Kennings in Mind and Memory: Cognitive Poetics and Skaldic Verse

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Summary

This study looks the kennings in a selection of five skaldic poems (Vellekla, Hákonardrápa, Óxarflokkr, Íslendingadrápa, and Ævikviða Grettis Ásmundarsonar) from the perspective of cognitive poetics; a relatively new discipline which looks at the mental processes which underpin how humans experience literary and figurative language. In particular, the ways in which conventionalised language and conceptual associations worked alongside catachresis (the incongruous misapplication or misuse of words and concepts) to engage the recipients of a poem on multiple levels. These include enabling recipients to comprehend the obscure nature of skaldic poetry, generating aesthetic impact through irreconcilable contrasts, and enhancing the memorisation and recall of stanzas.

Additionally, this study looks at how kennings’ use of language could contribute to the field of cognitive poetics. Not only is wordplay re-evaluated as a form of knowledge-elaboration, but it is argued that the way in which kennings draw attention and rely heavily upon inferences and assumptions based upon knowledge shared by poet/performer and recipients means that they create “text worlds” – a kind of temporary mental world constructed from information provided in a text and common knowledge. These are usually only thought to happen in extended prose discourses, but skaldic diction’s allusive nature appears to create an exceptional case where metaphors can almost completely detach from the thing they are being used to describe, to elaborate upon other forms of knowledge. Ultimately, although skaldic poetry did change in response to cultural and literary shifts, the mental processes that allowed it to exist as a verbal art form remained largely continuous.
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May you always know where your towels are, froods.
Introduction
Scope and Aims

In her account of how the human mind can decipher obscure language through inferences based upon previous linguistic or real-world experiences, Judith Greene argues that ‘the pervasiveness of inferences does not mean that people have the right to churn out gobbledygook just so we can display our highly developed inferential powers.’\(^1\) Yet skaldic poetry, particularly its circumlocutory noun-substitutes known as kennings, seems to be a celebration of precisely this, pushing figurative language to its limits for aesthetic effect. This led to scholars in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to condemn skaldic diction, especially the kenning-system, as ‘every possible artifice of rhyme and alliteration … and, above all, far-sought metaphorical allusions … [developed to] extremes of ”false wit.”’\(^2\) In the twentieth century the ghost of such attitudes seems to have been laid to rest, and a vast amount of scholarship has been produced on the structural, aesthetic, linguistic, and socio-cultural aspects of skaldic poetry.\(^3\)

This paper will bring a selection of theories from the field of cognitive poetics and cognitive linguistics to close literary readings of a selection of skaldic poetry, looking at the mental processes which occur during an individual’s reception of skaldic verse, as well as interpretations of these effects and the meanings they convey.\(^4\) Not only can cognitive poetics enrich understanding of the aesthetic and intellectual appeal of kenning-imagery, but skaldic diction’s baroque nature and often extreme disregard for linguistic norms offer unique insights into figurative language that can contribute toward cognitive poetic theory.

\(^4\) A similar approach is taken in Antonina Harbus, Cognitive Approaches to Old English Poetry (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2012).
As this is a large undertaking, further parameters will be introduced, based upon a polity within research on kennings. Some scholars emphasise the conventionalised and ‘fundamentally rule-based\(^5\) nature of skaldic diction. This approach has its basis in the theory that kennings constituted a paralinguistic system (poetic *langue*) of conventionalised semantic formulae, which relied upon sets of associated concepts and words to be deciphered.\(^6\) Other scholars focus upon the catachresis (misapplication/misuse of words, tropes, or concepts)\(^7\) of kenning-imagery. These are based upon Hallvard Lie’s argument that skaldic diction’s catachresis evoked ‘en primitive myteskapende fantansk spenstighet,’ an aesthetic impression mirrored in the non-naturalistic, hybrid beings of Old Norse visual art.\(^8\) More recently, Bergsveinn Birgisson has argued for a mnemonic function of catachresis in skaldic diction.\(^9\) Some scholars have attempted to reconcile this division,\(^10\) but such approaches remain rare. Thus, this paper will aim to illustrate how kenning-imagery exploited the cognitive effects of catachresis and convention in tandem, to engage recipients on multiple levels simultaneously.

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\(^5\) Clunies Ross, *A History*, pp. 106-107


\(^7\) OED Online, s.v. ‘catachresis, n.’. (December 2016). <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/19650?redirectedFrom=catachresis> [Accessed 29th January 2017]. Catachresis will be favoured over *bizarreness*, as although that term can mean a departure from typical usage, it also suggests a departure from norms of taste or beauty, which is arguably not the case in skaldic verse. Furthermore, it is hard to gauge the norms of taste in Viking Age and medieval Scandinavia. See OED Online, “bizarre, adj. and n.”. (December 2016). <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/19650?redirectedFrom=bizarre> [Accessed 29th January 2017].


\(^10\) Schulte, p. 18, comments that kennings constitute ‘gnisten og den poetiske kraften i den uepiske skaldediktningen og er på ingen måte et stereotyp og isolerbart ornament’; and Elena Gurevich, ‘The System of Kennings’, *Nordica Bergensia* 3 (1994), pp. 139-156 argues that whilst the conventionalised system underpinning kennings was important, it was ‘the art of variation’ in synonym-choice that created aesthetic impact and allowed recipients to identify and comprehend individual kennings.
Sources

Skaldic poetry was practiced in Iceland, the Orkneys, and Norway. The earliest known verse dates from the ninth century, and the form was gradually supplanted by rímur during the fourteenth century. Both skaldic and eddic verse derive from Germanic alliterative verse, and although this terminology is a post-medieval construct, Old Norse sources do appear to distinguish so-called “skaldic” verse as poetry which is attributed to an individual skald (poet), with further subgenres identified by metre, subject matter, and illocutionary intent. As a universal definition of poetry is difficult, if not impossible, here a definition based upon observations from skaldic and eddic verse will be posited: *a form of verbal art, distinguished by exaggerated use of metaphor, metonymy, and wordplay/synonym-variation, and subject to pre-defined metres which determine alliteration, rhyme, and, in many cases, syllable-counts.*

Skaldic poetry was initially composed and transmitted in a pre-literate (oral) literary culture, and literacy did not become a widely-used tool until after the Christianisation of Iceland and Norway in the eleventh century. Although considerable investment used to be placed in the “Great Divide” theory of orality vs. literacy, sources suggest that aurality – the practice of memorising and orally transmitting written materials – was a common practice in medieval Scandinavia, and so seemingly-oral modes of communication and thought persisted after the introduction of Latinate literacy to Scandinavia by the Christian church.

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14 For an account of the cultural developments that affected skaldic verse, including Christianisation, the introduction of Latinate literacy, and the decline and twelfth-century renaissance of skaldic practice, see Guðrún Nordal, *Tools*, pp. 3-15; Edith Marold, ‘Nyíerving und Ýkrat,’ *NOWELE* 21/22 (1993), pp. 283-302.

Quite who composed and consumed skaldic verse is debated. The Icelandic sagas feature characters from various social classes who compose skaldic verse, and Jonathan Grove has argued that ‘the vibrancy of poetic practice refracted in the narratives of Sturlunga saga and related texts suggests that verse-making was… far from being a purely elitist or scholarly pursuit.’¹⁶ Most of the poetry preserved in manuscripts does appear to be tied to elite culture, although this may be due to a bias in recording on the part of scribes/authors/compilers.¹⁷

The question of who could understand skaldic verse, particularly the kenning-system, is also unclear. According to Skáldskaparmál, to understand skaldic diction was ‘at kunna skilja þat er hulit er kvœit’ [to be able to understand that which is spoken obscurely],¹⁸ suggesting that it was deliberately obscure. John Lindow argues that this complex diction functioned as a shibboleth for courtly culture.¹⁹ Stefanie Würth has gone a step further, and argued that nearly all recipients could not understand skaldic verse, and that form was prioritised over content in judging good verse.²⁰ However, it is unlikely that an utterly incomprehensible art form would have enjoyed centuries of composition and consumption, and the rule-based langue underpinning skaldic diction suggests that skaldic competence could be gained through repeated exposure, just as with any other system of communication.²¹ Overall, Lindow’s argument that the kenning-system was a linguistic marker of a typically elite social “in-group” will be favoured here.

²⁰ Stefanie Würth, ‘Skaldic Poetry and Performance’, in Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World: Essays in Honour of Margaret Clunies-Ross, eds. Judy Quinn, Kate Heslop, and Tarrín Wills (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), pp. 266-274. As discussion of individual poems will show, literary anecdotes and scribal errors suggest that many recipients could not comprehend all aspects of skaldic verse.
The standard edition of most skaldic poems is still Finnur Jónsson’s *Den Norske-Islandske Skjaldeigning*, although *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* aims to supplant it.²² Editions frequently present poems as continuous wholes, but many are preserved as single stanzas or small groups of stanzas within larger prose works, and these editions are (sometimes heavily emended) reconstructions.²³ Therefore, this study will analyse individual stanzas within small excerpts from poems, and will not treat groups of stanzas as linear sequences, unless they are preserved as such in MSS. This will lessen the risk of misrepresenting the verses, even if it restricts analysis of “poems” as such.

As the corpus of skaldic verse is so immense, this study will take a selection of stanzas from five poems. Each poem explores the limits of skaldic diction, and so although this sample is somewhat atypical, it illustrates a variety of cognitive strategies found in skaldic verse at their most pronounced. *Vellekla (Vell)*²⁴ will be discussed in relation to the ways in which catachresis and convention in kenning-imagery together facilitated the comprehension and recall of stanzas. *Hákonardrápa (Hkdr)*²⁵ will be discussed in relation to the device of nýgerving, and how it could be used to guide recipients’ interpretations of narrative content. *Øxarflokkr (Øxf)*²⁶ is one of the most extreme examples of how kenning-imagery could depart from the objects being described(characterised, and shall be discussed as an example of how kennings push the boundaries of recipients’ ability to model text worlds. *Íslendingadrápa (Ísd)*²⁷ will be discussed in relation to how kenning-imagery could be used to self-consciously emulate older verse, and the cognitive processes involved in deciphering ofljóst kennings. Finally, the *Ævikviða (Ævkv)*²⁸ of Grettir Ásmundarson, discussed last due to its disputed composition date, features a use of nýgerving and ofljóst kennings which is

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²² *Den Norsk-Islandske Skjaldeigning* A1-B2, ed. Finnur Jónsson (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde og Bagger, 1967-1973 [1912-1915]). Further reference to these volumes will be in the body of the text and take the form Skj, followed by the volume letter and number and either the page or the stanza and line numbers, e.g. (SkjA I p/st:1).

²³ *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages*, ed. Diana Whaley et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012-). Further reference to these volumes will be in the body of the text and take the form SkP, followed by the volume in Roman numerals, the part in Arabic numerals, and the page or the stanza and line numbers, e.g. (SkP I 1 p/st:1). Unless otherwise stated, all translations from Old Norse are my own.

²⁴ For a discussion of the issues surrounding emendation and reconstruction, see Diana Whaley, ‘General Introduction § 3.1, Reconstruction of Skaldic Poems,’ *SkP* I 1, pp. xix-xlix.


²⁸ Haukr Valdimarson, *Íslendingadrápa*, SkjA I, pp. 556-560; SkjB I, pp. 539-545

remarkable even within the skaldic corpus, and so it will be discussed in relation to the
aesthetic and intellectual stimulation caused by such a combination of devices.

As this study will be engaging with the terminology and explanations found in the
Prose or Snorra Edda (SnE), there should be a brief discussion of it as a source. Although
SnE is thought to be the oldest extant commentary on the subject, Snorri was a highly
ambitious political figure writing centuries after the establishment of skaldic verse, who
‘strove… to preserve the capacity of [skaldic verse] to function as a marker of social prestige
and tool of political power.’ Therefore, his explanations are to be taken critically. At the
same time, they were unlikely to have been ex nihilo, and probably contain some grain of
truth regarding how poetry was understood, at least in the thirteenth century. This means that
although attempts will be made to model contemporary understandings of pre-SnE verses, the
filter of thirteenth-century Icelandic literary culture is, to an extent, unavoidable.

Kennings
Aside from its complex metres, one of the hallmarks of skaldic diction is the kenning. This is
a short phrase which ‘replaces a noun of ordinary discourse, consists of at least two parts and
follows typical circumlocutionary patterns.’ It has at least two explicit elements, the base-
word and determinant(s); and an implicit referent, which is the noun substituted by the
kenning. The base-word frequently has a metaphorical relationship with the referent, and the
determinant – usually in the genitive case – often has a metonymic relation with the referent.
The determinant may also be substituted with another kenning to create a rekit kenning. The
term kenning itself is likely to derive from ad kenna, meaning to perceive, recognise, or

29 As well as Skm, SnE contains Snorri Sturluson, Prologue and Gylfaginning 2nd ed., ed. Faulkes (London;
Viking Society for Northern Research, 2005); and Snorri Sturluson, Háttatáli 2nd ed., ed. Faulkes (London:
Viking Society for Northern Research, 2007), hereafter Gylf and Hit.
30 Kevin J. Wanner, Snorri Sturluson and the Edda: The Conversion of Cultural Capital in Medieval
31 Edith Marold, ‘General Introduction §5.1, Kenning’, SkP I1, p. lxx; with reference to the definition of
kennings as ‘ein zweigliedriger Ersatz für ein Substantiv der gewöhnlichen Rede,’ in Meissner, p. 2
Clunies Ross, ‘Cognitive Approach’, p. 276; Gary Holland, ‘Kennings, metaphors, and semantic formulae in
altgermanische Dichtung, 2nd ed. (Potsdam: Athenaion, 1941) p. 296 states that true kennings are solely
metaphorical (‘Metapher mit Ablenkung’). Frederic Amory, ‘Kennings, Referentiality, and Metaphors,’ Arkiv
för Nordisk Filologi 130 (1987), pp. 87-101 supports Heusler. However, a strictly metaphorical definition
misrepresents kennings as found in the sources, which frequently incorporate metonymy in cases such as nomen
agentis kennings, which characterise through behaviour (Meissner, pp. 283-332), or vidkennningar, which
characterise a specific entity through unique characteristics such as kinship-links (Skm 107).
33 Fidjestøl, ‘Kenning System’, p. 20; Marold, ‘Kennings’, p. lxii. Snorri distinguishes between tvikent
kennings, where one determinant is substituted with another kenning, and rekit kennings, with multiple layers of
substitution (Hit 5). Here, tvikent kennings will be incorporated into the term rekit.
characterise. This etymological hypothesis suggests that kennings’ appeal lay between the intellectual and the aesthetic: they use figurative language to perceive certain characteristics of what is being discussed, and to enable recipients to gain deeper insights into these concepts.

According to Bjarne Fidjestøl’s rules for the kenning-system’s langue, neither base-word nor determinant are synonymous with the referent; both are semantically incongruous in the context of their stanzas; base-words, determinants, and referents are subject to strictly limited semantic domains; and a similarly limited set of semantic formulae (kenning-types) can be used to reach them; and a high degree of synonym-variation exists within these formulae. For example, *hlifar eldi* [fire of the shield] (*Ævkv* 3:6) uses the kenning-type *<fire> of <shield>* [WEAPON], as does *hyrjar hjörlautar* [fire of the sword-dale] (*Vell* 30:2-4), although the latter uses a different synonym for *<fire>* and an additional kenning for *<shield>* , making it a rekit kenning.

As well as kennings themselves, *SnE* lists several devices based upon the manipulation of kennings’ semantic fields. *Nýgerving* (pl. *nýgervingar*) is where the imagery cued by a kenning’s base-word provides a conceptual/lexical precedent for subsequent kennings in the stanza. Thus, as *Htt* states, ‘þat eru nýgjörvingar at kalla sverðit orm ok kenna rétt, en slíðrirnar gotur hans, en fétlan ok umgjörð hams hans… þá þykja nýgörvingar vel kveðnar ef þat mál er upp er tekit haldi af alla visulengð’ [*Nýgerving* is to call a sword a serpent and to characterise it correctly, so that the sheath is its path, and straps and mountings its skin… *Nýgervingar* are thought to be well-composed if the subject which is taken up is held for the whole length of the verse] (*Htt* 7). According to *SnE*, this is an aesthetically-pleasing device that showcases a skald’s vocabulary and ability to understand a concept (*Htt* 7). *Nýgerving* is often translated as *extended metaphor*, ‘a string of metaphorical sub-images sustained and linked together by the base metaphor, creating a cohesive network of

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34 Clunies Ross, Skáldskaparmál: Snorri Sturluson’s Ars Poetica and Medieval Theories of Language (Odense: Odense University Press, 1987), pp. 51-55; Mats Malm, ‘Two Cultures of Visual(ized) Cognition’ in Intellectual Culture in Medieval Scandinavia, c. 1100-1350, ed. by Stefka Georgieva Eriksen (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016) p. 319. Both note that *SnE* is the earliest known attestation of the term kenning, and that although the device itself pre-dated *SnE*, the term may have been coined by Snorri with reference to the Classical rhetorical figure notatio. The poetic treatise termed Litla Skálfa, found in two MSS containing Snorra Edda, AM 748 1 b 4to and AM 757 a 4to, does not use kenning, but frequently uses að kenna við. See Edda Snorra Sturlusonar utgivet efter håndskriftene, ed. Finnur Jónsson (Gyldendalske boghandel – Nordiske forlag: København, 1931).


36 For an in-depth discussion of Fidjestøl’s criterion of “variation,” see Gurevich, pp. 141-142. Kenning-types are represented here in the form *<base-word>* of *<determinant>* [REFERENT]. Triangular brackets are used throughout this study to denote semantic fields. Uppercase letters in square brackets denote referents. Prose-order quotes from poems will be presented in italics, without quotation marks.
associative metaphorical and metonymic ties.\(^37\) Yet, as shall be discussed, nýgervingar do not behave in a manner entirely comparable to extended metaphors, as they also play an active role in developing and transmitting the forms of knowledge underpinning the kenning-system. This device has a counterpart in nykrat: the breach of a nýgerving in which the base-word of a kenning changes, so ‘*ef *sverð *er ormr kallaðr, < en síðan> fiskr eða vǫndr eða annan veg breytt, þat kalla menn nykrat’ [if a sword is called a serpent, and later a fish or a wand or is changed in some other way, then people call that nykrat.] (Htt 7). Snorri states that people ‘þykkir þat spilla,’ [see it as an error] (Htt 7). Marold argues that the “nykrat-rule” of metaphor-variation only applies within stanzas, although this is not clear from the sources.\(^38\) As shall be discussed, nykrat – whilst uncommon – was likely used to draw recipients’ attention to particular images and ideas, and to re-characterise concepts in a new light.

Another device of interest here is the ofljóst kenning. These are kenning-puns which rely upon homonymy, paronymy, and synonymy to decipher the referent. The recipient’s attention is initially drawn by the additional semantic incongruity beyond that normally generated by the kenning-system, and they must then employ further vocabulary resources to decipher the referent. For instance, the tenth-century poem Arinbjarnarkviða, attributed to Egill Skalla-Grímsson, refers to the character Arinbjór as grjótbjørn (17:5).\(^39\) This uses synonymy, as arinn can mean (hearth)<stone>, and grjót also means <stone>, usually grit. Mjöð haslrekka hausa [mead of the warriors of the skull of the hazel] [POETRY] (Ísdr 1:7-8), on the other hand, relies upon homonymy and a knowledge of myth: hasl hausa means [HAIR], an object on the skull which grows as a tree does. Hair in Old Norse is hárr, which sounds like the Óðinn-heit, Hár. His warriors are the Æsir, and their mead is poetry.\(^40\) The heuristic nature of how ofljóst kennings are deciphered means that the cognitive processes they involve are closer to riddles than poetic devices, as “the rules of deviations themselves are thoroughly disguised… if in poetry we expect mainly additional “rules of deviation”, literary riddles are typically generated through the willing suspension of certain processes

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\(^{38}\) Marold, ‘Nýgerving’, pp. 283-302

\(^{39}\) Egill Skalla-Grímsson, Arinbjarnarkviða, Skj I pp. 43-48, SkjB I pp. 38-41. This poem is only found in the Módravallabók manuscript tradition of this saga, but multiple stanzas are found in Skm and the Third Grammatical Treatise, including 17:5-8 with the ofljóst pun on Arinbjór (Skm 18). Therefore, it is likely to have had a wider circulation than manuscript witnesses suggest. See Bjarni Einarsson, ‘Foreword’, in Egils Saga, ed. Bjarni Einarsson (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2003) p. ix.

