

## *Abstracts*

### **Hannah Burrows (Durham University) / Unriddling Kennings**

It is common, and helpful, to describe kennings as ‘riddling’ or ‘riddle-like’. Indeed, an important article by John Lindow (1975) explored this comparison in depth, revealing the structural similarities between the two figures. But to what extent are kennings actually like Old Norse riddles? In this paper, I will probe the kenning-riddle comparison in the context of the Old Norse riddle corpus (rather than in terms of the use of the modern English word) to see exactly where the similarities lie, and whether this can shed any light on the composition and function of Old Norse riddles. In turn, this could provide a new perspective on the mental processes involved in the composition and comprehension of kennings, the artistry involved in each figure, and the conceptions of the world they reveal.

### **Vivian Busch (Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel) / A kenning-based analysis of the figure of Rán**

In my presentation I will examine from a chronological point of view in which contexts the name Rán is used as a base-word or determinant in kennings and also when and how Rán is circumscribed by kennings in Skaldic poetry. Rán is one of the figures of Norse mythology about whom we know relatively little. In the sources she appears to be a rather ambiguous figure. For example, her name is recorded in the lists of names for goddesses, for women and for the sea (s. *Þul Ásynja* 2/7; *Þul Kvenna II* 3/6; *Þul Sjóvar* 4/3). The *Snorra Edda* does not classify her any further and it seems impossible to determine her exact nature. In my presentation I will therefore focus on which actual knowledge is available about Rán from her usage in kennings and on that basis I shall discuss if the understanding of this mythical being has changed from early to late Skaldic poetry.

### **Margaret Clunies Ross (The University of Sydney) / Egill Skallagrímsson’s Kennings**

The aim of this paper is to review the kennings and kenning patterns from the whole corpus of the poetry attributed to Egill Skallagrímsson (comprising 124 whole or part stanzas) in order to detect any unusual trends or identifying features which could be said to constitute an Egill ‘footprint’ or ‘footprints’ when compared with the corpus of Old Norse kennings as a whole. For the purposes of this study it will be assumed that all the stanzas attributed to Egill were composed by a skald of that name who lived in the tenth century, although some of the analysis may cast doubt on that assumption, at least to some extent.

The analysis will divide into two main categories, each with a number of sub-categories. The two main categories are (a) subject-matter and (b) form or structure. In the first category belong kennings whose referents are noteworthy in some way, usually because they are atypical or focus intensely on a particular subject that is not common with other skalds. The second category includes kennings that belong to particular structural types, such as inverted kennings, kennings employing *ofljóst*, and extended kennings and *nýgervingar*. One issue that will be taken into

consideration in the analysis is the extent to which the genre or verse-form of a poem or stanza may have influenced the poet's choice of subject-matter and therefore his choice of kennings.

### **Kate Heslop (Universität Zürich) / Kennings and metaphors, eddic and skaldic**

The Poetic Edda is usually said to exhibit a reduced range of simpler ("non-oppositional") kennings than the skaldic corpus does. Where eddic poems make more extensive use of kennings, this is often assumed to point to skaldic influence. Although comprehensive analyses of the kenning repertoire of the Poetic Edda seem to be lacking, a start has been made on analysing the kennings of the poetry in eddic measures found in the *fornaldarsögur*, and this work largely confirms the impression of simplicity and reduced repertoire vis-a-vis the skaldic corpus. The Poetic Edda nonetheless does not lack for puzzling figurative expressions, of which Hávamál's

'óminnis hegri' is just one example. In my paper I wish to explore whether the impression of simplicity is accurate for the kennings of the Poetic Edda (and if so, why this might be), and whether an analysis in terms of kenning structure has anything to offer for the deciphering of the Edda's complex figurative expressions.

