

Egill, Snorri and the Story of a Hiatus

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1. Egill's Stanzas on Eiríkr Blóðøx and Queen Gunnhildr 1.1 Question and Method

This article belongs to the number of studies addressing the question of dating and authenticity of verse in the *Íslendinga sögur*.¹ In a recent treatment of the topic, Clunies Ross drew attention to some of the challenges posed by this corpus to linguistic dating:

Like other forms of textual criticism, the assessment of the authenticity and age of Old Norse poetry is not an exact science. It will probably never be possible to determine the age of many stanzas in these sagas in absolute terms or even sometimes within a specific time period. In some cases, this is because the poetry in question contains no diagnostic criteria that can establish its age within a particular chronological range. In other instances, *the evidence may point in several directions*, if the stanza or stanzas in question display *some early dating features and others consistent with a later date of composition*. For these and other reasons it is important to make judgements about the authenticity of a stanza or set of stanzas based on as numerous and varied a set of criteria as can appropriately be applied to them. (Clunies Ross 2022: 58, my emphasis)

One of the methodological impasses mentioned by Clunies Ross is the existence of stanzas displaying contradicting diagnostic features. The case study of this article addresses one such stanza, raising the question of how to explain

¹ On this topic, see most recently: Gade (2001); Myrvoll (2014; 2020; *SkP* 5, xcvi-cvii); Clunies Ross (2022: 51–76); Males (2024a).

the coexistence of forms seemingly belonging to different language stages. This study will mobilize a varied set of criteria in an attempt at providing an answer to the problem at hand, not under the epistemological misapprehension of dealing with an “exact science” but relying on the probabilistic methods proper of philological investigation (Fulk 1996; 2003). Without lingering on the literary implications of *authenticity*, I here call “authentic” stanzas that can be regarded as roughly contemporary with the events narrated in the saga. It may be noted that such a dating speaks in favor of the traditional attribution, since the skaldic art was strongly authorial, and verse was customarily transmitted together with the name of its composer. It is virtually impossible to establish whether this is, in fact, the case, but in presence of a tradition attributing verses to a certain figure, and in absence of evidence to the contrary, taking the medieval attribution at face value is simply the most economic assumption. For a similar principle of economy, I assume that, in absence of evidence pointing in another direction, the presence of “spurious” or “pseudonymous” verse (i.e. incompatible with the traditional attribution), is likely due to the intervention of the saga author during the creation of the prosimetric narrative.

For what concerns the composition of pseudonymous verse, *Egils saga* is the most studied text within its genre and, possibly together with *Gísla saga* (Myrvoll 2020), the one so far best understood.² Progress in the analysis of the saga’s poetic stratigraphy has been achieved by correlating a large number of formal features that are diagnostic of either an early or a late date, with as much other evidence as possible.³ Thus, beside the traditional dating criteria valid for the *dróttkvætt* corpus at large (Myrvoll, *SkP* 5, xcvi–cvii), two recent studies have isolated a set of formal criteria specifically encountered in the poetry of “Pseudo-Egill”, which can potentially be employed as a tool-set for further investigations of this specific corpus (Males 2020; Patria 2024). These include: (a) highly irregular rhyme-patterns (Males 2020: 220); (b) lack of textual complexity in terms of both syntax and diction (Males 2020: 220–232); (c) presence of signs of active archaization, such as excessive and/or unetymological occurrences of the expletive particle *of/um* (Males 2011; Patria 2024: 177); (d) presence of echoes from other skaldic poems (Patria

² The tradition of studies on the authenticity of the verse in *Egils saga* dates back to the late nineteenth century: Finnur Jónsson (1884: 173–178; 1886–88: xxix–xxx; 1912); Wieselgren (1927: 261–264); Jón Helgason (1969); Jónas Kristjánsson (2006); Males (2011; 2020: 220–232); Patria (2024).

³ This methodology is employed by Males (2020: 220–232) and advocated for by Clunies Ross (2022: 58–59).

2024: 178, 184–185). These formal features sometimes correlate with thematic ones, such as a fascination for the employment of runes for magic purposes (Males 2020: 228) or the occurrence of “anachronistic” concepts (e.g. the use of the word *víkingr* with a positive connotation, Patria 2024: 178–184), more readily explained as products of a medieval antiquarian attitude, rather than of a tenth-century skald.

Beside this set of observations, two additional factors make the poetic corpus in *Egils saga* particularly promising for authenticity investigations. The first one is the existence of three longer compositions attributed to Egill.⁴ Although composed in *kviðuháttir* rather than in *dróttkvætt*, this corpus provides an invaluable basis of comparison for some of the features that can be considered typical of Egill’s poetry, especially in terms of imagery and kenning style, as already suggested by Finnur Jónsson (1884: 174). The second factor is that, despite the existence of contrary opinions, there is a relatively large and long-standing scholarly consensus about the attribution of the authorship of *Egils saga* to Snorri Sturluson.⁵ This hypothesis, that is supported by a wide range of formal and contextual indications and that I therefore regard as well-founded, can be further tested by means of comparing the poetic praxis of Pseudo-Egill to that of Snorri. The latter has left us a large corpus of authorial texts, in both verse and prose, testifying to his interests, mindset and, what is most important in this context, his competence and convictions about poetic composition. As the rest of this article will illustrate, using the other Snorronian texts as a point of comparison for the spurious verse in *Egils saga* can yield significant results for the understanding of the latter.

1.2 The Material

In chapters 56 and 57 of *Egils saga*, Egill expresses his rage and frustration at Eiríkr blóðøx and Queen Gunnhildr in a couple of famous stanzas (*ÍF* 2:

⁴ The dating of Egill’s long poems is generally not questioned by skaldic specialists. Although composed in a metrical form that offers fewer diagnostic criteria, these poems only show early linguistic features (hiatus forms secured by metre, see below; pre-nominal particle *of*, Males 2024b: 4, 23). Jón Helgason’s argument about an alleged rhyme in *ø* : *ø* in *Höfudlausn* (1969: 168–176) was rebutted by Haraldur Bernharðsson (2006). Moreover, the poems appear not to have been part of the original text of the saga, having been transmitted separately, and several stanzas are quoted in works where spurious verse is not found, such as Snorri’s *Edda*.

⁵ Björn Magnússon Ólsen (1904; 1905); Sigurður Nordal (*ÍF* 2: xciv); Hallberg (1962); Torfi Tulinius (2014; 2018); Haukur Þorgeirsson (2014; 2018); Males (2020: 233–244); Patria (2024: 198–203).

163–165). Eiríkr and Gunnhildr have deprived him of the inheritance of his wife Ásgerðr, denying him access to Norway and to her properties there. Egill's relationship with the royal couple was never cordial and the conflict is rapidly escalating: Egill has just killed Eiríkr's friend, Ketill hǫðr (see *lv* 27, *ÍF* 2: 162), and, by the end of chapter 57, he will have caused the drowning of the king's young son Rǫgnvaldr (see *lv* 31, *ÍF* 2: 170). Nonetheless, at this point Egill feels wronged and seeks the sympathy of the pagan gods, invoking their retaliation (*ÍF* 2: 163). His request is expressed, in verse, in *lv* 28: "may the gods exile king Eiríkr, the thief, from his own lands, just like he has deprived Egill of his properties!" Shortly later, Egill directs an invective at Gunnhildr too, acknowledging that the evil queen is, in fact, most responsible for his exile, and vowing to take revenge (*lv* 29, *ÍF* 2: 165). The two stanzas read as follows:

lausavísa 28

Svá skyldi goð gjalda,
gram reki þond af lǫndum
reið sé rǫgn ok Óðinn,
rǫn míns féar hǫnum;
folkmýgi lát flýja,
Freyr ok Njǫrðr, af jǫrðum,
leiðisk lofða stríði
landóss, þannsó vé grandar.

So should the gods repay him [= Eiríkr] for the theft of my wealth: may the divine powers exile the ruler from the lands, may the gods and Óðinn be enraged; Freyr and Njǫrðr, make the people-oppressor flee from the lands; may the land-god [Þórr] become hostile against that enemy of men, who destroys the sanctuary [Eiríkr].⁶

lausavísa 29

Lǫgbrigðir hefr lagða,
landalfi, fyr mér sjǫlfum,
blekkir brœðra sökkuva
brúðfang, vega langa;
Gunnhildi ák gjalda,
greipt's hennar skap, þenna,
ungr gatok ok læ launat,
landrekstr, bili grandat.

The lawbreaker [Eiríkr], the land-elf [ruler], has laid for me long ways (= has made me an outlaw); the chosen bride deceives the murderer of brothers [Eiríkr]; it is Gunnhildr that I have to repay for this exile: cruel is her nature; (ever since I was) young, I got to destroy hesitation and to repay deceit.

As often in *Egils saga*, the two stanzas seem to form a conceptual pair (Olsen 1944: 183; *SkP* 5: 223). When subjected to metrical and linguistic analysis, however, they reveal possibly different linguistic stages, suggesting that

⁶ Translations from Old Norse are mine unless otherwise stated.

Tab. 1. The Eiríkr-Stanza: Linguistic Features

line	archaic feature	late feature
1	Svá skyldi goð gjalda, gram reki þond af lǫndum, reið sé rogn ok Óðinn, rǫn míns féar hǫnum;	hiatus form (<i>féar</i>)
5	folkmygi lát flýja, Freyr ok Njörðr, af jörðum, leiðisk lofða stríði	rhyme <i>yǫg</i> : <i>yj</i> (?)
8	landǫss, þann vé grandar.	lacking <i>-i</i> ending (dat. <i>véi</i>)

only one might be compatible with a tenth-century dating, while the other might have been composed for the saga.⁷

1.3 The Eiríkr-Stanza (*lv* 28)

Let us now analyze the two stanzas, with an eye to the diagnostic features that might indicate an archaic or late date of composition (Tab. 1). In the table, relevant features are in bold, while internal rhymes (*bendingar*) are in italics.