\(^{40}\) Frank, Court Poetry, p. 69
required by Linguistic and Poetic Competence. This – as shall be discussed – has a variety of effects, from intellectual pleasure to the maintenance of culturally-specific knowledge.

**Cognitive Theory**

As already mentioned, the theoretical grounding of the study takes elements from cognitive poetics. A relatively new discipline, its aim is to:

> Systematically account for the relationship between the structure of literary texts and their perceived effects… [through] an interdisciplinary approach to the study of literature employing the tools offered by cognitive science.

Instead of asking *what* a text means, it is interested in *how* it means: the mental processes through which “poetic” language is processed as “other” from everyday speech. This approach falls under the umbrella of *cognitive studies*, which is the study of human mental processes. Although cognitive studies initially de-emphasised cultural and emotional factors in cognition, ‘second generation’ approaches have reintroduced such considerations.

Although cognitive poetics has approached oral poetry, it has largely focused upon oral-formulaic verse, rather than the oral-memorial practices of composition and rote recall seemingly favoured in skaldic practice. This means the study of skaldic verse has the potential to offer insights into cognitive processes potentially less prominent in oral-formulaic traditions.

Cognitive poetics and previous cognitive approaches to kennings are both underpinned by several cognitive linguistic theories. One is that the human mind generates concepts and categories by creating idealised cognitive models (ICMs) – generalised mental models extrapolated from repeated experiences. These include *frames*, groups of words and

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42 Tsur, p. 1


45 See the chapters in Cánovas and Antović. For the performance of skaldic verse, see Würth, pp. 266-274.

concepts based upon ‘specific unified frameworks of knowledge, or coherent schematizations of experience’. ICMs and frames feed into conceptual metaphor theory, which states that the human mind ‘is fundamentally metaphorical in nature,’ with conceptual metaphors allowing humans to think about difficult or abstract concepts by mapping familiar concepts with similar qualities (source domain) to the concept at hand (target domain). This includes so-called “primary” metaphors, which are universal or semi-universal conceptual metaphors based upon the experience of being an embodied mind, such as happiness (target) is an upward sensation (source). Another key theory is conceptual blending. This states that a metaphor relies upon two or more concepts being input into a mental space where ‘a set of mappings [perceived similarities between concepts] characterise their relationship, but there is also a difference which allows the metaphor to operate.’

Although conceptual metaphor theory has obtained a kind of ubiquity, it has been challenged and developed. Zoltán Kövecses argues that primary metaphors are often supplanted by metaphors which include both bodily and cultural factors, and theories of extended cognition propose that some aspects of cognition are collectively-held, as ‘embodied human minds extend into a vast and uneven world of things… which they have collectively constructed and maintained.’ As shall be touched upon here, kennings do seem to be a form of extended cognition, as they were used to perpetuate ways of conceptualising things practiced within certain social groups.

These theories have been successfully employed in cognitive approaches to the kenning system. According to Margaret Clunies Ross and Gary Holland, kennings rely upon semantic frames to be deciphered. A determinant uses one aspect of a cultural topos to cue the

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51 Harbus, p. 25, comments that ‘almost anyone in any field who discusses metaphor mentions ‘Lakoff and Johnson’, and takes the existence of conceptual metaphor, and the ubiquity of conventional metaphors in everyday language, as givens.’

52 Kövecses, pp. 4, 11

rest of a conceptual schema (a conventionalised set of information or behaviour script), and in doing so narrows down the polysemy of the base-word by extending a common quality between base-word and determinant, which in turn defines the relationship between base-word and referent.\textsuperscript{54} These frames are based upon collectively-held and culturally-entrenched ICMs and conceptual metaphors.

A good example of this process is logskundaðar lindar (Vell 32:7). Logskundaðar is generally interpreted as “impeller of fire,” whereas lind could mean “spring” or “(linden) shield.” If the compound is broken apart, log lindar uses the kenning type <fire> of <x>, with <x> being either <water> or <shield/battle>. The presence of either determinant would cue frames which cause a competent recipient to accept <fire> as an element in the kenning. At the same time, these frames would cue the recipient to look for features of <fire> which would link the two elements to each other and thus to the referent. If <x> is <water>, then the referent is [GOLD]. Norse mythology refers to gold lying at the bottom of the Rhine, and Ægir (meaning sea) is said to have lit his underwater hall with lýsigull (Skm 40-41, 48). Thus, a recipient’s cognitive processes could be informed by mythological frames. The recipient also uses frames to choose qualities/categories to extend from <fire> to <water> and from <fire> to [GOLD]. Fire is bright and yellow, like gold shining underwater, and so colour is extended from base-word to determinant. On the other hand, if lind means linden (shield), then the semantic field of the determinant is <battle>. The category of harmful is carried over from the frame of <fire> to other things which do harm in battle, generating [WEAPON]. Thus, the systematic nature of the kenning-system aided the recipient’s comprehension through providing a set of predetermined kenning-elements and referents.

Although cognitive linguistics offers insight into how the kenning-system may have been comprehended by recipients, it does not necessarily have the tools to fully address the kenning-system as a verbal art. It is here that cognitive poetics can play a role, as it addresses not only how skaldic diction communicated meaning, but how it conveyed affect. One of the questions in the field of cognitive poetics most pertinent to this study is whether poetic language disrupts normal cognitive processes. Raymond W. Gibbs Jr., influenced by conceptual metaphor theory, argues that poets merely ‘talk about the metaphorical entailments of ordinary conceptual mappings in new ways,’ and therefore figurative language ‘does not

require special cognitive processes to be produced and understood.55 Reuven Tsur opposes this, stating that ‘poetic effects are the result of some drastic interference with, or at least delay of, the regular course of cognitive processes.’56 Tsur’s arguments are based on the Russian Formalist theory that people form “automatised” experiences of the world, and that ‘the device of art is the [defamiliarisation] of things and the complication of the form, which increases the duration and complexity of perception,’ making recipients hyper-aware of the sensory and conceptual qualities of what is being (re)presented.57 Although Tsur’s characterisation of poetic language might be extreme, kennings do seem to play with the norms of “ordinary” linguistic use, and under certain circumstances, poetic uses of language can provoke small cognitive disturbances. As Mark Turner argues, ‘creative metaphors call for conceptual revision. They require us to reconceive the ontology of a thing.’58

Bergsveinn Birgisson has used cognitive theories of concept and metaphor to argue that kenning imagery operates on a conceptual blending principle he terms ‘contrast tension aesthetics,’ whereby two or more elements which belong to contrasting conceptual realms are blended together to generate the referent, with the cognitive and aesthetic values of kennings deriving from the ensuing catachresis.59 He provides an example of a kenning for [HERRING] which uses the formula <bird> of <sea>, with contrast-tension created through irreconcilable differences between air and sea – these animals’ respective environments.60 It is this culturally-specific emphasis upon catachrestic blends, he argues, which alters mental processes regarding imagery and leads to the unique cognitive effects of kenning-imagery, such as enhanced attentional focus and recall.

Although contrast-tension as a cultural phenomenon is unique to Bergsveinn’s theories, the mental processes behind the emotional effects of catachrestic conceptual blends have been approached by cognitive studies on a more general level. According to these approaches, humour derives from the sudden revelation of a conceptual mapping which, although implicitly present all along, is absurd. The elation generated by scientific discovery occurs due to the relief of cognitive effort as two apparently-irreconcilable concepts suddenly map onto one another in a compatible manner. Art, meanwhile, partially resolves its

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55 Gibbs, The Poetics of Mind, pp. 7, 16-17
56 Tsur, p. 4, with a short overview of these interruptions and violations of cognitive processes in pp. 5-27.
58 Mark Turner, Death is the Mother of Beauty: Mind, Metaphor, Criticism (Christchurch: Cybereditions, 2000) p. 21
59 Bergsveinn Birgisson, ‘Mnemonic’, pp. 205-211; see also ‘Skaldic Blends’, pp. 283-298
60 Bergsveinn Birgisson, ‘Skaldic Blends’, p. 290
conceptual blends, but this partial resolution results in the sustained juxtaposition of multiple conceptual frames, each of which produces its own emotional reaction. The oscillation between responses generates the fascination and engagement that art holds over recipients.61 Tsur looks at such ideas in the context of poetics, and argues that a specific kind of poetry, the poetry of disorientation, exaggerates art’s cognitive effects by using irreconcilable conceptual catachreses alongside an emphasis on language and imagery to create a heightened consciousness of the words and imagery being used, and of the recipient’s own perceptual and conceptual structures.62

Skaldic diction occupies an arguably unique position in terms of how catachrestic conceptual blends create affect by disrupting routine patterns of thought. The processes of recognition, decipherment and resolution involved in the kenning-system’s langue arguably emulate the scientific discovery’s eureka moment. For instance, the ofljóst kenning grjótbjörn in Arinbjarnarkviða is resolved through recognising the partial synonymy between arinn and grjót. The accompanying sense of cognitive relief may – alongside a desire to be part of a social or intellectual in-group – explain why recipients persisted in learning and consuming skaldic diction. At the same time, the irreconcilability of the conceptual blends involved – which creates contrast-tension aesthetics – lead to the same oscillations of affect that mark art and the poetry of disorientation. The concepts involved in mapping <stone> onto <bear> are not reconciled in deciphering grjótbjörn; nor are grjót and arinn completely synonymous. Furthermore, the recipient must remember that all these words and concepts are ultimately mapped onto a human character whose name just happens to be Arinbjörn. This sustained and unresolvable conceptual juxtaposition would draw attention to the character Arinbjörn, as well as to the words and concepts underpinning his name. Kennings’ drive towards synonym-variation, the semantic incongruity rule, and the manipulation of the kenning-system’s conventions in nýgerving, nykrat, and ofljóst all further disrupt routine cognitive processing of conceptual blends. These create various effects, ranging from aesthetic thrill, to enhanced recall, to the modelling of renewed ways of seeing concepts.

Another theory of cognitive poetics central here is that of text worlds. This argues that ‘a text or discourse represents a coherent and joint effort on the part of its producer and its recipients to build up a “world”, within which its propositions are appropriately-formed and

62 Tsur, pp. 25, 405-414
make sense.\(^{63}\) This world, although it is an *ad hoc* mental construct, is temporarily modelled as a possible reality, even if its premises are impossible in this world. Any text world is constructed from three elements: the *discourse space*, which is the real-world scenario within which a text is experienced; the incrementally-added referential and deictic elements provided by the discourse, which create the fabric of the text world in the mind of the recipient; and the *Common Ground* of knowledge, which is assumed to be shared by participants in the discourse and supplies frames which can be used to fill in gaps in the information provided by the text through inference.\(^{64}\) Within a “primary” text world, there can be further sub-worlds based upon characters’ thoughts, representations of the past and future, etc.\(^{65}\) A good illustration is *Haraldskvæði (Hrafnsmál)\(^{66}\):*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Old Norse</th>
<th>English prose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hlyði hringberendr, meðan ek frá Haraldi segi odda ífróttir inum afarauðga. Frá mótum mun ek segja, þeim es ek mey heyrða hvíta hadðbjarta, es við hrafna dæmði.</td>
<td>Let sword-bearers [WARRIORS] listen, while I recount feats of weapon-points concerning Haraldr the exceedingly wealthy. I shall recount the words that I heard a white, bright-haired girl [utter] when she spoke with a raven.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitr þottisk valkyrja; verar nörðr þekkir feimu inni framsöttu, es fugls róðd kunni. Kvæði in kverkhvíta ok in glæ*hvarma Hymis hausreyti, es sat á horni of bjarga.</td>
<td>The valkyrie thought herself wise; men were not pleasing to the aggressive maid, who understood the voice of the bird. The white-throated and the bright-eyelashed one greeted the skull-picker of Hymir &lt;giant&gt; [RAVEN], which sat on the edge of a cliff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Hvat es yðr, hrafnar? Hvaðan eruð ér konmir með dregru nefi at degi ónverðum? Hold loðir yðr í klóum; hres þefr gengr ór munn; nær hygg ek yðr í nótt bjoggu, því es vissuð nái liggja.’</td>
<td>‘What is the matter with you, ravens? From where have you come with gory beaks at break of day? Flesh hangs from your claws; the stench of carrion comes from your mouths; I think you lodged last night near where you knew corpses were lying.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hreyfðisk inn høsfjáðri, ok of hyrnu þerði, arnar eiðbróðir, ok at andsvarum hugði:</td>
<td>The grey-feathered sworn-brother of the eagle [RAVEN] gloated and wiped its bill, and gave thought to an answer: ‘We have</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\(^{64}\) Werth, pp. 7, 20, 46-52

\(^{65}\) Werth, pp. 210-258

The original discourse space of this poem was presumably a recital at the court of King
Haraldr, which would raise expectations in recipients regarding the style and content of the
poem, as a skaldic praise poem. Two text worlds are set up in stanza 1: the first is an idealised
version of the discourse space: the court of a ruler, filled with his retinue of warriors. The
second is the “primary” text world of the poem, in which a raven and a valkyrie converse with
one another. Stanza 2 sets up the belief-world of the valkyrie, in which she is presented as
wise. Stanza 3 presents another belief-world: her belief that the raven was at a location with
carrion the previous night, as the raven’s claws are bloody. This information is also
incremented into the primary text world. Stanza 4 introduces the raven’s memories of King
Haraldr’s life as another text world, which is developed upon for the rest of the poem.

The main reason to apply text world theory to skaldic poetry is that kennings
themselves appear to construct text worlds. This proposition may be refused by some text
world theorists, as text world theory was founded as a reaction against tendencies in cognitive
linguistics to look at short utterances as opposed to entire discourses.67 Yet the allusive nature
of skaldic diction, whereby kenning-types are deciphered with the aid of webs of associated
frames which are cued by certain semantic fields, arguably sparks a process similar to the
fleshing-out of text worlds through the use of frames.68 This creation of metaphorically-based
text worlds would be quicker than in many other forms of discourse, where associated frames
are not so instantaneously accessed. Hymis hausreyti [RAVEN] (2:7) appears to allude to a
now-lost mythological narrative frame, which would be brought to a recipient’s working
memory by this kenning.69 The second raven-kenning, eiðbróðir arnar (4:3), creates another
text world in which a raven and an eagle swear oaths to one another; likely alluding to their
association through the beasts of battle motif.70 Thus, the allusive nature of kennings allows
these short utterances to model temporary text worlds which in turn contribute further
information to other text worlds though the frames they evoke. The kenning-system, then,
constitutes something of an outlier in cognitive studies of art, as it relies so heavily upon both

67 Werth, pp. 19-20
68 Werth, pp. 20, 51.
69 Fulk’s notes to Haraldskvæði, p. 96. For working memory, a mental space in which new information and
information recalled from long-term memory are combined, see Greene, p. 39
299.
resolution and irresolution to draw attention to its own use of imagery and conceptual interplay, whilst also functioning as a meaning-bearing semiotic system. With this theoretical framework in place, close readings of the poems will begin.

**Einarr skálaglamm Helgason – Vellekla. c. 975-995**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Old Norse</th>
<th>English Prose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hugstóran bǐðk heyra</td>
<td>I bid the great-minded protector of the land [HÁKON] to hear the waves of dregs of the warriors of the fjord-bone [ROCK &gt; DWARVES &gt; POETRY] hear, jarl, the blood of Kvasi [POETRY].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– heyr, jarl, Kvasið dreýra – fjalðar förð á forða, fjárrîeggjar brím dreggiar.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Núş, þats Boðnar bára, (berg-Saxa) tör vaxa, (gervi þöl þok hlyði, hljóð fley þofurs þjóðir).</td>
<td>Now, it happens that Boðn’s wave [POETRY] grows; may the ruler’s folk grant a hearing in the hall and listen to the ship of the rock-Saxons [GIANTS &gt; POETRY].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eisar vágr fyr vísa, (verk) Rǫgnis (mér hagna?), þýtr Óðrœrir alda, oldrafs við fles galdra.</td>
<td>The wave of Óðinn [POETRY] roars before the leader; the works are successful for me: the wave of Óðrœrir’s ale-sea [POETRY] booms against the skerry of incantations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ullar gengr of alla, asksgøn, þess’s hvót magnar, byrgis boðvar sorgar, bergs grynlj ðverga.</td>
<td>The shoal-wave of the rock of dwarves [POETRY] goes over all the ash-host of the Ulfr of the sorrow of the fence of battle [SHIELD &gt; WEAPON &gt; HÁKON &gt; SHIP CREW/ARMY], the one who increases boldness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hljóta munk, né hlîtuk, hertýs, of þat frýju, fyr þræysi at ausa austr vín-Gnóðar flausta.</td>
<td>I will be allotted to bale the bilge-water of the wine-Gnóð of the army-god [ÓÐINN &gt; POETRY] for the valiant racer of ships [HÁKON]; I will not endure reproach for that.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The poem *Vellekla* is attributed to the tenth-century skald Einarr skálaglamm Helgason, and said to be composed in honour of the Norwegian jarl Hákon Sigurðsson (d. 995) of Hlaðir, Norway. Due to its phonological and metrical features, as well as historical events it alludes to, *Vell* is conventionally dated to somewhere between 975/85 and 995, depending on whether the stanzas referring to Hákon’s 985 battle with the Jómsvíkingar are considered original. Thus, it was most likely orally composed and transmitted prior to being written down.

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71 All MSS read *högna*, however this does not make sense in the context, and *a* and *ø* could still be joined in an *aðalhending* in the tenth century.
72 The reading in *SKP* will be favoured, as Finnur Jónsson’s reading, *geymlj*, requires heavier emendation.
73 *Egils saga*, pp. 164-166
74 Hans Kuhn ‘Vor tausend Jahren. Zur Geschichte des skaldischen Innenreims’, in *Speculum Norroenum*, pp. 308-309, conducts a metrical and phonological analysis of the poem, and concludes that *Vell* was indeed composed in the late tenth century. Marold, ‘Introduction’ to *Vell*, *SKP* 1, p. 282 argues that the Jómsvíking stanzas are original, whereas Finnur Jónsson, ‘Vellekla: Tekstkritiske bemærkninger’, *Aarbøger for Nordisk Oldkyndighed og Historie* (Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel, 1891) p. 148, argues they were a later interpolation.
As Vell is reconstructed from excerpts found in multiple texts,\textsuperscript{75} analysis here will focus upon the five stanzas preserved in Skm. Given their richness in kennings and their use of the “bid for a hearing” formula,\textsuperscript{76} these are likely to comprise the introductory section. Stanzas 1-4 are found in the section dealing with kennings for poetry (Skm 12-13, stanzas 27-28, 34-35), and stanza 5 is found in the section on Óðinn-kennings (Skm 10, stanza 18). These stanzas are not attributed to a particular poem, although similarities in style and subject matter, and their preservation in Skm, would suggest that they at least belong to the same poem – as Guðrún Nordal notes in relation to Öxfl, ‘in Skáldskaparmál Snorri Sturluson rarely cites a sequence of stanzas by the same poet, and when he does the verses are most often drawn from the same poem.’\textsuperscript{77} Within these stanzas, the use of rhetorical formulae prepares recipients for the experience of skaldic diction; formulaic kenning-types facilitate comprehension of the kennings; and catachrestic conceptual blends and unique synonym-choices would have created aesthetic and intellectual enjoyment, and allowed Einarr to communicate meanings beyond his kennings’ immediate referents. Finally, the combination of distinctive, non-naturalistic imagery and verbal schemas in these stanzas also held mnemonic benefits.

