

**Univerzita Karlova**

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Ústav anglofonních literatur a kultur

# **Diplomová práce**

Bc. Barbora Hlavatá

**A Comparison of William Morris' *The Story of Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs* and J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún***

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Vedoucí práce: PhDr. Jiří Starý, Ph.D.

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**Klíčová slova:**

William Morris, J. R. R. Tolkien, srovnání, rozbor, staroseverská literatura, Sága o Völsungzích, Starší Edda

**Klíčová slova (anglicky):**

William Morris, J. R. R. Tolkien, comparison, analysis, Old Norse literature, Saga of the Volsungs, Elder Edda

## Abstrakt

Tato práce se zaměřuje na formální a stylistický rozbor a porovnání dvou děl anglických autorů, a sice Williama Morrisa a jeho básně *The Story of Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs* (*Příběh Sigurda Volsunga a pád Niblungů*, 1876) a J. R. R. Tolkiena s básnickým dílem *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún* (*Legenda o Sigurdovi a Gudrún*, vydáno posmrtně 2009), s ohledem na to, jakým způsobem každé ze zmíněných děl nakládá s původní staroseverskou látkou, na jejímž základě obě díla vznikla. Jak *Sigurd Volsung*, tak *Legenda o Sigurdovi a Gudrún* se dají považovat za básnické adaptace staroseverského příběhu o Sigurdovi Drakobijci, který je vylíčen v *Sáze o Völsungzích* a v cyklu básní obsaženém v *Písňové Eddě*. Morris i Tolkien tento příběh pro svá díla převzali, ale každý z nich ho zpracovává jiným způsobem; obě díla se proto na více rovinách liší nejen od původních staroseverských textů, ale i jedno od druhého. Rozdíly lze vyzorovat například v metrických vlastnostech jednotlivých básní či v užití specifických stylistických prvků. Na jejich základě můžeme soudit, že ačkoliv si oba autoři kladli za cíl ve svém díle vyvolat atmosféru hrdinského dávnověku, v němž se Sigurdův příběh odehrává, každý z nich se o to pokouší jiným způsobem, což pravděpodobně pramení z jejich odlišných představ o tom, co je hlavní složkou tohoto ducha severského dávnověku přítomného ve staroseverských literárních dílech. Na druhou stranu se však v některých ohledech obě adaptace shodují; tyto podobnosti budou v práci také popsány.

## Abstract

This thesis focuses on the formal and stylistic analysis and comparison of two works written by English authors, namely William Morris' poem *The Story of Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs* (1876) and J. R. R. Tolkien's poetic work *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún* (published posthumously in 2009) with respect to how each of these works deals with the original Old Norse motives which they are based on. Both *Sigurd the Volsung* and *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún* can be described as poetic adaptations of the Old Norse tale of Sigurd Fafnisbani, which is recounted in the *Saga of the Volsungs* and in a cycle of poems found in the *Poetic Edda*. Both Morris and Tolkien borrowed this story to use it in their own works, yet each of them treats it in a different manner. Therefore, not only do both of the works differ from the original Old Norse texts on multiple levels, but they also differ one from another. The differences between them can be traced in the metrical properties of the individual poems, for instance, or in the use of specific stylistic elements. From this, it can be inferred that although it was the goal of both authors to evoke the atmosphere of the legendary heroic past where Sigurd's story takes place, each of them attempts to do so in a different way. This is probably caused by the authors' different perceptions of what was the key component of the spirit of the Norse legendary past that pervades the Old Norse literary works. On the other hand, in certain aspects the adaptations correspond with each other as well; such similarities will also be addressed in the thesis.

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## 1. Introduction

My choice of the thesis topic stems from my interest in the reception of Old Norse literary works in British literature in general and in Morris' and Tolkien's respective works in particular. Both of them can be considered unique, each in their own way, thanks to their individual treatment of the Old Norse sources they use and the way the Old Norse elements are transformed in them.

Generally speaking, both authors appear to have decided to make use of some of the Old Norse metrical and stylistic elements in their own works. Similarly, both of them also explore the role of the narrator in the story and his significance in the process of reviving the atmosphere of the Old Norse tale. This can be seen as evidence that they deemed the form and the style of the Old Norse sources to be an important constituent of the "Old Norse spirit" they were attempting to recreate.

In Morris' case, the relation between *Sigurd the Volsung* and his other works should be pointed out. It can be said that his interest in the Middle Ages, which he was known for, permeates all of his work. Since Morris was not only a writer but also a designer, it can be noted that the medieval influence is visible in his designs as well. For instance, his tapestry designs often feature romanticised medieval motives. It was this fascination by the Middle Ages that brought Morris to study Old Norse literature; he eventually acquired a broad knowledge of the Old Norse materials by studying them and translating them into English.