The strongest sign of late composition is the dat. sg. form *vé* in l. 8, first noticed by Jón Helgason (1969: 157). This form shows the loss of the inflectional ending *-i* after a vowel (Noreen 1923: § 361; 363), to be connected with the contraction of hiatus forms before c. 1150 (see below). Before the twelfth century, neuter *a-*, *ja-* and *wa-*stems ending in a vowel always show the dative marker *-i* (Finnur Jónsson 1901: 26–27, 31, 35). The form *véi* would make the line unmetrical, however, requiring resolution in position 4: ***landǫss, þann véi grandar*. Equally unmetrical would be a dat. pl. *véum*. As the verb *granda* requires a dative object, the Solomonic solution of taking *vé* as an acc. pl. (*SkP* 5: 222) seems unlikely. The only form allowed by meter and grammar is a dative sg. *vé*, which indicates a date of composition later than Egill's time.

Another feature noted by Jón Helgason is the possible occurrence of a full rhyme in l. 5 between the words *mygir* and *flyja*, granted, however, a thirteenth-century pronunciation of ⟨gi⟩ as [j]. Evidence from manuscript orthography and skaldic *bendingar* suggests that, in Old Icelandic, the lin-

⁷ A comparable situation is offered by *lausavísur* 8 and 9 about Bárðr's feast: these (apparently) twin-stanzas were discussed by Males, who showed that only one of the two is linguistically compatible with Egill's lifetime, while the other was likely composed by the saga author (2020: 224–228). See also: Patria (2024: 172–178).

guistic change of [j] to [j] was already underway in the early thirteenth century.⁸ Based on manuscript spellings, Jón Axel Harðarson observed that, in a phonetic context such as *mýgir* (after a vowel or diphthong and before [i]), the merger between [j] and [j] appears more secure and widespread from the fourteenth century on, but he did not exclude a thirteenth century dating for the line *folkmýgi lát flýja* (2007: 85–87). In Egill’s time, by contrast, *mýgir* and *flýja* would simply not have rhymed, since *-ýg-* [ýγ] would have required the segment *-Vg-* [Vγ] to produce *hending*. Jón Helgason’s remark can easily go overlooked because of editorial choices. In his influential edition, Finnur Jónsson substituted the manuscript reading *flýja* with a more archaic form of the same verb, *flæja* (*Skjald B*, I: 46).⁹ Finnur was following his ordinary editorial praxis, which was to “correct” those forms that he regarded as products of scribal “updating”, in order to restore the plausible phonology of the poem at the presumed time of composition.¹⁰ In so doing, he did not obtain a regular *skothending*, as the line is still rhyme-less, but he, deliberately or not, ended up dispelling the impression of a late rhyme. Since the form *flæja* is purely a product of Finnur’s zealous reconstruction, the pair *mýgir* : *flýja* might indeed be a late *aðalhending*, as suggested by Jón Helgason. In this context, it is worth mentioning that *aðalhending* instead of *skothending* in the first or third line of a *helmingr* is a poetic license allowed by Snorri in the commentary of *Háttatal* and employed in other stanzas by Pseudo-Egill (Patria 2024: 200).¹¹ Jón Helgason’s second criterion is, however, not as strong as the first one (dat. sg. *vé*), since it is perfectly possible that l. 5 lacked *hendingar* altogether.

Despite containing certainly one or, possibly, two late features, *lv* 28 displays one form that points in the opposite direction: the word *féar* (gen. of *fê*) in l. 4 requires a disyllabic scanning and appears, therefore, as a genuinely archaic hiatus form (Finnur Jónsson 1884: 177). The occurrence of the monosyllabic form *ffjár* would make the line hypometrical: ** *rón míns ffjár*

⁸ Consider the spellings ⟨husfrágia⟩ and ⟨orcnaýgiar⟩ for, respectively, *búsfreyja* and *Orkneyjar* in the ms AM 325 II 4to, dated to c. 1225 and the evidence from the rhymes in the poems of Sturla Þórðarson: *Hrynhenda* (dated c. 1263) st. 16.7: *geiga* létuð gyltar *sýjur*; *Hrafnismál* (dated c. 1265), 7.4: *leygs* í *Suðreyjar*; st. 10.8: *fleygr* í *Suðreyjum* (Jón Axel Harðarson 2007: 85–87). See also: Tarsi (2025: 73).

⁹ The manuscript readings are ⟨flyja⟩ (*Möðruvallabók*, *Ketilsbók*) and ⟨fylgja⟩ (*Wolfenbüttel*) (*Skjald A*, I: 53).

¹⁰ Finnur’s choice was followed by Clunies Ross (*SkP* 5: 223), but not by Sigurður Nordal (*ÍF* 2: 163).

¹¹ *Þriðja leyfi er þat at hafa aðalhendingar í fyrsta eða þriðja vísuorði* “The third poetic license is to have full rhymes in the first or third line [of the half-stanza]” (Faulkes 2007: 8).

hǫnum (5 metrical positions). Based on metrical evidence and on their treatment in the *First Grammatical Treatise* (to which I shall return below), the contraction of hiatuses to monosyllables in Old Norse appears to have been completed around c. 1150. In particular, forms like *fǣar* are regarded as especially strong indications of early composition, because, unlike other kinds of hiatus, they were never restored analogically and is therefore assumed that they could never be reproduced by archaizing poets (Myrvoll, *SkP* 5: xcvi–xcvix). It should be noticed, however, that, if composed in the tenth century, the stanza ought to contain another hiatus, namely the above-mentioned dative *véi* in l. 8.¹² In fact, lines 4 and 8 present us with a reversed situation: for metrical reasons, we must reconstruct a form with hiatus in l. 4 (*fǣar*), and one without hiatus in l. 8 (*vé*). To this discordant evidence I will return below, but for the moment, it seems safe to assume that at least the second half of the stanza was probably composed for the saga.

Other characteristics relevant for dating regard the stanza's style and content. The syntax is linear, the only kenning being *land-áss* ('the land-god'), usually interpreted as referring to Þórr. While invoking the fury of Óðinn, Freyr, Njǫrðr and Þórr, Egill accuses Eiríkr not only of having stolen from him, but of having wronged the gods themselves, being a destroyer of heathen temples. That of "temple-destroyers" is a characteristic description for Eiríkr's sons in the court poetry composed for the pagan ruler Hákon jarl Sigurðarson of Hlaðir (cf. *Vellekla* st. 14–15, *SkP* 1: 301–305). In fact, in a stanza attributed to a *drápa* composed for Hákon jarl by his court poet Einarr skálaglam, the Eiríkssynir are described in terms that are strongly reminiscent of the ones used for Eiríkr in *Eg lv* 28:

Byggði lǫnd, en lunda
lék orð á því, forðum
Gamla kind, sú *granda*,
gunnborðs, véum þorði.

The kin of Gamli [Eiríkssynir], *who dared to destroy sanctuaries*, once occupied the lands, and the talk of the trees of the battle-board [shield > warriors] was about that.¹³

Note that, as in Egill's *lv* 28, the verb *granda* governs the noun *vé*, which,

¹² Strictly speaking, a tenth-century line 3 would have had hiatus in the 3. pers. subjunctive as well: *reið séi rǫgn ok Óðinn*. In this case, however, both a disyllabic (resolved) form and a monosyllabic one could occur in the second weak position of the line, and the form has therefore no diagnostic value.

¹³ Einarr skálaglam Helgason, *Hákonardrápa* 1, ed. ad trans. by Edith Marold (*SkP* 1: 279).

as expected, occurs in the dative (*véum*). The stanza is only transmitted in *Fagrskinna* and refers to a historical reality: the Eiríkssynir, as vassals of the Christian king Haraldr Gormsson, had destroyed heathen places of worship, while Hákon jarl is celebrated by his skalds for restoring them (*ÍF* 26: 203, 241). While that of “temples-destroyers” is thus a well-known characterization for the Eiríkssynir in tenth-century panegyrics, the same cannot be said of their father, Eiríkr blóðøx. The first king to destroy pagan temples in Norway in an attempt at a top-down conversion of the realm, was in fact Eiríkr’s brother and opponent, Hákon góði Aðalsteinsfóstri (*ÍF* 26: 166–167; Bagge 2004). Thus, the description of Eiríkr as an enemy of the pagan gods is puzzling and, possibly, fruit of an anachronistic reanalysis projecting a typical characterization of the Eiríkssynir onto their father.

Magnus Olsen (1944: 188–189) drew attention to the similarity between l. 2: *gram reki bõnd af lõndum* and the line *nú rekið gand of landi* (‘now you banish the wolf/outlaw from the land’), which occurs in a *lausavísa* attributed to Hildr Hrólfsdóttir nefju, wife of Rognvaldr jarl Eysteinnsson of Møre and mother of Gõngu-Hrólfr, quoted by Snorri in both *Heimskringla* and in the *Separate Saga of St Óláfr* (*SkP* 1: 139). On the conceptual level, some parallels with *lv* 28 can also be found in one of the famous “conversion stanzas” by Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld, where many pagan gods are named all together:

Mér skyli Freyr ok Freyja,
– fjõrð létk af dul Njarðar,
líknisk grõm við Grímnir –
gramr, ok Þórr inn rammi;
Krist vilk allrar ástar,
– erum leið sonar reiði,
vald es á frægt und foldar
feðr – einn ok goð kveðja.

