

On the Old Icelandic Riddle Collection *Heiðreksgátur*

Aurelijus Vijūnas
National Kaohsiung Normal University

Abstract. In this article, the language of the Old Icelandic riddle collection *Heiðreksgátur* is studied, paying attention to its tropes (kennings and *heiti*), humour, and narration techniques. In addition to this, also literary links with other poems of the Poetic Edda are discussed.

1.

In the medieval Icelandic saga about Hervǫr and Heiðrekr (*Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*) there occur a number of riddles. These riddles appear in an episode where a certain Gestumblindi has to save his life by posing such a riddle to the wise king Heiðrekr that the latter would not be able to guess. Gestumblindi asks Óðinn himself for help, and Óðinn, disguised as Gestumblindi, goes to Heiðrekr's court. Heiðrekr keeps guessing all the riddles posed by Óðinn, until the latter reverts to the riddle that proved fatal to his opponent in another story, a contest in wisdom with the giant Vafþrúðnir described in the Eddic poem *Vafþrúðnismál* ("Sayings of Vafþrúðnir", stanza 54; see also below in section 10). Heiðrekr, too, is unable to solve this final riddle, and Óðinn wins the contest, whereas the king ultimately dies.

These riddles, known as "*Heiðreksgátur*" ("Heiðrekr's riddles"), are important for Icelandic philological studies in many ways – first of all because this small collection is the largest – and perhaps the only – source of riddles from the Old Icelandic period.¹ In addition, these riddles are

1 Several old riddles also occur in ms. AM 625 4to (for the text, see Jón Árnason and Ólafur Davíðsson 1887: 29). Although also these riddles are written in an Eddic metre (*fornyrðislag*), their language may already be described as Middle Icelandic, and that part of the manuscript in which the riddles occur is from late 16th century (see <http://handrit.is/is/manuscript/view/AM04-0625>).

also closely related to the poems of the Poetic Edda via their form, since they are written in the same poetic metres, and their language contains many similarities. Thus, *Heiðreksgátur* may also be said to be an important additional source of Eddic poetry beside the poems that are preserved in Codex Regius as well as the other poems that are normally considered to be Eddic, e.g., *Rígsþula* ‘The lay of Rígr’, *Baldrs draumar* ‘Baldr’s dreams’, etc.

This corpus of riddles is fairly small: it contains only 36 stanzas, normally one stanza representing one riddle. An exception to this is stanza 7, which may be said to contain four separate riddles, which would make the actual number of the riddles 39. As small as this corpus is, however, it nevertheless contains a lot of valuable philological material. Besides being one of generally very few sources of riddles in medieval Germanic languages,² it also provides the researcher with various other details that are of interest both from literary and linguistic point of view. In the following sections, I would like to discuss the language of Heiðrekr’s riddles, analyzing their various poetic devices – kennings and *heiti*, various *Augenblicksbildungen*, etc. These riddles may also be studied from the intertextual perspective, since a number of details in the riddles of this saga reveal a close connection between these riddles and the much older poems of the Poetic Edda (especially *Vafþrúðnismál*). There is no doubt that both the author/narrator of this saga and the audience were well familiar with Eddic poetry, and much of the intended humour in this riddle episode of this saga can be more fully appreciated only when it is interpreted in the broader context of the Poetic Edda.

2.

Heiðrekr’s riddles are written in the traditional alliterative verse, and are in form and language comparable to the poems of the Poetic Edda. That they are part of the same poetic tradition is also demonstrated by the fact that both are written in the same metres, viz. *ljóðaháttir* and *fornyrðislag*. Although *fornyrðislag* is only little used in Heiðrekr’s riddles, the reason for the dominance of *ljóðaháttir* can be understood when the riddles are compared with other poems in the Poetic Edda that are

2. Another important medieval Germanic source of riddles is a much larger Old English collection of riddles from the so-called “Exeter Book” (Codex Exoniensis; see Thorpe 1842).

written in this metre. In the Poetic Edda, *ljóðaháttir* is typical of gnomic and dialogue poems, e.g., *Vafþrúðnismál*, *Lokasenna* ‘The Flyting of Loki’, *Alvíssmál* ‘The Sayings of Alvið’, *Hávamál* ‘The Sayings of the High One’, etc. Heiðrekr’s riddles may be said to fit into this category of dialogue poems, too, since most of this poem is a conversation between Gestumblindi and king Heiðrekr.