Nevertheless, the approach to these sources that he takes in *Sigurd the Volsung* appears to be more artistic than scholarly. It would seem that in *Sigurd the Volsung*, Morris is not particularly interested in staying faithful to the form or the style of the Old Norse texts; rather, he appears to have only picked out a few select features from them, both from the metrical

properties and from the style of the eddic poems, to use in his own work. Other than that, however, his poetic retelling of the story of Sigurd can be seen as stylised and influenced by the romanticising tendency that can be found in some works of Victorian literature. Thus, despite being presented with a tale from the Old Norse heroic past, the reader is kept aware of the fact that this tale is being recounted by a Victorian poet.

On the other hand, in *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún*, Tolkien's overall approach to the source materials seems to be less artistic and more scholarly. This is quite understandable, as Tolkien himself was a scholar whose academic specialisation included the study of Old Norse literature to some extent. In this work, he is placing special focus on the relation between Old Norse and Old English verse and how this relationship is reflected in their formal properties. At the same time, he is also exploring the possibilities of applying the principles of Old Norse verse in modern English poetry, based on the linguistic affiliation between the two. Thus, *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún* can be interpreted as an extraordinary scholarly study of the story of Sigurd.

## 2. Introduction of Primary Sources

### 2.1 Old Norse Literature

The term “Old Norse literature” generally refers to the medieval literary works of the inhabitants of Scandinavia and several other regions, composed in the vernacular and dating from c. 800 to 1397 AD. For the most part, the first textual records of Old Norse literary works date from the early 12th century to the late 14th century. However, much of the corpus of Old Norse literature is commonly believed to have originated in oral tradition, and is thought to have survived in that state for several centuries before first being recorded in manuscripts.<sup>1</sup> The majority of these manuscripts come from Iceland, which is why the term “Old Icelandic literature” also exists and is sometimes used synonymously with “Old Norse literature,” although the latter is generally more appropriate thanks to its inclusion of the other regions where the literary works of the Norsemen also saw the light of day.

The works of Old Norse literature include both poetry and prose; this thesis will mostly be concerned with the former, although the latter will also be mentioned to some extent. Old Norse poetry is generally categorised into two main groups: eddic and skaldic poetry. The difference between the two types lies in several aspects of the works they encompass.

The authors of skaldic poetry (skalds) are mostly known by name, which means that most skaldic poems can be attributed to their respective authors. In the manuscripts, skaldic poetry is only found as part of so-called prosimetrum compositions, i.e. the poems are incorporated into prose narratives and do not occur on their own. The primary purpose of skaldic poetry was either to record significant events, especially battles, or to praise a particular person of importance, e.g. a jarl or a king; some of the later skaldic poems also contained Christian

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<sup>1</sup> The topic of how the individual literary works were transformed during the process of oral tradition, as well as after the emergence of the first manuscripts, has been the subject of extensive discussion among scholars for many years. See e.g. Quinn, Judy. “From Orality to Literacy in Medieval Iceland.” *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. 30-60.

themes. Skaldic poetry is also known for its characteristic formal features, which can be summed up as having ornate language and syntax and exceedingly complex metrical rules. This has led many scholars to believe that the poems could be passed on for centuries without any major modifications in their form or content, as the rules of their composition would not allow it. Lastly, skaldic poetry is generally known as a type of poetry unique to the medieval North, as there are no parallels to be found between the works of the skalds and poetry from other cultures from the same time period.

Eddic poetry differs from the skaldic in that its authors are unknown. It can be found both in prosimetrum narratives and occurring individually. Despite following its own set of metrical rules (discussed in chapter 3), it can be considered simpler in terms of language and style as opposed to skaldic poetry. The eddic poems explore a broad range of themes and are generally divided into poems with mythological content and those with heroic content, as will be shown below.

Old Norse prose encompasses a wide range of literary works, including diverse historiographical writings and lawbooks. This thesis will only focus on Old Norse narrative prose; such works are usually labelled as sagas. Sagas are typically classified into various genres according to their content, such as the Kings' sagas, the sagas of Icelanders, chivalric sagas, or legendary sagas; the *Saga of the Volsungs* that is addressed in this thesis is an example of a legendary saga. Most of the saga types share some general characteristics, including a dry, objective, and economical narrative style with very little commentary on behalf of the narrator, and a lack of emotive passages or descriptions of the characters' inner thoughts or feelings.