### **Robert D. Fulk (Indiana University Bloomington) / Kennings in Old English Literature**

Old English kennings are certainly simpler than skaldic ones, but they are also generally more literal than eddic ones: expressions like *valdogg* for 'blood' and *háffall skarar* for 'head' would be unusual in West Germanic. Yet Old English and eddic kennings have much in common. In both types, the *tvíkennt heiti* is unusual, and with rare exceptions neither type shows the riddling quality that characterizes skaldic kennings. There is much to be learned from an examination of the way kennings are distributed in Old English poetry, but before the relevant data can be compiled, certain subjective judgments must be applied, particularly in connection with the question of what constitutes a kenning. Is a kenning simply "ein zweigliedriger Ersatz für ein Substantivum der gewöhnlichen Rede," as Meissner supposed (1921: 2), or must it involve metaphorical content, as Heusler countered (1922: 130)? If the latter is the case, how strict a definition of "metaphor" should be applied—e.g., should metonymy and synecdoche count as metaphors? As an initial attempt to tabulate the data, the very narrow definition is applied that was employed by Gardner (1969), who as a result concluded that just 122 of the more than six thousand compounds in Old English may be regarded as kennings. When the distribution of these 122 across the Old English poetic corpus is tabulated, the results tend to confirm certain more subjective impressions about the corpus, for example that the *Meters of Boethius* and the Psalms of the Paris Psalter evince little poetic skill. But some surprising findings also come into view: for example, poems rich in compounds, such as *Exodus* and *Beowulf*, along with other seemingly early compositions like *Genesis A* and *Daniel*, generally fall below the mean in terms of density of kenning use, whereas poems by Cynewulf and others similar to them in style show a higher incidence. When the tabulation of the data is based instead on the findings of van der Merwe Scholtz (1927), with a much more inclusive view of what constitutes a kenning, the results are not greatly altered. The latter, however, surveys not just compounds but also phrases, and this enables a direct comparison between the incidence of kennings in Old English and in eddic verse, based upon the list of eddic kennings compiled by Meyer (1889: 170–9). When these data are tabulated, no very plain pattern emerges to associate frequency of eddic kenning use with subject matter (heroic versus mythological, native legend versus foreign) or metrical type. What does become clear is that density of kenning use varies

widely across both Old English and eddic poems, and the upper and lower limits of incidence are not widely different in the two corpora. In several respects associated with kennings, then, the general scholarly impression of the comparability of eddic and Old English verse is lent support.

#### References:

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### Kari Ellen Gade (Indiana University Bloomington) / The Term *rekit* in *Háttatal* and *Háttalykill*

The two *claves metricae* *Háttalykill* (c. 1150) and *Háttatal* (1223) provide the earliest information on Old Norse metrical terminology. The extant manuscripts of *Háttalykill* (Holm papp 25 8<sup>o</sup>; UppsUB R 683<sup>x</sup>), seventeenth-century copies by Jón Rugmann of a no longer extant manuscript from the end of the twelfth century, contain pairs of stanzas illustrating forty-one different verse-forms. There is no accompanying prose, but the names of thirty-five verse-forms are recorded above each pair of stanzas. Snorri Sturluson's *Háttatal*, a praise poem of 102 stanzas honoring the Norwegian king Hákon Hákonarson and his father-in-law, jarl Skúli Bárðarson, exemplifies a total of 94 verse-forms. Unlike the manuscripts of *Háttalykill*, the extant manuscripts (R, T<sup>x</sup>, U, W) of *Háttatal* contain an elaborate prose commentary, most likely originally by Snorri himself, which details the metrical and syntactic peculiarities of each verse-form and also gives the names of the meters. Of the thirty-five names of meters recorded in the manuscripts of *Háttalykill*, thirty appear in more or less unchanged form in *Háttatal*. Hence there can be no reason to doubt that Snorri was familiar with that poem and with the metrical terminology employed there, although there is no evidence that *Háttalykill* was ever transmitted along with a prose commentary.