In both Heiðrekr’s riddles and the Poetic Edda, similar poetic devices are employed – primarily metaphors (kennings, *heiti*) and repetition of poetic formulae. In the following sections, I would like to discuss some of these devices in more detail.

3.

Repetitive formulae are very well known in medieval Icelandic poetry, and they occur quite frequently in the Poetic Edda, cf. *vituð ér enn, eða hvat?* ‘would you know more, or what?’ in *Völuspá* (st. 27, 28, 33, etc.), *senn váru Æsir allir á þingi ok ásynjur allar á máli, ok um þat réðu ríkir tívar...* ‘immediately all the Æsir went to the council, and all the goddesses were talking; and the mighty gods spoke about...’ in *Þrymskviða* (st. 14) and *Baldurs draumar* (‘Baldr’s dreams’; st. 1), *ok hann þat orða alls fyrst um kvað* ‘and he first said such words’ in *Þrymskviða* (st. 2, 3, 12; with slight modification in st. 9), etc. In several dialogue poems, notably *Vafþrúðnismál* and *Alvíssmál*, most of the stanzas begin with one or another formula.

Repetition of formulae may generally be said to perform the function of raising the curiosity of the audience: thus, the formula *vituð ér enn, eða hvat?* from *Völuspá* implies that there is more news to be heard, most likely even more dreadful than the things already revealed by the seeress. Likewise, the various formulae beginning most of the stanzas in *Vafþrúðnismál* serve as a kind of psychological test posed by one opponent to the other, prompting the audience to wonder about the next question in the contest of wisdom between the two sages – Óðinn himself and the giant Vafþrúðnir.

The function of the formulae can also be more complex, e.g., beside the introductory function, Þórr’s formulae in *Alvíssmál* also serve a different purpose: by extending his questions and endlessly praising the dwarf’s wisdom, Þórr is slyly trying to deceive his unsuspecting guest and ultimately to destroy him. Þórr’s plan does not appear obvious until the very end of the poem, though, when, at sunrise, he suddenly admits to having deceived his guest by all the flattery (*Alvíssmál*, st. 35):

Í einu brjósti	In one breast
ek sá-k aldregi	have I never seen
fleiri forna stafi;	more ancient wisdom;
miklum tálum	with great wiles
ek kveð tældan þik:	I claim to have deceived you:
uppi ertu, dvergr, um dagaðr,	you have been caught by daylight, dwarf,
nú skínn sól í sali.	now the sun is shining into the halls.

4.

A small number of formulae may also be found in *Heiðreksgátur*. The most common formula is *Heiðrekr konungr, hygg þú at gátu* ‘king Heiðrekr, think about this riddle’, and it functions as a cue for king Heiðrekr that Gestumblindi’s riddle is over. This line ends all the riddles, except the very last one. Heiðrekr’s responses are partially formulaic, too, each response starting with a *ljóðaháttur* line *góð er gáta þín, Gestumblindi, getit er þeirar* ‘good is your riddle, Gestumblindi – it has been solved’ (the rest of the solution being said in prose language). This formula is only omitted in the last response, since the king is unable to solve it.