### 2.1.1 The Poetic Edda

The *Poetic Edda*, also known as the *Elder Edda* or *Sæmund's Edda*,<sup>2</sup> is the name usually given to a collection of eddic poems, most of which are found in a manuscript known as the *Codex Regius* of the *Elder Edda*, which is thought to have been written around the year 1270. These poems can be found in several other manuscripts as well, including some poems that *Codex Regius* itself does not contain. Nevertheless, it is *Codex Regius* that is regarded as the chief source of eddic poetry. It contains a range of mythological and heroic poems, of which the former comprises themes such as stories of the Norse gods, gnomic poetry, or prophetic descriptions of the beginning and ending of the world. The heroic poems are set in a legendary heroic past, but the stories narrated in them often echo real events and people from the Migration Period (c. 4th to 7th century), suggesting the poems' early origin in oral tradition. These poems can be divided further into several groups, or cycles, associated with pivotal heroic characters. Possibly the most significant, as well as most well-known, of these cycles is the so-called "Sigurd cycle." It is centred on the story of the hero Sigurd Fafnisbani and other characters involved in his tale, which is also recounted in *The Saga of the Volsungs* and the German epic *Nibelungenlied*. The Sigurd cycle encompasses more than 10 of the poems in the heroic section of *Codex Regius*. Two of the poems within the cycle are not complete, as there are eight leaves missing in the manuscript, leaving a gap known as the Great Lacuna; the missing part of the narrative is known only from the *Saga of the Volsungs* (see below).

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<sup>2</sup> This is a reference to the Icelandic scholar and priest Sæmundr the Learned (1056-1133) to whom the *Codex Regius* was initially attributed, although he is no longer believed to be its author by scholars today.

### 2.1.2 The Prose Edda

The *Prose Edda*, also known as *Edda*, *Younger Edda* or *Snorri's Edda*, is a literary work that is usually ascribed to the Icelandic poet, historian, and politician Snorri Sturluson (1179-1241), and is commonly believed to have been written in the 13th century. The work is structured as a retelling of the mythological and heroic matter from the *Poetic Edda* in the form of prose narrative, as well as a treatise on the principles of skaldic poetry. Both of these subjects were probably chosen by Snorri to be recorded so that they would not be lost, as in the 13th century the originally pagan themes and concepts were mostly overridden by Christianity and frowned upon by the learned clergy.

The *Prose Edda* is divided into four sections. The first section is a prologue that explains the origins of the Norse deities and mythology in general in a Christian euhemeristic manner, portraying the gods as descendants of warriors from Troy. The prologue is followed by “Gylfaginning” (“The Tricking of Gylfi”), a section which retells the mythological and heroic stories from the *Poetic Edda*. The third part, called “Skáldskaparmál” (“The Language of Poetry”), deals mainly with the stylistic devices used in Old Norse poetry known as kennings and heiti (see chapter 4). The last section is titled “Háttatal” (“Enumeration of Metres”) and as the title suggests, it focuses on types of metrical forms known from Old Norse poetry (see chapter 3).

### 2.1.3 The Saga of the Volsungs

*The Saga of the Volsungs* (*Völsunga saga*) can be classified as a legendary saga. Written in the 13th century, it recounts the events described in the Sigurd cycle in the *Poetic Edda*, including the part of the story left out by the lacuna in the *Codex Regius*. Regarding its style and form, it displays the typical narrative style of the sagas described above. Parts of the

narrative are written in the prosimetrum form, with poetry embedded in the text. As a legendary saga, *The Saga of the Volsungs* contains some elements of the supernatural; it also deals with themes such as love and betrayal, and highlights the Germanic heroic ideal that is reflected in Sigurd's character.

## **2.2 General Outline of the Reception of Old Norse Literature in British Literature**

The earliest examples of works of literature dealing with Old Norse themes in British literature date from the 17th century, mostly found in the form of antiquarian treatises written in Latin that addressed the subject of the origin of the North Germanic peoples and their relation to the Anglo-Saxons. Old Norse literature and culture gained wider recognition in Britain in the late 18th century, following Thomas Percy's translation (1770) of Paul Henri Mallet's work *Monuments de la mythologie et de la poésie des Celtes, et particulièrement des anciens Scandinaves* (*Northern Antiquities* in the English translation), which included translations from the *Poetic Edda*, the *Prose Edda*, and skaldic poetry. This was a breakthrough work that sparked interest in Old Norse themes in Britain to such an extent that they began to appear in literary works, most notably in Thomas Gray's *Norse Odes* (1768).

The Victorian era (1837-1901) saw another rise in the popularity of Old Norse subject matter. In this period, many Old Norse literary works were translated into English. Apart from the translations, Old Norse themes also appeared in prosaic, poetic and dramatic retellings or adaptations of various mythological and heroic tales. The novel was a very popular genre in this respect, and there are numerous examples of Victorian novels with Old Norse motives. Nevertheless, poetic adaptations also appeared, as William Morris' *Sigurd the Volsung* proves (see below). Morris' poem, as well as some of his other writings, had considerable influence on later authors, including J. R. R. Tolkien. Some of his prose stories, which also contain

traces of Old Norse themes, can be considered early examples of fantasy literature, and thus he can be seen as one of the earliest fantasy authors in British literature. However, *Sigurd the Volsung* remains Morris' most well-known Old Norse adaptation.