Vell 1-2, like Haraldskvæði 1, uses what Cecil Wood calls the skald’s bid for a hearing – a verbal formula based upon the form hljóðs biðk – to create a text world.\textsuperscript{78} This, Wood argues, addresses the audience and ‘requests the silence necessary for actual oral delivery.’\textsuperscript{79} This does more, however, than address this practical necessity. The bid for a hearing also establishes the discourse space of “skaldic performance”, which cues recipients to anticipate the specialised langue of skaldic diction. Furthermore, as in Haraldskvæði, this formula overlays this discourse space with a text world which exists between the discourse space and the primary text world: that of an idealised skaldic performance. Not only are a jarl and his warrior retinue posited as elements in this world, but the hljóðs biðk formula is repeated three times in the first two stanzas: heyr jarl, Kavasis dreyra [hear, jarl, Kvasir’s blood] (1:2); biðk hugstóran foldar vörð heyra brim dreggjar fyrða fjardleggjar [I bid the great-minded protector of the land to hear the waves of dregs of the warriors of the fjord-bone] (1:1, 3-4); and jósurs þjóðir gerfi hljóð í hóll ok hlyði berg-Saxa fley [may the ruler’s folk grant a hearing in the hall and listen to the ship of the rock-Saxons] (2:3-4). All of these images refer

\textsuperscript{75} Marold, ‘Introduction’ pp. 280-282
\textsuperscript{77} Guðrún Nordal, Skaldic Versifying and Social Discrimination in Medieval Iceland (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2003) p. 9
\textsuperscript{78} Wood, pp. 241-242
\textsuperscript{79} Wood, p. 240
to the myth of the mead of poetry – the drink brewed from the blood of the semi-divine Kvasir by dwarves, stolen by the giant Suttungr and retrieved by Óðinn (Skm 3-5). This too overlays the discourse space with a mythologised text world in which the invoked audience coexists with a host of supernatural entities associated with the mead of poetry, drinking their blood and hearing their dregs. As most known [POETRY] kennings use the associated kenning-type, *<drink>* of *<mythological entity>*; this myth appears fairly well-known within circles that consumed skaldic poetry. \(^80\) This causes a series of shifts between the immediate discourse space and the mythologised text world, which mirrors the discourse space yet requires a more reverential form of engagement. This enhances the experience of linguistic disorientation, which heightens recipients’ awareness of the poetic experience, particularly the allusive potential of language.

As mentioned, there are arguments that recipients’ comprehension of skaldic stanzas’ content was low and largely irrelevant. According to such arguments, the linear nature of oral delivery means that ‘the message has to make itself heard from the start.’ \(^81\) Such arguments do seem appealing in the face of stanzas such as *Vell 2:*

Nús, þats Boðnar bára,  
(berg-Saxa) tér vaxa,  
(gervi í hóll ok hlýði,  
hljóð fley þjóðs þjóðir).

The word order has little relation to how it would appear in prose, and decipherment seems to rely on grammatical inflections and recipients’ inferences. \(^82\) There are at least two kennings, one of which, *berg-Saxa fley* [POETRY] has its determinant on line 2 and base-word on line 4. Yet, frames may have played a role in recipients’ comprehension of the stanza. An experienced recipient would have developed a set of frame schemas which would be triggered by words occupying certain semantic fields, particularly if these were semantically-incongruous words in the genitive case; or common kenning base-words. Here, the mention of Boðn in *Boðnar bára* [wave of Boðn] would have cued the frame *myth of the mead of poetry* and its associated kenning-type to working memory as a potential schema. Such frames would shape the processing of subsequent lines, meaning that *bára*, as a liquid, would be classed as a possible extension of the semantic field *<drink>*. The genitive plural *berg-Saxa* [DWARVES/GIANTS] would likewise recall *<drink>* of *<mythical entity>* [POETRY].

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\(^{80}\) Meissner, pp. 427-430.


\(^{82}\) Schulte, pp. 22-28 has argued that determinant usually precedes the base-word and is signalled by a genitive case, although this is by no means as pervasive as his arguments make it seem.
According to Snorri, the base word is *fley*, making *berg-Saxa fley an ofljóst* kenning, as ‘er kalladr skáldskaprinn far eða líðið avgeranna; líðið heitir òl ok líðið heitir skip.’ [poetry is called the ship or vessel (*líðið*) of the dwarves; beer is called *líðið* and a ship is also called *líðið*.] (Skm 14)83 The repetition of kenning-types, then, as well as being aesthetically pleasing, facilitated the understanding of a complex mode of communication through establishing cues between frames, whether conventional or novel.

There are, however, issues with this kenning-type. Roberta Frank argues that Snorri invented the myth of the mead of poetry to reconcile kenning-imagery with his belief that all pre-Christian kennings had a mythological or animistic explanation, and that these kennings are based on a metaphor between bodily intoxication and altered states of mind induced by poetic inspiration.84 According to Frank, *Vell* 2 reads *berg-Saxa boðnar bára* [wave of the cup of the rock-Saxons] and *fleyjofurs þjóðir* [ship-captain’s people], removing the *ofljóst* kenning whilst retaining both referents.85 Marold dismisses this, arguing that it creates overdetermined kennings,86 although the use of additional descriptive/intensifying elements in kennings is not uncommon. Frank’s readings remain feasible, if unconventional. For the purposes of this study, however, the thirteenth-century mythological reading of *Vell* 2, whilst potentially “inauthentic,” will be accepted due to more explicit attestation.

Seven of the eight instances of <drink> of <mythological entity> [POETRY] expand the semantic field of the base-word, using base-words synonymous with *sea* or *wave*: *dreggjar brim, fley, bára, vágr, alda, grynniló*, and *austr*. This repeated interweaving of *<sea>* and *<drink>* in [POETRY] kennings is an unusual feature of Einarr’s *parole*. On the one hand, the blend of *<drink>*, *<poetry>*>, and *<sea>* cues a set of reaction frames: nutrition, altered linguistic/conceptual experiences, and the ‘savagery and fatal beauty’ of a rough sea, respectively.87 This metaphorically maps the bodily/cognitive experience of intoxication onto

83 Snorri also provides a metaphorical interpretation based on this myth, stating that ‘köllum vér skáldskap... far skost dverga, fyrir þvi at só míjóð fr/lutti þeim fjórlausn or skerinu.’ [we call poetry the dwarves’ vessel because that mead (of poetry) gave them deliverance from the skerry (they were trapped in)] (Skm 4)
84 Frank, ‘Snorri and the Mead of Poetry,’ in *Speculum Norroen*um, pp. 155-170
85 Frank, ‘Snorri’, p. 162
86 Marold, *Vell*, SKP I 1.1, p. 285
the disturbances of cognition caused by skaldic diction, and gives it a violent immediacy. As well as this metaphor of skaldic verse as an intoxicating wave, there is another possible factor in Einarr’s choice of sea imagery. It may be used to embellish the primary text world’s narrative of a praise poem intended for Jarl Hákon: sea battles, as Hákon was a successful war-leader both on land and water, and Vell was composed in praise of these achievements. The pun fleylið, like the various terms for “wave,” links the semantic field <drink> to the field <sea>, and furthermore lið, like asksogn (4:2), can mean a martial sea-crew, thus bringing in the frames of both <sea> and <battle>. The recurrent use of this imagery would incrementally build one or more text world(s) that blend an intoxicating poetry-beverage with allusions to Hákon’s prowess in sea battles, foregrounding (drawing attention to) them through repetition, novel variations, and conceptual catachresis. This could have served to engage recipients on one or more levels of the stanza’s imagery; and establish, modify, and switch frames depending on recipients’ own interests and the ways in which the poem leads them.

According to Bergsveinn Birgisson, kenning-imagery’s catachrestic blends also facilitated the recall of stanzas, due to the allegedly-mnemonic “bizarreness effect” – that “bizarre” imagery aids memory. This can be traced back to the Classical text ad Herennium, which states that images which ‘adhere longest in memory’ are distinguished through ‘exceptional beauty or singular ugliness,’ or other visually-striking qualities. The notion that skaldic diction had mnemonic benefit has been discussed in relation to its strict meters, and arguments that skaldic verse incorporated mnemonic devices would make sense. Not only would reciters need accurate recall during performance, but if comprehension was not immediate, accurate recall allowed recipients to think through verses and decipher them. An episode in Gísla saga Súrssonar illustrates this process. The character Þórdís overhears Gisli speak a verse with an offjóst kenning. The narrative states that she ‘nam þegar vísuna, gengr heim ok hefir ráðit visnu,’ [At once learned the verse by heart, went home, and contemplated

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88 See Tsur’s discussion of the relation between poetry of disorientation and altered states of consciousness, pp. 405-510. Frank, ‘Snorri’, p. 170, touches upon this, but she suggests a more ritualistic/religious perspective.
89 For the semantic range of lið in skaldic and runic contexts, see Judith Jesch, Ships and Men in the Late Viking Age (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2001) pp. 135-136, 186-194. Marold, notes to Vell p. 288
91 Stockwell, pp. 156-158 discusses the switching of frames in narratives. Such an approach can be taken to the interconnected layers of imagery which kennings construct as different “perspectives” on a world/narrative.
92 Bergsveinn Birgisson, ‘Cognitive Archaisms’, pp. 166-170; ‘Mnemonic’, p. 201
93 Ad Herennium, III, xxii, trans. H. Caplan, quoted and modified in Frances A. Yates, The Art of Memory (London: Routledge and Keagan Paul, 1966), p. 10. It should be noted that ad Herennium was not widely studied until the twelfth century, and so its direct effects were upon late- and post-medieval practices.
94 Gade, Dróttkvætt, pp. 24-25; Whaley, ‘Skaldic Poetry’, p. 488
the verse].

After a period of consideration, she deciphers its hidden meaning. This is a fictional anecdote, but it may have some basis in real practices that allowed recipients to decipher complex stanzas, particularly if they were still acquiring skaldic competence.

Yet, “bizarreness” alone has not yielded particularly positive results in empirical tests of recall. Bergsveinn takes this into account, and argues that kennings’ contrast-tension aesthetics possess four qualities which cognitive science states to have a positive effect on recall: they are attention-drawing, they communicate meaning, they are distinctive from their surroundings, and their elements interact. These qualities, he argues, make them a potent mnemonic tactic in oral skaldic verse, which was lessened under the influence of Classical/Christian aesthetic values of proportion and naturalistic mimesis. Such mechanisms appear to operate in Vell. The first stanza contains the kenning fyrða fjardøleggjar brim dreggjar (1:3-4). This can be assembled into the form fjardøleggjar [ROCK] + fyrða [DWARVES/GIANTS] + dreggjar [(MEAD OF) POETRY], with brim acting as an intensifier, blending the kenning elements’ imagery with the power of crashing waves.

Within this, there are three key blends: the dreg-waves of dwarves, the warriors of rock, and the bones of a fjord. Each one has multiple interacting elements, and each one is distinguished from its surroundings by its non-naturalistic quality. Arguably the most distinctive blend here is fjardøleggjar, as although terms like “the dregs of dwarves” may seem strange to a modern recipient, they may well have felt commonplace to recipients familiar with the myth of the mead of poetry. According to Bergsveinn’s theory, fjardøleggjar would blend the conceptual

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98 The nature of these beings is uncertain – Meissner, pp. 256-257 groups all <warrior/dweller> of <rock> kennings under [GIANT], but mythological narratives and other skaldic verses also make [DWARF] feasible.
99 Marold, Vell, SKP I 1, p. 284, follows a similar argument.
100 Karin Olsen, ‘Metaphorical Density in Old English and Old Norse Poetry’, Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi 117 (2002), p. 175, notes that many metaphors found in skaldic verse appear exclusive to the genre, and therefore
fields of <fjord> and <animal> to form a new image: a river-beast. Subsequently this animal perishes, and its flesh – water – falls away to leave its bones: rocks. Thus, the kenning draws attention through its catachrestic concepts (living/non-living, vertebrate/invertebrate), which are made to interact with each other, and these interactions are a type of *elaboration* – an ‘unusual interaction’ between or distortion of image-elements, ‘by which images are made bizarre.’ In the case of *fjarðleggjar* this does seem to be the case – the two concepts themselves are unremarkable, and it is only through their unusual interaction that they are made distinctive; this in turn would aid recall.

According to Bergsveinn, skaldic diction is particularly amenable to contrast-tension aesthetics because ‘both parts of the kenning are concrete images.’ However, some kennings generate catachresis on a higher level by blending concrete and abstract nouns. In the kenning *asksǫgn Ullar sorgar byrgis bōðar* [ash-host of the Ullr of the sorrow of the fence of battle] [HÁKON’S ARMY] (4:3), the abstract noun *sorg* is given a concrete determinant, *byrgis bōðar* [SHIELD], and referent, [WEAPON]. Firstly, a recipient must assign an emotional state, *sorrow*, to a non-sentient object. At the same time, the concrete tendencies of skaldic imagery push towards concretising this emotional state, and *sorrow* is thus transformed into a metonym for *harm or injury*, which in turn stands in for the *cause* of said harm or injury of a shield – [SWORD/WEAPON]. The <god> of a [WEAPON] would be a warrior, [HÁKON], and his *asksǫgn* – itself a blend of inanimate ash-wood and a living martial group – would be his ship’s crew, as ash wood is noted in Insular and Continental sources as being used to build Viking Age ships, and *skip(s)ǫgn* is a word for a ship’s crew. The high level of physicality involved in the semantic field <battle> arguably increases the catachresis between the kenning’s imagery and the abstract element *sorg*. Thus, the same phenomenon of interacting, meaning-bearing images from contrasting semantic fields can be observed here, with the greatest catachresis being derived from the contrasting blend of abstract and concrete concepts.

Although Bergsveinn acknowledges the importance of interaction in mnemonic images, he does not discuss this phenomenon happening *between* kennings, and between kennings and

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101 Wollen and Margres, p. 119, Bergsveinn, p. 206. “Bizarre” here is taken to mean non-naturalistic, or catachrestic according to culturally-understood norms.

102 Bergsveinn, p. 207

103 Marold, notes to ‘Vellekla’, p. 288; Jesch, pp. 135-136 186. An alternative reading would be [ARMY], as ash is also used metonymically to refer to ash-wood spears. See *Lexicon Poeticum*, 2nd ed., s.v. ‘askr;’ by Finnur Jónsson. However, the nautical text worlds established in *Vell* 1-5 support [SHIP CREW].
other elements of the stanzas. Due to the mental expenditure that takes place in their
deciphering, it is tempting to think of kennings as independent entities. Yet, they are tied into
the stanzas in which they are found. In *Vell 4*, *grynniló bergs dverga* [shoal-wave of the rock
of dwarves] [POETRY] (4:4) is the subject of the verb *gengr, asksögn* is its object, and *Ullar*
is the subject of *magnar hvøt*. Thus, each kenning interacts with its surroundings. Such
interlocking systems of catachrestic images were commonly recommended in Classical and
medieval treatises on memory.104 Although such texts were not known in tenth-century
Norway, such qualities in kennings may well have stemmed from a lay understanding of
mnemonic techniques, whether intuitively-realised or formalised. In an art form such as
skaldic poetry, which was oral-memorial in origins and may have remained largely aural-
memorial, such techniques were vital.

Yet, as mentioned, the “bizarreness effect” has shown limited success in empirical tests.
Furthermore, the studies Bergsveinn cites argue that conventionalised imagery also has a
mnemonic effect. According to Francis Bellezza, mnemonic devices such as “bizarre”
imagery can be voluntarily triggered, and can be used to store a wide variety of information
due to a broader range of what they can be used to encode. Schemas, on the other hand, are
limited in terms of what they can be used to encode, and are automatically – rather than
voluntarily – triggered, but can be used to infer further information due to their limited and
conventionalised scope.105 Closely related to this is the notion of horizontal and vertical
recall, which deals with “sets” of information. Vertical recall is the retrieval of key fragments
of a set through free recall, whereas horizontal recall is the recall of a set in as complete a
state as possible, cued by these key fragments.106 According to this theory, “bizarre” images
benefit vertical recall, as distinctive features ‘differentiate stimuli at input and can be used
later as retrieval cues,’ whereas common/conventional images ‘enjoy the benefit of greater
integration’ with their surroundings and thus ‘produce a higher probability of recalling an
entire image given recall of any part.’107 Kennings appear to function both as mnemonic
devices and verbal schemas. They follow a very limited set of semantic formulae, yet their
artistic worth is at least in part founded upon the combination of contrasting concepts and the
variation of synonyms in unique combinations.

104 Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge:
Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 133-140
105 Bellezza, pp. 43-52.
106 Wollen and Margres, p. 107
107 Wollen and Margres, pp. 112-115
There are approximately thirteen kennings in Vell 1-5, with only four referents: eight kennings refer to [POEM], three to [HÁKON], one to [RETAINERS], and one to [TEETH]. Within this already-limited field, the kennings for [POETRY] all use the kenning type <drink> of <mythological entity>, with <drink> expanded to incorporate sea and blood, and Kvasir, dwarves/giants, the vats of the mead of poetry, and Óðinn standing in for <myth>. Although at first these kennings all appear wildly different due to synonym-variation, they do all follow the same pattern. To return to stanza 1, the reciter may use one of two bizarre images in this stanza to facilitate free (vertical) recall: Hákon hearing the blood of Kvasir, or the blended image of fjarðleggjar. In the former case, there is a succinct image with a high level of distinctiveness and interaction: the jarl, Kvasir, and Kvasir’s blood are all combined in a single scene. As such, the recall of one element would help to cue the rest. Additionally, both follow the kenning-type <drink> of <mythological entity> [POETRY], and so the recall of one could help establish the kenning-type as a memory schema for the other.

In the second kenning, vertical recall would likely be attached to fjarðleggjar, as it is an elaborated, distinctive, interacting image: no other instances of fjords are found in the surrounding kennings, and the image itself, water’s bone, likewise has no analogue in the text or reality. Fjarðleggjar alone only provides [ROCK]. Yet at its semantic level, the overall kenning cluster encodes a chain of conventionalised associations which run: <bone> of <land/river> [ROCK], <dweller/warrior> of <rock> [DWARVES], and <drink> of <mythological entity> [POETRY]. If the reciter already knew what schema they were looking for, then they could use the target schema, the [POEM] kenning-type, alongside the [DWARF] kenning-type, to recall the elements needed to reconstruct the kenning. Thus, from the free recall of fjarðleggjar, the skald can use kenning-type schemas to access fyrða and dreggjar brim. A similar process can be found in Vell 2, where a shorter kenning, Boðnar bára, precedes another, longer one of the same type: berg-Saxa fley. The catachrestic image of the wave of a vat/vessel here cues vertical recall, and, granted that the reciter knew that they needed to refer to poetry using the kenning-type <drink> of <mythological entity> [POETRY], the occurrence of the shorter instance of the kenning-type earlier in the stanza would aid in cueing the schema underpinning the longer and more complex kenning. Thus, the combination of catachresis and harmony functioned to enhance free recall of both kennings which, in turn, would cue the recall of larger sections of the stanza.