Freyr should be furious with me, and Freyja and the mighty Þórr; last year I left off the delusion of Njarðr; let the fierce one ask mercy from Grímnir. I want to ask Christ alone and God for all love; the Son’s anger is hateful to me; he holds famous power under the father of earth [GOD].¹⁴

With the exception of Freyja, these are the same gods named in the Eiríkr-stanza of *Egils saga*. Hallfreðr calls Óðinn by his appellative Grímnir but names directly ‘the powerful Þórr’. Conversely, in *lv* 28, Óðinn is called by his name, while Þórr is called *land-áss* (‘the land[defending?]-god’). For

¹⁴ Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld, *lausavísa* 9, ed. and trans. by Diana Whaley (*SkP* 5: 887).

Hallfreðr, the reason for naming all the gods is clear: he is rejecting them to embrace the new faith, and naming the pagan deities one by one is in line with attested *abrenuntiatio* practices.¹⁵ The need for Egill to invoke the rage of all the gods against Eiríkr blóðøx is less clear. Admittedly, it is not unconceivable to summon several gods in the context of a curse. Long lists of infernal deities and creatures connected to the underworld and the realm of the dead are characteristic, for instance, of Greco-Roman cursing-rituals. The closest Nordic parallel is the invocation of *Úlfr auk Óðinn auk Hótyrr* as benign helpers on the runic inscription on the Ribe skull (dated c. 725 AD).¹⁶ Sigurður Nordal (*ÍF* 2: 163, n. 1) has also drawn attention to the similarity between this passage and the legal oath formula *hjálpí mér svá Freyr ok Njörðr ok áss inn almáttki* ('may Freyr and Njörðr help me and the all-powerful god'), mentioned in *Landnámabók* (*SkP* 5: 223; *ÍF* 1: 315). If, however, this stanza was composed by Snorri, as I argue, the parade of pagan deities would rather be due to an antiquarian taste. Among the *lausavísur* of *Egils saga*, the other one that contains an explicit reference to the cult of the pagan gods is *lv* 59 (*Esa Friðgeiri færi*, *SkP* 5: 272–273), which on linguistic grounds was suspected of being a late forgery already by Finnur Jónsson (1884: 177).¹⁷ This stanza also contains the description of the *berserkr* Ljótr inn bleiki, depicted in the iconic act of biting his shield, that has a parallel in Snorri's description of the *berserkir* in *Ynglinga saga* (*ÍF* 26: 17).

In sum, in the panegyrics composed for Hákon jarl, the celebration of the restored pagan temples was a historical and political reality. Similarly, in Hallfreðr's conversion stanzas there is a historically plausible context for the enumeration of the main pagan deities. In *Egils saga*, by contrast, both traits might be an expression of antiquarian fascination for pre-Christian practices rather than genuine tenth-century realities. Finally, let us bear in mind that Egill's wish to see Eiríkr exiled will come true at a later stage in the saga. Thus, from a narrative perspective, *lv* 28 works as a premonition or as a self-fulfilling prophecy in the saga plot.

¹⁵ Cf. the *abrenuntiatio* formula of the Old Saxon Baptismal Vow: *end ec forsacho allum dioboles uuercum and uuordum, Thunaer ende Uoden ende Saxnote ende allum them unboldum, the hira genotas sint* (Cod. Pal. Lat. 577, fol. 6v: <https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.9726#0016>; Simek 1993: 276). As in Hallfreðr's stanza, the repudiation of the false idols is followed by the profession of one's faith in Christ, God and the Holy Spirit (Cod. Pal. Lat. 577, fol. 7r: <https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.9726#0017>).

¹⁶ Runor: DR EM85;151B.

¹⁷ The dating of the stanza was questioned because of the occurrence of the late form *blótar* (3 sg. of a weak verb *blóta* 'to perform a pagan sacrifice'), required by meter, instead of the archaic *blætr* (*SkP* 5: 272–273).

Tab. 2. The Gunnhildr-Stanza: Linguistic Features

line		archaic feature	late feature
1	Lögbrigðir hefr lagða, landalfr, fyr mér sjölfum, blekkir bræðra sökkuva brúðfang, vega langa;	<i>aðalhending in a : ρ</i>	
5	Gunnhildi ák gjalda, greypt's hennar skap, þenna, ungr gat ok læ launat,	anticipation of <i>ok</i> lack of <i>skotbending</i>	
8	landrekstr, bili grandat. The lawbreaker [EIRÍKR], land-elf, has laid for me long ways (= has made me an outlaw); the chosen bride deceives the murderer of brothers [EIRÍKR]; it is Gunnhildr that I have to repay for this exile: cruel is her nature; (ever since I was) young, I got to destroy hesitation (= react promptly) and to repay deceit.		

1.4 The Gunnhildr-Stanza (*lv* 29)

Let us now turn to a linguistic analysis of *lv* 29, the Gunnhildr-stanza (Tab. 2); the features that are diagnostic for dating are rendered in bold, while internal rhymes are in italics.

The strongest dating criterion for *lv* 29 is the *aðalhending in a : ρ* in l. 2. This kind of rhyme declines over the eleventh and twelfth centuries and is never attested after *c.* 1200 (Hreinn Benediktsson 1963; Myrvoll 2014: 147–163; Myrvoll, *SkP* 5: c–ci; Þorgeir Sigurðsson 2023). The lack of *skotbendingar* in l. 7 is not a decisive criterion for dating, as it can occur in both early and late verse, but, while it is relatively frequent in early poets, it is decidedly less common after the year 1000. Another seemingly early trait is the “inversion” or anticipation of the conjunction *ok* in ll. 7–8: *ungr gat ok læ launat | (landstrekr) bili grandat*. This translates, very literally: ‘young, I got and deceit repaid, (land-exile), hesitation destroyed’, which means: ‘(since I was) young, I got to destroy hesitation and repay deceit’.¹⁸ This is a syntactically marked construction only known from skaldic poems, where the second of two items linked by *ok* occurs before the first one, which comes later and often in hyperbaton.

Unmarked syntax:	A ok B	bili grandat ok læ launat
Skaldic construction:	ok B [...], A	ok læ launat [...] bili grandat

Instances of this rare construction are more frequent in the earliest skaldic

¹⁸ As expected, the verb *granda* takes the dative: *bili*.

poems, reaching a peak in the second half of the tenth century and declining after the turn of the millennium.¹⁹ The only two twelfth-century occurrences I have found belong to the same poem, Gamli kanóki's *Harmsól* (c. 1200), while the last instance occurs in Snorri's *Háttatal* st. 1 (c. 1220). This suggests that, in the later period of *dróttkvætt* composition, this marked construction was an object of imitation only by a few learned authors. Thus, on the one hand, the criterion cannot be used to exclude Snorri's authorship of the stanza, but, on the other, it is compatible with tenth-century style, it occurs in Egill's *Sonatorrek* (st. 5) and it does not contradict the evidence of the *aðalbending* in *a : ρ*.

Moreover, the *ok*-inversion is in line with the relatively complex, embedded syntax of *lv* 29: the second *helmingr* comprises three clauses, with a structure: *a-b-a-c-a-c*. This syntactical configuration is significantly more complex than the one found in *lv* 28. For what concerns linguistic complexity and syntax, the Gunnhildr-stanza seems thus more similar to the ones attributed to historical Egill, while the Eiríkr-stanza appears closer to the praxis of Pseudo-Egill.

Another detail worthy of mention concerns the kennings *land-alf* ('land-elf') in *lv* 29 and *land-áss* ('land-god') in *lv* 28. Some scholars interpret the kenning *land-alf* as yet another vocative addressing Þórr, following the model of *lv* 28, where many gods are addressed directly and where *land-áss* seems, in all likelihood, a kenning for Þórr (Finnur Jónsson 1884: 144; *SkP* 5: 225). The direct address to the god seems, however, out of context in this stanza, and no internal reason prevents us from interpreting *land-alf* ('elf of the land' = RULER) as an apposition of *lögbrigðir*, describing Eiríkr.²⁰ In early skaldic poems, the word *alf* occurs as a base-word in warrior kennings for several legendary and historical rulers: *sóknar alf* 'elf of the

¹⁹ Occurrences of *ok*-inversion. Ninth cent: 1. Bragi *Rdr* 5 (*SkP* 3: 35); 2. Bragi *Frag* 1 (*SkP* 3: 54); 3. Þjóð *Haustl* 10 (*SkP* 3: 446). Tenth cent: 4. Þhorn *Gldr* 6 (*SkP* 1: 85); 5. Egill *St* 5 (*SkP* 5: 304); 6. ÚlfrU *Húsdr* 2 (*SkP* 3: 407); 7. Eskál *Vell* 27 (*SkP* 1: 317); 8. Tindr *Hákr* 2 (*SkP* 1: 341); 9. Eil *Þdr* 15 (*SkP* 3: 108); 10. Hókr *Eirfl* 2 (*SkP* 1: 473). Eleventh cent: 11. Arn *Magnr* 7 (*SkP* 2: 216); 12. Arn *Frag* 4 (*SkP* 3: 6); 13. Gisl *Magnkv* 2 (*SkP* 2: 418). Twelfth cent: 14. Gamli *Has* 22 (*SkP* 7: 92–93); 15. Gamli *Has* 64 (*SkP* 7: 130). Thirteenth cent: 16. SnSt *Ht* 1 (*SkP* 3: 1104). This preliminary analysis of 'ok-inversion' was conducted with the digital tool *The New Lexicon Poeticum*, edited and developed by Tarrin Wills (<https://lexiconpoeticum.org/m.php?p=lp>). This database is still incomplete, as it does not yet include, for instance, the poetry from the *Islendingasögur*. Considering, however, that this is the least secure section of the corpus in matters of dating, its exclusions from the control sample is in fact required.