The term *rekit* 'driven, extended' occurs in *Háttalykill* as the name of a meter, an octosyllabic variant of *runbent* (RvHbeiðm Hl 33-4 in *SkP* III). *Rekit* is also used by Snorri in the prose of *Háttatal* – not as the name of a meter, but apparently to denote extended kennings, that is, kennings with three or more determinants. The term is later used with the same meaning in the Preface to the grammatical treatises in ms. W of *Snorra Edda* (... *kennningar, eigi lengri reknar en Snorri lofar* '... kennings, not extended further than Snorri permits') and in *Laufás Edda*. Because *Háttalykill* is not transmitted along with a prose commentary, it is difficult to establish exactly what the name *rekit* means here. It is clear, however, that the term cannot have denoted the same phenomenon as in *Snorra Edda*, because the two stanzas that follow this heading in *Háttalykill* contain only one kenning; namely, the gold-kenning *armlog* 'arm-flame', which has one determinant. Moreover, it is also peculiar that the stanza in *Háttatal* (SnSt Ht 3 in *SkP* III) that allegedly exemplifies *rekit*, apparently contains only one such construction (see Faulkes, *SnE* 2007, 48). The present paper is an attempt to elucidate and explain exactly how the term *rekit* was understood by the *Háttalykill* poets and by Snorri Sturluson.

**Ann-Dörte Kyas (Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel) / *Gollsendir lætr hljótt grundar njóta mjaðar Yggs* - The use of the kenning referent 'Generous Man' in Skaldic Poetry**

In st. 36 of *Vellekla* the poet Einarr skálaglamm describes himself as a *gollsendir* 'gold-distributor' [GENEROUS MAN], which is quite unusual because normally the poet asks for a reward for his poem. This is also demonstrated in the stanza itself in which the poet says *knák hljóta mæti hans* 'I can receive his precious gifts'. This example raises the question what the kenning referent 'Generous Man' really means.

In general it is assumed that in praise poems this kenning referent denotes a quality of a ruler while in *lausavísur* it can refer to any man. In this presentation I will examine the use of these kennings in both praise poems and *lausavísur*. I will investigate who and in which situations people are described as generous men. This paper should lead to an evaluation of this kenning referent.

**Jana Krüger (Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel) / Ambiguous weapon-kennings**

Within the group of weapon-kennings there seems to be an overlap in the kenning patterns for some weapons. According to Meissner's *Kenninglexikon* (1921) for example the spear as well as the sword can be referred to as 'snake' or 'reed' and the like in the base-word, and both can show the same determinants such as 'battle', 'wounds' and others. So it is impossible to know, which referent ('spear' or 'sword') is meant in these cases without the textual context of these kennings. On the basis of some examples, I will examine the immediate textual context of such kennings for 'spear' and 'sword' in order to find out how the context can nevertheless supply a (clear and) unambiguous attribution for the recipient.

**Mikael Males (Universitetet i Oslo) / Explorations of Poetic Diction as a Precondition for the Icelandic Mythological Renaissance**

Jan de Vries and Bjarne Fidjestøl have noted a fall in mythological kennings in the period c. 1000-c.1150 (c.1200 according to Fidjestøl). In this paper, I argue the case further and, more importantly, I demonstrate a chronological covariation between complex mythological references, ofljóst/wordplay with names, and nýgerving. This observation implies that the Old Icelandic mythological renaissance was largely a matter of style or, in other words: The perception of mythology as one of several features of complex poetic diction may be the main reason why in all of Europe, it was only in Iceland that classical mythology was systematically replaced with native counterparts within grammatical studies. The different parameters under study are also helpful for outlining the conceptual background of Snorri's Edda among the poets of the preceding two to three generations.

**Margrét Eggertsdóttir (Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, Reykjavík) / Kennings in rímur and other Icelandic 17th century poetry**

Icelandic poets in the 16th and 17th century had great interest in formal features such as rhyme, kennings, and periphrasis. *Rímur* poets made use of Eddic diction and imagery but the use of kennings was not limited to *rímur*; it can also be found in other kinds of poetry. Baroque delight in periphrasis and metrical complexity ensured a favorable reception for the renewed

interest in *dróttkvætt* measure, with its aurally intriguing rhymes and complex kennings. The paper will discuss the use of kennings and the connection between kennings, riddles and metaphors and also between kennings and Eddic and classical myths.