Research into oral traditions’ sound-patterns and formulae have largely focused on recreative recall, whereby story-schemas, sound patterns, and oral formulae enable a reciter to
recount a tale, even if each reiteration is different.\textsuperscript{108} It would appear that kenning-types were themselves memory schemas, working in a similar manner to the larger story scripts, epithets, and action sequences of oral epic.\textsuperscript{109} A reciter could first access key fragments through free recall, which would then unlock conventionalised semantic and metrical cues to reconstruct the verse. Mnemonists, classical treatises, and modern researchers have all shed doubt upon the feasibility of using images alone to recall information word-by-word,\textsuperscript{110} and so these interlocking recall mechanisms would have facilitated rote recall of such long and complex texts as dróttkvætt stanzas.

Overall, the use of conventionalised semantic formulae in \textit{Vell} 1-5 facilitated both comprehension and recall, as the schemas they create have a limited number of slots for information, and a limited amount of types of information which can slot into them. The use of catachrestic imagery, on the other hand, could draw the recipient’s attention, and this focus facilitated the free recall of certain images, which could then cue the recall of these larger schemas. Additionally, the frames cued and created by this imagery could be used to create text worlds which touched the discourse space and/or narrative context of the poem, intertwining multiple layers of meaning to create an oral text that was comprehensible, memorable, and aesthetically pleasing not in spite of its unique diction, but \textit{because} of it.

\textbf{Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld Óttarson – Hákonardrápa. Late tenth century/early eleventh century.}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Old Norse</th>
<th>English Prose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Askþollum stendr Ullar austr at miklu trausti rækilundr hín ríki randfárs brumaðr hári.</td>
<td>The powerful tending-grove of the shield’s injury [HUMAN &gt; SWORD &gt; WARRIOR, HÁKON] stands as a great help east for the pines of Ullr’s ash [HUMANS &gt; SPEAR/SHIELD &gt; WARRIORS]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ólitit brestr úti unndýrs frönum runnum hart á Hamðis skyrutm hryngráþ Egils vápna.</td>
<td>The ringing hail of Egill’s weapons [ARROWS/BATTLE] bursts not little from the foremost bushes of the wave-beast [HUMANS &gt; SHIP &gt; WARRIORS], strongly onto Hamðir’s kirtles [MAIL].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þaðan verða fót fyrða (fregnk görla það) Sórla rjóðask björt í blóði benfúr méilskúrur.</td>
<td>As a result Sórli’s bright clothes [MAIL] must be reddened by wound-fire [WEAPONS] – I learn precisely of this – in arrow-showers [BATTLE] with men’s blood.\textsuperscript{111}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\textsuperscript{109} Rubin, pp. 16-17, 26-31,194-224

\textsuperscript{110} Bergsveinn Birgisson, ‘Mnemonic Device’, pp. 202-203

\textsuperscript{111} Translation taken from Faulkes (trans.), \textit{Snorra Edda} (London: Everyman, 1998) p. 117.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ok geirrótu götvar gağls við strengjar hagli hungreyððum hanga hléðut, jarmi séður.</td>
<td>And clothes of the spear-rain[^112] [BATTLE &gt; ARMOUR], sewn from iron, clings to the destroyer of the hunger of the gosling of the hanged man/Óðinn [RAVEN &gt; WARRIOR] against the hail of strings [ARROWS/BATTLE].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grams rúni lætr glymja gunnrík, hinns hvót líkar Högni hamri slegnar heiptbráðr of sik váðr.</td>
<td>The battle-mighty king’s confidant [JARL], the one whom quick deed pleases, hot-blooded, causes the hammer-stricken clothes of Högni [MAIL] to clatter over himself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sannyrðum spenr sverða snarr þiggjandi viggja barrhaddaða byjar biðkván und sik Briðja.</td>
<td>The swift receiver of the horses of the breeze [SHIPS &gt; HÁKON] stretches out below himself the pine-needle-haired awaiting-woman of Þriði [ÓÐINN &gt; JQRD] with the true words of swords [BATTLE].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Því hykk fleygjanda frakna (ferr jóðr und menþverri) ítra eina at látu Æðs systur mjók trauðan.</td>
<td>Thus I think the thrower of lances [HÁKON] very reluctant to leave alone Auðr’s glorious sister [JQRD]. Earth goes under the necklace-breaker [HÁKON].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ráð lukus, at sá, síðan, snjallráðr konungs spjalli áttí eínga döttur Ónars, við gróna.</td>
<td>The marriage-case closed thus, that that counsel-wise king’s advisor [HÁKON] had the only daughter of Ónarr [JQRD], overgrown with trees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breiðleita gat brúði Báleygs at sér teygða stefnir stóðvar hrafna stálra ríkismálum.</td>
<td>The steerer of the Hrafnar/ravens[^113] of the bay [HORSES &gt; SHIPS] had the broad-faced bride of Báleygr [ÓÐINN &gt; JQRD] drawn to him by the powerful speeches of steel weapons [BATTLE].</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Hákonardrápa** is the name given to a collection of nine half-stanzas found in *Skáldskaparmál*. Stanza 1 is found in *Skáldskaparmál*’s discussion of kennings for [MAN] which use the base-word <tree> (Skm 65; stanza 212); stanzas 2 and 3 are found in the use of the kenning-type <clothes> of <hero> [MAIL] (Skm 68; stanzas 229-230); stanza 4 in the discussion of arrow-kennings (Skm 71; stanza 248); stanzas 5 and 8 in the discussion of jarl-kennings (Skm 81; stanzas 288, 291); and stanzas 7-9 appear in the discussion of kennings for Jórð (Skm 35-36; stanzas 118-119).[^114] They are all attributed to a Hallfróðr, referred to at one point as Hallfróðr.

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[^112]: *Lexicon Poeticum*, 2nd ed., s.v. ‘geir-Róta;,’ by Finnur Jónsson, states that this is the name of a valkyrie. However, *geirróta* could also be translated as *spear-shower*, a kenning of the type <storm> of <weapons> [BATTLE]. See Faulkes (ed.), Snorri Sturluson, *Skáldskaparmál 2. Glossary and Index of Names* (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1998), p. 286. The specific wording used here, *geirrótu götvar*, appears to be a quotation of Egill Skalla-Grimsson, *Lausavís* 15-6, SkjA I, p. 52; Skj/B I, p. 46. However, the earliest attestation of this *lausavís* is in AM 162 A 0 fol., dated c. 1240-1260, which is several centuries after both skalds’ lifetimes, slightly after the posited composition of *Skm*, and predates GKS 2367 4to and DG 11, the earliest extant MSS containing *Skm*. Thus, it is difficult to ascertain precisely which poem is referencing which. See ‘AM 162 A þeta fol.’, [https://handrit.is/en/manuscript/view/is/AM02-0162A-theta] [Accessed 22nd May 2017]; ‘GKS 2367 4to.’, [https://handrit.is/en/manuscript/view/is/GKS04-2367] [Accessed 22nd May 2017]; Faulkes, ‘Introduction’, in *Skm*, pp. xi-xii; Heimir Pálsson, ‘Introduction’, in *Uppsala Edda. DG 11 4to*, ed. Heimir Pálsson, trans. Anthony Faulkes (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2012), p. xxx.

[^113]: This could refer to *ravens* or to the legendary horse *Hrafn*; Either one would potentially lead to the same referent, [SHIPS]. See Faulkes, *Skáldskaparmál* 2, pp. 316-317.

[^114]: Stanza 5 also appears in the section on Óðinn-kennings (*Skm* 8, stanza 10). I follow the provisional stanza-numbering found on the *SKP* website, ‘Hákonardrápa — Hf Háð[ðVo],’ ed. Kate Heslop, *SKP* online.
vandræðaskáld (Skm 35). As such, they have been attributed to Hallfreð vandræðaskáld Óttarson (c. 960-1007) the protagonist of the episodically-preserved Hallfreðar saga.115 This saga tells of his travels, his troubled romance with Kolfinna Álvaladadóttir, his conversion to Christianity, and his devotion to King Óláfr Tryggvason.116 The saga claims that he composed a drápa in honour of Jarl Hákon.117 Yet, whilst the verses may be Hallfreðr’s, their attribution to Hkdr is conjectural, as no redaction of this saga preserves the drápa’s contents.118 The use of catachresis and convention in these stanzas illustrates how skaldic diction could use conceptual blending not only to aesthetic and mnemonic effects, but also to extend the terms of a conventionalised kenning-metaphor and model different ways of understanding a concept.

If these stanzas do come from Hkdr, then, like Vell 1-5, they would have been composed in an oral-memorial milieu, and would likewise be invested in the mnemonic aesthetics of contrast-tension. Hkdr 6 provides a good example of this, as both verbs and descriptive elements form part of the highly-contrasting imagery of the kennings’ nouns. Sannyrdum sverða [true words of swords] (6:1) blends the concrete, <weapons>, with the intangible, <voice>, to refer to a concrete event, [BATTLE]. Not only must the recipient imagine a speaking weapon, but they must then map the abstract concept words onto the concrete concept [BATTLE]. The mythological kenning barrhaddaða biókván Priððja [pine-needle-haired awaiting-woman of Priðði] [JQRD] (6:3-4) is not necessarily catachrestic, but the descriptive element barrhaddaða is a non-naturalistic combination of human and tree features. Furthermore, the verb used to link subject [HÁKON], direct object [JQRD], and instrument [BATTLE] is spenr – to seduce/spread out.

This produces a nýgerving, as the base-words’ semantic fields of <man>, <woman>, and <voice> are held together in an extended metaphor of sexual and martial conquest which

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115 For the manuscript tradition of Hallfreðar saga, see Erin Michelle Goeres, “The Many Conversions of Hallfreð Vandræðaskáld”, Viking and Medieval Scandinavia 7 (2011) pp. 45-47.
117 Hallfreðar Saga, p. 151. Snorri Sturluson, ‘Part II. Skáldatal, Genealogy of the Sturlungs, List of Lawspeakers’, in Uppsala Edda, p. 110 does not list Hallfreðr as a skald in the service of Jarl Hákon, which led Fidjestøl, in Det Norske Fyrstediktet (Óvre Ervik: Alvheim & Eide, 1982), p. 102, to argue that it was commissioned by his son, Jarl Eiríkr Hákonarson.
118 Guðrún Nordal, Tools, p. 78, remarks that Hallfreðr’s verses in Skm and konungasögur are more likely to be authentic than those found only in Hallfreðar saga. For a discussion of the authenticity of the lausavisur in Hallfreðar saga, see Diana Whaley, “The Conversion Verses” in Hallfreðar saga: Authentic Voice of a Reluctant Christian?, in Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross, Viking Collection 14 (Odense: Odense University Press, 2003) pp. 234-257.
underlies many of these stanzas, illustrating Hallfreðr’s command of the kenning-system and his knowledge of concepts and their associations. Yet, this nýgerving draws attention to the conceptual contrast between marriage/seduction and battle that runs through these verses, as they are two vastly different events with very different outcomes.\(^{119}\) This battle/seduction metaphor was likely an innuendo intended to entertain the audience. Whilst this tension between the text world of the nýgerving (sex), and the poem’s primary text world (battle) does not necessarily match Bergsveinn’s description of contrast-tension aesthetics, it would create conceptual catachresis, drawing attention to the images and aiding recall of the stanza.

_Hkdr_ likewise uses the semantic formulae of kenning-types to aid recall and comprehension. The non-naturalistic kenning-images in _Hkdr_ 6, such as viggja byrjar [horses of the breeze] (6:2-3) and barrhadaða biðkván are all potential candidates for vertical recall. If viggja byrjar is recalled with the knowledge that the referent is [HÁKON], then it would cue the search for an appropriate nomen agentis base-word, and hending (internal rhyme) would help to cue þiggjandi. If barrhadaða biðkván was recalled, the base-word biðkván alongside knowledge of the referent [JÖRD] would prompt horizontal recall of the determinant <Óðinn> as the only known lover of Jórð. Overall, it again seems that the co-occurrence of contrast-tension aesthetics, conventionalised semantic formulae, and metrical considerations facilitated the decipherment and recall of _Hkdr_’s stanzas.

In addition to the aesthetic and mnemonic impact of the catachresis and conventionalised semantic formula in its kenning-imagery, _Hkdr_ uses text worlds generated by nýgervingar to model ways of viewing concepts; and the disruptions to these worlds caused by nykrat to lay bare and play with these conceptual structures for aesthetic and intellectual effect. Possibly the most conventionalised conceptual metaphor underpinning the kenning-imagery found in _Hkdr_ is the base-concept _<tree> = [HUMAN]_.\(^{120}\) This base-concept is widespread, with the grammatical gender of the base-word determining the gender of the referent. It has multiple determinants, most of which pertain to the culture of the drótt, including _<battle>, <ship> or <gold> (Skm 40, 63-66).\(^{121}\) Snorri Sturluson offers a typically medieval etymological explanation for this metaphor, stating that:

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\(^{119}\) This same group of subject, object, and instrument is found in _Hkdr_ 9, with different synonyms. Again, this repetition-with-variation seems to be a foregrounding tactic particular to skaldic verse, as it uses both contrast/novelty and repetition.

\(^{120}\) *Base-concept* will be used where a base-word may have multiple determinants but the same referent, suggesting the base-word/referent relationship exists beyond individual kenning-types and appears to be a kind of conceptual metaphor which appears primarily/exclusively in skaldic diction.

\(^{121}\) Meissner, pp. 243-350, particularly pp. 266-272. Kennings with the base-word _<tree> make up one of the largest categories of [MAN] kennings outside nomen agentis kennings.
Ok fyrir því at hann er reynir vápnanna ok viðr víganna... viðr heitir ok trú, reynir heitir trú—af þessum heitum hafa skáldin kallat men... viðar heitum karkendum ok kent til víga eða skipa eða fjár. [And for that reason is he (man) a tester (reynir) of weapons and performer (viðr) of slaughter... a tree is also called viðr, and a tree is called reynir (rowan tree) – from these names have the poets called men... masculine-gendered trees, kenned with battle or ships or gold.] (Skm 40)\(^2\)

In \textit{Hkdr}, this kenning-type is found three times, and is only used with masculine base-words, and determinants with the semantic field \textit{<battle>}: \textit{askpollum Ullar} [ash-pines of Ullr] (1:1), \textit{rækilundr randfárs} [tending-grove of the shield-wound] (1:3-4), and \textit{runnum unndýrs} [bushes of the wave-beast] (2:2), which turns the referent from [HUMAN] to [WARRIOR]. Each kenning sets up an image whereby an immobile tree is blended with the highly kinetic and violent event of battle; appropriate for the court of Hákon/Eiríkr. The individual word-choice in each kenning enhance the conceptual catachresis. In \textit{askpollum Ullar} (1:1), \textit{pollum} stands for the referent, [WARRIORS], whilst \textit{askr Ullar} uses a synecdoche whereby \textit{askr}, meaning ash-wood, stands in for the material of a shield/spear.\(^3\) Thus, there is a doubled tree-image whereby the recipient envisages an ash tree over which Ullr presides, and this ash tree is blended with multiple pines. At the same time, these trees are blended with the weaponry which they represent – if ash trees/spears – or possess, if pines/warriors.

The second kenning which uses this base-concept, (\textit{rækilundr randfárs brumaðr hári}, [tending-grove of the shield-wound, budded with hair] (1:3-4) uses the same blend of a shield and injury/upset found in \textit{Vell} (4:3), and portrays a grove of trees either causing or growing from this shield-wound, drawing more attention to the determinant \textit{<battle>} due to its also being a kenning. The accompanying descriptive element, \textit{brumaðr hári}, is an unconventional elaboration upon \textit{<tree>} = [HUMAN], further distinguishing and defamiliarising it by extending its terms. The resolution of conceptual contrast in the referent [HUMAN] provided pleasant cognitive relief, whilst such embellishments helped to retain the conceptual and affective conflicts this contrast generated, drawing and holding recipients’ attention.

\textit{Hkdr}, like \textit{Vell}, shows how skalds manipulated conventionalised imagery to achieve certain ends. Whereas Einarr does so by expanding the semantic fields of certain base-words, Hallfreðr interweaves layers of meaning, adds more elaborate descriptive elements, and changes base-words completely. \textit{Hkdr} features two kenning-types for [BATTLE]: \textit{<storm> of <weapons>}, seen in \textit{hryngráp vápna} [resounding hail of weapons] (2:4), \textit{méilskúrum}

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\(^2\) This etymology is not attested prior to \textit{SnE}, and Clunies Ross, \textit{A History}, p. 112 note 23, offers alternative readings of this metaphor based upon the creation of Askr and Embla from tree trunks in \textit{Gyfaginning} and the simple visual resemblance between humans and trees as standing objects.

\(^3\) Faulkes translates \textit{askr Ullar} as [SHIELD] in Snorri Sturluson, \textit{Edda}, ed. and trans. Faulkes, (London: Everyman, 1995 [1987]) p. 116, but, as already discussed, \textit{askr} can also be used to refer to spears.
[weapon-showers] (3:4), and hagli strengja [strings’ hail] (4:2); and <voice> of <weapons>, seen in sannyrðum sverða (6:1) and rikismölum stálara [steel’s powerful words] (9:4).¹²⁴ The determinant is the same for both, with <weapons> metonymically cueing [BATTLE]. The different metaphorical connotations of the base-words in turn foreground different aspects of <battle> relevant to the poem as an oral composition dedicated to Hákon.

Of the two kenning-types, <storm> of <weapons> is the more prevalent, both in Hkd₇ and in the skaldic corpus overall. The base-word’s semantic field recalls the thickness of projectiles and violent kinetic intensity shared by both storms and battles, with weapons being likened to precipitation. This kinetic intensity acknowledges the danger which both storms and battles bring. Such a kenning-type may have been intended to foreground the martial prowess of Jarl Hákon, a survivor of many such storms. <Voice> of <weapons> [BATTLE] is slightly less common. Meissner argues that it is related to a semantically-broader kenning-type <noise> of <weapons> [BATTLE], which may – debatably – be related to spell-casting and other puissant uses of language.¹²⁵ <Voice> as a base-word does not contain such connotations of martial prowess, but rather emphasises the ability to display power through verbal dexterity. This is arguably linked to the praise of Hákon’s diplomatic skills – likewise alluded to by Hkd₇’s [JARL]-kennings, which derive from being a king’s advisor or confidant¹²⁶ – as well as his ability to seduce women. The kenning-type <voice> of <weapons>, then, could have been chosen as a deliberate counterpart to the physicality of <storm> of <weapons>, as it draws attention to the perceived ability of words – particularly “true” or “powerful” ones – to act upon the world, and thus to the power of Hákon’s alliances, as well as to the potency of the drápa as a propagandistic tool.¹²⁷ Although kennings relied

¹²⁴ Hagli strengja may be a battle-kenning or an arrow-kenning (see Skm 71), as the determinant <bow> turns the wider referent [BATTLE] into [ARROW(S)]. This again illustrates how the determinant sets up certain frames, which guide the meanings given to the base-words. These two kenning-types could constitute a form of nykrat, but it occurs between, not within, stanzas.

¹²⁵ Meissner, p. 197. Meissner categorises multiple speech-acts such as <voice>, <spell>, and <senna> as base-words for three independent kenning-types which fall under the umbrella of <noise> of <weapons> [BATTLE]. (pp. 196-199). Although several literary sources suggest that skaldic verse could hold supernatural potency, Nicholas Meylan, ‘The Magical Power of Poetry’, Saga-Book 37 (2013) pp. 43-60, argues against these that the magical powers attributed to skaldic verse were a medieval invention to bolster the social prestige of skaldic verse, and that in earlier centuries word of mouth, such as propagandistic skaldic verse, had the ability to profoundly affect the social standing of an individual to the point where it was almost preternatural.