²⁰ So Sveinbjörn Egilsson: "*Land-álfr*: genius terræ tutelaris, rex (Eg. 56), ubi iunguntur per appositionem *landálfr lögbrigðir* rex legum violator, de Eriko Blodaxa" (*LP1*: 492).

attack' (king Jǫrmunrekkr);²¹ *ráðalfr* 'ruling-elf' (king Hǫgni);²² *brynjalfr* 'byrnie-elf' (the ruler Hálfðan hvítbeinn);²³ *sverðalfr* 'sword-elf' (Hákon jarl or, possibly, Sigvaldi jarl);²⁴ *morðalfr* 'battle-elf' (Hákon jarl).²⁵ In *Ragnarsdrápa* 4.2, the term *alfr* is used to describe Jǫrmunrekkr/Ermanaric, a character who receives a markedly negative connotation in Norse poetry. Therefore, there is no reason to believe that the word *alfr* had a particularly "complimentary" meaning and would not be used for Eiríkr (*SkP* 5: 225). All the occurrences of the word *alfr* in warrior-kennings appear to be early, and this word is never attested in this function after *Vellekla* (c. 975), until it is revived in antiquarian, learned poetry in the mid-twelfth century.²⁶ It is first attested again in the circle of Rǫgnvaldr Kali Kolsson and it becomes popular in the poetry of the Sturlungar and later (*LP*: *alfr*).²⁷ The occurrence of *alfr*-kennings in early verse, their disappearance during the eleventh century and, finally, their revival in antiquarian and strongly mythologizing diction indicate that the mention of these beings was in fact perceived as marked, especially by early Christian skalds. In eleventh-century poetry, the term *alfar* occurs only once, not in a kenning, but in the famous mention of the *alfablót* in Sighvatr Þórðarson's *Austarfararvísur*, and, indeed, the endurance of such religious practices might contribute to explain the careful avoidance of this term by recently Christianized poets.²⁸ I am inclined to think that the occurrence of the unparalleled kenning *land-áss* ('god of the land') in the Eiríkr stanza, might be based on the kenning *land-alfr*, actually meaning 'ruler' in the Gunnhildr stanza. In

²¹ *Ragnarsdrápa* 4 (*SkP* 3: 33), c. 850.

²² *Ragnarsdrápa* 11 (*SkP* 3: 43), c. 850.

²³ *Ynglingatal* 22 (*SkP* 1: 48), c. 900.

²⁴ *Háleygjatal* 11 (*SkP* 1: 210), c. 970.

²⁵ *Vellekla* 26 (*SkP* 1: 315), c. 975.

²⁶ The use of mythological references in skaldic diction reflects the changing attitudes towards the pre-Christian matter contained in the kennings and undergoes three phases: an early (c. 850–995) or genuinely "pagan" period, characterized by specific mythological references; an intermediate (c. 995–1120) or "early-Christian" period, marked by active avoidance of heathen imagery; finally, a late (c. 1120–1300) or "antiquarian" period, characterized by a learned revival of what is now perceived as mythological lore (Males 2020: 75–76).

²⁷ In *Háttalykill* (st. 29, *SkP* 3: 1038) we find the kenning *morðalfr*, in imitation of *Vellekla*. The complex and heavy mythologizing kenning *Baldrs beiði-Rindi bandalfr* is composed by Rǫgnvaldr's companion, the skald Oddi inn litli (*SkP* 2: 614–616). The kenning involves *ofljóst* and references to obscure pagan myths and is composed in the occasion of a poetical challenge between Oddi and Rǫgnvaldr (*ÍF* 34: 202–203).

²⁸ During a diplomatic mission to Västergötland dated to c. 1018, Óláfr Haraldsson's skald Sighvatr is refused hospitality in a farm where a heathen ceremony for the *alfar* is taking place (*SkP* 1: 590).

fact, for the purpose of kenning-construction, Snorri seems to perceive *Æsir* and *alfar* as largely equivalent categories, arguably because of their frequent occurrence in alliterative collocations in eddic poems (Nygaard 2022: 293–294).

In þriðja málsgrein er kǫlluð er kenning, ok er sú grein svá sett, at vér kǫllum Óðin eða Þór eða Tý eða *einbvern af Ásum eða alfum*, at hverr þeira er ek nefni til, þá tek ek með heiti af eign annars Ássins eða get ek hans verka ǫkkvorra. (Faulkes 1998, I: 5, my emphasis)

The third category of [poetic] language is what is called kenning (description), and this category is constructed in this way, that we speak of Óðinn or Þórr or Týr or *anyone of the Æsir or elves*, in such a way that with each of those that I mention, I add a term for the attribute of another Áss or make mention of one or other of their deeds. (Faulkes 1987: 64, my emphasis)

It seems thus natural to assume that for Snorri *land-alfr* and *land-áss* were basically synonymic expressions.

Despite differences in language and content, the two stanzas share some conceptual and verbal parallels:

1. In both, the poet expresses the idea that Eiríkr and Gunnhildr should be repaid (*gjalda*) for their wrongdoings towards Egill.
2. The kenning *land-áss* recalls *land-alfr*.
3. The last lines of each stanza share a diffused similarity, due to the collocation of the words carrying rhyme: *land* and *granda*:

28.8: landóss, þanns vé grandar 29.8: landrekstr, bili grandat

1.5 Summary of the formal analysis

In sum, *lv* 29 shows one strong sign of early composition (*aðalbending* in *a : ρ*), as well as several characteristics that do not contradict this conclusion. The ‘*ok*-inversion’, the lack of *skothending* in l. 7 and the occurrence of the *alfr*-kenning are all features that, in theory, could be reproduced by an archaizing poet, but are much more common in poems earlier than c. 1000. This stanza has no religious content, rather expressing a strong conflict with the royal couple, and deals with Egill’s already decided exile, not with Eiríkr’s, thus not serving any marked narrative function within the saga plot.

The situation of the Eiríkr-stanza is less straightforward. The stanza bears clear signs of late composition: the dative *vé* [l. 8]; the probable rhyme *yǰ : yǰ* [l. 5]; the simple syntax; the unexpected description of Eiríkr as a

destroyer of pagan temples [l. 8]; the occurrence of a kenning *land-áss* [l. 8], possibly based on a misinterpretation of *land-alfr*. The only, but considerable, complication is the hiatus form *fjár* [l. 4]. Since the strongest signs of late date are found in the second *helmingr*, one could argue that only this half-stanza was composed for the saga, a situation that has been proposed for another stanza in *Egils saga* (lv 12, Males 2020: 220–221). In that case, however, a strong stylistic difference between the two *helmingar* was detected. This is not the case here, where the simple syntax, general lack of linguistic complexity, and thematic coherence apply in equal measure to the entire stanza. For this reason, I will explore the possibility that the pseudonymous poet, specifically Snorri, composed the entire stanza. This would have required of him the ability to attribute to the word *fjár* a bi-positional scansion.

2. The Hiatus Form *fjár*

2.1 Evidence from the First Grammatical Treatise

Probably shortly before the composition of the Icelandic *First Grammatical Treatise* (*FGT*, anon. c. 1150), Old Norse words containing vowels in hiatus underwent two kinds of linguistic change. In words like *á.ar* and *fé.i*, the short vowel following a long, stressed vowel of the same quality fell, producing forms like *ár* and *fé*. Forms like *fé.ar* and *sé.a*, by contrast, underwent a shift in accent, so that the originally stressed vowel lost its syllabic nature, while the short unstressed one became the accented syllabic nucleus: *fjár* and *sjá* (Noreen 1923: §130–135; Myrvoll 2014: 313–314). Because of the metrical requirement for a bimoraic lift, hiatus forms often underwent resolution ($\cup \times = \cup$). However, in a number of metrical contexts in which suspension of resolution is required, such as A2k lines, the linguistic change resulted in a disruption of the meter. This is what drew the attention of medieval scholars towards these forms. Indeed, we know that the presence of hiatus forms in older poetry was “known” to (some) medieval Icelanders, although their understanding of the phenomenon was quite different from ours. In a famous passage of *FGT*, the author is arguing for the original quality of the first phoneme in the word *járn* ‘iron’. In so doing, he notes that this word, that he knows as monosyllabic, must nonetheless receive a disyllabic spelling in a certain skaldic line, and provides the following explanation:

Skáld eru höfundar allrar rýnni eða málgreinar, sem smíðir [smíðar] eða lögmennt laga. En þessa lund kvað einn þeira eða þessu líkt:

Höfðu hart of krafðir
 hildir óx við þat skildir
 gang, enn gamlir sprung
 gunnþings éarnhringar.

Nú þó at kveðandinn skyldi hann til at slíta eina samstöfu í sundr ok göra tvær ór, til þess at kveðandi haldisk í hætti, þá rak hann þó engi nauðr til þess at skipta stöfunum ok hafa *e* fyrir *i*, ef heldr ætti *i* at væra en *e*, þó at mér lítisk eigi at því.

The skalds are authorities in all (matters touching the art of) writing or the distinctions (made in) discourse, just as craftsmen (are) [in their craft] or lawyers in the laws. One of them made a verse somewhat as follows:

The shields, strongly urged
 to conflict, made headway;
 battle's fury mounted,
 but the old *iron* (*éarn*) swords burst.

Now even though the (metrical) rhythm forced him to split the one syllable [of *járn*] and make two out of (it) [*é.arn*], in order for the rhythm of the meter to be preserved, still no necessity compelled him to change the letters and use *e* instead of *i*, if *i* should (in fact) be (used) rather than *e* in spite of my belief to the contrary. (Hreinn Benediktsson 1972: 224–227)

The quoted *belmingr* belongs to a poem composed in the first half of the eleventh century.²⁹ The First Grammarian does not seem to imagine that circa a century before his time, Óttarr svarti might have only known this word as disyllabic, and explains the phenomenon not as a linguistic change, but, synchronically, as a metrical license. As he was inclined to, he then engages some virtual opponents in a polemic about the pronunciation of the word. He claims to have heard the form *é.arn*, that he prescribes, from sensible men (*menn skynsamir*), who, in turn, learned it from others before them (Hreinn Benediktsson 1972: 226). From this short passage we can infer some things: first, that around the middle of the twelfth century, hiatus forms could still be reproduced *metri causa*, when poems were pronounced and recited with a special attention to metrical rules. Second, that, although the meter might have helped preserving the old forms, these were nonetheless puzzling and, apparently, experts in poetry discussed (and argued about) their pronunciation.