The formula *at forvitni fǫður* ‘for father’s curiosity’ is used three times, in three consecutive riddles (st. 20-22), cf. one instance from a riddle about partridges (st. 20):

Hverjar eru þær leikur	Who are those playmates
er líða lǫnd yfir	who travel over the lands
at forvitni fǫður?	for father’s curiosity?
Hvítan skjöld	A white shield
þær á vetrum bera ³	they carry in winter,
en svartan um sumar.	but a black one in summer.
<i>Konungr Heiðrekr,</i>	<i>King Heiðrekr,</i>
<i>hygg þú at gátu!</i>	<i>think about the riddle!</i>

3 Alliteration is missing in these lines, unless one assumes that *hvítan* irregularly alliterates with *vetr* (or that the reading of *hvítan* was actually **vítan*, which is rather doubtful). Alliteration is also missing elsewhere in this collection, cf. the second part the riddle in st. 1: *lýða lemill, orða tefill, ok orða upphefill*. In these lines, *lýða lemill* and *orða tefill* do not alliterate.

The function of this formula is not as obvious as that of the preceding two formulae discussed above. It is not clear from this formula who the “father” is, or why he should find the facts described “curious”. Although the term *faðir* and its variants normally refer to Óðinn himself in Old Icelandic poetry (cf. his alternative name *Al-fǫðr*), and therefore one could speculate that Gestumblindi/Óðinn is referring to himself, this speculation does not provide the reader with any deeper insights into this riddle. The two words, *forvitni* and *faðir*, may have been selected primarily for the reason that they alliterate, whereas the formula itself may be said to be semantically “empty”.

Another formula used in this collection of riddles is *eigu-t þær varðir vera* ‘they do not have to be women’ (i.e., ‘they are not women’). This formula occurs in a riddle about a type of flower (*fjallhvönn*, st. 18) and in another one about waves (st. 22). Unlike the semantically “empty” formula *at forvitni fǫður*, this formula is actually a meaningful part of the riddle, since the nouns representing the solution of these riddles, viz. *fjallhvönn* ‘type of flower (angelica?)’ and *bylgja/bára* ‘wave’, are grammatically feminine (the waves are also called *Ægis meyjar* ‘Ægir’s maidens’ by king Heiðrekr). Therefore, this line may be interpreted in such a way that Gestumblindi in an artistic presents these objects as females who at the same time are not human women.

The *ljóðaháttir* line *hvat er þat undra, er ek úti sá fyrir Dellings durum* ‘what is that wonder that I saw outside Dellings’ doors’ begins nine consecutive stanzas (st. 8-16; cf. st. 9 below):

Hvat er þat undra,	What is that wonder
er ek úti sá	that I saw outside
<i>fyrir Dellings durum:</i>	<i>Dellings’ doors:</i>
ókyrrir tveir	two unquiet
andalausir	[and] soulless
sára lauk suðu?	boiling the leek of wounds?
Konungr Heiðrekr,	King Heiðrekr,
hygg þú at gátu!	think about the riddle!

It is not entirely clear what the function of Dellings’ doors in this formula is, since also Dellings himself is only a very poorly understood figure in the Old Icelandic literature. His name only occurs several times in the corpus: Dellings is called the father of Day (*Dagr*) in *Vafþrúðnismál* (st. 25) and in Snorri’s Edda (ch. 10), whereas the formula

fyrrir Dellings durum is also once mentioned in *Hávamál* ‘Sayings of the High one’, st. 160 (and may have been borrowed from there).⁴

As a whole, this formula may be said to serve as a “riddle-introduction”, and therefore in its function quite similar to the various introductory formulae discussed in section 3 above. However, in a certain way it is also different from the formulae in the older texts. Unlike those formulae, the continuous repetition of the same phrase in *Heiðreksgátur* in the end produces a rather unexpected (but obviously comical) result: after having listened to the same beginning line for nine consecutive times, king *Heiðrekr* apparently becomes bored, and he impatiently asks *Gestumblindi* to start his riddles in some other way, so that the same words are not repeated again and again.⁵ In this sense, the effect of repetition in the riddle episode may be said to be antithetical to the “traditional” function and effect of repeated formulae, since in this text, the audience (i.e., king *Heiðrekr*) perceives the repetition as a *negative* feature of *Gestumblindi*’s speech.

5.

This small riddle corpus also contains a number of kennings and *heiti*, typical of both Eddic and scaldic poetry. Although *Heiðrekr*’s riddles cannot compete with either in the number and variety of such poetic metaphors, some of the *heiti* and kennings occurring in these riddles are quite unique, and are only found in this saga.

