch. 29	Björn Breiðvíkingakappi Ásbrandsson 2 stanzas: <i>Eb</i> sts. 24–25		Björn	<i>Þá kvað Björn vísu þessa /Björn kvað</i> “Then Björn recited this verse/Björn recited”
Ch. 37	Þormóður Trefilsson 1 stanza: <i>Eb</i> st. 26	<i>Hrafnsmál</i>	narrator	<i>Um [...] kvað Þormóður Trefilsson vísu þessa</i> “About [...] Þormóður Trefilsson recited this verse”
Ch. 40	Björn Breiðvíkingakappi 5 stanzas: <i>Eb</i> sts. 27–31		Björn	<i>Þá kvað Björn vísu þessa/Þá kvað Björn vísu/ok enn kvað hann/Björn kvað</i> “Then Björn recited this verse/Björn recited a verse/and again he recited”
Ch. 43	höfuðit 1 stanza: <i>Eb</i> st. 32		Unidentified head	<i>Höfuðit kvað stöku þessa</i> “The head recited this bit of verse”
Ch. 44	Þormóður Trefilsson 1 stanza: <i>Eb</i> st. 33	<i>Hrafnsmál</i>	narrator	<i>Svá segir Þormóður Trefilsson í Hrafnsmálum</i> “Just as Þormóður Trefilsson says in <i>Hrafnsmál</i> ”
Ch. 56	Þormóður Trefilsson 1 stanza: <i>Eb</i> st. 34	<i>Hrafnsmál</i>	narrator	<i>... orti Þormóður Trefilsson í Hrafnsmálum vísu þessa</i> “Þormóður Trefilsson composed this verse in <i>Hrafnsmál</i> ”
Ch. 62	Þormóður Trefilsson 1 stanza: <i>Eb</i> st. 35	<i>Hrafnsmál</i>	narrator	<i>Svá sagði Þormóður í Hrafnsmálum</i> “Just as Þormóður Trefilsson said in <i>Hrafnsmál</i> ”
Ch. 63	Fóstra Þórodds 2 stanzas: <i>Eb</i> sts. 36–37		Un-named old woman	<i>Þá kvað kerling vísu þessa/hon kvað</i> “Then the old woman recited this verse/she recited”

Table 1: The stanzas quoted in *Eyrbyggja saga*

From Table 1, it can be seen how *Eyrbyggja saga* is held together structurally by five quotations from Þormóður Trefilsson’s *Hrafnsmál*. The stanzas, which articulate the spine of the plot, celebrate a series of killings: of Vigfúss Bjarnarson (*Eb*: st. 20); of Arnkell goði Þórólfsson (*Eb*: st. 26); of five captured men at the battle of Alptafjörður (*Eb*: st. 33); of two

unnamed men closely followed by another seven at a site south of the river which a pun reveals to be Þórsnes (*Eb*: st. 34); and the killing of three sailors at Bitra (*Eb*: st. 35). The perpetrator of the killings is identified twice as Snorri goði (see *Eb*: sts. 26 and 33); otherwise, the killer, and some of his victims, are designated by an array of warrior-kennings. The broader canvas of the prose narrative reveals that Snorri did not always win – in fact he often lost cases and failed in his punishing missions – but praise poetry, by definition, keeps its sights on the victories. In addition, as many commentators have noted, the saga narrator has an ambivalent attitude towards Snorri goði, fulsomely praising instead one of his enemies, Arnkell, after Snorri has killed him (see *Eb*: 103).