### **Edith Marold (Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel) / The kennings of Þórsdrápa**

Þórsdrápa is rightly regarded as one of the most difficult skaldic poems. Its kennings which do not only consist of numerous elements, but also are sometimes in fact very special, contribute to the challenges this poem poses. Furthermore there are circumlocutions which do not accord to our expectations, how a kenning should be built, and therefore the question arises whether they can be regarded as kennings or free or individual circumlocutions. The first part of my contribution will discuss some of these items. The second part will be devoted to the question how far and to what extent the kennings contribute to the shaping of the myth of Þórr's journey in the land of the giants and to Geirrøðr.

### **Klaus Johan Myrvoll (Universitetet i Oslo) / Loose ends: How important are kenning types compared to other formal criteria in textual criticism?**

When scholars work with the restoration and interpretation of skaldic poetry, different formal criteria sometimes come into conflict. This may be the case both when there is a choice between different readings in the manuscripts, and when words or phrases may be connected syntactically in more than one way. In such instances editors often give priority to different criteria. For example, Finnur Jónsson (in *Skj.*) generally seeks to ensure that all kennings are in accordance with the classical rules (outlined by Snorri in *Skáldskaparmál*), whereas Ernst A. Kock is more concerned about what he regards natural word order («naturlig ordfølgd»). Still, most editors seem highly eclectic in their choices of readings and interpretations. This is also evident in the new edition (*SkP*).

Within the study of skaldic poetry, the kenning system has attracted much attention and study, «mehr als mir förderlich scheint» (Kuhn, *Das Dróttkvætt*, 1983, s. 226). Thorough analysis of the corpus has made it possible for scholars to reduce the variety of attested kennings to a limited set of kenning *types*, which could be seen as more or less predictable (cf. Meissner, *Die Kenningar der Skalden*, 1921). Parallel to this, other scholars have established rules, or even laws, for metre, rhyme and skaldic syntax. Some of these rules or laws have been regarded as being virtually without exception, e.g., Craigie's law concerning the fourth metrical position (*ANF* 16, 1900), Kuhn's V2 rule in unbound clauses (*selbständige Sätze*, *BGDSL* 57, 1933), and Kristján Árnason's principle of «the sonority minimum» in alliteration and rhyme (*ANF* 122, 2007). Other rules are probably not to be considered equally strict, but have nonetheless been used as defining criteria in textual criticism. This is the case, e.g., with the assumption that a skaldic verse (with some minor exceptions) should not be divided into three syntactic parts (Kuhn, *Göttingische gelehrte Anzeigen* 191, 1929).

What are we to do when two or more formal criteria point in different directions? There is clearly no consensus among skaldic scholars about what criteria should be given priority. In this paper, I shall give some examples where strict adherence to known kenning types come into conflict with other formal criteria, and where there is no consensus regarding the solution to the contradiction. Finally, I shall attempt to establish a hierarchy for the different formal criteria. The degree of predictability will be the most important guideline for establishing this hierarchy.

## **Katharina Seidel (Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel) / The reception of kennings in the Laufás Edda manuscripts**

In my paper I will discuss textual variance in the kennings of skaldic verse which are transmitted in the Laufás Edda manuscripts and vary from other manuscripts. The analysis of textual variance will contribute to the understanding of the reception of skaldic verse and kennings in the 17<sup>th</sup> century manuscripts of the Laufás Edda. A survey of the stanzas, using the established kennings of *SkP*, shows that textual variance occurs in kennings in 22 out of 203 stanzas in *LaufE Y*. 9 out of the 22 stanzas are attributed to Einar Skúlason. The textual variance in kennings does occur in the *LaufE* mainly under the headlines for *Eyja heiti* (LaufE 1979, 342), *Gullz heiti og kienninga* (LaufE 1979, 346-355), *Viðurkienninga* (LaufE 1979, 370-373), and others (LaufE 1979, 384-391). Textual variance does occur mainly in kennings concerning the kenning referent MAN (9x), SEA (5x), GOLD (4x), WEAPON (3x) and POETRY (2x). With these facts in mind, I will discuss and demonstrate the quality of kenning construction and the use of kenning patterns on the basis of 4 examples.