6.

The *heiti* in these riddles are quite numerous, and some of them commonly occur in the poetic language in general. Among the more common Old Icelandic *heiti* occurring in these riddles are the following *heiti* for ‘woman’: *brúðr* (st. 17, 23), *mær* (st. 18, 22, 33), and *snót* (st. 19, 21), or the following *heiti* for ‘people, men’: *lýðar* (st. 1, 15), *aldir* (st. 6), *Danir* and *firrar* (st. 26), *þegnar* and *lýðir* (st. 31), *jarlar* (st. 32), as well as *gumi*

4 Although this connection between the two texts is speculative, a very real literary link between poems of the Poetic Edda and this saga is discussed in more detail in section 10 below.

5 ... *Eda kanntu ekki á annan veg gátur upp at bera en hafa it sama upphaf at, þar sem mér virðisk þú fróðr maðr?* ‘Can’t you present your riddles in some other way than having the same beginning, since you seem to me a wise man?’

(here used in singular only, cf. st. 5, 26). Also the noun *segl* ‘sail’ (st. 34) is otherwise commonly used as a *heiti* for a ship whereas *glygg* fairly commonly occurs as a *heiti* for ‘wind’ (st. 5).

Among the rarer *heiti* it is possible to mention *rýgr* (st. 18), *leika* (st. 20), and *vǫrð* (st. 22) for ‘woman’, as well as the compounds *brimreið* ‘wave ride’ (= ‘sea’; st. 24), *moldbúi* ‘earth-dweller’ (st. 24), *drynhraun* ‘noisy cave’ (st. 27), and *bitskálm* ‘bite-sword’ (st. 27). The last three *heiti* only occur in these riddles (as part of kennings), and therefore are precious *hapaxes*. The noun *brimreið* has been interpreted as a misspelling for *brimleið* ‘wave road’, which occurs elsewhere as a *heiti* for ‘sea’ (see LP.64); however, the actual spelling *brimreið* also appears thinkable, as this noun may be semantically interpreted as ‘wave ride’ (cf. also such nouns as *álfa-reið* ‘elven ride’, *gand-reið* ‘magical ride’, etc.).⁶ As for *moldbúi*, outside of this saga, it only occurs once in the saga about Hǫrðr and Hólmverjar (*Harðar saga ok Hólmverja*), chapter 15, where the kenning *hús moldbúa* ‘earth-dweller’s house’ refers to a cave in a mound, inhabited by a certain Sóti (the actual “moldbúi”).

7.

This collection of riddles also contains a small number of kennings. Most of the kennings used here do not occur anywhere else in the entire corpus of Old Icelandic literature, e.g., *lýða lemill* ‘beater of men’, *orða tefill* ‘hinderer of words’, and *orða upphefill* ‘starter of words’ (= ‘beer, mead’; st. 1), *drykkjar drynhraun* ‘noisy cave of drink’ (= ‘head of an ox’; st. 27), *hálm’s bitskálmir* ‘bite-swords of straw’ (= ‘jaws of an ox’; *ibid.*), *bǫrkr viðar* ‘tree bark’ (= ‘bird’s claws’; st. 34), and the somewhat obscure kenning *foldar moldbúi* ‘earth-dweller of soil’ (st. 24).⁷ Only the kenning *sára*

6 According to LP.64, the noun *brimreið* also occurs in *Hrafnsmál* by Sturla Þórðarson (st. 3), even though there, too, supposedly, it should be read as *brimleið*. However, the actual text in the manuscript of *Hrafnsmál* says not *brimreið*, but rather *brynreið*, cf. *skein af skát vǫnom / skeiðom brynreiðar / sol af sigdeili / snottrom óþrotlíg* (*Skjaldedigt.*, A2.120). Therefore, the noun *brimreið* in Heiðrekr’s riddles may be a *hapax*.