Pormóðr, on the other hand, praises Snorri through repeated allusions to the feeding of ravens on the corpses of the men he has killed (see *Eb*: sts. 20 and 35). This is a poem celebrating a successful war-leader in the manner of praise poems for foreign rulers, those which form the backbone of many *konungasögur*. But in the prosimetrum of *Eyrbyggja saga* the juxtaposition of grandiose skaldic lexis and the quotidian banality of farmland feuding is sometimes jarring. When Snorri and six men ambush a farmer called Vigfúss who is unarmed and burning charcoal in the woods, for instance, the poet describes Snorri as “the ruler of the people” (*folksvaldi*) – a moot point – and Vigfúss as the warrior who knocked off gold-adorned helmets (“veltir gollbyrsta valgaltar”) (*Eb*: st. 20). In fact, according to the saga, Vigfúss’s experience in combat seems to have been limited to an unsuccessful scheme to bribe his slave to stab Snorri at his farm when he was going outside to the toilet (see *Eb*: 66). It is tempting to read irony here, or bathos, but it is probably just the shift in register, as successful brutality heaves itself up to the level of admirable leadership that is the idiom of the skaldic *drápa*. The reported recitation of praise for Snorri as an established ruler is also clearly at odds with the prose account of his continuing struggle to assert himself against an array of often likeable adversaries. The quotation of praise poetry in this saga genre can create a kind of dissonance, in terms of the overall semantics of the prosimetric work.

Unlike his uncle Gísli, Snorri goði appears not to have been much of a poet himself; at least no poetry by him is quoted in *Eyrbyggja saga*, though a short sarcastic ditty is attributed to him in *Njáls saga*. He would presumably have been pleased nonetheless with the poetry which praised his blood-thirsty pursuit of vengeance and one-up-manship. The first quotation of verse in *Eyrbyggja saga* is from another praise poem, by the poet Oddr in honour of Illugi svarti, and it also focusses on Snorri. Illugi plays a very minor part in the saga – he returns among Snorri’s enemies at a later point during the battle of Alptafjörðr in chapter 56, which is the subject of one of the quoted stanzas from *Hrafnsmál* (see *Eb*: st. 34) – but his first appearance, and the verses quoted that commemorate it, establish an important theme in the saga: the pivotal role of marriage arrangements in political manoeuvring.

The pair of stanzas by Oddr describes a withheld dowry for Illugi’s wife which he pursues through legal action supplemented by mob pressure (see *Eb*: sts. 1–2). A fragile settlement is reached before further violence erupts, with an eventual settlement negotiated by Snorri goði. Given that Snorri’s friendship with Illugi eventually turns sour, there is some irony in Illugi’s eponymous *drápa* celebrating how Snorri’s leadership grew famous from the encounter (*Eb*: st. 2; “þat forráð fyrða gørðisk frægt”). The saga narrator notes that after Snorri’s intervention in the case, he and Illugi remained friends “for the time being” (*Eb*: 33; “váru þeir þa vinir um hríð”). But perhaps this encounter

needs to be viewed in the context of the saga narrator's closing observation on Snorri goði, that in his later years his popularity increased partly because the number of his opponents decreased (*Eb*: 180; "En er Snorri tók at eldask, þá tóku at vaxa vinsældir hans, ok bar þat til þess, at þá fækkuðusk ofundarmenn hans"). Mainly, it might be glossed, because Snorri killed them.

Puríðr Barkardóttir – the outlines of a life

As can be seen from the inquires in Table 1 above, the stanzas quoted from the praise poetry of Þormóðr and Oddr are drawn on for their corroboration of events in Snorri's life. A surprisingly high proportion of the rest of the poetry in the saga, however, orbits the life of Snorri's half-sister Puríðr. As is dramatically told in *Gísla saga Súrssonar*, Puríðr's mother, Þórdís, was married to the chieftain Þorgrímr Þorsteinsson, before he was murdered by Þórdís's brother, Gísli. Their son, Þorgrímr, given the name Snorri, is born after his father's death when Þórdís has married her first husband's brother, Þorkr, and gone to live with him at Helgafell. Puríðr is thus the daughter of Þórdís and her second husband, making her Snorri's half-sister. Puríðr is introduced in chapter 15 of *Eyrbyggja saga* as the wife of Þorbjörn digri ("the fat") of Fróðá, who had previously been married to another woman called Puríðr, the sister of Björn Breiðvíkingakappi, who – the saga narrator rather ominously notes – "comes into the saga later" (*Eb*: 27; "er enn kemr síðar við þessa sögu").