¹²⁶ Hákon was an ally of King Haraldr Bláþonn of Denmark for some time. See Kate Heslop and Diana Whaley, ‘Hákon jarl Sigurðarson’, in SkP 1 I, pp. cxixi-cxiv. Both Røgnvaldr jarl Kali Kolsson, Lausavísur 1, ed. Judith Jesch, SkP II 2, pp. 576-7, and Haraldr harðræði Sigurðarson, Gamanavísur 4, ed. Gade in SkP II 2, pp. 39-40, list poetry and other verbal skills as ípröttir – feats, alongside combat skills.

¹²⁷ For the use of skaldic verse as a truth-claim in konungasögur, see Mikael Males, ‘Applied Grammatica: Conjuring up the Native Poetae’, in Intellectual Culture in Medieval Scandinavia, c. 1100-1350, ed. Stefka Georgieva Eriksen (Turnhout: Brepolis, 2016) p. 289. Heimskringla says of skaldic panegyrics, ‘tökum vér þat allt fyrir satt, er í þeim kvæðum finnsk… eigi myndi þat þóra at segja sjálflum honum þau verk hans, er allir þeir, er heyrði, vissi, at hégömi veri ok skrøk, ok svá sjálfr hann. Þat væri þa hâd, en eigi lof.’ [We regard all that
upon formulae to communicate set meanings, in both Hkdr and Vell, semantic variations of these formulae were used to highlight different aspects of these meanings.

Hkdr also uses conceptual metaphors to develop its narrative of Hákon’s victory in battle as a set of interwoven text worlds which surround the primary narrative text world. Firstly, there is an offjóst pun between Jørð (earth/land), and its personification, Jørði, referred to using four viðkenningar: biðkván Priðja (6:4), systur Auðs [Auðr’s sister] (7:4), dóttur Ónars [Ónarr’s daughter] (8:3-4), and brúði Báleygs [Báleygr’s bride] (9:1-2). Such kennings rely upon a mythological Common Ground which appears fairly widely-known.128 Derived from this personification is another metaphor, as the interactions between Jarl Hákon and Jørð are made sexual and/or marital: it is said that Hákon spenr und sik barrhadaða biðkván Priðja [stretches out below himself the pine-needle-haired awaiting-woman of Priði ] (6:1-4), that he was mjók trauðan at látæ eïna Auðs systur [very reluctant to divorce Auðr’s sister] (7:3-4), that ráð lukusk at sá, snjallráðr konungs sjallið átti eïnga dóttur Ónars [the marriage-case closed thus: the counsel-wise king’s advisor married the only daughter of Ónarr] (8:1-4), and that he gat at sér teyga breiðleita brúði Báleygs [drew the broad-faced bride of Báleygr to himself] (9:1-2). This imagery would be in keeping with Jarl Hákon’s characterisation as a womaniser and a pagan.129 The innuendo here was presumably meant to amuse, and this kenning-type’s use caused pleasure for those who understood the puns and mythological references not only by causing conceptual conflict, but by marking the recipient as part of an in-group possessing specific cultural knowledge.

The manipulation of convention in Hkdr was not limited to varying kenning-types. Although the stanzas comprising Hkdr incorporate many typical elements of the skaldic panegyric, the seduction-narrative that centres around Hákon and Jørð is somewhat atypical. An erotic narrative would not seem unfeasible on the part of skald or patron. Jarl Hákon’s reputation has already been mentioned, and Hallfreðr is said to have composed several verses

which is found in those [skaldic] poems [about Norwegian rulers] as true... [no one] would dare to tell [the ruler] himself and all those who listened about his deeds which they knew to be falsehood and fiction. That would be mockery, not praise.] Snorri Sturluson, Heimskringla I, ed. Bjarni Áðalbjarnarson, Íslenzk Fornrit 26 (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 1941) p. 5

128 Skm 35. Such epithets appear in pre-Sné kennings such as man Priðja, Tindr Hallkelsson, Hákonardrápa 8:2, ed. Russell Poole, SkP 1 1, p. 351; and Yggjar brúði, Eyjólfr dàðaskáld, Bandadrápa 3:5, ed. Poole, SkP 1 1, p. 460. The former is another drápa composed in honour of Jarl Hákon, and the latter was written in honour of Eiríkr. Both feature Óðinn-related imagery.

129 Heslop and Whaley, p. ccxiv. Ágrip af Nóregskonungasögum. A Twelfth-Century Synoptic History of the Kings of Norway, ed. and trans. Matthew J. Driscoll (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1995) p. 22, states that ‘hann lét sér konur allar jamt heimirar er hann fýsti til, ok var engi kvenna munr í því gjör, ok engi grein, hvers konu hver væri, eða systir, eða dóttr.’ Driscoll’s translation on p. 23 reads – ‘he considered all women whom he desired equally available to him, making no distinction as to who was whose wife or sister or daughter.’
to woo his love, Kolfinna. Yet, the discourse space of skaldic performance puts certain generic expectations in place, and skaldic seduction-verse seem to have been subject to a taboo. Furthermore, these verses could potentially have been construed as veiled mockery, alleging that Hákon prioritised sexual matters over his duties as a ruler – an act punishable by outlawry. Yet the other effects of the discourse space, emphasised by the [BATTLE] kennings’ emphasis on the power and versatility of words, would cue recipients to look for other implications of the nýgerving’s use of language which would lead to alternative interpretations. This involves an inspection of how text worlds interact with one another, and with the discourse participants’ Common Ground. Through this, it becomes possible to view a multi-layered work of praise within this nýgerving.

The punning personification of the land as [JÖRD] is the starting-point for this nýgerving’s text world, which creates a set of sub-worlds which run parallel to the stanza’s primary text world. Perhaps the most immediately-evident level of meaning in the nýgerving’s imagery is accessed through the kinship-vidkennings used to identify Jörð. Through these kinship-associations and the kenning-imagery’s text worlds, Hákon is metaphorically mapped onto Óðinn. As well as pre-Christian religion, Óðinn is associated with martial prowess and poetry; all things key to Hákon’s public persona. Thus, on the most immediately-accessible level of meaning, the kenning’s referents, the text world of this nýgerving increments and repeats conventional mythological knowledge to complement Hákon by comparing him to a favoured deity of warriors and poets. This is not to argue that Hkdr was a religious poem, but rather that it illustrates how mythological allusions in kenning-imagery constructed text worlds that fed into the meanings conveyed by the primary text world of the poem.

Two of these kennings also incorporate further descriptive elements which incrementally add to the text worlds created by the kennings: barrhadaða bíðkván Þriðja (6:3-4) and döttur Ónars, viði gróna (8:3-4). That the woman is covered in trees/foliage foregrounds and defamiliarises the conceptual structures which underpin this metaphor by

130 Hallfreðar saga, pp. 133-200. These seduction-verse were also níð-verses insulting his rival suitor. Clunies-Ross, A History, pp. 61-63.
131 Discussed by Clunies Ross, A History, pp. 41-42, 64. However, the paucity of certain genres/themes in the skaldic corpus may be due to a lack of interest on the part of the historiographers and grammarians who recorded verse, rather than a genuine lack of such poems. See also Guðrún Nordal, Tools, pp. 8-10.
132 Grágás. Íslendingaættsbók i Fristatens Tid, udgivet efter det Kongelige Biblioteks Haandskrift II, ed. Vilhjálmur Finsen (Brøndre Berlings Bogtryggeri: Copenhagen, 1852) p. 183
133 See Werth, pp. 213-248
134 Turville-Petre, pp. 35-74; Heslop and Whaley, ‘Hákon jarl Sigurðarson’, pp. cxviii-cxcv; Skáldatal, p. 110
repeatedly extending their implications into imagery beyond the kenning proper. Both *barrhadaða*, of the woman, and *brumaðr hári* (1:4), of Hákon, extend `<tree>` = [HUMAN] into the realm of descriptive imagery. These stanzas together create a chiasmus between these two tree-people, where one has hair for foliage and the other has foliage for hair.\(^{136}\) Such chiasmus may have created aesthetic pleasure through symmetrical/repeated patterns. By extending the terms of this base-concept to create a descriptive element that blends hair and foliage, *Hkdr* also defamiliarises this potentially conventionalised blend afresh, causing recipients to reassess this tree/human metaphor. Such imagery may have also been used to suggest that Hákon was the rightful match for the land, as he is of the same “kind.” This conceptual pun could be used as a new piece of information which would overlay the purely mythological text world in which the [JǪRÐ] kennings themselves operate.

Overall, Hallfreðr’s kennings, like those of Einarr, exhibit conventionalised and catachrestic features which would have aided the comprehension and recall of stanzas, as well as creating an aesthetically-pleasing poem. Unlike Einarr, Hallfreðr also uses descriptive elements to further elaborate and defamiliarise the metaphors underpinning his kennings, thus drawing attention to them. Such descriptive elements may have also held mnemonic impact, and may also have featured as part of Hallfreðr’s skaldic *parole*, showing his artistic prowess in varying and enriching his diction. Overall, this shows that although the aesthetics of contrast-tension were present in this tenth-century poem, it also had considerable investment in conventional concepts, sustained imagery, and even more harmonious/symmetrical devices such as chiasmus, all of which contributed to the intellectual and aesthetic appreciation of these stanzas as much as the use of catachrestic conceptual blends.

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**Einarr Skulason – Óxarflokkr. Early-mid-twelfth century.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Old Norse</th>
<th>English Prose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Párs Mardallar milli meginhúðar, liggr skurða</td>
<td>There where Mardoíl’s weeping [FREYJA &gt; GOLD] lies between cuts we carry the flaw of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gauts berum galla þrúttinn grár, dalreyðar látri.</td>
<td>Gautr’s mighty gate [ÓÐINN &gt; SHIELD &gt; WEAPON]; swollen with the lair of the valley-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>whale [SERPENT &gt; GOLD].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eigi þverr fyr augna</td>
<td>The strong ice-sheet of Róðí’s roof [SHIELD &gt; AXE] does not wane before the rain of the eyes of Öðr’s bedfellow [FREYJA &gt; GOLD]; so may the king achieve old age.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Óðs beðvinu Róða ræfrs (eignisk svá) regni ramsvell (konung ellí).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hróðbarni knáð Hömrar (hlutum dýran grip) stýra</td>
<td>I can possess the gold-wrapped proud child of Hörn [FREYJA &gt; HNOSS]; we are allotted a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{136}\) Fidjestøl, *Fyrstedikt*, p. 105 comments on such a chiasmus operating on a structural level between stanzas.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brandr þrymr gjalfss á grundi gollvífiðou, hlífar, (sáðs) berr sinnar móður (svans unni mér gunnar fóstr geðandi Fróða) Freys nipt bráa driptir.</th>
<th>Precious treasure; the firebrand of the ocean’s roar [GOLD] extends on the shield’s injury [AXE/WEAPON]; Freyr’s niece [HNOSS] bears the swodrifts of her mother’s eyelashes [FREYJA &gt; GOLD]; the feeder of the swan of battle [RAVEN &gt; WARRIOR] granted to me the crop of Fróð’s fosterings [GOLD].</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nýt buðumk (Njarðar dóttur) nálægt vas þat skála (vel of hrósak því) vísa vörn, sævar, òx (barni).</td>
<td>The useful axe offered sure defence to me; that was near the sea’s hall; I praised well the child of Njóðr’s daughter [FREYJA &gt; HNOSS].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaf, sás erring ofrar, ógnprúðr Vanabrúðar þing Vófuður þróngvir þróttþoflga mér dóttur; ríkr leiddi mey mæks mótaþald á beð skaldi Gefnar, glóðum drífrn Gautreks svana brautar.</td>
<td>The battle-minded crowder of the wanderer’s meeting [ÓDINN &gt; BATTLE] who shows skill gave me a feat-strong daughter of the Vanir-bride [FREYJA &gt; HNOSS]; the powerful causer of sword’s meetings [BATTLE &gt; WARRIOR] led Gefn’s maid [FREYJA &gt; HNOSS] to the poet’s bed, driven by the embers of the road of the swans of Gautrek [SHIPS &gt; SEA&gt; GOLD].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frák at Fróða meyjar fullgólga mólu lætr stillir grið gollí, grafvitis beð, slítna; (mjúks) bera minnar ðxar meldr þann, við hlyn feldrar, (konings dýkra fét) Fenju foðr hýr (bragar stýri).</td>
<td>I heard that Fróði’s maids full-capably ground Grafvinitir’s bed [SERPENT &gt; GOLD]; the leader causes gold’s peace to be torn; the cheek of my axe, to maple fastened, carries that flour of Fenja; the gentle king’s wealth exalts the steerer of poetry.137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blóðeisu liggr bæði bjargs tveim megin geima sjóðs (ák sokkva striði) snær ok eldr at mæra.</td>
<td>Both the purse’s snow [SILVER] and sea’s fire [GOLD] lies on each side of the blade of the blood-flame [WEAPON]138; I have to praise the destroyer of enemies [RULER].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dœgr þrymr hvert, en hjarta hlýrskildir, reðr mildu Heita blakks, of hvitum hafleyr digulskafi; aldrí má fyrr eldi áls hrynbrautar skála (ðill viðr folká fellir framræði) snæ bræða.</td>
<td>Each day, ocean-flame [GOLD] spreads over white crucible-snow [SILVER]; the supplier of ship-stave shields of Heiti’s steed [horse of sea king &gt; SHIP] commands (with) a generous heart. Never may scales’ snow melt before the fire of the eel’s sounding road [SEA &gt; GOLD]; the feller of folk performs all skilful deeds.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Óxarflokkr** is the name coined by Jón Sigurðsson to refer to a collection of verses that appear to form an ekphrastic (descriptive) poem about an axe. **Óxflr 1-8** are found in the section of **Skm** dealing with gold-kennings (**Skm** 43-44, 57, 62; stanzas 145-149, 183, 194, 197). A further two stanzas, attributed to an “Einarr” and found in a later discussion of weapon-

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137 An alternative reading is: the king’s wealth exalts the steerer of agile poetry.

138 *Lexicon Poeticum*, 2nd ed., s.v. ‘bjarg;’ by Finnur Jónsson., argues that bjarg is part of the axe-kenning, but blóðeis on its own follows the [WEAPON] kenning-type <fire> of <wound/blood>. This reading will be preferred.
kennings (Skm 71; stanzas 244-245), are conventionally regarded as Øxfl 9-10. Finnur Jónsson also includes an anonymous stanza from the Third Grammatical Treatise. However, Guðrún Nordal argues that ‘it is impossible to say whether the three additional fragments… belonged to the same poem.’\(^{139}\) Stanza 11 will be excluded due to lack of internal or external evidence supporting its attestation. Stanza 9, attributed to an Einarr, shares certain features with 1-8, such as the kenning-type <ice> of <shield> [WEAPON], and stanza 10 may come from the same poem as it is quoted directly after stanza 9. As such, although Øxfl 9-10 will be acknowledged, discussion will focus on stanzas 1-8.

The cultural context of Øxfl differs from that of Vell and Hkdr. Einarr Skúlason (c. 1090s-1160s) lived well after Iceland’s Christianisation in 1000, and his position as a priest, as well as his poetry, suggest he was educated in Christian European traditions of thought. His most well-known poem, Geisli, shows a concerted effort to merge skaldic traditions not only with Christian faith and symbolism, but with Christian practices of meditatio, Classical composition strategies, and even Neoplatonic cosmology; culminating in a poem whose innovative use of imagery and kennings set a precedent for the Christian revival of skaldic verse.\(^{140}\) Doubt has been raised as to whether Øxfl was ever performed, or if it was composed and transmitted on the page as what Christopher Abram terms ‘an extremely self-conscious and learned exercise… that smells more of the classroom than of the pagan temple.’\(^{141}\) Whilst this characterisation of its use of pre-Christian myth may be accurate, away from questions regarding the “authenticity” of its Freyja-kennings Øxfl is a fascinating case study in how kennings could be used to generate text worlds almost independent of the primary text world with which to model concepts.

According to Bergsveinn Birgisson’s arguments, Christianity and literacy would have had a profound impact upon Einarr’s cognitive and compositional strategies.\(^{142}\) Through complex syntax and the foregrounding of conceptual puns between base-words, Øxfl detaches the metaphorical source worlds (the text worlds of source domains) of the kennings’ text worlds almost completely from the target world (the text world of the target domain) of the

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\(^{139}\) Guðrún Nordal, Social Discrimination, p. 10, note 15.


\(^{141}\) Christopher Abram, ‘Einarr Skúlason, Snorri Sturluson, and the Post-Pagan Mythological Kenning’ in Eddic, Skaldic, and Beyond: Poetic Variety in Medieval Iceland and Norway, ed. Martin Chase (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), p. 50. Skáldatátíl, pp. 100-107, lists Einarr as having composed for numerous patrons. It is not impossible that Øxfl was composed for a courtly performance, it is not certain either.

\(^{142}\) Bergsveinn Birgisson, ‘Cognitive Archaisms’, pp. 162-165, 171-173, 179. Such arguments, however, have been convincingly challenged. See Coleman, pp. 5-15.
axe. In doing so, Einarr seems to be merging Christian perspectives on obscure language with a ‘clever and self-conscious repositioning of the tradition of [Old Norse] ekphrasis to push the potential of the kenning-system as a means of exploring knowledge. Yet, the cognitive processes relating to comprehension, aesthetic appreciation, recall, and the creation of text worlds appear largely continuous with those of Vell and Hkdr.

Despite having a different socio-cultural context from Vell and Hkdr, Øxfl still shows investment in the interplay between formulaic kenning-types and contrast-tension aesthetics. In ten stanzas, there are approximately 37 kennings, with four kenning-types for [GOLD], one for [SILVER], five for [WARRIOR], two for [AXE], and one oflóst kenning-type that refers to the “precious object” (axe) through the <daughter> of <Freyja> [HNOSS]. Within this model, Einarr frequently chooses synonyms in a manner that suggests he is playing with the norms of skaldic diction for effect. For instance, brandr gjalfrs [firebrand of wave-noise] [GOLD] (3:3) uses the sound of waves to metonymically refer to the sea. The recipient is thus prompted to imagine a firebrand being applied to this sound, whilst also transforming this metonym into the concrete image of fire contained in the sea. Thus, contrast-tension and defamiliarisation are generated not only through conceptual blending in the kenning-type <fire> of <water> [GOLD], but through bringing senses other than sight into the largely visual realm of kenning-imagery.

Furthermore, brandr not only means firebrand, but also ship’s prow, which puns upon the verb styra [to steer] (3:2) as well as the determinant’s semantic field, <sea>. Such a concatenation of meaning and catachresis within conventionalised constraints, which appeals to multiple senses and conceptual fields, would be aesthetically-pleasing and makes brandr a likely element to be remembered through free recall. The contrasting sensory imagery, alongside the kenning-type, would aid the recollection of gjalfrs, and its semantic field of <sea> would arguably cue styra, and the interaction between kennings within the stanza would also arguably cue grandi hlifar [injury of the shield] through the verb prymr [extends]. Thus, like the kenning-imagery of Vell and Hkdr, the kenning-imagery of stanza 3 aids recall and creates aesthetic effect through non-naturalistic imagery and manipulation of the literary conventions of the kenning-system.