In sum, it seems that medieval scholars interested in matters of poetry and language observed this phenomenon in the early poems and became

²⁹ Óttarr svarti, *Höfuðlausn* st. 8, ll. 5–8 (composed for Óláfr Haraldsson c. 1024).

aware of the fact that certain words needed to receive an odd, bi-positional scansion, but were not able to reconstruct the linguistic dynamics behind it. In this respect, the First Grammarian's analysis is reminiscent of the one provided in the *Third Grammatical Treatise* for the two variants of the name Þórrøðr/Þórðr, where Þórðr is a later contraction of the original form Þórrøðr (Björn Magnússon Ólsen 1884: 88–89). Óláfr Þórðarson writes:

Dieresis gerir tvær samstöfur af einni, sem Björn kvað:

Nú læt ek at þar þrjóti,

Þórrøðr, vini óra.³⁰

Hér eru tvær samstöfur gervar af einni samstöfu, Þórðr, til þess at kveðandi haldisk.

Dieresis makes two syllables out of one, as Björn composed:

'Now I will let our friends be failed there, Þórrøðr'

Here two syllables are made from one, Þórðr, in order to fit the meter.

As the First Grammarian with the hiatus form, Óláfr shows no awareness of the fact that the two forms may belong to two different chronological phases of the language. It seems that medieval scholars knew that certain words were subject to this metrical oddity and regarded the competing forms as synchronic metrical allomorphs, to be employed at will whenever the meter required it – *til þess at kveðandi haldisk*. It is also reasonable to think that, since they were not able to individuate the phonological context of application of the rule, they interpreted this as a metrical license (*leyfi*) attached to some specific words, and that they detected these “special words” in older poems.

2.2 Snorri's Study of “Slow Syllables”

A similar procedure emerges clearly from the passage of *Háttatal* in which Snorri builds a stanza characterized by the metrical license of the “slow syllables” (Faulkes 2007: 7). This stanza contains even lines of five syllables instead of the standard six. The commentary explains that some of these syllables can be lengthened in pronunciation (*samstöfur seinar* ‘slow syllables’), so that, despite the apparently lacking metrical position, the lines are somehow still metrical.

Hjálm's fylli spekr hilmir

hvatr Vindhlés skatna;

³⁰ This couplet occurs, with the variant reading *vinun*, in a stanza attributed to Hólmǫngungu-Bersi in *Kormáks saga* (*SkP* 5: 1101).

hann kná hjörvi þunnum
 hræs þjóðár ræsa.
 Ýgr hilmir lætr eiga
 öld dreyrfá skjöldu;
 stýrs rýðr stillir hersum
 sterkr járngrá serki.

The brave lord subdues men with Vindhlér's [Heimdallr's] filling of the helmet [HEAD > SWORD]; he can make mighty rivers of carrion [BLOOD] rush with the slender sword. The terrifying lord makes people possess bloodstained shields; the strong ruler reddens the iron-grey shirts of battle [BYRNIES] of the bersar.³¹

In three out of four cases, the “slow syllables” in question are, in fact, products of the contraction of a historical hiatus: *þjóðár* < *þjóðá.ar* (acc. f. pl.); *dreyrfá* < *dreyrfá.a* (acc. m. pl.); *járngrá* < *járngrá.a* (acc. m. pl.). Rather than making two syllables out of one, Snorri imagines these words to contain an “extra-long” vowel that fills two positions rather than one. This is due to the fact that the hiatus forms he selected, originally contained homorganic vowels that were contracted or fell, producing a long vowel (*á.ar* > *ár*; *fé.i* > *fé*) rather than an ascending diphthong like the one analyzed by the First Grammarian (*é.arn* > *járn*; *fé.ar* > *ffár*). Despite the different quality of the hiatus, all these forms equally resulted in hypometrical lines in the archaic poems Snorri knew. As observed by both Gade (2001: 52) and Myrvoll (2009: 24–25), for some of Snorri's forms it is possible to individuate a precise model in lines from early poems, where the hiatus must be reconstructed *metri causa*:

- | | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|---|
| l. 4: hræs þjóðár ræsa | cf. œstr þjóðáar fncestu | (Eilífr Guðrúnarson,
<i>Þórsdrápa</i> 5, l. 8) |
| l. 6: öld dreyrfá skjöldu | cf. með dreyrfáar dróttir | (Bragi Boddason,
<i>Ragnarsdrápa</i> 3, l. 3) |

Both model lines are transmitted (and only attested) in Snorri's *Skáldskaparmál*. The case of l. 8 is curious, because not only do we fail at finding, in the attested corpus, a precise model for the form *járngrá*, but this word, in archaic times, might have contained not one but potentially two hiatus forms: *é.arn-grá.a*. Such a form would not have occurred in Snorri's model, however, because resolution cannot occur in position 2 in a D verse. If, as for lines 4 and 6, Snorri followed a precise model for this line, that might have contained the Old Norwegian variant form *jarn* (Bjorvand and Lindeman

³¹ Snorri Sturluson, *Háttatal* st. 7, ed. and trans. by Kari Ellen Gade (*SkP* 3: 1111).

2019: 598–599). Since a precise model is not attested, however, the closest matches can be found in lines containing the word *blár* rather than *grár*:

l. 8: sterkr járnrá serki cf. Ulfkell bláar skulfu (Þórðr Kolbeinsson,
Eiríksdrápa 11, l. 8)

So far, the “slow syllables” seem to be based on models that contained historical hiatus forms, contracted by Snorri’s times. This is not the case, however, for the genitive *Vindblés* in l. 2. The etymology of this name is somewhat debated, but it does not seem to have contained a hiatus form in the genitive (Kuhn 1983, 69–70; Gade, *SkP* 3: 1111). The gen. of the mythological name *Hlér* (possibly < *blewaz, *AEW*: 237), of which *Vindblér* seems a compounded form, occurs in a *lausavísa* in *Egils saga* where it occupies, as expected, one metrical position: *sorg, Hlés vita, borgar* (*Eg lv* 24, l. 2, *SkP* 5: 213). In the dative, however, the encounter between the stem *blé-* and the ending *-i* would have produced a hiatus form (*blé-i*), lost by Snorri’s time. Since Snorri apparently used models drawn from early poetry in order to reproduce the metrical license of the slow syllable, the question arises of why he used the form *Vindblés* in line 2. In the extant poetic corpus, this name is never attested, with the exception of this occurrence in *Háttatal*. Otherwise, it is only known from a passage in *Skáldskaparmál*, where it is mentioned as one of the names of the god Heimdallr.

Heimdalar höfuð heitir sverð; svá er sagt, at hann var lostinn manns höfði í gognum. Um hann er kveðit í *Heimdalaraldri*, ok er síðan kallat höfuð mjötuðr Heimdalar; sverð heitir manns mjötuðr. Heimdallr er eigandi Gulltops; hann er ok tilsækir Vágaskers ok Singasteins; þá deildi hann við Loka um Brisingamen; hann heitir ok Vindhler. Ulfr Uggason kvað í *Húsdrápu* langa stund eptir þeirri frásögu, ok er þess þar getit, er þeir voru í sela líkjum; ok sonr Óðins (Faulkes 1998, I: 19).

A sword can be called ‘the head of Heimdallr’; so it is told, that he was once struck through with a man’s head. About him it is told in *Heimdalaraldri*, and since then the head is called Heimdall’s doom; a sword is a man’s doom. Heimdallr is the owner of Gulltopp; he is also the visitor of Vágasker and Singasteinn; there, he contended with Loki for the Brisingamen; he is also known as Vindhler. Ulfr Uggason composed a long passage in *Húsdrápa* about this story, and it is known from there that they were in the form of seals; [he is called] also son of Óðinn.

Note, moreover, that the kenning type used in *Háttatal* 7, *Vindblés hjálms fyll* (‘the filling of the helmet of Heimdallr’ = [HEAD > SWORD]) is otherwise unattested too. Snorri explains this kenning in the quoted passage of *Skáld-*

skaparmál with reference to an episode told in a now lost eddic poem, called *Heimdalarǵaldr* ('Heimdallr's spell'). The name Vindhlér, by contrast, seems to be mentioned in connection with the Brisingamen episode, told in a now largely lost section of Ulfr Uggason's *Húsdrápa*, a poem, like the aforementioned *Ragnarsdrápa* and *Þórsdrápa*, partly quoted in *Skáldskaparmál*. Thus, it seems that Snorri based both the god's *beiti* and the sword-kenning used in the *Háttatal* stanza on lore about Heimdallr coming from old poetic sources. At this point, I think all the necessary elements are in place and it is thus possible to speculate about how the "slow syllable" form *Vindblés* of the *Háttatal* stanza came about:

- a. The name Vindhlér would have had a dative form *Vindbléi*, occupying three metrical positions in an old poem, but sounding like *Vindblé* by Snorri's time.
- b. Vindhlér is a name of the god Heimdallr.
- c. Unlike us, Snorri had access to two poetic sources about Heimdallr, the eddic *Heimdalarǵaldr* (completely lost) and the skaldic *Húsdrápa* (fragmentarily attested).³²
- d. It is possible that a dative form of the god's *beiti* Vindhlér appeared in one of these now lost sources in the dative form **Vindbléi*, occupying three metrical positions: cf. *Vþluspá* 64, l. 4: *á Gimlé [-i]*; *Hymiskviða* st. 9, l. 5: *Er minn frí [-i]*.
- e. The evidence of *Háttatal* 7 suggests that Snorri was not able to reconstruct this form (although, in theory, he might have been able to do it by analogy). Rather, I suggest that he thought that the name Vindhlér could be subject to the "slow syllable" license, irrespective of its inflectional case.