Þorbjörn has a son called Gunnlaugr – *Landnámabók* specifies that he is from his first marriage (see *Ldn*: 112) – who is therefore Puríðr's step-son. Gunnlaugr flirts with the occult and in particular with Geirríðr, the daughter of the wily Þórólfr bægifótr Bjarnarson who, one way or another, haunts most of the saga. After Gunnlaugr is mysteriously assaulted, Geirríðr is blamed and Þorbjörn prosecutes the case with support from Snorri who, through Puríðr's marriage, is Gunnlaugr's step-mother's half-brother. They lose the case in the face of the defence put up by Geirríðr's brother, Arnkell, and her son, Þórarinn. Tensions between the two sides escalate, and in a skirmish arising from the dispute the hand of Þórarinn's wife is cut off. Overheard boasting that the amputator was her own husband leads to violent retaliation, with Þórarinn killing, among others, Puríðr's husband Þorbjörn. In his dramatically-staged poetic account of the dispute, known as the *Máhlíðingavísur*, Þórarinn declares that he will defy the likely legal action Snorri will take (see *Eb*: st. 5).⁴

Þórarinn also observes that the recently widowed Puríðr is *qldrukkin* and *hoppfögr* (*Eb*: st. 17; "drunk on ale", "lovely to watch as she dances"). Puríðr's high spirits are noted in the prose account as well, Arnkell suggesting that Puríðr might be amused by Þórarinn's pensive mood, given how cheerful she is at being widowed (*Eb*: 49). So little attention is paid to the characterization of Puríðr by the saga narrator that it is hard to judge the import of these remarks, other than to note that there is no mention in the saga of Puríðr having been consulted about her marriage, and her husband was described as an unbalanced man who bullied weaker men (*Eb*: 29; "Þorbjörn var mikil fyrir sér ok ósvífr við sér minni menn"). While she might not mourn the loss of her husband, some of the criticism of her by scholars is surely unwarranted. Vésteinn Ólason (2003: xxviii) claimed that Puríðr is "implicated in an evil scheme against Þórarinn and his wife" and that she is "repeatedly the cause of

4 See further Kate Heslop (forthcoming), Vésteinn Ólason (1989), and Russell Poole (1985).

conflicts, as her mother was in *Gísla saga*”, echoing a judgement by Gabriel Turville-Petre (1976: 63) that “[Þuríðr] inherited the erotic tendencies of her mother”. While Þórarinn’s poetry makes frequent mention of justifying his conduct to a listening woman (see *Eb*: sts. 5, 10, 14, 16 and 19) and refers to women’s taunts (see *Eb*: sts. 3, 5, 8 and 17), there are a number of suspects in the frame for that, including his own mother, Geirríðr (see *Eb*: 36). There is, however, no textual support for the assumption that it was Þuríðr who urged the mutilation of her stepson and the subsequent killing of her own husband.

Þórarinn’s reflective poetry about his reluctant involvement in violent retaliation uses the same idiom of carrion birds feasting on flesh as *Hrafnsmál*, but in its detailed elaboration of reactions and effects, he produces more subtle poetry than commissioned praise can elicit, poetry that the saga narrator was clearly drawn to since he quotes his source extensively across several chapters, accommodating seventeen stanzas in all. Þórarinn was himself no fan of Snorri goði, whom he describes in his verse as “vittr vekjandi löggráns” (*Eb*: st. 5; “the clever awakener of law-robbery”), anticipating that Snorri will attempt to outlaw him, an eventuality the prose narrative later describes.