### 2.2.1 The Story of Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs

Morris' poetic rendition of the tale of Sigurd as it is told in the *Poetic Edda* and the *Saga of the Volsungs* has been regarded as one of the most noteworthy adaptations of Old Norse themes of the Victorian era. Published in 1876, it reflects Morris' broad knowledge of Old Norse literature, which he had gained through his previous study and translation of Old Norse literary works (both poetry and prose). Despite the fact that *Sigurd the Volsung* is not entirely faithful to its sources in that it does not aim to imitate them thoroughly in form or in style, the poem has still been commended as successful in its recreation of the Old Norse spirit. For instance, Karl Litzenberg claims that "in *Sigurd* a peak was reached. No other modern English writer has re-created the temper of Old Norse literature so completely and so adequately [...]."<sup>3</sup> Likewise, C. H. Herford asserts that

[...] no other English poet has felt so keenly the power of Norse myth; none has done so much to restore its terrible beauty, its heroism, its earth-shaking humour, and its heights of tragic passion and pathos, to a place in our memories, and a home in our hearts.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Karl Litzenberg, *The Victorians and the Vikings: A Bibliographical Essay on Anglo-Norse Literary Relations* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1947) 2.

<sup>4</sup> C. H. Herford, *Norse Myth in English Poetry* (Manchester: Longman, Green & Co., 1919) 5.

### 2.2.2 The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún

J. R. R. Tolkien wrote *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún* in the 1930s; however, it was first published posthumously by his son Christopher in 2009. The work consists of two poems, titled “Völsungakviða en nýja,” or “The New Lay of the Völsungs,” and “Guðrúnarkviða en nýja,” or “The New Lay of Gudrún” respectively. The poems are written in modern English despite their Old Norse titles. It is likely that the titles are in Old Norse because of Tolkien’s primary intention with the work: he intended to fill in the Great Lacuna that is found in the *Codex Regius* manuscript with the two lays he wrote. Thus, despite the fact that they are written in modern English, the poems are composed according to the metrical rules of eddic alliterative verse, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

### 3. Metrics

#### 3.1 General Characteristics of Old Norse Prosody

As has already been mentioned (see chapter 2), Old Norse poetry is commonly divided into two main groups: eddic and skaldic poetry. These two types differ from one another in terms of properties such as their authorship, function, or content. As for their formal aspects, it can be said that eddic and skaldic poetry share some common ground: both types can generally be characterised as examples of strophic poetry with no end rhyme;<sup>5</sup> furthermore, both rely on alliteration and numbers of stresses per line as a means of creating rhythm and linking the lines in each strophe of a given poem together. There are nevertheless differences to be found between the two types: according to E. O. G. Turville-Petre,

[t]he Eddaic poetry is in ‘free’ measures. This implies that syllables and line-endings are not measured strictly, although the stresses are. [...] Unlike skaldic poetry, Eddaic poetry is not strictly syllabic. Probably under the influence of the scalds, Eddaic poets began to count their syllables [...].<sup>6</sup>

What can be said for certain about the strophic structure of either type of Old Norse poetry is that its rules, similarly to those of the syllabic structure, appear to be much more rigid and complex in skaldic poems than in eddic ones. This fact corresponds with the general pattern

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<sup>5</sup> Most Old Norse poems indeed do not make use of end rhyme; nevertheless, there are several examples of both eddic and skaldic poems where end rhyme can be found. In *Scaldic Poetry*, E.O.G. Turville-Petre notes that “a verse which has end-rhyme is said to be *Runhenda* [i.e. a metrical form used in skaldic poetry]. [...] It is widely believed that regular end-rhyme was introduced into Norse poetry by Egill Skalla-Grímsson, who is said to have composed his famous *Höfuðlausn* [“Head Ransom,” a poem in praise of king Eric Bloodaxe] in York c. 948.” Turville-Petre suggests that Egill’s innovative application of end rhyme can be seen as the result of his dwelling in England and encountering Christian poetry, which did make use of end rhyme: “It has been noted that end-rhyme occurred sporadically in Eddaic lays [...] [b]ut forms like these are so rare that they are not likely to have provided the basis for Egill’s form. Egill [...] had spent a considerable time in England. He had fought at the side of King Aðalsteinn [Æthelstan], apparently at Brunanburh (937), more than a decade before he composed his *Höfuðlausn*. He was *primsignaðr*, made a kind of catechumen, and thus had the right to consort with Christians.” Nevertheless, as Turville-Petre also remarks, “Egill’s innovation (if it was his) was rather unfruitful.” E.O.G. Turville-Petre, *Scaldic Poetry* (Oxford: OUP, 1976) xxxvi-xxxviii.

<sup>6</sup> Turville-Petre xii.

that can be observed when eddic and skaldic poetry are compared: the structure of the latter is governed by elaborate metrical rules and thus can be considered more stable and fixed on the whole, while the former's principles can be characterised as somewhat simpler, the structure then being looser. This can indeed be seen as the most basic formal difference between the two types of Old Norse poetry, and it should be noted that it goes hand-in-hand with other aspects of the poems, such as their purpose, content, or their authorship.<sup>7</sup> The difference in the structure of the poems also suggests why eddic poetry may have undergone alterations over time – the looser structure permitted this, whereas skaldic poetry has been preserved in what can be considered its original form thanks to its more complex rules.