Like the First Grammarian and Óláfr hvítaskáld, Snorri probably attributed the poetic license to certain *words*: that is to say, that he was unable to generalize the phonological context of application of the linguistic change (*blé-i > blé*), but that, in case of need – *til að kveðandi baldisk* – he would generalize the metrical license to the entire paradigm of the word (dat. *blé.e > nom. blé.er*, gen. *blé.es*). Therefore, he assumed he could use a genitive form *Vindblé.es*, even though such a form would never have occupied two positions in archaic verse, for it never contained hiatus. Snorri's *modus operandi* in the slow-syllables stanza shows that he first detected metrical oddities in old poems, where he observed that some words had to receive an unnaturally

³² In the extant fragments of *Húsdrápa*, only sts 2 and 8 mention Heimdallr (*SkP* 3: 407, 418).

“prolonged” pronunciation; then, he used these as models to reproduce what he interpreted as licenses, with which he enriched his *clavis metrica*. I argue that he probably always followed older models, even in those cases for which we have lost the “originals”.

Coming back to our initial problem, namely the stanza in *Egils saga*, the question is: would Snorri have been able to reproduce the form *fé.ar* (or, possibly, a “slow-syllable” form *ffá.ar*) instead of the one belonging to his spoken norm, *ffár*? It should be stressed that this kind of hiatus word differs crucially from the ones just observed in *Háttatal* 7, belonging rather to the kind examined by the First Grammarian. I hypothesize that he could have done so, if he had access to verses in early poetry that could provide him with a model for the metrical license. Had Snorri observed cases in which the word *ffár* needed to be scanned as bi-positional, then he might have either followed the same line of reasoning of the First Grammarian and thought that such words could be subject to splitting or applied his own concept of slow syllable and subject them to an unnatural lengthening.

2.3 Possible Sources for the Form *féar*

The first reasonable place where to start looking for Snorri’s sources of inspiration is probably Egill’s own poetry. There are at least two passages in Egill’s long poems that must have originally contained the hiatus form *féar*: these are *Sonatorrek* 16 and *Arinbjarnarkviða* 17.

Sonatorrek 16

Finnk þat opt
es **féar** beiðir

I find that often,
when someone asks for money...³³

Arinbjarnarkviða 17

en Grjótbjörn
of gœddan hefr
Freyr of Njörðr
at **féar**afli.

but Freyr and Njörðr have endowed Grjót-
björn [Arinbjörn] with wealth-power.³⁴

In these two poems in *kviðubáttr*, the word *fé* occurs in the genitive and it likely had a hiatus form at the time of composition. Strictly speaking, both the archaic form (*féar*) and the contracted one (*ffár*) would be metrical,

³³ Ed. and trans. Margaret Clunies Ross (*SkP* 5: 315).

³⁴ Ed. and trans. Margaret Clunies Ross (*SkP* 5: 354).

producing, respectively, a C2 line (with *féar* resolved in position 2) and a C1 line (with two heavy lifts, the first one occupied by *ffjár*). It has been observed, however, that C1 lines were mostly avoided in *fornyrðislag* and in the even lines of *kviðubáttr*, something which strengthens the case for the reconstruction of the hiatus forms current in the norm of historical Egill (Finnur Jónsson 1886–1888: 435; Þorgeir Sigurðsson 2019: 142–44; Haukur Þorgeirsson 2016a: 231–234; 2023: 706–707). It is, however, highly unlikely that this word still received a disyllabic pronunciation by Snorri's time. The *FGT* suggests that a bi-positional scansion could be detected only in those cases in which the meter would, otherwise, be disrupted, and this is not the case here. One comforting detail may come from a marked similarity between *Arinbjarnarkviða* 17 and the Eiríkr stanza in *Egils saga*.

Arinbjarnarkviða 17

Pat alls heri
at undri gefsk,
hvé urþjóð
auði gnœgir,
en Grjótbjörn
of gæddan hefr
Freyr of Njörðr
at **féar** affli.

Egils saga, lv 28

Svá skyldi goð gjalda,
gram reki bönd af lönðum,
reið sé rogn ok Óðinn,
rön míns **féar** hönum;
folkmýgi lát flýja,
Freyr ok Njörðr, af jörðum,
leiðisk lofða stríði
landóss, þann's vé grandar.

In poetry, the collocation *Freyr ok Njörðr* is attested only in these two texts, as already pointed out by Magnus Olsen (1944: 182). Given Snorri's tendency to use older poems as a model for pseudonymous creations, this parallel may instill some confidence in suggesting that *Arinbjarnarkviða* 17 was a model for lv 28.³⁵ This hypothesis is highly speculative, however, as there is no guarantee that the disyllabic pronunciation *féar* was known to Snorri and would be applied in this case. In order for Snorri to know that the word *ffjár* could incur in the metrical license, he must have encountered a source in which the form needed to be scanned as *unambiguously* bi-positional.

³⁵ There are other places, in Egill's long poems, in which hiatus forms had to necessarily receive the bi-positional scansion, and in those instances, we can assume Snorri to have been aware of their oddity, as in, for instance, *Arinbjarnarkviða* st. 11, l. 3: *kní.a fremstr* (*knjá fremstr* would make a hypometrical odd line).

2.4 A Strange Episode in *Morkinskinna*

In the extant skaldic corpus, we do find a stanza in which the word *féar* occurs in a metrically secured context, although the circumstances of its composition are somewhat unclear. This is a stanza in *fornyrðislag* belonging to a *þáttr* contained in *Morkinskinna* as well as in *Hulda-Hrokkinskinna* (*SkP* 2: 825; *ÍF* 24: 12–14; *Mork*: 283–284). From the *Morkinskinna* tradition, the *þáttr* is also at some point interpolated into the *y*-branch of the *Heimskringla* tradition (Louis-Jensen 1977: 37–39; 83). The stanza is part of the so-called *Krákukarls þáttr* (‘Story of the crow’s man’), a curious episode about a Norwegian landowner and his ability to understand the language of birds. The king is skeptical about the rumors regarding the *bóndi* and his supernatural skill and decides to test him. Without the man knowing, the king has his mare beheaded. The severed mare’s head is then wrapped in a cloth and hidden under the boat bench on which the unknowing owner is sitting. When three crows fly by the boat and start cawing, the man is asked to translate what they are saying. He answers with a stanza in *fornyrðislag*:

Segr vetrǫgmul,	veit ekki sú
ok tvévetr segr,	‘trúik eigi at heldr’
en þrévetr segr,	‘þykkira mér glíkligt’
kveðr mik róa	á merar hǫfði,
en þik, konungr,	þjóf míns féar!

‘The one-year-old [crow] says—she knows nothing—, and the two-year-old says—I don’t believe it either—, but the three-year-old says—it doesn’t seem likely to me—, she claims I’m rocking on a mare’s head, and that you, king, are the thief of my property!’³⁶

The stolen *fé* is the landowner’s horse, victim of the king’s divination experiment, while, somewhat surprisingly, the king in question is Óláfr kyrri (r. 1067–1093). Various editors have been puzzled by this identification, since, although the *krákukarl* is generously compensated in the end, the callousness of this king seemed incongruous with what little we know about the peaceful Óláfr kyrri. For this reason, the episode has been suspected to be the fruit of a later interpolation (*Mork*: 34). Other attempts to make sense of the story connected it to other, more spirited kings, such as Haraldr harðráði (*ÍF* 24: 12; *Mork*: 447), or Óláfr Tryggvason, the latter being particularly interested in bird divination, according to medieval sources (*SkP* 2: 825).

³⁶ *Lausavísur from Óláfs saga kyrra* 2, ed. and trans. by Kari E. Gade (*SkP* 2: 825).

Not too much weight should be attached to Óláfr's nickname, however, and his peaceful reign has probably little to say about his propensity towards animal cruelty.

Morkinskinna is the earliest Icelandic synoptic work about Norwegian kings and its composition is dated to the period 1217–1220 (*Mork*: 66–67). That of its oral or written sources is a complex and debated question, especially for what concerns the many *þættir* (Andersson 1985: 218–219; *Mork*: 57–58). Jonna Louis-Jensen tended to regard the *krákukarl þáttr*, as well as others, as unlikely to belong to the lost original redaction, referred to as *Ældste Morkinskinna* (1977: 39; 69). However, the rich anecdotal material is today generally regarded as integral to the original composition (*Mork*: 13–14, 22–24). About this *þáttr* in particular, Finnur Jónsson limited himself to remark: “ældre kilde ukendt” (Finnur Jónsson 1932: xxv) and, indeed, the metrically secured hiatus form indicates that the stanza in question is relatively old, composed before c. 1150. Unlike the C-lines of *Sonatorrek* and *Arinbjarnarkviða*, the one here is a *fornyrðislag* A2k verse, and the contracted form *fiár* would result in a hypometrical line of three positions. Both the author of *Fagrskinna* and Snorri knew *Morkinskinna* and used it as a source, although they deliberately omitted most of its anecdotal content and many of its poetic quotations, especially those in the simpler eddic meters (*Mork*: 25). The fact that Snorri had access to a copy of *Morkinskinna* when composing *Heimskringla* is beyond doubt (*Mork*: 68), but we are not sure whether he had access to it when he composed *Egils saga*, and, above all, we do not know if that copy contained the *krákukarls þáttr* (*Mork*: 34). Certainly, the hiatus form occurs in a line (*þjóf míns féar*) that recalls the one in Egill's *lv* 28 (*rón míns féar þónum*) both in wording and metrical type (A2k).