Soon after her husband’s death, Snorri goði has his half-sister moved back from Fróðá to Helgafell because of rumours that Björn Breiðvíkingakappi was visiting her with the aim of seducing her (see *Eb*: 55). Björn is the brother of her late husband’s first wife, though nothing is made of that by the saga narrator. Once again, there is no reporting of Þuríðr’s attitude or agency in these encounters, which are narrated through the patriarchal lens of marriages arranged for political or financial advantage. Indeed, Snorri soon leaps at the opportunity of marrying his sister off a second time when a returning sailor, who has made his money exploiting shipwrecked tax-collectors, stays at Helgafell. Þoroddr skattkaupandi (“tax-trader”) seems like a good prospect to Snorri, though there is no genealogical depth to his identity, only a nickname, perhaps underlining the expediency of the arrangement. There is also no mention of Þuríðr being consulted before the wedding takes place and she is expeditiously returned to her old home at Fróðá with a new husband.

Björn returns to Fróðá too, and resumes his love affair with Þuríðr, with Þoroddr unable to do much about it. With help from his farmhands and a neighbour’s sons, he ambushes Björn, who is outnumbered five to one but still manages to kill two of his attackers. Only three of the attackers survive, with Þoroddr sustaining minor injuries and Björn bloodied but unbowed. Snorri prosecutes the case and Björn, Snorri’s sister’s lover, is outlawed for three years. The summer Björn leaves, Þuríðr gives birth to his son, Kjartan, who is raised as Þoroddr’s son.

No account at all is given of Þuríðr’s reaction to any of this, except that she seems to reciprocate Björn’s love. When Björn returns to Iceland, he soon seeks out Þuríðr again. His friend warns him off resuming the affair, with Björn acknowledging the danger involved in taking on her brother Snorri (see *Eb*: 109). He continues the affair, nonetheless. Þoroddr is perplexed by his impotence at preventing his wife’s affair and, like a number of figures in *Eyrbyggja saga*, resorts to magic, paying for a magical storm to prevent, or at least delay, Björn’s next visit to Þuríðr. Eventually exasperated, Þoroddr appeals to Snorri to intervene to end his humiliation. Snorri is, however, outplayed by Björn, who holds a knife to his chest while they exchange pleasantries after Snorri’s ambush goes wrong (see *Eb*: 132–134). Björn suggests a truce, something Snorri agrees to on condition the affair ends. Björn explains that he will be unable to stop seeing Þuríðr while they live in the same district, to which

Snorri replies that he should therefore leave the district. Something to which Björn – tacitly impelled by his own logic – agrees.

Björn sails away on a strong nor-easter, driven as much by the convention that poet-lovers in the *Íslendingasögur* never achieve conjugal bliss as by Snorri's assertion of control. In line with those same conventions, it is his rival Þóroddr who is named in Björn's verses (and not Snorri, the architect of Björn's retreat). Björn's verses express his longing for long days spent with Puríðr and his frustration at the impediments to their union, including days spent during bad weather sheltering in a cave rather than enjoying the comfort of her bed (see *Eb*: sts. 29–31). In his verses, Björn also acknowledges his paternity of Kjartan (see *Eb*: sts. 27–28).

We next encounter Puríðr distracting herself from the sorrow of their parting with an interest in the fine clothes and bed-linen brought to Iceland by a visiting Hebridean woman called Þorgunna (see *Eb*: 137). Before Þorgunna dies of a mysterious illness, she gives specific instructions that her beautiful bed-linen must be destroyed, although she bequeaths a scarlet cloak to Puríðr. As her husband Þóroddr attempts to burn the linen, Puríðr intervenes and persuades him to disregard Þorgunna's baleful warnings (see *Eb*: 142). Hauntings of marvellous variety ensue, with young Kjartan proving an effective ghost-buster in a lively sequence of chapters that are, however, without poetry so they will be skipped over here, noting only that Þóroddr ends up being drowned at sea. When Puríðr herself falls ill, Kjartan burns the bed-linen (as well as prosecuting the assembled revenants, which include the drowned Þóroddr) and Puríðr recovers, living to a grand old age apparently without being married off again. Many scholars have seen some kind of moral in this episode, accusing Puríðr of vanity or covetousness. Bernadine McCreesh (1978–1979: 274) suggests “the implication is that if Puríðr had not coveted them so much as to refuse to have them destroyed, the hauntings might never have taken place”, while Rory McTurk (1986) cites Kjartan Ottósson who argues that Puríðr plays a role similar to Eve in the Old Testament. It is an odd ethical landscape that this reading constructs – underwritten though it may be by Christian teaching – where the desire to preserve high quality domestic goods is seen as a moral failing while serial murder and violent harassment are simply the collateral damage of political ascendancy.