### 3.2 Old Norse Metrical Forms

Old Norse poetry, both eddic and skaldic, was composed in accordance with specific “templates,” or verse forms. Each of these had its own name as well as detailed rules regarding the verse structure. The Old Norse metres and their principles were listed and exemplified among others by Snorri Sturluson in the last section of his *Prose Edda*, known as “Háttatal” (“Enumeration of Metres”). Given the significance of the *Prose Edda*, as well as Morris’ and Tolkien’s interest in Old Norse poetry, it is most likely that both authors were familiar with “Háttatal” and the Old Norse metrical forms, and that their knowledge is reflected in their respective renditions of the *Saga of the Volsungs* and the Sigurd cycle in the

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<sup>7</sup> For instance, skaldic poetry is known for its emphasis on form and its view of the poems as works of art; a skald’s ability to compose poetry with a complex metrical structure would be seen as a sign of prestige and would earn him renown. Therefore, there is a logical link between the strict rules of the skaldic verse forms and the skalds themselves. In most cases, the authors of skaldic poems are known, unlike in the case of eddic lays, which are likely to have been shaped and reshaped by several generations of authors. The purpose of eddic poetry, however, was different from that of skaldic poetry: the eddic lays preserved the knowledge and beliefs of the Old Norse society. In other words, they can be seen as “cultural texts,” which, as Jan Assmann explains, “form the center of what could be termed the traditional and relevant knowledge of a society” and “are important for, and expressive of the self-image and self-understanding of a given society, in short: [...] they fulfill an ‘identity function’.” Jan Assmann, “Cultural and Literary Texts,” *Definitely: Egyptian Literature. Proceedings of the Symposium “Ancient Egyptian Literature: History and Forms”*, Los Angeles, March 24-26, 1999, ed. Gerald Moers (Göttingen: Lingua Aegyptia, 1999) 1-15.

*Poetic Edda*. Thus, a question arises as to in what ways and to what extent the metrics of Old Norse poetry can be traced in *Sigurd the Volsung* and *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún*. The following text will mostly be concerned with the structural principles of eddic poetry, as both of the adaptations are connected with eddic poems to a much larger extent than with the works of the skalds.

### 3.2.1 The Structure of the Eddic Strophe

Before the individual types of eddic metres are named, the basic structure of the eddic strophe should be defined. The strophe (*vísa*) in eddic lays usually consisted of two “half-strophes” (*helmingr*). Each of these contained two long lines (*ffórðungr*), which could be divided further into two half-lines (*vísu-orð*). Thus, one whole strophe typically comprised four long lines, which equalled eight half-lines:

Nú eru komnar	til konungs húsa,
frammvísar tvær,	Fenja ok Menja,
þær ro at Fróða	Friðleifsonnar
mótkar meyjjar	at mani hafðar. <sup>8</sup>

Now there have come	to the king’s dwellings
two fore-knowing women,	Fenia and Menia;
the mighty girls	were with Frodi,
Fridleif’s son,	kept as slave-girls. <sup>9</sup>

However, in some cases, the structure was slightly different, as will be shown below.

<sup>8</sup> *De gamle Eddadigte*, ed. Finnur Jónsson (Copenhagen: G. E. C. Gads Forlag, 1932) 165.

<sup>9</sup> *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Carolyne Larrington (Oxford/New York: OUP, 2014) 252.

### 3.2.2 Metrical Forms in Eddic Poetry

There were four metres used in eddic poetry, known as *fornyrðislag* (“old-story metre”), *ljóðaháttir* (“song-metre”), *málaháttir* (“speech-metre”), and *galdralag* (“spell-measure”<sup>10</sup>). Turville-Petre asserts that “[a]s the syllables [in eddic poems] came to be counted, two distinct measures in Eddaic poetry [*fornyrðislag* and *málaháttir*] developed,”<sup>11</sup> suggesting that *fornyrðislag* and *málaháttir* are the oldest metres in eddic poetry. He also notes that *fornyrðislag* “does not differ radically from [the measure] of the Old English *Beowulf*, the Old High German *Hildebrandslied*, and the Old Saxon *Heliand* [...]”<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Carolyne Larrington remarks that “[*fornyrðislag*] is the most frequent narrative metre, especially in the heroic poetry; it is very similar to what might be described as a common Germanic metre, having affinities with Old English and Old High German poetry,”<sup>13</sup> while Humphrey Carpenter describes *fornyrðislag* as “the Old Norse stanzaic metre, very closely resembling in its lines those of Old English poetry, in which most of the narrative poems of the Edda were composed.”<sup>14</sup> Therefore, it seems probable that *fornyrðislag* can be seen as having a close connection with the Germanic heroic epic tradition that can be found in literatures of multiple pre-Christian Germanic societies. A *fornyrðislag* strophe typically consisted of eight half-lines (four long lines), where each half-line bore two stressed syllables and in most cases, two syllables with no stress, although there was no fixed number of syllables per one half-line. The eight half-lines were linked in pairs, forming four long lines “separated by a pause or

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<sup>10</sup> The English translations for the Old Norse terms are by Carolyne Larrington. Carolyne Larrington, “Note on the Translation,” *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Carolyne Larrington (Oxford/New York: OUP, 2014) xxviii-xxix.