## **Rolf Stavnem (Aarhus Universitet) / Kennings in Context. A Discussion of the Interpretation of Skaldic Imagery in View of the 'Kenning-System'.**

In *Ynglingatal* 3 a mysterious female being, referred to by the kenning 'troll-descended Grímhildr of strong drink' (trollkundr Grímhildr líðs), is sent by a sorceress to trample (troða) the unfortunate king Vanlandi to death. The closing lines of the stanza inform that the king was tormented by a *mara*, which, according to popular folklore, is a female being believed to kill people in their sleep, hence the expression 'nightmare'. The referentiality of 'troll-descended Grímhildr of strong drink' is controversial and has been interpreted in various ways. Some scholars (e.g. E. A. Kock) suggest that it refers to the sorceress, while others (e.g. Finnur Jónsson) favour the *mara*. The verb *troða* indicates the *mara* and this interpretation is also reflected in the *Heimskringla* prose. However, in SKP 1, Þjóð Ýt, the kenning is categorized as a "normal woman-kenning of the type 'heroine/trollwoman of strong drink"; thus, according to this interpretation, we are not dealing with a sorceress or a *mara* but simply a woman. It is not explained in the notes how 'troll-descended' (trollkundr) applies to a normal woman-kenning, nor is it explained how an ordinary woman makes sense in the particular stanza. A more principled discussion, however, arises from the arguments refuting previous interpretations of the compound as a kenning for *mara*. As it is argued "the cpd is not plausible as a kenning since it appears to be a unique coinage, rather than conforming to known semantic-structural patterns" (SKP 1, 13). Based on the above mentioned example and similar examples excerpted from SKP I will discuss the principal approach of construing kennings in accordance with semantic-structural patterns (the Kenning-System) and, as a consequence of this, question whether it is productive to disregard the poetic context and the possibility of non-conventional kennings in the process.

## **Diana Whaley (Newcastle University) / Dimmt dvergregn: Kennings as evidence for the pre-Christian religion(s) of the North**

In referring to poetry as *dimmt dvergregn* 'dark dwarf-rain' in *Reksteffa* 31 (late twelfth- or early thirteenth-century; Stavnem, *SkP* I, 894), the skald Hallar-Steinn is tapping into a rich and well-matured brew of mythological material – in this case the complex myth of Óðinn's theft of the mead of poetry from giants and (indirectly) dwarfs. In using the epithet *dimmt* Hallar-

Steinn may be commenting on the obscurity of the skaldic art or modestly denigrating his own poor effort (*ibid.*, 934), but I am deploying the phrase here to represent the difficulties of using skaldic kennings as evidence for pre-Christian mythology and religion. The paper opens by summarising the general advantages and disadvantages of the kenning evidence, then (all briefly) surveys the kinds of information offered by mythological kennings, considers three possible degrees of mythological significance, and glances at the kenning evidence for pre-Christian ritual and belief. The focus throughout is chiefly on kennings from the period before c. 1000, and examples are drawn from, among others, Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld 'Troublesome-poet' Óttarsson, most soul-baring of skalds.

### **Tarrin Wills (University of Aberdeen) / Measuring kenning variability**

The substitutability of elements in a kenning is a fundamental feature of the kenning system in skaldic poetry. The possibility of substituting elements seems to have produced a tendency towards uniqueness in kenning composition. As part of research leading to my paper to the 2009 saga conference I had determined that over 96% of kennings in the digital skaldic corpus were unique, but this was based on a much more limited corpus than is now available, and was subject to some methodological problems. This paper addresses the question of the extent to which kenning composition approaches uniqueness using the corpus as entered into the skaldic database (some 76% of the total corpus) and the methodological problems in measuring this feature. I will also present the more commonly-occurring kennings in the corpus and reflect on the definition of kenning as it applies to very common constructions.