7 It is not entirely clear what the kenning *foldar moldbúi* refers to. It is suggested in LP.410 that *moldbúi* refers to the dead horse (*skal være betegnelse for den ‘døde hest’*), but semantically this kenning seems to better match the worm/snake that is lying on top of that horse, since the worm (or snake) may be easier perceived as an “earth-dweller of soil”.

laukr ‘the leek of wounds’ (= ‘sword’; st. 9) also occurs elsewhere; however, in spite of its very “classical” look, this kenning is only attested twice in the corpus, and both examples occur in the poem *Liðsmannaflakkr* in the saga about Óláfr helgi (*Óláfs saga hins helga*).

The nouns *lemill*, *tefill*, and *upphefill* are deverbal agentive formations, built with the suffix *-ill* from the weak verbs *lemja* ‘beat’, *tefja* ‘delay’, and the strong verb *hefja* ‘lift; begin’ (cf. also OIc. *upphaf* ‘beginning’). These three words may be said to be different in nature from the other nouns mentioned above in that whereas the nouns *drynhraun*, *bitskálm*, or *moldbúi* have an obvious poetic outlook, and may be easily perceived as poetic *Augenblicksbildungen*, created by the poet *ad hoc* in order to make the language richer and more embellished, the former three nouns do not have this *ad hoc* outlook, as their shape is just like that of many other Icelandic derivatives in *-ill*, such as *kistill* ‘little box’ (~ *kista* ‘box, chest’), *lykill* ‘key’ (< **luk-ila-*, orig. ‘closer, locker’; ~ *lúka* ‘close’), *ferill* ‘process, course’ (< **farila-* ~ *fara* ‘go’), *pistill* ‘essay’ (ultimately < Greek ἐπιστολή ‘letter’), etc. However, these three nouns are necessarily late *ad hoc* creations, as they do not occur anywhere else in the entire Old Icelandic corpus at all, and their morphological shape also betrays that they were built directly from the verbs *lemja*, *tefja*, and *hefja* at the Old Icelandic stage, after the so-called *i*-umlaut had stopped operating (if these formations had been Proto-Scandinavian, their root vowels would have been umlauted, and the shape of the derivatives should have become **limill*, *tifill*, and probably **upphifill*).

8.

One of the riddles in this collection presents a particularly fine example of play on Old Icelandic homonymy, as well as a unique trop, which can neither be called a kenning nor a *heiti*. The text of the riddle is presented below (st. 34):

Sat ek á segli,	Sat I on the sail (i.e., ‘boat’)
sá ek dauða menn	saw I dead men
blóðugt hold bera	carrying bloody flesh
í þork viðar.	in the tree bark.
Konungr Heiðrekr,	King Heiðrekr,
hygg þú at gátu!	think about the riddle!

The key in this riddle is the phrase *dauðir menn* ‘dead men.’ This phrase is used metaphorically here; however, it is not a classical kenning, as it does not have the usual “noun + noun” structure characteristic of kennings (cf. *sára laukr*, *foldar moldbúi* etc. in section 7 above). It may not be called a *heiti* either, as *heiti* normally contain one word (either simple or compound, e.g., *brúðr* or *bit-skálm*). This phrase is ultimately a pun involving two Old Icelandic homonyms, as correctly guessed by king Heiðrekr. One of these homonyms is *valr* ‘fallen warriors’ (i.e., the word implied by Gestumblindi’s *dauðir menn*), whereas the other one is *valr* ‘falcon’, the word actually meant in the riddle. Heiðrekr skillfully solves this riddle interpreting it as a falcon (*valr*) carrying prey (‘bloody flesh’; not a kenning) in its claws (‘tree bark’).⁸

9.

The riddle presented in stanza 30 is unique among all the riddles in this collection both as far as its type and function in this narrative are concerned. Unlike all the other riddles, king Heiðrekr first asks his subjects to solve this one, and only after all their attempts prove unsuccessful does he solve the riddle himself. The text of the riddle in st. 30 is presented below:

Hest sá ek standa,	A stallion I saw
hýddi meri,	flogging a mare,
dúði dindil,	shaking the dangler,
drap hlaun und kvið,	beating with the hip at the belly;
ór skal draga	out shall draw,
ok gjofta at góða stund.	and <i>deal with</i> for a while. ⁹
Konungr Heiðrekr,	King Heiðrekr,
hygg þú at gátu!	think about the riddle!