Such play upon the expectations generated by the kenning-system is also found in Þóða ræfrs ramsvell [the mighty ice-sheet of Þóði’s roof] (2:2-4). The unusual kenning-type <ice> of <shield> [WEAPON] is likely a calque upon the widespread <fire> of <shield> [WEAPON], which is also used in blóðeisu [blood-ember] [AXE] (7:1-2).\(^{145}\) Cataphresis is generated between the base-word used here, <ice>, and the one found in the conventional kenning-type, <fire>, drawing attention to the base-word. As such, ramsvell is likely to be retrieved through free recall, and in turn cue the rest of the semantic formula. Such contrast also defamiliarises the kenning-types, and prompts a reconsideration of what <ice> and <fire> have in common that would allow them to be substituted. Both base-words are bright/shiny, and their contrasting extremes in temperature reflect the striking tactile sensation of pain inflicted by weapons. Through changing the base-word of a conventionalised kenning-type, Einarr breaches and defamiliarises kenning-types’ conventionalised imagery to draw attention to the visual and tactile qualities which are being metaphorically mapped from base-word to referent, giving his poem a sensory immediacy.

The kennings in Øxfl, like those of Vell and Hkdr, model text worlds to explore certain conceptual frames. But here, the kennings appear to push the boundaries of what they can do in terms of modelling knowledge beyond the referent. The most prevalent kenning-type in Øxfl is <tears> of <Freyja> [GOLD] (1:1, 4, 2: 1-3, 3: 5, 8, 9:4), which alludes to a myth that Freyja’s husband Óðr ‘för í braut langar leiðir, en Freyja grætr eptir, en tår hennar er gull rauð’ [went far away, and Freyja weeps after him, and her tears are red gold] (Gylf 29). A Nýgerving then generates the accompanying ofljóst kenning <daughter> of <Freyja> [HNOSS/AXE]. Although an argument has been put forward that this reflects a pagan revival or even a continuous pagan undercurrent in Iceland, the greater scholarly consensus is that Øxfl is a catalogue-poem written by a scholar interested in collecting kennings which allude to particularly esoteric parts of pre-Christian myth, as most of the information pertaining to Freyja found here is not in any older source.\(^{146}\)

The encyclopaedic nature of this kenning-collection has led some scholars to argue that this illustrates the point where kennings, particularly mythological ones, ceased to be an active linguistic system and became an archive of poetic ornaments. Many of the Freyja

\(^{145}\) For the relative rarity of <ice> as a base-word compared to <fire>, see Meissner, pp. 149-151. Einarr may be using a type of nykrat, although this is debatable as the difference in base-word occurs between stanzas.

\(^{146}\) Kuhn, ‘Das nordgermanische Heidentum in den ersten christlichen Jahrhunderten’, ZDA 79 (1942), pp. 133-166; Abram, pp. 50-54. Similarly, in Geisli 48:7-8, the kenning gylðis kindar gómsparrí [gun-spar of the wolf’s kin] uses a kenning-type attested only once in earlier verses – sparra varra Fenris [prop of the lips of Feni'sulf] Eyvindr skáldaspillir Finnsson, Lausavísa 6:1-2, ed. Poole, SkP I 1, p. 223. This suggests Einarr viewed such antiquarian pursuits as compatible with Christian faith.
bynames in Øxfl appear to be generic terms for female deities in older sources, and hnoss as a simplex meaning *precious thing* is not found in any pre-Christian verse, suggesting Einarr was more interested in compiling obscure mythological curios rather than understanding them.\(^{147}\) As Christopher Abram comments, ‘these are mythological references rendered anodyne by their excess.’\(^{148}\) Yet, the knowledge Einarr models through his kennings, including his adaptations of esoteric mythological allusions, gained currency in subsequent works of poetry and poetics. The use of gömsparri [gum-prop] in SnE’s discussion of Fenrisúlfr (Gylf 27) is likely a quotation of gylðis kindar gömsparra [gum-spar of the wolf’s kin] (Geisli 48:7-8), and Sturla Þórðarson, Snorri’s nephew, uses the compounds haflýegr [ocean-flame] and digulksfla [crucible-snow], echoing Øxfl (8:4), in his poem Hákonarkviða, showing the profound influence Skm had, particularly amongst the Sturlungar.\(^{149}\)

Furthermore, this suggests that, rather than just reflecting conventionalised knowledge, kennings played an active part in the establishment and transmission of conceptual schemas. Thus, a skald’s individual *parole* had the potential to rework not only the kenning-system’s *langue*, but the conceptual frames it drew upon.

This interaction between kennings and knowledge holds interesting repercussions concerning the idea that skaldic diction creates ‘entire systems of interlocked kennings,’\(^{150}\) which rely upon their own internal logic. In Øxfl, the kenning-imagery’s text worlds appear to go beyond extended metaphor, which increments source-world information and directs it towards the target-world, and generate something akin to a *pataphor*, which ‘uses [a] newly created metaphorical similarity… to describe a new and separate world, in which an idea or aspect has taken on a life of its own.’\(^{151}\) Nýgervingar are not pataphors in the strictest sense, in as much as they do retain some attachment to target world, but at the same time their highly allusive and concrete nature creates a scenario whereby the implications of the kennings’ metaphors start to model ideas beyond the remit of the kennings, and even of the stanzas themselves. This means that some nýgervingar differ from the accepted text world theory account of metaphor, which argues that metaphorical source worlds are created solely to feed into the target world.\(^{152}\)

\(^{147}\) Abram, pp. 50-51, 59-60
\(^{148}\) Abram, p. 50
\(^{149}\) Abram, p. 60; Mikael Males, (forthcoming) pp. 75-76; Sturla Þórðarson, Hákonarkviða 33:1, 6, ed. Gade, SkP II 2, p. 723
\(^{150}\) Frank, *Court Poetry*, p. 44
and/or perpetuate certain concepts, and is one of the exceptional semantic features of skaldic verse that could contribute new ideas to cognitive poetics.

There are two key nýgervingar in Øxfl, both of which pertain to the [GOLD] adorning the axe. The first is <tears> of <Freyja>, and the second is <fire> of <water>. As mentioned, the former generates the kenning-type <daughter> of <Freyja> [HNOSS], and the latter generates the base-concept <ice> = [SILVER]. The former nýgerving’s text worlds are arguably easier to model, as they stem from a narrative involving humanoid actors. For instance, in stanza three it is said that Freys nipt berr driptir bráa sinnar mður [Freyr’s niece bears the snowdrifts of her mother’s brows] (3:5,8). This overlays the physical reality of the axe bearing golden ornaments with the metaphorical source-world of Hnoss carrying Freya’s tears. In each instance, the qualities of brightness, rarity, social prestige, exalted origins, and the ways in which lines of gold inlay could resemble rivulets of water, suggested by pars milli skurða liggr Mardallar grátr [there, where the tears of Mardoll lie between cuts] (1:1-2, 4), are mapped from the source, Freyja’s tears, to the target, gold, and from there are metonymically transferred to the axe itself. At the same time, these kennings evoke narrative frames which are, at most, peripherally attached to the target world of the axe – for instance, the axe should not be taken as the daughter of its golden ornamentation. Thus, although nýgerving resembles extended metaphor, it oversteps the boundaries of this device.

The <fire> of <water> nýgerving is more complicated. The multiple possible origins of <fire> of <water> [GOLD] has already been discussed, and Snorri states that the accompanying base-concept <ice> = [SILVER] is a play upon this conventional [GOLD] kenning-type: just as gold is associated with fire due to its redness, silver is associated with ice due to its whiteness (Skm 61). This kind of conceptual and visual opposition would presumably appeal to the contrast-tension aesthetics of skaldic verse, as well as to the naturalistic symmetry in Classical aesthetics. Furthermore, at several points in this poem, the interplay between <ice> and <fire> goes beyond aesthetic contrast, and starts to encroach upon wider frames of knowledge. This is most apparent in 8:1-4, where it is stated that hafleygr pryrm of hvitum digulskafli [ocean-fire spreads over white crucible-snow]. Here, multiple text worlds are generated: the primary/target text world in which the gold and silver adorn the axe, at least two source worlds which model each individual kenning’s imagery, and one source world where the base-words of the two kennings are placed side by side, standing in for their referents.

The most immediately-evident purpose of this imagery would be the aesthetic appeal of contrast. Not only do the base-words, <fire> and <ice> stand in opposition, but in hafleygr,
there is the poetically-conventional but naturalistically-catachrestic juxtaposition of <water> and <fire>; and in digulskafli, the recipient must envisage snow contained within a crucible – a device used to heat substances. These two compounds are placed directly beside one another in line 4, and are linked through adalhending (full internal rhyme). Thus, even if the poem were to be orally delivered, the recipient has their attention drawn to this contrasting combination. The primary purpose of this defamiliarising contrast would be to accentuate the visual contrast between fire/ice and gold/silver. Additionally, <fire> and <ice> both arguably access the quality, dangerous, used by the kenning-types <fire/ice> of <battle> [WEAPON], layering these kenning-types’ text worlds.

This text world, in which fire and ice coexist, is impossible – something Einarr acknowledges in the next half of the stanza, stating that aldri má skála snæ bræða fyr álsl hrynbrautar eldri [scales’ snow may never melt before the fire of the eel’s sounding road] (8:5, 8). This comment foregrounds the usually-unacknowledged impossibilities in kennings’ imagery. Faulkes suggests that here, Einarr is playing upon the qualities of base-word and referent: as gold is a fire that creates no heat, it cannot melt snow or silver. Yet, in commenting upon the impossibility of his own nýgerving, Einarr also draws attention to the degree to which he can extend the conceptual terms of a kenning’s imagery to the point where it almost detaches from its referent and dictates its own reality without breaching the sense of the overall poem, thus showing off his poetic skill.

The potential for kennings to create text worlds which allude to and interact with one another has already been discussed in relation to the nýgervingar in Hkdr. Whereas the text worlds of the nýgervingar in Hkdr remain focused upon the target world of Jarl Hákon’s military achievements, the kennings and nýgervingar in Øxfl create metaphorical mappings between the source worlds which almost completely obscure the target world. At several points, the kenning-types in Øxfl begin to intertwine to the point where they start to interact more with each other than their target world. In two kennings, bráa driptir [brows’ snowdrifts] (3:8) and drifinn hvarmþey Freyju [the driven eyelid-thaw of Freyja] (9:4), Freyja’s tears are explicitly linked to thawed snow, which is said to be impossible in stanza 8; and in (9:4) and driða glóðum Gautreks svana brautar [driven with the embers of the road of Gautrek’s swans] (5:7-8), the axe and the tears are said to be drifinn, a term related to driven snow or sea-spray. Again, this could simply be due to aesthetic reasons: the image of an axe-blade patterned with gold and silver like driven snow is a striking one. Yet the conceptual

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153 For negation as a foregrounding tactic, see Browse, pp. 28-29
154 Faulkes (trans), Edda, p. 114
interplay between fire, snow, tears/water, and thaw also forms a web of associations only peripherally attached to the target/primary text world.

This interplay creates a kind of hybrid of *nykrat* and *nýgerving*, in as much as the axe is at once fire, ice, and water/precipitation: all distinct yet interlinked concepts. These images recall the elemental and mythical knowledge-frames already discussed, and the likening of tears to rain could allude to Old Norse myth, Neoplatonic ideas of the body as a microcosm, or a synthesis of the two.155 The catachrestic nature of the kennings themselves, combined with this overarching conceptual punning, works to draw attention to the imagery of the kennings and map links between the text worlds they generate, rather than onto the target world of the axe. This foregrounding of conceptual play through the modelling of metaphorical source worlds is remarkable even in skaldic poetry, and goes against the extended metaphor as understood in cognitive poetics, in which clause-level metaphors may be briefly foregrounded, but only to build a single discourse-level metaphorical source world that underlies and feeds into an understanding of the target world.156 Thus, *Øxfl* appears to engage *nykrat* and *nýgerving* to explore concepts beyond the terms of the primary text world, and explore how different source worlds relate to one another and to the real world.

In addition to its semantic complexity, the syntax of the kennings in *Øxfl* is more fragmented than in *Vell* or *Hkdr*. In the first five stanzas, there are three instances where the components of a kennings are separated by two lines, and eight instances where the elements of a kenning are intertwined with those of other kennings. This can be seen in stanza 3:

(sáðs) berr sinnar móður
(svans unni mér gunnar
fóst fóstr gæðandi Fróða)

*Freys nipt bráa driptir*. (3:5-8)
The elements of *Freys nipt berr bráa driptir sinnar móður* are separated by lines 6-7, and the different typefaces highlight how the kennings are syntactically intertwined, and interrupt one another to the point of apparent incoherence. In contrast, two-line separation of kennings does not happen in *Vell* 1-5 or *Hkdr* 1-5. In *Vell* there are only two intertwined kennings (5:2-4), and two in *Hkdr* 1-5 (4:2-3); and neither two-line separation nor intertwining occurs in the first five stanzas of the ninth-century ekphrastic poem *Ragnarsdrápa*.157 Due to this more

156 Browse, p. 25
complex word order, Würth’s arguments regarding the incomprehensibility of skaldic verse in an oral recitation seem more applicable here than in the earlier poems. In fact, Einarstr þáttir Skálasonar recounts an instance where King Sigurðr munr tries to recall a verse spoken by Einarr, and seems utterly uncomprehending, saying ‘Þat ætla ek at ek muna: Hola báru ristr hlýrum. Já, veit Guð. Barmr lyptingar farmi.’ [This is what I think I remember: hollow billow carves with bow. Yes, God knows… Rim deck’s cargo.]

Whether this is genuinely representative of the reception of Einarr’s poetry is unknown, but it does imply that Einarr’s poetic style was thought to be particularly challenging.

Given its close relationship to the modelling and transmission of knowledge, rather than being an illustration of the post-Christianisation decline of the art of kennings, Óxflj may be an appropriation of kennings to fit the new demands of Einarr’s learned milieu. St. Augustine, whose work was known in medieval Iceland, discusses the virtues of obscure diction in the Scriptures. He states that ‘the more opaque they seem, because of the use of metaphor, the greater the reader’s pleasure when the meaning becomes clear,’ and that such texts use ‘a helpful and healthy obscurity in order to exercise and somehow refine the readers’ minds or to… cloud the minds of the wicked.’ During the Middle Ages, the obscurity of Latin (particularly the Scriptures) became something of an obscuritas cottage industry, encouraged by the assumption that ‘any intricate and “difficult” style was inherently “high” and courtly,’ and the Neoplatonic mode of thought, which dictated that ‘the appearances of this world are only dim reflections of the hidden realities in heaven above… [obscure literature] requires the reader to pick up the knack of stripping [such] coverings through ruminatio,’ which is the practice of using imagery to (re-)live scenes from the Bible. This practice, termed ‘visualised cognition’ by Mats Malm, is one example of the widespread use of imagery to model and explore complex or abstract concepts. Training cognitive abilities through


159 Although it postdates Einarr by two centuries, a manuscript containing Augustine’s De Doctrina Christiana dated to 1397 was found at the site of Viðeyjarklaustur. Emil Olmer, Boksamlingar på Ísland 1179-1490 (Gothenberg: Wettergren & Kerber, 1902), p. 7.


obscure verbal imagery, then, was a part of Christian exegesis, and furthermore Augustine’s comments on intellectual stimulation echo the cognitive accounts of scientific discovery, artistic experience, and kenning-decipherment described in this study’s introduction.

Part of the acquisition of skaldic competence may have involved training the working memory to deal with syntactic and semantic obscurity, and Einarr may have been interested in exploiting the obscurity inherent in kennings to refine such cognitive processes. These processes require many of the same cognitive mechanisms as the creation of text-worlds from prose discourses, such as their incremental construction from information provided in the text, and retrospective “frame repair” of worlds based upon new information. Semantically-incongruous words would be retained in working memory until compatible words could “resolve” them. To return to stanza 3, sinnar módur would be marked as semantically incongruous until Freys nipt is added, whilst svans gunnar [battle’s swan] [RAVEN] (3:6) may have been a “resolved” kenning reactivated by the later incongruous geðandi [feeder] (3:7), creating [WARRIOR]. This would occur alongside decipherment of the poem’s overall narrative, and the cross-mappings between text worlds discussed earlier. Such skills may have been uncommon, but the possibility that they could be acquired to deal with the extreme semantic and syntactic manipulation of language and use of multiple parallel text worlds in skaldic verse could hold new avenues of research for cognitive poetics, looking at how poetic language and conceptual structures interact.

Overall, Øxfl seems invested not only in preserving examples of mythological diction, but in using them to explore wider knowledge systems through interwoven metaphors. This may have been part of the twelfth-century reconciliation of a socially-revered pagan art form with Christian culture. The resulting text interweaves multiple source worlds and creates a text almost entirely predicated upon the terms of metaphors. This illustrates how the study of kenning imagery could enrich the field of cognitive poetics, by investigating the abilities of discourse participants to sustain such foregrounded metaphors and relate them to one another, whilst still comprehending the overall text. The exact intentions behind the composition of Øxfl, and how widely it was understood and appreciated, remains unknown. Yet its impact

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163 Olsen, p. 180, note 9, proposes that working memory could have been trained to accommodate patterns of delay, polysemy, and incomplete utterances in skaldic diction. Torfi H. Tulinius, ‘The Prosimetrum Form 2: Verses as the Basis for Saga Composition and Interpretation,’ in Skaldsagas: Text, Vocation, and Desire in the Sagas of Poets, ed. Russell Poole (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2001) p. 191, has suggested that similar cognitive processes of identifying and retaining incomplete units of information were at play in ‘episodic and seemingly rambling’ sagas such as Eyrbyggja saga.

164 Werth, pp. 20, 51; Stockwell, p. 157

165 Guðrún Nordal, Tools, p. 7
upon subsequent poetic practice and interpretations of pre-Christian myth through its inclusion in SnE was profound, and illustrates how the kenning-system was intrinsically tied up with practices of visualised cognition and the transmission of knowledge.

**Haukr Valdísarson – Íslendingadrápa. Late twelfth/early thirteenth century**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Old Norse</th>
<th>English Prose</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bera skal líð fyr lýða Lóðúrs vinar, glóða hrafna víns nema hafni hneigjendr Dvalins veigum; reyndir þið at randar runnar hlustar munnun hausa harða lýsán haslekka166 mjoð drekki</td>
<td>I shall carry the ale of the people of Lóðurr’s friend [ÓÐINN &gt; POETRY], unless the movers of the embers of raven’s wine [BLOOD &gt; WEAPON &gt; WARRIOR] may forsake Dvalinn’s strong drinks; I bid that the tried-and-tested bushes of shields [WARRIORS] drink the very bright beam of the warriors of the hazel of the skull [WARRIORS] with the mouths of hearing [EARS].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hvals167 munk hvassa telja húðlendinga búðar hamra við þás hofðu hoddlogendr byr gnógan meðan til þess, en þessum þögna veiti hlynn peitu garða grundar Níðir, geð deilisk máér, seilar.</td>
<td>I will tell of the keen hide-landers of the booth of the whale [ICELANDERS; explained below], treasure-destroyers [RULER], then when they had sufficient breeze of the wife of cliffs [TROLL-WOMAN &gt; ARDOUR], whilst wit extends itself to me for this task, and may the Njǫrðrs of the yards/dwelling-places of the string of the plain [SNAKE &gt; GOLD &gt; WARRIORS/MEN] grant hearing to this maple of the spear [WARRIOR].</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Íslendingadrápa is the name given to a collection of stanzas found at the end of AM 748 I b 4to, an early fourteenth-century manuscript which also includes Skm and the Third Grammatical Treatise.168 Although it is referred to as a drápa – a praise poem with a refrain – although it is unclear if the refrain is one of the extant stanzas, and, if so, which one.169 Its title and attribution to Haukr Valdísarson are taken from a rubric found in the manuscript, and the poem is preserved in linear form, cut off at the second line of the twenty-seventh stanza. Although Ísdr is not part of Skm, its inclusion in a manuscript alongside Skm and the Third Grammatical Treatise would suggest that it was considered of cultural and literary interest, particularly regarding kennings.