Conclusions

I have dwelt on the outlines of Puríðr's life because a significant number of verses quoted in the saga are motivated by events in her life: she is the focus of Björn's verses and alluded to in Þórarinn's. Another intriguing sequence of verses interrupts the narrative of Björn and Puríðr's affair, which is first mentioned in chapter 22, before becoming the focus of the saga in chapters 29 and 40, as well as recurring in a postlude in chapter 64 when, years later, Björn sends a token of his continued devotion to Puríðr from a distant land. In the meantime, two Swedish warriors, named Halli and Leiknir, are people-trafficked between Scandinavian kings before being passed on to a visiting Iclander as a means of increasing his prestige; he in turn passes them on to his brother, Víga-Styrr Þorgrímsson. Part of the deal between their traffickers is that the *berserkir*, as they are described in the saga, should be well looked after and not denied what they ask for. They express the desire to marry into their adoptive community in Iceland but when one of

them sets his heart on Styrr's daughter, Ásdís, her father becomes desperate to prevent the marriage eventuating.

The warriors up the ante in their marriage campaign by reciting *dróttkvætt* stanzas, demonstrating that they have class if not wealth and, in their adept crafting of kennings for women, demonstrate how well acquainted they are with the luxurious attributes that the leaders of their community identify with (see *Eb*: sts. 21–22). The impetus for their recitations, according to the saga, is Ásdís parading past them in all her finery, apparently complicit in her father's devious plan to thwart the aspirational marriage (see *Eb*: 73). Styrr has hatched his plan with none other than Snorri goði, so it should be no surprise that it ends in the brutal killing of both brothers. On form, Snorri also takes advantage of the situation by marrying Ásdís himself, forging a useful political alliance with her father and uncles (see *Eb*: 75). Although the burlesque sequence of *berserkr* verses does not bear directly on the affair between Snorri's sister and the Breiðavík champion, the poetry illuminates the same anxiety about losing control of the marriage arrangements of sisters and daughters which plays out across this phase of the saga. The suitors are different – the poetry they compose nonetheless plumbs similar feelings – and the response of the woman wooed is different, but the assertion of male control over the ultimate arrangement is very similar and Snorri plays a pivotal role in both cases. The trio of verses about a *berserkr*'s marriage proposal is therefore linked to the theme of controlling marriage alliances which flows through the saga's account of Þuríðr life story and is also signaled in the very first quotation by Oddr skáld. To some extent this pattern undermines the distinction drawn by Heather O'Donoghue (2005: 78) between the documentary quotations of praise poetry, on one hand, which is concerned with political themes and, on the other, all the *lausavísur* quoted in the saga, which she describes as providing “a completely different dimension . . . emphasiz[ing] the personal and emotional lives of individual[s]”. What might be termed the ‘marriage verses’ are essentially political – albeit expressed through the individual circumstances of different figures in the narrative – and they all contribute to the overall picture we get of Snorri's tactics in advancing himself and the limited options of women in his sphere.