As is practically inevitable – and indeed must have been expected by the author/narrator of this saga – all the king’s subjects interpret this

8 This last rare kenning may be easily appreciated if one interprets the bird’s claws tightly gripping the branch of a tree as bark, which equally tightly surrounds the wood.

9 The word *gjofta* is a *hapax legomenon*, and its meaning is not entirely clear (cf. LP.186, Ásgeir B. Magnússon 1989: 251). It is tentatively translated here as ‘deal with’, following Ásgeir B. Magnússon, as some kind of prolonged action is implied (for this interpretation, see also below in this section).

riddle in a sexual way, guessing it to be a description of an intercourse (although this is not said explicitly in the saga itself).¹⁰ Disappointed by the poor guessing skills of his subjects, king Heiðrekr solves the riddle himself, interpreting it as weaving on a traditional vertical loom: ‘that stallion you call linen fabric, and the shaft is his mare; one shall beat the cloth up from above’ (*hest þann kallar þú línvef, en skeið meri hans, er upp ok ofan skal hrista vefinn*).

The king could have obviously solved the riddle by himself in the way he did in the end (i.e., without asking his subjects to guess it); however, by letting the king first ask his subjects to solve this riddle, the author/narrator achieves two different results: first, as the king asks the other people at the court to solve this riddle, the author/narrator indirectly asks his own audience (or the reader) to try solving it, without doubt expecting them to be deceived by the *double-entendre* of this riddle as well. Second, the narrative itself may be said to benefit from such an arrangement: since, on the one hand, the main riddle of this story is yet to come (see section 10 below), the king may not solve the present one incorrectly. On the other hand, however, if the incorrect (i.e., sexual) answer is not presented in some way, the humorous nature of this episode would be diminished. Therefore, in order to imply that the wrong answer was indeed pronounced, this answer had to be put into the mouth of somebody else – in this case, the king’s subjects. After the subjects are unable to solve the riddle properly, the king solves it himself, both proving his wisdom, and allowing the narration to continue towards its culminative moment, and a much more dramatic end.

10.

The final riddle in this collection is important not so much because the king is finally unable to solve it, as because it reveals a close and important connection between the riddles of this saga and the poems of the Poetic Eddic, or, more specifically, the poem *Vafþrúðnismál*. In fact, the significance of this riddle can only be fully understood when one compares the riddle episode in this saga with the contest of wisdom between the two sages, Óðinn and the giant Vafþrúðnir, in the afore-mentioned poem.

¹⁰ The text here says ‘they guessed many things, and nothing of the very beautiful sort’ (OIc. *þeir gátu margs til, ok eigi fagrs mjök*).

For his final riddle in the riddle episode of the saga about Hervor and Heiðrekr, Óðinn selects a riddle that he had once successfully used before in a wisdom contest with the giant Vafþrúðnir, described in *Vafþrúðnismál*. The two stanzas in the saga and the Eddic poem are quite similar, and both the author/narrator of the saga and the audience were obviously familiar with the Eddic poem:

Vafþrúðnismál (st. 54)

Fjǫlð ek fór,	Much I travelled,
fjǫlð ek freistaða-k,	much I tried,
fjǫlð ek reynda regin:	(with) much I tested the gods:
hvat mælti Óðinn,	what spoke Óðinn,
áðr á bál stigi,	before (he) ¹¹ stepped onto the pyre,
sjálfir í eyra syni?	himself into son's ear?

Heiðreksgátur (st. 36)

Segðu þat þá hinzt,	Say, then, that last,
[ef þú, Heiðrekr, ert	[if you, Heiðrekr, are
hverjum vitrari vísa]:	wiser than any man]: ¹²
Hvat mælti Óðinn	what spoke Óðinn
í eyra Baldri,	into Baldr's ear
áðr hann var á bál hafðr?	before he was <i>lifted</i> onto the pyre?