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166 The compound haslekka appears in the manuscript, and there is little reason to separate its elements.

167 The manuscript reads hals, emended by Finnur Jónsson to hvals. This does appear demanded by the context. The alternatives are halr (man) and háls (throat): halr does not make sense, and the primary meaning of háls would not either; although its secondary meaning, ship’s prow, could give a similar referent to hvals.


169 Clunies Ross, A History, p. 36 note 33, uses Ísdr to argue that a drápa did not require a refrain. Given the poem’s incomplete state of preservation, however, this is not necessarily convincing.
Although AM 748 I b 4to has been palaeographically dated to the early fourteenth century, it is unclear when Ísdr was composed. Roberta Frank states that it is ‘probably a product of [the] twelfth-century [skaldic] revival in Iceland,’ due to its interest in mythology and history, ironic poetic position, and the ‘artificial, encrusted style’ of its kennings.\textsuperscript{170} Theodor Möbius and Bjarni Einarsson date it to the late thirteenth century due to its allegedly free and simple stylistic structure and its apparent reliance on the written saga tradition. Jónas Kristjánsson, meanwhile, follows Finnur Jónsson in dating it to the late twelfth century due to narrative discrepancies between the poem and the sagas, the scarcity of the name Valdís, the presence of the early pronoun ept, and the lack of thirteenth-century phonological changes in the aðalhendingar.\textsuperscript{171} Jónas Kristjánsson’s dating will be followed here, making Ísdr slightly later than Óxfl, and considerably later than Vell and Hkdr. As no information exists on Haukr, it is hard to judge the background which would shape this poem’s assumed Common Ground. However, the use of multiple saga narratives and allusions to older skaldic verse suggests he was well-versed in skaldic practice and the Icelandic sagas’ narrative traditions.

Although Ísdr is preserved in a continuous form, analysis will focus upon the two introductory stanzas, due to their similarities to Vell 1-5. These are not only rich in kennings, but they also play with the bid for a hearing and with afljóst kennings. In both instances, Ísdr appears to push the limits of these conventions. The results of this experimentation suggest, again, not only that the cognitive processes underpinning the kenning-system were largely continuous, but that these devices could open further avenues of investigation in cognitive poetics. Firstly, in the creation of rhetorical text-world/discourse space blends; and secondly, in the use of wordplay to connect conceptual frames in a manner that elaborates upon knowledge and potentially aids recall.

Ísdr 1 uses the same ‘bid for a hearing’ formula found in Vell 1-5 to address an imagined audience of jarl’s courtiers, requesting that they listen to the poem about to unfold. This again layers an imagined text world upon the “real” discourse space, and the recipient is invited to identify with the audience constructed by the poem. Here, the ‘bid for a hearing’ takes the form biðk at reyndir randar runnar drekki harða ljósan mjóð haslrekka hausa hlustar munnum [I ask that the tried-and-tested shield-bushes may drink the very bright mead of the warriors of the skull’s hazel with the mouths of listening] (1:5-8) This also displays the same layering of discourse space and kenning-derived text worlds found in Vell 1-5, even predicated upon the same kenning-type: <drink> of <mythological being> [POETRY].

\textsuperscript{170} Frank, Court Poetry, pp. 68-70.
formula occurs three times in this stanza: lúð Lóðurs vinar [drink of Lóðurr’s people] (1:1-2), veigm Dvalins [strong drink of Dvalinn] (1:4), and mjoð hasrekka hausa (1:7-8), and it is also used to create a nýgerving which generates hlust munnun (1:6), through which the imagined courtiers drink the mead of poetry.

This text world of the myth of the mead of poetry172 is initially evoked through the narrative and conceptual cues of the [POETRY] kennings. But as Roberta Frank points out, the kenning-imagery of Ísdr 1 as a whole is ‘couched in the imagery of the idealised Germanic mead hall.’173 This imagery often pertains to Óðinn, pre-Christian god of poetry and battle, retriever of the mead of poetry, who drinks wine and keeps the company of ravens.174 This draws together several other kennings in the stanza: <battle> frames are cued by words such as haska, rekka and randar, as well as the referent [RAVEN], whilst the pre-Christian mead-hall is evoked through the multiple references to drink and to glóða [embers]. This incrementally creates the text world of an idealised Viking Age mead-hall, based upon the mythological and literary Common Ground of Haukr and his medieval recipients. This overlays the discourse space through identifying Haukr’s recipients with the warrior audience, drawing recipients into the discourse. Haukr’s highly-wrought style was likewise possibly a ploy to draw a medieval audience into the artistic convolutions of language unique to skaldic diction. This building of a text world though the frames evoked by kenning-elements resembles the way that clause-level metaphors in present-day extended metaphors build source text worlds through incrementally adding information to an overarching source world.175

It is unlikely that this similarity between the text worlds in Vell 1-2 and Ísdr 1 is coincidental. Although it is unclear if Ísdr was directly influenced by Vell, it is clearly steeped in Old Norse literary traditions. Nearly all the kenning-types are well-attested in the skaldic corpus, and although the referent [POETRY] itself is not particularly widespread, the kenning-type <drink> of <mythological entity> [POETRY] is its most widespread kenning-type.176 Furthermore, the kenning hlust munnun (hlustamunnun) also appears in

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172 As Ísdr is likely closer in composition date to SnE than Vell, Ísdr’s Common Ground of mythological knowledge was arguably closer to SnE than Vell, even if this myth was a medieval invention.

173 Frank, Court Poetry, p. 69

174 Turville-Petre, pp. 35-74. The nýgerving of <liquid> of <myth> [POETRY] is arguably muddled by the kenning hneigjendr glóða vins hrafnna (1:2-4), as vins hrafnna also uses the base-word <drink>, but to stand in for [BLOOD]. Yet, the use of glóða may play a part in the identification and decipherment of this kenning. It is the first word of that kenning to appear in the poem, and may have been used to separate hrafnna vin [BLOOD] from the [POETRY] kennings which share the base-word <drink>, as there are no known kenning-types pertaining to [POETRY] and <liquid> which contain the determinant <fire>. See Meissner, pp. 363-364

175 Browse, p. 25

176 Meissner, pp. 363-364
Arinbjarnarkviða (6:8). As the kenning-system emphasises variation of kenning-types, it is likely that Ísdr is referencing Arinbjarnarkviða. These kenning-types, in conjunction with the bid for a hearing, suggests that Ísdr draws upon a precedent set by texts like Vell and Arinbjarnarkviða, echoing their kenning-imagery to build its text world of the saga age.177

However, whereas Vell 1-5 widens the semantic range of its base-words to include <sea> and <drink> as base-words, Ísdr only uses the base-word <drink>, and focuses upon the consumption of this poetic beverage. The difference this creates between these two poems’ text worlds offers an insight into how skalds varied synonyms within kenning-types in response to their poems’ contexts. Einarr skálaglamm was composing for Jarl Håkon Sigurðsson, who was known for his prowess in sea battles, and Einarr’s kennings reflect this. Haukr, on the other hand, only uses <drink>, which emphasises the text world of the saga age hall. Furthermore, he requests that his recipients not hafna ( forsake, often used in relation to renouncing pre-Christian gods) his proffered drink (1:3). Haukr’s use of the bid for a hearing likely appealed to literary conventions to give Ísdr a pedigree. However, the ways in which it was deployed suggest he was trying to reposition the drápa as a nostalgic form of entertainment, rather than the propagandistic tool it once was. In this, Ísdr resembles the ironic inversion of the “bid for a hearing” used by Bjarni Kolbeinsson in Jómsvíkingadrápa, another medieval drápa dedicated to past heroes.178 Although Ísdr 1’s kenning-imagery uses a conventionalised device to evoke the archaic “setting” of a skaldic performance, shift recipients’ attitudes towards language, and to layer text worlds; the tone of the verbs involved acknowledge the changed position of skaldic poetry in the twelfth/thirteenth century.

The other remarkable feature of Ísdr 1-2 is its use of ofljóst kennings. As a hybrid of riddle and pun, ofljóst kennings could offer potential insight into the cognitive effects of wordplay. Tsur offers a cognitive perspective on puns, stating that the pleasure derived from such devices is linked to an infantile use of language that prioritises phonetic play over words’ meanings. By allowing a signifier to stand for more than one signified at once, puns reduce the mental effort of deciding which concept a phonetic sign represents.179 Yet, this characterisation of such wordplay as a form of mental regression is influenced by post-

177 Saga age refers to the era in which the íslendingasögur were set; roughly the ninth to eleventh centuries.
179 Tsur, pp. 93, 236-237, 407
medieval criticisms of this phonetic play as ‘false wit.’

Rather, oðlöst kennings, particularly those as developed as the ones in Ísdr, suggest that wordplay could be used in the elaboration and transmission of knowledge.

The kenning-system already encourages split views of signs, as recipients must envision the qualities of the base-word and determinant to cue the referent, causing them to model all elements of the kenning at once. Mjǫð haslrekka hausa, as mentioned, relies on homonymy between hárr and Hár. Thus, recipients must visualise a hazel, an entire, living tree, growing from a skull, part of a deceased human, which presides over a group of warriors and their mead, all of which are attached to an intangible referent, [POETRY]. These images also feature a high degree of interaction: randar runnar is said to drink mjǫð haslrekka hausa with hlustar munnum. Such interaction could aid decipherment, as the image of drinking mead through the ears could cue the referent [POETRY], even if the oðlöst determinant (hárr/Hár) remained unclear. In the second oðlöst kenning, húðlendinga búðar hvals [hide-landers of the booth of the whale] [ICELANDERS] (2:1-2) the whale’s búð is the sea, and the sea’s hide is húðlendinga. Recipients must blend a wild animal with booths of human manufacture to arrive at [SEA], and then envisage the skin of a solid, living being upon the liquid, non-living sea to reach [ICE]. The catachrestic imagery would hold the recipient’s attention to the semantically-incongruous kennings as something that deserves special attention.

By introducing phonetic play, oðlöst kennings amplify this split view, adding further conceptual frames. In the first kenning, recipients must see all the explicit elements, as well as [HAIR], which is the oðlöst kenning’s initial referent; Óðinn, who is its second referent, and the associative chain which follows this: Æsir and poetry. The hárr/Hár pun (1:7-8) cements the allusions to Óðinn found in the lexical references to the myth of the mead of poetry and to the pre-Christian mead hall throughout Ísdr 1. In the second kenning, recipients must envision all the elements mentioned previously, and the referent is simultaneously those who live in Iceland and those who live on a land of ice. As búð can refer to the booths set up by Icelanders at the Alþing, and sea-creatures appear to hold particular significance in Icelandic culture, this potentially draws together knowledge-frames regarding the natural world and Icelandic culture. Puns such as oðlöst kennings could generate pleasure by allowing the

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181 These cues would be through knowledge of the myth of the mead of poetry, or the conceptual metaphor of knowledge as a drink. See discussion of Vell above, with reference to Quinn, p. 183; Ong; Orton, pp. 277-300.

simultaneous existence of multiple interpretations, thus conserving recipients’ mental energy. Yet, their reliance upon homonyms and synonyms, in addition to the rules of the kenning-system, means that decipherment would grant greater cognitive relief than regular kennings, as well as a greater amount of sustained conceptual irresolution. Ofljóst kennings could also confirm a recipient’s greater levels of skaldic competence, and their possession of cultural and lexical knowledge beyond that required by regular kennings.

Furthermore, by creating and/or renewing conceptual associations otherwise less active in the minds of recipients, ofljóst kennings are subject to elaborative rehearsal, whereby concepts are repeatedly considered in light of new associations, developing multiple cues that aid long-term memorisation.183 Although Ísdr was composed in a post-literacy culture, in medieval European culture, a premium was still placed upon memorisation as a means of internalising knowledge and exercising creativity.184 Thus, they arguably strengthened conceptual associations and lexical knowledge more than regular kennings, and elaborative rehearsal aided in the memorisation of the concepts, words, and stanzas involved. These aspects of ofljóst kennings, like the multiple text worlds generated by the kennings in Øxfl, are another avenue of research which kenning imagery’s play with convention and catachresis could open to cognitive poetics.

Overall, Ísdr appears to have been a consciously nostalgic and “literary” poem, composed with an awareness of the clichés and conventions it was using. Yet although the uses of skaldic poetry changed in response to socio-cultural shifts, the need for aesthetically striking and memorable poems remained largely unchanged, as did the cognitive processes by which they were created. Stanza 1’s bid for a hearing creates layers of text worlds, incorporating multiple frames pertaining to the myth of the mead of poetry and to the idealised pre-Christian hall. This prepares recipients for the specialised mode of skaldic discourse; albeit one more nostalgic than propagandistic. The use of ofljóst kennings, as well as being an additional layer of riddling diction to provide entertainment, could have also held practical benefits in the transmission and elaboration of cultural knowledge, as their use of phonological and semantic similarities draws additional links between conceptual frames, adding nuance and aiding recall. Thus, ofljóst kennings highlight aspects of wordplay which have been largely overlooked in literary and linguistic scholarship, again showing how


184 Carruthers, pp. 7-8, 62, 122-123.
skaldic diction’s impulse to test the limits of language could enhance the approaches of cognitive poetics.

*Grettir Ásmundarson – Ævikviða. Likely fourteenth century, attributed to eleventh century skald.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Old Norse-Icelandic</th>
<th>English Prose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vas Þófinnр, þjóðar sesi, aldrs alinn oss til hjalpar, þás mik víf í valskǫrum lukt ok læst, lífs of kvaddi.</td>
<td>Porfinnr, begotten of pedigree, benchmate of people, was of help to us when the woman locked and confined in the slain-realms [HEL] laid a claim to my life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vas stórskip stálgoðs(^{185}) bana rauða-hafs ok Regins skáli, es Býleists bróður-dóttur manna mest mér varnaði.</td>
<td>The great ship of the bane of the cliff-god of the red sea and Reginn’s hall [DRÓMUNDR + ÞÓRR + STONE &gt; FÖRSTEINN DRÓMUNDR] shielded me most of all men from Býleistr’s brother’s daughter [LOKI &gt; HEL].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þótti þá þengils mǫnnum ekki dælt oss at stríða, es Hlébarðr hlífar eldi brágða borg brenda vildi.</td>
<td>It seemed then to the prince’s men that we were not so easily dealt with in battle, when Hlébarðr [BERSI] wished to burn the stronghold of ideas [BREAST] with shield’s fire [WEAPON].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitt vas gilt gæfuleysi í marþaks miðjum firði es gamlir grísir skyldu hálfa mér at hǫfuð beinum.</td>
<td>My lucklessness was great in the middle of the sea-thatch’s fjord [ÍSAFJǪRÐR] when old pigs could hold me by the head bones.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sǫgðu mér þaus Sigarr veitti, mæða-laun margir hæfa,</td>
<td>Many said to me that the kinship-reward Sigarr granted [HANGING] was appropriate, until warriors found the rowan-bush praise-grown with the leaf of praise.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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\(^{185}\) The manuscript readings for stálgoðs are somewhat problematic. Although stáð- is fairly stable, AM 556 a 4to and AM 152 fol. read -gæðs and -geds respectively for -goðs. Storgæðs in AM 556 a 4to may be attributed to dittography during scribal transmission, as it is preceded by stórskip. The emendation stálgoðs appears to be predicated on the lack of pretexts for a genitive meaning cliff-witted for either bana or rauðahafs.
The Ávikvida (Ævkv) of Grettir Ásmundarson comprises of two groups of stanzas found in Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar, considered a single poem due to similarities in metre, subject matter, and style. Stanzas 1-3 appear consecutively as verses 22-24 of Grettis saga, and stanzas 4-7 appear as verses 39-42. Its date of composition is somewhat contested – Finnur Jónsson argues that Ævkv is one of a few “genuine” verses ascribed to Grettir, whereas Guðni Jónsson posits a fourteenth-century composition date for most of the verses in Grettis saga, based upon phonological features of the words and how they affect metrical features such as hending. While Ævkv is not as amenable to such dating methods as its metre, kvíðuháttr, lacks hending, the lexical and stylistic similarities to more securely datable stanzas in the saga – such as those attributed to the character Loptr – suggest that they share a (fourteenth-century) composer. As such, Guðni Jónsson’s dating will be favoured here: after the relevant phonological shifts took place, but before the fifteenth century, when the earliest extant manuscripts containing these verses were written.

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186 Finnur Jónsson posits laufgan (laufugr: leafy, grown with leaves). However, the Íslenzk Fornrit edition’s reading, lofgróinn, is favoured here. Several MS readings resemble lofgróinn, or feature an ambiguous hybrid between lofgróinn and laufgrann, and the reading lofgróinn would make sense as a pun continued in laufi sémðar [leaf of honour], and the aim of the stanza: to praise her intervention in Grettir’s life.

187 Grettis saga, pp. 86-87, 170-172. Here, the two groups will be considered two parts of the same poem.


As well as its later date of composition, several other features of Ævkv set it apart from the other stanzas discussed here. It is incorporated into a saga narrative, which adds to the assumed Common Ground of the poem; and it is composed in kviðuháttr, an alliterative, syllable-counting metre with eight lines in a stanza.\textsuperscript{190} Compared to dróttkvætt, kviðuháttr possesses a relatively fluid syntactical structure, with concatenating clauses flowing between half-stanzas and even between stanzas.\textsuperscript{191} In addition, the use of kennings in kviðuháttr is more sparing than that of dróttkvætt, although nýervingar, metaphors, and figurative expressions which are not strictly kennings are prevalent in kviðuháttr poems.\textsuperscript{192}

The metre itself could have been part of a ploy to establish the discourse space of “archaic verse,” as kviðuháttr is one of the earliest attested skaldic metres.\textsuperscript{193} Several other features of this poem also suggest a self-conscious emulation of older literature, such as the masking of personal names with ofljóst kennings and an almost direct reference to a saying found in SnE. Such a self-conscious use of literary conventions ties these stanzas into Grettis saga as a whole, which has been characterised as:

“A drama of language”…[exploring] the status and effects of different forms of literary discourse — not only skaldic verse, but also proverbs, curses, and songs… not so much ‘contaminated’ by fictionality, as centred on it, a tireless and inventive exploration of its forms and effects.\textsuperscript{194} This groups Ævkv alongside Ísdr as a nostalgic and self-aware composition which plays with the conventions of older literature. The sparseness of kennings in kviðuháttr does pose problems regarding Bergsveinn Birgisson’s theory of kennings as mnemonic devices, as it would mean there is less mnemonic imagery in each stanza; although the freer syntax and metre of kviðuháttr arguably enables greater use of narrative content such as story-scripts as mnemonic cues.\textsuperscript{195} As such, mnemonics will not be the focus of discussion here, but rather the use of nýerving and ofljóst kennings – including additional descriptive elements – as a means of playing with the expectations of conventional semantic formulae and modelling of concepts. Overall, these stanzas show that even in the latter days of the genre, composers of skaldic poetry still sought to experiment with the limits of figurative language.