<sup>11</sup> Turville-Petre xiii.

<sup>12</sup> Turville-Petre xii.

<sup>13</sup> Larrington xxviii.

<sup>14</sup> Humphrey Carpenter, “Notes,” *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien (London: HarperCollins, 2006) 452.

caesura,<sup>15</sup> and each pair was connected by means of alliteration<sup>16</sup> placed only on the stressed syllables. As Turville-Petre explains,

[t]here may be one or two alliterating syllables in the first line of the pair, and they generally carry full stress [...]. There is only one alliterating syllable in the second line of the pair [...] and this, as usual, is the first fully stressed syllable of that line.<sup>17</sup>

The initial stanza of “Völuspá” (“The Seeress’s Prophecy”), the first of the mythological poems in the *Poetic Edda*, can be considered a typical example of *fornyrðislag* verse:

<u>Hljóðs</u> biðk <u>allar</u>	<u>helgar</u> <u>kindir</u> ,
<u>meiri</u> ok <u>minni</u>	<u>mögu</u> <u>Heimdallar</u> ;
<u>vildu</u> at, <u>Valföðr</u> ,	<u>vel</u> fyrir <u>teljak</u>
<u>forn</u> spjöll <u>fira</u> ,	þaus <u>fremst</u> of <u>man</u> . <sup>18</sup>
Hearing I ask	from all the tribes,
greater and lesser,	the offspring of Heimdall;
Father of the Slain, you wished me	well to declare
living beings’	ancient stories,
those I remember	from furthest back. <sup>19</sup>

As for *málaháttir*, its strong resemblance to *fornyrðislag* makes it somewhat challenging to tell the two forms apart. Turville-Petre states that “[t]he difference between *Málaháttir* and *Fornyrðislag* is not deep, but, while the lines of each of them contain two main stresses, those

<sup>15</sup> Larrington xxviii.

<sup>16</sup> It should be noted that in while consonants only alliterated with identical consonants, a vowel should alliterate with any other vowel or with *j*, which was considered a vowel as well (usually when the *j* was in the initial position in a word; historically, the initial *j* had evolved from vowels. Thus a connection can be seen between the English *earl* and Norse *jarl*. Similarly, the Old Norse version of the name Edward was *Játvarðr*, and so on.)

<sup>17</sup> Turville-Petre xii.

<sup>18</sup> *De gamle Eddadigte* 1. Alliteration is marked in bold letters; stressed syllables are underlined.

<sup>19</sup> *The Poetic Edda* 4.

of *Fornyrðislag* rarely have less than four syllables; those of *Málaháttir* rarely have less than five [...].”<sup>20</sup> Larrington describes *málaháttir* as “an augmented *fornyrðislag*”<sup>21</sup> and claims that “each half-line can contain as many as eight syllables, giving an expansive effect.”<sup>22</sup> There is another subtle difference to be found between the two metrical forms: while in *fornyrðislag*, “a full meaning was only formulated by the long line, [...] a half-line in *málaháttir* [...] expressed a statement of its own.”<sup>23</sup>

*Málaháttir* appears in some of the strophes of eddic poems such as “Hávamál” (“Sayings of the High One”) or “Hárbarðsljóð” (“Harbard’s Song”); the heroic lay “Atlamál in grœnlenzku” (“The Greenlandic Lay of Atli”) is the only eddic poem that is composed entirely in *málaháttir*. The fourteenth stanza from “Atlamál” can be shown as an example of *málaháttir*:

<u>Stop</u> alt munuð <u>g</u> anga,	ef it <u>st</u> undið þ <u>ang</u> at,
<u>y</u> kr mun <u>á</u> st <u>k</u> ynni	<u>e</u> igi í <u>s</u> inn þetta;
<u>d</u> reymði mik <u>H</u> ogni,	<u>d</u> yljumk þat <u>e</u> igi;
<u>g</u> anga mun ykr <u>a</u> ndæris,	<u>e</u> ða ella <u>h</u> ræðumk. <sup>24</sup>
‘You’ll meet your downfall	if you set off there,
there’s no loving welcome	waiting for you this time.
I had a dream, Hogni,	I won’t delude myself:
an evil fate will come upon you –	or am I simply too afraid?’ <sup>25</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Turville-Petre xiii.

<sup>21</sup> Larrington xxix.

<sup>22</sup> Larrington xxix.