Both of Óðinn's opponents, Vafþrúðnir and king Heiðrekr, realize from this riddle that they have been dealing with Óðinn himself in disguise;¹³ however, they respond to in very different ways: whereas Vafþrúðnir immediately acknowledges Óðinn's superiority in knowledge and accepts his own doom, king Heiðrekr accuses Óðinn of cheating, and even tries to kill him. The king's fury and his calculated insult in the saga is in stark contrast with the Eddic giant's desperate acknowledgment of his fiasco and imminent doom, and there is little doubt that the author/narrator of the saga expected from the audience to make the same comparison of the two responses:

11 The pronoun *he*, the following verb *stepped* and the noun *son's* refer to Baldr.

12 Reconstruction.

13 As was mentioned earlier in section 1, Óðinn went to king Heiðrekr's court disguised as Gestumblindi, whereas in *Vafþrúðnismál*, he names himself "Gagnráðr" to the giant Vafþrúðnir.

Vafþrúðnismál (st. 55)

Ey manni þat veit,	No man knows
hvat þú í árdaga	what you in days of yore
sagðir í eyra syni;	spoke into son's ear;
feigum munni	with a doomed mouth
mæltu ek mína forna stafi	I spoke my ancient lore,
ok um ragna røk.	and about the doom of the gods.
Nú ek við Óðin	Now I with Óðinn
deilda-k mína orðspeki,	shared my wisdom of words,
þú ert æ vísastr vera!	you are eternally the wisest of the men!

Heiðreksgátur (st. 37)

Undr ok argskap	False things and unmanly matters,
ok alla bleyði,	all sorts of cowardice
[vænti ek verit hafa,	[I expect it to have been,
en orð þau, er mæltir,	and those words that you spoke
einn þú veizt], ¹⁴	you alone know],
ill vættr ok orrm!	evil wretched creature!

When this riddle and king Heiðrekr's response are interpreted in this broader context of Old Icelandic literature, it becomes obvious that the audience of this saga was necessarily familiar with the Eddic tradition – and specifically the poem *Vafþrúðnismál* – since, without the contrast with this poem, the king's furious reaction to this riddle would be more difficult to appreciate, and, on the contrary, Heiðrekr's fury appears more dramatic and comical if one compares the outcome of the contest of wisdom between Gestumblindi/Óðinn and king Heiðrekr on the one hand, and the dialogue between Gagnráðr/Óðinn and Vafþrúðnir on the other hand.

11.

In the present article, I have discussed the language of the medieval Icelandic Heiðrekr's riddles, paying special attention to its metaphors, employment of wordplay, and *double-entendre*. Although this collection of riddles is very small, it nevertheless provides the reader with a number of unique and skillfully created metaphors as well as other poetic

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devices, various *Augenblicksbildungen* and several *hapax legomena*. Subtle sense of humour is expressed through the king's order to his subjects to solve the ambiguous – but implicitly sexual – weaving riddle, as well as their subsequent embarrassment, whereas the re-employment of Óðinn's "trump-riddle" from *Vafþrúðnismál* at the end of this contest shows a close connection between Eddic poetry and the present episode in the saga, and that Eddic poetry was well familiar to the contemporary general audience.

In this context, I cannot fail to remember the conference speech delivered by dr. Ieva Steponavičiūtė in the conference on Old Norse literature, mythology, culture, social life, and language held at Vilnius University in October 2007, in which dr. Steponavičiūtė discussed another case of complex intertextual relationship between two literary texts, written at different times and in different countries (see Steponavičiūtė 2007). The connection between the saga about Hervor and *Heiðrekr* on the one hand, and the poems of the Poetic Edda on the other hand provides yet another example of how comparative/intertextual studies can help a student of philology gain a deeper insight into literary works, at the same stressing the importance of a holistic, integrated approach to literary studies.

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