\textsuperscript{190} Clunies Ross, History, pp. 24-27.
\textsuperscript{191} Gade, Dróttkvætt, pp. 234-237; Clunies Ross, History, p. 24; Gade, ‘4. Metre’, SkP I, 1, p. lx
\textsuperscript{192} Gade, Dróttkvætt, pp. 236-237. For nýerving in kviðuháttr, see Lie, ‘Natur’, p. 301, where he terms kviðuháttr “nýervingstilen,” and Marold, ‘General Introduction § 5.3. Metaphors’, in SkP I 1, pp. lxxxix-xc. Notable examples of nýervingar in kviðuháttr include Þjóðólfr Ör Hvini, Ynglingatáli, ed. Marold, in SkP I 1, pp. 3-60; and Sturla Þórðarson, Håkonarkvöða.
\textsuperscript{193} Clunies Ross, History, pp. 24-27; Gade, Dróttkvætt, pp. 234-235.
\textsuperscript{195} For a discussion of story scripts in oral-formulaic poetry, see Rubin, pp. 24-28
Like the other poems discussed so far, Ævkv uses nýgervingar to draw attention to certain conceptualisations of kenning-referents. The first nýgerving is Hlébarðr brenna vildi bragða borg hlifar eldi [the bear [BERSI] wished to burn the stronghold of emotions with the fire of the shield] (3:5-8), which stems from the kenning hlifar eldi. In this instance, the kenning-types involved were widespread and likely somewhat conventionalised, and so the purpose of this nýgerving may have been to draw out the terms of these metaphors and defamiliarise them afresh, drawing attention to the conceptual frames involved and manipulating them for effect. Firstly, there is the weapon-kenning hlifar eldi. The nýgerving operates on the assumption that if a weapon is a fire, then to harm someone or something with it is to burn it, further defamiliarizing the concepts and drawing attention to them by extending the terms of the metaphor to the verb as well as the kenning-elements. The object of brenna is bragða borg. Here, catachresis is generated through contrasting a concrete base-word, borg, and referent, [BREAST], with an abstract determinant, bragða. These are mapped onto one another in a visual manner, demanding the recipient visualise the abstract element, again drawing attention to the kenning-elements.196

This kenning-type reflects a conceptual metaphor prevalent in medieval Iceland: the body is a container for the mind. This metaphor can be found in Skáldskaparmál, where it is stated that ‘hús eða garð eða skip hjarta, anda eða lífðar, eljunar land, hugar ok minnis’ [house or courtyard or ship of the heart, soul, or life; the land of life force, mind, or memory] (Skm 108); and in the thirteenth-century Elucidarius, where it is stated that ‘likamr er hús andar.’ [The body is the house of the spirit.]197 The accompanying kenning-type, <abode> of <spirit/mind> [BREAST], can be found in the majority of pre- and post-thirteenth-century [BREAST] kennings.198 This is likely grounded in the experience of embodied cognition, and is a different conceptualisation of thoughts compared to hlustar munnum (Ísdr 1:6), which portrays the mind is a means of digesting information, or byr hamra vífs [breeze of the cliffs’ wife] [COURAGE] (Ísdr 2:3-4), which portrays thoughts as a forceful wind that acts upon the world.199 The <battle> frame evoked by the initial metaphor – hlifar eldi – is continued by the synonym chosen for <abode>, borg, and the act of killing is evoked through the burning

198 Meissner, pp. 134-135; Guðrún Nordal, Tools, pp. 254-258. Similar imagery is found in Old English literature, suggesting similar influences and/or root beliefs. See Harbus, pp. 30-38, 49-51.
of this stronghold. This nýgering, like those of the older poems, draws upon and extends the conventionalised associations between these kennings and conceptual frames to defamiliarise the act of killing a person and turn it into an act of siege. In doing so, it emphasises the martial prowess of Bersi by foregrounding and exaggerating his desire to kill.

In addition to nýgering, the most notable feature of Ævkv is its use of ofljóst kennings. The ofljóst kennings in Ævkv all have names of people or places as referents:

- **Stórskip rauða-hafs stálgoðs bana ok Regins skáli** [great ship of the red sea of the bane of the cliff-god and Reginn’s hall] [DÓRSTEINN DRÓMUNDR] (2:1-2); Hlébarðr [BERSI] (3:5); marþaks firði [sea-thatch’s fjord] [ÍSAFJÖRDR] (4:3-4); reynirunn [rowan-bush]

- [ÞORBJǪRG] (5:7); hjǫlp beggja handa Sífjar vers [help of both hands of Sífr’s husband] [ÞORBJǪRG] (7:1-3); and þveng Þundar beðju [thong of Þundr’s bedfellow] [GRETTIR] (7:5-6). Hlébarðr can be a synonym for Bersi (bear), whereas marþaks firði resembles húðlendingar hvals búðar (Ísdr 2:1-3), as it relies upon the substitution of the kenning’s referent, íss, into the verbal context, creating íss firði; and þveng Þundar beðju requires the kenning to be deciphered to [SERPENT], one synonym of which is grettir. This device of obscuring personal names could have been seen as an archaizing tactic – as discussed in the introduction, Arinbjarnarkviða uses a similar device. Although Grettir is not as chronologically far back as Egill, his attitude is arguably that of an “older” type of hero, out of joint in the eleventh century; his verse reflects that. Such devices would also entertain recipients who could decipher such kennings, as it would allow them to understand the stanzas and confirm their knowledge of the saga narrative.

Three of these ofljóst kennings also illustrate how late skaldic verse was still invested in pushing the limits of kenning-imagery’s use. The first of these is stórskip rauða-hafs stálgoðs bana ok Regins skáli, which has as its referent Grettir’s half-brother Þórsteinn drómundr. This kenning has two conventionalised mythological kennings: bana stálgoðs uses the kenning-type of <enemy> of <giants> [PÓRR], and Regins skáli is of <abode> of <dwarves> [STONE]. Thus, two of the parts of this ofljóst kenning become Pórr ok steinn, which leads

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200 Hlébarðr (leopard) seems to have been used fairly indiscriminately for large predators. An Icelandic-English Dictionary, s.v. ‘Hlé-barðr,’ by Cleasby and Vigfússon.

201 Males, ‘Applied Grammatica’, pp. 285-286 makes a similar argument regarding the use of archaising verse forms in Jómsvíkingadrápa. For Grettir’s verse style marking him as someone displaced from his historical/social surroundings, see O’Donoghue, pp. 182-183, 227.

202 Skm 14; Meissner, p. 89. The use of Reginn for <dwarf> is slightly problematic, as it is unclear if the Reginn of the Sigurðr Fafnison cycle was a dwarf but the prose preface of Reginsmál states that Reginn was ‘dvergr of voxt’ [a dwarf in stature] (Neckel and Kuhn, p. 173), and Völuspá (12:7) lists a Reginn amongst dwarves, although the manuscripts of SnE which cite this passage replace it with Rekkr (Skm 16). This kenning suggests that by this point these figures were conflated.
to the name Þórsteinn, granted that the recipient arrives at the right synonym for [STONE] and recognises that ok entails the compounding of these words. This still leaves stórskip rauða-hafs unresolved. This is arguably a kind of viðkenning, as it refers to a specific type of warship, a drómundr, which is found in the Middle East and Mediterranean (near the Red Sea), and is Þórsteinn Ásmundarson’s byname.\footnote{Guðni Jónsson, Grettis saga, p. 34 note 4, and p. 86, 23. visa b} Although ship-kennings are widespread,\footnote{Meissner, pp. 208-222} it is rare for a kenning to refer to a specific type of ship, and this ofljóst requires a knowledge both of ship types and the saga’s narrative. Multiple rules must be followed to decipher this kenning: the recipient must identify the semantically-incongruous elements, then assemble these referents in a manner that makes them no longer incongruous, considering additional factors such as the need for compounding two referents, and the metonymic means of solving the kenning for Þórsteinn’s byname. Recipients must be sensitive not only to catachresis due to the semantic incongruity rule, but also the additional incongruities distinguishing ofljóst kennings from the rules of the kenning-system.

Possibly the most interesting use of ofljóst kennings in these stanzas is in a nýgardning which spans several stanzas, and has the character [ÞORBJORG] as a referent. The way in which this initially appears is through reynirunn (5:7). This is a bipartite compound which appears to use the base-concept <tree> = [HUMAN], something which, as mentioned, was so widespread it may well have become automatised in those with a high degree of skaldic competence. However, reynirunn is not a conventional kenning, as it lacks the <base-word> of <determinant> construction, and it breaches the above kenning-type by using a masculine base-word, runnr, to refer to a woman. As reynirunn is semantically incongruous but does not belong to any known kenning-type, it would presumably be placed into recipients’ short-term memory as an unresolved piece of information, particularly as kviðuháttr can syntactically run between stanzas.

As stanzas 4-7 are presented as consecutive, frame repair would occur in the following stanzas, due to the explicit naming of Þorbjörg in (6:5) and the reiteration of the significance of the rowan bushes in the kenning hjölp beggja handa vers Síðjar (7:1-3), which follows the more conventional kenning-type <saviour> of <Þórr> [ROWAN], and which can be expressed as bjǫrg Þórs. This echoes a passage in Skm, where Snorri describes a myth in which a rowan bush saves Þórr from a river:

Eigi misti hann þar er hann kastaði til. Ok í því bili bar hann at landi ok fekk tekit reynirunn nokkvorn ok steig svá ór ánni. Því er þat orðtak haft at reynir er bjǫrg Þórs. [He did not miss that which he aimed for, and in that moment he came to

\footnote{Guðni Jónsson, Grettis saga, p. 34 note 4, and p. 86, 23. visa b}
land and grasped a rowan-bush and thus climbed out of the river. So was the saying born, that the rowan is Þórr’s salvation.] (Skm 25)\(^{205}\)

The phrase *hjǫrg Þórs* is directly echoed by the name Þorbjǫrg, and this hybrid *ofljóst-nýgerving* structure in *Ævkv* is remarkable. The human referent is suggested in reynirunn’s appeal to *<tree>* = [HUMAN], but a typical kenning requires recipients to blend the kenning elements together to arrive at the referent. Instead, this sequence of kennings relies upon frame repair, starting in stanza 5 with *reynirunn* as a kind of *heiti* for Þorbjǫrg, and working backwards to the [ROWAN] kenning in (7:1-3), with the *ofljóst* pun meaning that the kenning-type’s elements are in fact the referent [ÞORBJØRG]. Thus, this *nýgerving* breaches the rules of the kenning-system in multiple ways. It uses the referent of the mythological kenning as a *heiti* for the referent of the *nýgerving*, and reveals the referent of the *ofljóst* pun in the stanzas themselves, before reiterating the formula with a kenning that has the initial *heiti* as its first referent and the *nýgerving*’s subject as the solution to its *ofljóst* pun.

In breaching these norms of kenning-use, *Ævkv* foregrounds the kenning-elements and the frames they cue, and manipulates the ways in which the primary text world is conceptualised. Mapping Þorbjǫrg and the rowan that saved Þórr onto one another cues mythological frames, which create a parallel between Grettir and Þórr. As Heather O’Donoghue notes, Þorbjǫrg’s rescue of Grettir – cursed but usually unafraid to walk this world alone – occurs at one of the lowest points in Grettir’s life. Yet, he metaphorically puts himself into the place of one of the strongest deities.\(^{206}\) In terms of literary effects, this constitutes an emotional appeal to recipients, stating that just as the god Þórr needed help, so too did Grettir. Furthermore, this is one of the frequent incongruities between verse and prose in *Grettis saga*, which demand that the recipient actively engages with the saga and its use of language to gauge what is happening in the spaces between the text worlds presented in the language of Grettir’s verses and the primary text world of the saga narrative.\(^{207}\) Assuming these stanzas were composed alongside the saga narrative, these *ofljóst* kennings reflect this composition tactic in the saga, challenging recipients’ ability to identify and deal with incongruities, both at the level of language and of the information this language conveys.

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\(^{205}\) Males, ‘Skáldskaparmál as a Tool for Composition of Pseudonymous Skaldic Poetry,’ in *Eddic, Skaldic, and Beyond*, p. 72, points out there is no known prior attestation of this myth, and the “saying” itself has no hallmarks of poetic diction, meaning that it was either a heavily altered poetic quotation, or that Snorri invented it. If *Ævkv* is a fourteenth-century composition, then the composer and recipients would likely have had *Skm* as a Common Ground of “pre-Christian myth,” and so although it is not certain, this could be a direct reference to this passage, playing what O’Donoghue, p. 183, calls Grettir’s ‘fondness for the oblique and time-honoured proverb.’

\(^{206}\) O’Donoghue, pp. 205-206

\(^{207}\) O’Donoghue, pp. 182-184
Although the frames set up by <tree> = [HUMAN] would need to be repaired in light of the new information provided by the poem, this does not completely negate them in recipients’ minds. Rather, this kenning-type and base-concept, and their associated frames, create a new blend. Although the base-concept <tree> = [HUMAN] is no longer active, the allusive, almost pataphorical nature of kennings’ text worlds could exert background influence over subsequent information provided in the text. Typically, <tree> = [HUMAN] has <battle> or <gold> as a determinant, which narrows the semantic field of the base-word to reach the referent [WARRIOR]. This, as mentioned, is not the case here – reynirunn has no determinant, and furthermore it is a masculine tree being used to refer to a woman. Yet the base-concept <tree> = [HUMAN] was so widespread that it would to some extent be automatised. Thus, alongside the foregrounded frame/text world in which Þorbjǫrg is the rowan which saved Þórr is the “backgrounded” frame/text world in which Þorbjǫrg is likened to a masculine tree, which would normally lead to a [MAN/WARRIOR] referent. Thus, the blend transfers some of the categories reserved for the referent [WARRIOR] onto Þorbjǫrg, such as authority and power – a characterisation which mirrors her role in the saga as a figure who, in the words of Heather O’Donoghue, ‘assumes masculine authority’.  

The use of the descriptive elements in Ævkv also plays a role in this simultaneous appeal to multiple frames/text worlds. Þorbjǫrg is said to be lofgróinn laufi sæmðar (5:5-6), which again drawing attention to itself through conceptual catachresis between the concrete, (grown with) leaves, and abstract, praise. This image draws upon the terms of the nýgerving, as the praise with which Þorbjǫrg is decorated is visualised as leaves upon a rowan tree. <Leaf> of <praise> also does not follow any known kenning type, meaning that it, like reynirunn, is somewhat ambiguous and may simply be emulating the kenning form to draw attention. The imagery of this descriptive element, meanwhile, applies simultaneously to the base-word and the referent, elaborating upon them and drawing them together. <Leaves> applies to the rowan-bush, and <praise/honour> applies to Þorbjǫrg and furthermore uses vocabulary resembling that of encomiastic skaldic verse. Although Ævkv does not explicitly praise Þorbjǫrg as a warrior, this descriptive element plays with the expectations and frames generated by the conventionalised, even automatised, base-concept <tree> = [HUMAN], and simultaneously embellishes the text world of the nýgerving’s kenning-

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208 O’Donoghue, p. 206
209 O’Donoghue, p. 205 note 57, argues that the use of leaf-imagery in the context of praise may be an allusion to Ragnarsdrápa and Egill Skall-Grimsson’s Sonatorrek. Such references would not only – as O’Donoghue suggests – continue poetic traditions, but also contribute towards the discourse space archaic verse.
elements and maps [WARRIOR] onto [ÞORBJǪRG] in a manner reminiscent of skaldic praise poetry.\textsuperscript{210} Thus, \textit{Ævkv} breaches the conventions of the kenning-system to disrupt the automatised cognition of \texttt{<tree>} = [HUMAN] in skaldic diction and draw attention to Þorbjørg’s importance in the saga as a heroic figure.

The nature of \textit{kviðuháttr} means that the syntactic and metrical rules and reliance upon kennings found in \textit{dróttkvætt} operate under different rules. The heavy use of \textit{ofljóst} kennings in \textit{Ævkv} appears to evoke an “archaic” discourse space, and furthermore challenges the recipient’s ability to decipher multiple kinds of wordplay. The [ÞORBJǪRG] \textit{ofljóst/nýgervi}n, meanwhile, appears designed to challenge the recipient’s capacity to draw out the implications of kenning imagery and consider the text worlds of the saga’s narrative and the stanzas’ language alongside one another. Ultimately, as with \textit{Øxfl} and \textit{Ísdr}, although cultural changes may have affected the kenning-imagery’s Common Ground and the ways in which certain images and devices were deployed, the cognitive processes underlying the kenning-imagery in \textit{Ævkv} were largely continuous with those of \textit{Vell} and \textit{Hkdr}.

\textbf{Conclusion}

As each reading has a brief concluding statement, there remains little to do except to sum up some of their findings. Kennings’ use of catachrestic conceptual blends served to grab the recipient’s attention through defamiliarizing the concepts and images involved. In doing so, kennings prompt the recipient to reconsider these concepts, and to draw links between concepts which may not otherwise be active. Secondly, kenning-types’ conventionalised semantic formulae allow recipients to acquire competence in the kenning-system, just like any other rule-based communicative system. Skalds could manipulate these conventions, such as extending or breaching frames set up by a kenning through \textit{nýgervi}ning or \textit{nykrat}, to achieve certain effects. In conjunction with one another, catachrestic imagery and conventionalised associations could benefit the memorisation and recall of stanzas by facilitating free recall through grabbing recipients’ attention, and by acting as predictable semantic schemas into which synonyms would slot. \textit{Ofljóst} kennings add further semantic incongruity, and allow the coexistence of multiple signifieds for a phonetic signifier in the already-allusive kenning-system, drawing further narrative and conceptual frames into consideration.

\textsuperscript{210} Carol Clover, ‘Regardless of Sex: Men, Women, and Power in Early Northern Europe’, \textit{Speculum} 68.2 (1993), pp. 363-387 argues that gender in Old Norse-Icelandic literature were defined more by social than biological factors. This is perhaps romanticised; however, calling Þorbjørg a \textit{reynirunnr} could be making her an “honourary” man, allowing the poem to map \textit{nýgervi}ning imagery more appropriate for a warrior onto her.
One of the most remarkable features of kenning-imagery from a cognitive poetic perspective is kennings’ construction of text worlds. Kennings, particularly in nýgervingar, can operate in a manner resembling extended metaphors and provide pieces of information which incrementally assemble a source world that feeds into the target world. Yet individual kennings, due to their reliance upon implicit knowledge-frames – both narrative and ontological – draw upon similar mechanisms as prose text worlds in that they rely upon inferences from discourse participants’ Common Ground. Thus, they arguably create text worlds themselves from short utterances rather than sustained discourses. This creation of text worlds through a hyper-allusive form of discourse is uncommon outside skaldic verse, and is therefore worthy of further research. Similarly, the resemblances between nýgervingar and pataphors invites further investigation, as it holds interesting implications regarding kennings’ function as a means of transmitting knowledge between members of an in-group which, alongside skaldic competence, functioned as a prestigious social marker.

The exceptional cases of kenning-use highlighted here illustrate the extent to which kenning-imagery explored the limits of how short, metaphorical statements could be used to model concepts in a manner that reaches beyond the premises of the original metaphor without detaching it utterly from its referent. Whether these poetic experiments were wholly successful is hard to gauge, as the use of language in these poems is so far removed from everyday communication and the aesthetic standards of the present day. Yet, their preservation in manuscripts does support the argument that they were considered of cultural importance, even if only to certain circles.

Ultimately, skaldic poetry was supplanted by rímur, suggesting that it was considered too archaic or obscure to continue to hold appeal. However, there has been an undercurrent of enduring fascination with the rich, almost dreamlike imagery of skaldic diction and the legacy it left in Icelandic poetic practice, leading Magnús Óláfsson to comment that ‘you would say that an outstanding [Icelandic] poet explaining poetical matters to others… was seized by… a certain particular mannerism which we call skáldvingl or poetical delirium.’211 This may be in part due to the almost unique use of language and imagery which allows riddle-like verbal formulae to be resolved whilst also sustaining impossible conceptual combinations through imagery. This made kenning-imagery a profoundly powerful aesthetic and intellectual tool, and allowed skalds to create multiple layers of meaning in a phrase as short as two words.

211 Magnús Óláfsson, ‘De poesi nostra discursus’; quoted in Faulkes, Poetical Inspiration in Old Norse and Old English Poetry (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1997) p. 5
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