As has often been observed, the narration of *Eyrbyggja saga* is conspicuous for its fascination with paranormal events and it is worth noting that most of these portions of the saga narrative are unsupported by verse quotation (see Bibire 1973: 6; McTurk 1986: 232). The exception is a pair of prophetic verses recited at the end of the saga by the unnamed foster-mother of Snorri's foster-brother, Þoroddr, about a rampaging bull which was apparently fathered by a cow ingesting the burnt remains of the troublesome Þórólfr bægifótr (see *Eb*: 169–176). All in all, there are thirty-seven stanzas quoted in *Eyrbyggja saga*, not the highest number among the *Íslendingasögur* but it is a figure that draws the saga towards the grouping of *skáldasögur*, a genre with which the Björn-strand of the narrative clearly has affinities. This was an author interested in the inherited corpus of poetry from the settlement period as well as in crafting a narrative about one of the most powerful men of the era. If we look at the plot lines across the poetry that is quoted in the saga, the gravitational pull of the life of Snorri's half-sister is evident. It is striking too that in the poetry quoted in the saga, women enjoy a lively presence – drinking, goading, dancing, making love – whereas in the prose their voices are muted if not mute: Ásdís, for instance, does not speak in the saga, even though one *berserkr* describes her as the “smiling-voiced

goddess of the drinking-horn [woman]” (*Eb*: st. 22; “hyrmælt Hlín hvítings”). Þuríður speaks only a few sentences throughout the whole saga despite motivating so much of the plot and a good deal of the quoted poetry: once to warn her lover about an ambush her husband is planning, once to discuss with Þorgunna the value of the bedclothes she coveted and once to dissuade her husband from burning them (see *Eb*: 78, 138–139, and 142–143). Socially marginal female figures like Þorgunna and Katla are more loquacious, a point which underlines the saga narrator’s recurring fascination with dramatizing the paranormal.

The inherited material in poetic form that the saga author had to draw on reveals slightly different preoccupations from those pursued in the prose. Presumably without poetry by Snorri himself to quote, the saga author had to go beyond the usual well of *lausavísur* attributed to figures from the past and delve instead into praise poetry, though it might be argued it suits the scenography of the *Íslendingasögur* less well than *lausavísur* do (see Einar Ól. Sveinsson/Matthías Þórðarson 1935: xi). While Snorri goði and Illugi svarti were not the only powerful Icelanders to have been attracted by the medium of the praise poem as a way of furthering their political legacies, they may have been among the first. That little of this kind of poetry was quoted in the corpus of *Íslendingasögur* is perhaps not all that surprising given that narrators typically worked to maintain the illusion that they were there on the scene, reporting what people were saying, what someone recited in the heat of the moment, not what someone beyond the story as it is told might have been induced to compose in the service of one of the saga characters. Overall, the authors of the *Íslendingasögur* seem to have preferred to stage verse recitation as a live performance within the story rather than as authorial scaffolding for their narrative authority. This is particularly clear in chapters 18 to 22 of *Eyrbyggja saga*, when the saga author stages the performance of seventeen verses by Þórarinn Þórólfsson as a sequence of responses to different interlocutors in different locations. If, as many have suspected, these once formed a cohesive poetic unit, the saga author can be seen transforming a poem into prosimetrum in a highly inventive way. It is therefore interesting to observe the ways in which the author of *Eyrbyggja saga* experimented with different prosimetric combinations. Perhaps we can even see something of the ambivalence towards Snorri manifested in the balancing of different types of poetry across the saga. The significant number of stanzas by Þórarinn that are quoted early on in the saga set the scene for a nuanced consideration of violent retaliation and even though Þórarinn himself is soon out of the saga, his reflective mindset lingers – adding dimension to the gory triumphalism of the body count which is the idiom of the praise poetry quoted in support of Snorri’s achievements. Þórarinn’s frequent apostrophes to a woman in his poetry also reinforces the impression that the forces that formed the social web of actions, interactions and reactions as recorded in the quoted poetry involved women in ways that the prose narrative plays down.

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