There are also some interesting similarities in the plot of the episodes described in the *Morkinskinna þáttr* and in *Egils saga*. In both, a Norwegian king is accused of stealing the property of a free landowner: the lines *en þik, konungr, þjóf míns féar* and *rón míns féar þónum* basically express the same concept (*þónum* referring to king Eiríkr, in Egill's stanza). In both episodes, a horse head is involved in some kind of magical practice. In *Egils saga*, a horse head is notoriously mounted on the *níðstǫng* with which Egill curses Eiríkr and Gunnhildr before leaving Norway (*ÍF* 2: 171).³⁷ In this context, the function of the horse head seems to be suggestively connected to pagan practices and to the cursing ritual, alongside the inscription of runes on the

³⁷ The description of the *níðstǫng* ritual has a close parallel in *Heimskringla* (*ÍF* 26: 270–271).

níðstung and the recitation of spells. Thus, the similarity between the lines *þjóf míns féar* and *rón míns féar*, the context of a Norwegian king behaving abusively towards a free landowner and the detail of the severed horse head might indicate that there was an intertextual contact between *Egils saga* and the *Morkinskinna þáttr*. Admittedly, given the dubious context of provenance of the latter, the direction of the loan might be argued. However, the metrically secured hiatus form indicates clearly that the *krákukarl* stanza is old, and, whatever its original context, the stanza implies some kind of accompanying narrative frame. Thus, irrespective of what we think about Óláfr kyrri's propensity to decapitate horses, the material is probably old, and it is plausible that knowledge thereof was widespread in the Icelandic intellectual context that produced *Morkinskinna*. My suggestion is that Snorri knew the *þáttr*, or at least the *fornyrðislag* stanza contained in it, and that he used the portion of the line containing the phrase *míns féar* as a model for his line in *Egils saga*. He substituted the noun *þjófr* 'thief' with an analogous concept (*rán* 'theft') and added a trochaic cadence (*hánum*) to complete the *dróttkvætt* line. The four required positions of the *fornyrðislag* line in the *krákukarl* stanza informed him about the fact that the genitive form of *fé* "could" (in fact, had to) occupy not one, but two metrical positions.

Now, in my opinion, two possible scenarios are imaginable for how Snorri understood this phenomenon. The first one is that Snorri applied a disyllabic scansion of the kind prescribed in the *FGT*, with a "splitting" of the syllable into two: *fé.ar* or *fi.ar*. This possibility, that I consider less likely, depends on the condition that Snorri had access to the *FGT* and/or that he came into contact with "poetry experts" who prescribed the retainment of the disyllabic pronunciation. It might be useful here to recall the situation outlined by the First Grammarian: he claimed that he was aware of the pronunciation *é.arn* for having heard it from *skýnsamir menn* and he reminds his readers that one should always rely on the skalds' authority for all matters concerning language. These remarks suggest that the skalds he refers to engaged in a careful, faithful memorization of the poems, this being the technical requirement for their professional activity, which is compared to that of craftsmen and law experts. Had such a careful pronunciation been cultivated all the way into the thirteenth century, the archaic form might possibly have reached Snorri's ears as well: only in that case would he have been able to retrieve a "splitted" pronunciation *fé.ar*. It should be born in mind, however, that the First Grammarian writes around the mid-twelfth century, when the contraction of hiatus forms was still a recent phenomenon. In his childhood, for instance, the grammarian might have met people who still

had the uncontracted pronunciation in their spoken norm. For the disyllabic pronunciation to survive for one more century, down to Snorri's times, we must postulate a process of extremely careful memorization, akin to the one that, in Vedic hymns, enabled the pronunciation *metri causa* of Sievers' law's disyllabic sequences (e.g. *tuvám* after heavy syllable : *tvám* after light syllable) long after the alternation had ceased being productive in Classical Sanskrit (Sievers 1878: 129–130; Barber 2013: 25–27; 40). The Vedic situation differs from the skaldic one, however, for the significant distance between the reciters' spoken language and the Vedic poetic idiolect, which already in the time of the hymns' composition "was distinctly hieratic, archaizing, and so to some extent artificial" (Edgerton 1934: 241). Moreover, the reproduction of these liturgical texts was cultivated and guarded with a special degree of phonetic precision; under such conditions, the old pronunciation could be preserved in transmission and even become target of archaizing imitation (Jamison 1986: 164–165). By contrast, however carefully we might imagine skalds to have memorized ancient verse, evidence from *bendingar* and syllabic weight shows that, in composition, they tended to operate with their own living, spoken norm (Myrvoll 2019).

For these reasons I am inclined to regard the second scenario as more likely, namely the one in which Snorri extended his own "slow syllable" explanation to this kind of hiatus forms too, irrespective of the different quality of the original vowels. Just like **Vindblé.es*, the form *ffár* would have received an extralong pronunciation, occupying two metrical positions: *ffá.ar*. In this case, the operation at work is very similar to Homeric *diectasis*, a "metrical emendation" where the ruptured meter resulting from the historical contraction of hiatus forms ($\acute{\omicron}\rho\acute{\alpha}\omicron\nu\tau\epsilon\varsigma > \acute{\omicron}\rho\tilde{\omega}\nu\tau\epsilon\varsigma$; $\acute{\omicron}\rho\acute{\alpha}\iota\varsigma > \acute{\omicron}\rho\acute{\alpha}\iota\varsigma$) is repaired by stretching the contracted vowel ($\acute{\omicron}\rho\tilde{\omega}\nu\tau\epsilon\varsigma > \acute{\omicron}\rho\acute{\omega}\nu\tau\epsilon\varsigma$; $\acute{\omicron}\rho\acute{\alpha}\iota\varsigma > \acute{\omicron}\rho\acute{\alpha}\iota\varsigma$), thus producing unetymological but prosodically optimal forms.

In either case, what is beyond doubt is Snorri's interest for the phenomenon of hiatus and his careful study of ancient poems, both eddic and skaldic. These were then used as models in the production of his own verse, as illustrated by *Háttatal*. Furthermore, Snorri was not the only learned author who made deliberate use of metrical licenses connected to original hiatus. Evidence of employment of hiatus forms as metrical variants is found in a poem dated to shortly before Snorri's time: *Merlínusspá*, composed in *kviðubáttr* around c. 1200 by Gunnlaugr Leifsson, monk at Þingeyrar.³⁸ Gunnlaugr apparently

³⁸ A similar alternation of contracted and non-contracted forms is found also in the poem *Gripisspá*, probably to be dated to the late twelfth century (Males, forthcoming).

employs disyllabic (or, possibly, bi-positional) scansion of original hiatus forms in 3 occasions, only with the high-frequency verbs *sé* and *séa* (later *sjá*) and always in positions 3–4 of C lines:

GunnLeif <i>Merl II</i> 8.8:	en áðr <i>sé.i</i>
GunnLeif <i>Merl II</i> 37.6:	sem hann dauðr <i>sé.i</i>
GunnLeif <i>Merl II</i> 56.6:	en á hauðr <i>sé.a</i>

He also uses, however, the contracted forms of the same verbs when it is convenient:

GunnLeif <i>Merl I</i> 95.3:	hvé at spjollum <i>sé</i>
GunnLeif <i>Merl I</i> 95.7:	hverr fyrða <i>sé</i>

As in Snorri's case, it is impossible to establish whether Gunnlaugr retained the archaic disyllabic pronunciation (*sé.i* and *sé.a*), or if he applied a “slow syllable” explanation (*sé.e* and *sjá.a*). Whatever the case, it seems that some form of metrical license was acknowledged as valid for these forms in specific metrical contexts. We can thus glimpse the traces of a (possibly uninterrupted) study of metrical licenses concerning the treatment of ancient hiatus forms as metrical allomorphs from the First Grammarian to Snorri.

3. Various Conclusions

3.1. Conclusions about the Eiríkr-Stanza

Linguistic evidence shows that at least the second *belmingr* of Egill's *lausavísa* 28 (for Eiríkr) was composed for the saga. The late features observed by Jón Helgason must be taken at face value: the form *vé* [l. 8] is unlikely to be an accusative plural and must in fact be a late dative form, with loss of the inflectional ending *-i*. The form *flæja* [l. 5] is fruit of an archaizing reading by Finnur Jónsson; manuscript evidence suggests that the original form was *flýja*, which would have rhymed with *mýgir* if the stanza was composed after c. 1200. In addition, some peculiar traits of the stanza, namely the description of Eiríkr blóðøx as a temple-destroyer and the self-fulfilling curse addressing several pagan gods appear as fruit of the taste of an antiquarian author, one especially well-acquainted with late tenth-century skaldic poetry and invested in the literary representation of pre-Christian beliefs.

The first *belmingr*, however, presents a difficult situation, since the hiatus form *fǣar* is usually taken as diagnostic of a date of composition prior to c.

Tab. 3. The Eirík Stanza and its Model Lines

Egils saga <i>lv</i> 28	Model line	source
Svá skyldi goð gjalda, gram reki bönd af löndum, reið sé rogn ok Óðinn, rön míns féar hönnum; folkmygi lát flýja	nú rekið gand of landi	Hildir Lv 1.2 (<i>SkP</i> 1: 139)
Freyr ok Njörðr, af jörðum, leiðisk lofða stríði	þjóf míns féar	Anon (<i>Ólkyrr</i>) 2.8 (<i>SkP</i> 2: 825)
landóss, þannss vé grandar.	Freyr ok Njörðr	Egill <i>Arkv</i> 17.7 (<i>SkP</i> 5: 354)
	landrekstr, bili grandat landalfr [...]	Egill Lv 22.8 Egill Lv 22.2 (<i>SkP</i> 5: 224)

1150. The present article has proposed that Snorri reproduced the form *féar* (or, possibly, *fjá.ar*) following the model provided by the *fornyrðislag* stanza transmitted in a *þáttur* in *Morkinskinna*. As already pointed out, the employment of echoes from other poems is a characteristic of Pseudo-Egill, while that of appropriating other poets' lines is a poetic license allowed by Snorri in *Háttatal*, as long as the loan amounts to 'one line or less' (Faulkes 2007: 8). In this paper, the parallels in Tab. 3 were detected.