<sup>23</sup> „[...] zatímco [...] smysluplnou větu v[e fornyrdislagu] obvykle tvořil teprve verš dlouhý, krátký verš v málaháttu [...] tvořil uzavřenou výpověď.“ Jiří Starý, et al., *Eddica Minora: Hrdinské básně ze staroseverských ság* (Prague: Herrmann & synové, 2011) 40. My translation.

<sup>24</sup> *De gamle Eddadigte* 316-317.

<sup>25</sup> *The Poetic Edda* 213.

Both *fornyrðislag* and *málahátt* were often used in epic poems, their relatively regular rhythm suitable for conveying the loose, flowing stream of the narrative. Perhaps the non-strophic qualities of certain eddic poems (as reported by Turville-Petre) can be explained in this way as well; i.e. that this sense of a “free flow” prevented the poems from being organised into smaller separate units, causing them to be perceived as a larger whole instead.

*Ljóðahátt*, the third of the eddic metres, differs from *fornyrðislag* and *málahátt* in several ways. A strophe composed in *ljóðahátt* consisted of two long lines (which resembled those in *fornyrðislag* and *málahátt* regarding stress and alliteration) and two “full lines,” which typically contained two or three stressed syllables with alliteration. The pattern in each strophe was such that one long line was followed by one full line, after which another long line and a full line followed. According to Larrington, *ljóðahátt* was “used for wisdom and dialogue poetry,”<sup>26</sup> while Turville-Petre asserts that

[n]othing comparable to [*ljóðahátt*] is known from other Germanic poetry, and its origins are altogether obscure; it is the most irregular of Norse measures. [...] There are other peculiarities about the *Ljóðahátt*. For reasons which cannot be determined, the cadence  $\bar{\times}$  (trochee), favoured in many measures and obligatory in some, is nearly always avoided in the Full Line. [...] While there are numerous variants of the *Ljóðahátt*, it appears to be basically strophic. It is doubtful whether this can be said of other Eddaic poetry, at least in its earliest form.<sup>27</sup>

Beside other poems, *ljóðahátt* is one of the metres used in “Hávamál,” which can be seen as a representative of “wisdom poetry,” as Larrington refers to it; stanza no. 21 can be cited to demonstrate the structure of *ljóðahátt*:

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<sup>26</sup> Larrington xxix.

<sup>27</sup> Turville-Petre xv-xvi.

Hjarðir þat vitu, nær heim skulu,  
ok ganga þá af gradi;  
en ósviðr maðr kann ævagi  
síns of mál maga.<sup>28</sup>

Cattle know when they ought to go home,  
and then they leave the pasture;  
but the foolish man never figures  
the measure of his own stomach.<sup>29</sup>

*Galdralag* was the last of the metres used in eddic poetry. It appears to have been developed from *ljóðaháttur* in the way that a full line was repeated or paraphrased in another (following) line.<sup>30</sup> Its repetitive quality made it a suitable metre for passages concerned with spells and incantations (hence its name – “spell-measure”). Stanza no. 34 from “*Skírnismál*” is an example of the *galdralag* metre:

Heyri jotnar, heyri hrímþursar,  
synir Suttunga, sjalfir ásliðar,  
hvé fyrir byðk, hvé fyrir bannak  
manna glaum mani, manna nyt mani.<sup>31</sup>

‘Hear O giants, hear O frost-ogres,  
Suttung’s sons, the Æsir-band itself,  
how I forbid, how I deny  
pleasure in men to the girl, benefit from men to the girl.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>28</sup> *De gamle Eddadigte* 24.

<sup>29</sup> *The Poetic Edda* 16.

<sup>30</sup> Starý 40.

<sup>31</sup> *De gamle Eddadigte* 79.

<sup>32</sup> *The Poetic Edda* 63.

It should also be said that not all of eddic poetry was composed precisely in accordance with the rules of the individual metrical forms. In some cases, even a single strophe could be a combination of several types of metres, or the numbers of lines could differ from what is today perceived as the general rule of the metre. Therefore, it is not always an easy task to determine which of the metres is used in a particular poem.

### 3.3 The Metrical Structure of *Sigurd the Volsung*

At first glance, it would seem likely that Morris' work does not display signs of Old Norse influence regarding its metrical structure. Jane Susanna Ennis states that "Morris does not attempt to reproduce the rhythm or metre of Eddic verse in his poem, no doubt considering that he had done all that was necessary in that direction in his translations."<sup>33</sup> Indeed, it should again be stressed that the apparent lack of metrical influence from Old Norse poetry in *Sigurd the Volsung* does not point to Morris' lack of knowledge of Old Norse metrics. On the contrary, it can be said with certainty that he was closely acquainted with them, having himself translated a number of eddic poems. Moreover, he must have also been aware of the similarity between the Old Norse *fornyrðislag* and the form used in Old English poetry, as he had also translated *Beowulf*. According to J. W. Mackail,

[Morris'] translation of "Beowulf," a *tour de force* executed for a special object, keeps as closely as possible to the original metre of early English poetry, with its rigid metrical laws, and its mouldings (if a metaphor from architecture be allowed) axe-hewn, rather than undulating under the chisel.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Jane Susanna Ennis, *A Comparison of Richard Wagner's Der Ring des Nibelungen and William Morris's Sigurd the Volsung*, thesis (University of Leeds, 1993) 228.