3.2. Conclusions about Hiatus as a Dating Criterion

If correct, the hypothesis exposed here may potentially have serious implications for the employment of hiatus forms as a dating criterion in *dróttkvætt* poetry. These are considered among the strongest diagnostic signs of early composition (Myrvoll 2014: 309–329; 2025: xcvi–xcix), but if learned authors could reproduce them at will, the usefulness of this criterion is severely curtailed. All is not lost, however. First of all, it seems that only a few poets, and specifically Snorri, devoted time and efforts to the experimental reproduction of “ex-hiatuses”. As observed by Gade (2001: 53), Snorri is the only one who tried to approximate rare hiatus forms, not limited to few conventional words (e.g. the frequent verbs *sjá* and *sé*) or to analogically restored inflectional endings (e.g. *blá-um*). In theory, the stanza in *Háttatal* might have provided a model for later reproductions of this feature, but the “slow-syllable” license is treated there not unlike the several other metrical curiosities contained in the *clavis metrica* and, in praxis, the influence it exerted on later poets remains arguable.

Most important, however, is to consider that, as argued again by Gade, “although Snorri recognized the feature as a poetic license, he did not make

any connection between such words and archaic practice” (2001: 52). This is a crucial point. Like the First Grammarian and Óláfr hvítaskáld, Snorri did not realize that such metrical oddities were the product of an older linguistic stage, as proved by his use of the “wrong” form *Vindhlés*. In the case examined above, for instance, it was probably the wish to follow the model line (*þjóf míns féar*) that caused Snorri to adopt the disyllabic scansion of *fjár*, rather than the will to consciously reproduce an “archaic” form. Unlike other features, such as the expletive particle *offum* (Gade 2001: 59–61; Males 2011), we have no reason to believe that medieval scholars perceived the “slow syllables” as connected to the poems’ *age* and that they would thus employ them in deliberate archaizing designs. In *Háttatal*, the slow syllables are treated together with the quick syllables (*samstoðfur skjótar*), under the first metrical license, which is that of “prolonging or shortening the correct pronunciation of a sentence”.³⁹ The “quick syllables” are exemplified with *dróttkvætt* lines showcasing examples of resolution, neutralization and elision (*SkP* 3, 1112), a technique that is paralleled in two probably spurious stanzas of *Egils saga* (*lv* 7 and 14; Patria 2024: 178–180). While the slow syllables derive from hiatus contraction, the quick-syllable lines have no diachronic dimension, being simply experimental products of the rhythmical possibilities always allowed by *dróttkvætt* meter. Snorri probably conceived the two phenomena as perfectly equivalent and employed them in the composition of pseudonymous verse in *Egils saga* without a conscious archaizing design.

In general, to come back to the methodological question raised by Clunies Ross and posed at the beginning of this article, if a stanza presents both late and archaic features, logic suggests that late features should be accorded more weight. While later developments could not be anticipated by old poets, it is not only conceivable, but indeed expected that archaic forms would be consciously reproduced by later poets. However, the question of medieval authors’ ability to archaize cannot be taken for granted — as has too often been the case in the past — and should rather be empirically established and tested (Haukur Þorgeirsson 2016b). Crucially, archaic forms obscured by language change were not fully comprehended by medieval scholars, thus not retrievable, and often not even recognized as such. And yet, even if Snorri did not attribute to the slow syllables any historical connotation, his tendency to lift lines from old poems as models for his

³⁹ *Það er leyfi báttanna at hafa samstoðfur seinar eða skjótar, svá at dragisk fram eða aþtr ór rétttri tþlu setningar* (Faulkes 2007: 7).

forgeries may still undermine the diagnostic effectiveness of hiatus, as the case of the Eiríkr-stanza shows. It is thus necessary to raise the question of the strength of this criterion, at least when it comes to the verse in *Egils saga*. In this respect, it is important to bear in mind that this case study represents the exception, rather than the rule. As this lengthy and, at times, exacting discussion shows, the one attempted here is not the most economical explanation for the occurrence of a hiatus in verse. Thus, in absence of strong contradictory evidence, a hiatus form should normally be taken at face value, possibly with just a little extra caution in the case of Egill's poetry, because of the special profile of Snorri as a clever archaizer often "recycling" old lines.

3.3. Conclusions about the Verse in *Egils saga*

Turning to the question of Egill's poetry more generally, I wish to address a sensible objection raised by one of my peer-reviewers. Of course, the "hiatus" separating the historical Egill from Snorri was filled, in fact, by several individuals, who were responsible for the oral transmission of the verse associated with the tenth-century skald and the accompanying stories. By reducing the analysis to dynamics that oppose two well-acknowledged authorial personalities, such as Egill and Snorri, are we oversimplifying a more nuanced situation? Do we not incur in the risk of downplaying the role of these storytellers, who might have been responsible for modifications to the verse itself, thus contributing to the shaping of the stratified literary work that is *Egils saga*? To some extent, this risk is unavoidable, as we are unlikely to ever disentangle the saga author's own voice from that of the anonymous storytellers who preceded him. Nonetheless, *Egils saga* puts us in the privileged situation of being able to compare both the saga's prose and poetry with other texts presumably composed by the same author, allowing us to subject even the assumption of Snorri's authorship to some degree of scrutiny. In the course of this argumentation, several contacts have emerged between the possibly spurious verse in *Egils saga* and various works attributed to Snorri:

1. A line of the Eiríkr-stanza has a parallel in a *lausavísa* attributed to Hildr Hrólfsdóttir nefju quoted by Snorri both in the *Separate Saga* and in *Heimskringla* (*SkP* 1: 139).
2. Stanza 59 in *Egils saga* (*Esa Friðgeiri færi*, *SkP* 5: 272-273) contains a description of the berserkr Ljótr biting his shield-rim, that is paralleled in *Ynglingasaga* (*ÍF* 26: 17).

3. The description of Egill's *níðstǫng* and the invocation of the *landvættir* — supported by the content of st 28 — has a close parallel in *Heimskringla* (*ÍF* 26: 270–271).
4. The form *vé* in the last line of *lausavísa* 28 confirms that the original dative *vé.i* was not reconstructed by analogy by Snorri, matching his failed understanding of *Vindblé-i** in *Háttatal* 7.

Moreover, a number of metrical phenomena described by Snorri in *Háttatal* find a counterpart in the stanzas of Pseudo-Egill:

5. The first metrical license, that is to use “slow or quick syllables” (*Hátt*, 7, 8; *Eg lv* 7, 14, 20).
6. The “third license” that is to have *aðalbending* in odd lines (*Eg lv* 10, 20).
7. The “eighth license”, that is to borrow one line or less from other skalds (Faulkes 2007: 8; *Eg lv* 10).

In isolation, none of these observations would constitute evidence of Snorri's composition of the verse in *Egils saga*; when taken cumulatively, however, their case is rather compelling, especially in light of the various, independent arguments claiming his authorship of the saga. Ultimately, whereas the stories that accompanied the transmission of poetry associated with Egill might well have formed during the timespan dividing Egill from Snorri, making it virtually impossible to establish how much Snorri owes to oral tradition on that front, the spurious verse is much more likely to have been produced by him at the time of the elaboration of the written saga.⁴⁰ In absence of conflicting evidence, this is simply the most economical hypothesis, which agrees with what we know about the general development of literary conventions in saga prosimetra in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (Patria and Jørgensen forthcoming; Myrvoll forthcoming).

A final question to raise is whether the pseudonymous poetry in *Egils saga* preceded or followed the composition of *Háttatal*, constituting a test ground for Snorri's poetic experiments or, rather, an application of his own prescriptions. Further research in this area is needed and I believe *Háttatal* might provide useful tools for future analyses of Pseudo-Egill's verse.

⁴⁰ Let us bear in mind, for instance, that linguistic dating provides not only *ante-quem* but also *post-quem* criteria, and a stanza like the Eiríkr-one above is unlikely to have been composed earlier than c. 1200, based on the likely merger of palatal /gi/ and /j/ suggested by the rhyme in the line *folkmyggi lát flýja*.

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Summary

This article addresses the question of the authorship of a couple of stanzas (*lausavísur* 28 and 29) attributed to Egill Skalla-Grimsson in the eponymous saga (*ÍF* 2: 163–165). The stanzas contain two invectives addressed at Eiríkr blóðøx and Queen

Gunnhildr, share several verbal echoes and seem to constitute a conceptual pair. Unlike the one focusing on Gunnhildr, the stanza for Eiríkr contains linguistic features not compatible with a tenth century dating and seems a probable product of the saga author. Alongside the late ones, however, the stanza contains a seemingly archaic feature, thus presenting a methodologically challenging case. The presence of the hiatus form *fjár* (gen. of *fǰ*, contracted to *ffjár* after ca. 1150) calls into question the ability of Icelandic medieval scholars, and of Snorri Sturluson in particular, to deliberately reproduce linguistic archaisms, as well as the feasibility of using hiatus forms as a dating criterion for Old Norse verse.

Keywords: *dróttkvætt*, linguistic dating, hiatus, *Egils saga*, Snorri Sturluson, diektasis

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