<sup>34</sup> J. W. Mackail, *The Life of William Morris: Volume 1* (London, New York & Bombay: Longmans, Green and Co., 1901) 285.

Therefore, it would seem that it was a conscious choice for Morris not to make use of the Old Norse metres in his *Sigurd the Volsung*, despite his knowledge thereof and despite his previous experience with composing such poetry in his translations. One of the reasons for such a choice could be the author's intention to approach a wider audience by composing the poem in a form that would resemble poetry they were accustomed to reading (or hearing), instead of distancing himself from the audience by using the Old Norse form that very few were familiar with at that time. This would also correspond with Morris' belief that art should be accessible to everyone, which he summed up in the well-known quote, "I do not want art for a few, any more than the education for a few, or freedom for a few."<sup>35</sup> It however remains to be seen whether this signifies that there is no Old Norse influence whatsoever to be found in the structure of *Sigurd the Volsung*.

Generally speaking, the specific qualities of the metre that Morris uses appear to have been the source of much discussion among scholars. What can be said for certain is that the entire poem is written in rhyming couplets,<sup>36</sup> a pattern clearly distinguishable from the very beginning:

There was a dwelling of kings ere the world was waxen old;  
Dukes were the door-wards there, and the roofs were thatched with gold;  
Earls were the wrights that wrought it, and silver nailed its doors;  
Earls' wives were the weaving-women, queens' daughters strewed its floors,  
And the masters of its song-craft were the mightiest men that cast  
The sails of the storm of battle adown the bickering blast.  
There dwelt men merry-hearted, and in hope exceeding great

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<sup>35</sup> William Morris, *The Decorative Arts, Their Relation to Modern Life and Progress: An Address Delivered before the Trades' Guild of Learning* (London: Ellis and White, 1878) 30.

<sup>36</sup> Naturally, rhyming couplets can hardly be considered a feature characteristic of Old Norse poetry, which is typically unrhymed, as has been shown earlier.

Met the good days and the evil as they went the way of fate:  
 There the Gods were unforgotten, yea whiles they walked with men,  
 Though e'en in that world's beginning rose a murmur now and again  
 Of the midward time and the fading and the last of the latter days,  
 And the entering in of the terror, and the death of the People's Praise.<sup>37</sup>

In *The Story of Sigurd and its Sources*, Francis Hueffer expresses the opinion that

[t]his metre has been a sore puzzle to the critics of "Sigurd". It has been described as "anapæstic", "dactylic", "English ballad metre", and what not... Mr Morris's lines undoubtedly are [English hexameters] in a certain sense – in so far, namely, as they contain six high-toned or accentuated syllables. But a couplet like this, chosen at random –

*The shapen ancient token that hath no change nor end,  
 No change and no beginning, no flaw nor God to mend –*

distinctly shows that the fundamental scheme of the metre in "Sigurd" is neither dactylic nor anapæstic, but iambic [...].<sup>38</sup>

It is true that many lines of the poem do display iambic movement, including the example given by Hueffer, or lines such as "So strode he to the Branstock nor greeted any lord" (p. 6), or "We tell thee now, King Siggeir, that all will soon be done" (p. 24). Likewise, many of the lines appear to contain six stressed syllables. This, however, should not lead us to automatically label the scheme of the poem as iambic hexameter (i.e. the usual scheme of the alexandrine in English poetry), as there are irregularities to be found that do not allow such a simple definition. Of these, the most obvious is the varying number of syllables in each line of

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<sup>37</sup> William Morris, *The Story of Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs* (London: Ellis & White, 1877) 1-2. All future page references will be to this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text.

<sup>38</sup> Ennis 228.

the poem. While on average, each line consists of fourteen or fifteen syllables, some lines can be found that only contain thirteen (“Nought Sigurd seeth of Regin, and nought he heeds of him,” p. 138), and others where there are as many as nineteen syllables (“I arose, and I wondered and wended, and I smote, and I smote not in vain,” p. 142). This aspect is reminiscent of the eddic metrical forms: similarly to *fornyrðislag* and the other metres, there appears to be no fixed number of syllables per line in *Sigurd the Volsung*, and it seems a rhythmical pattern is ensured by means of stress.

Some critics have asserted that the metre Morris uses is inspired by the metre of the *Nibelungenlied*. As Hueffer writes,

[...] a comparison of the same couplet [“The shapen ancient token that hath no change nor end, / No change and no beginning, no flaw nor God to mend”] with the very first verse of the “*Nibelungenlied*” –

*Uns ist in alten maeren          wunder vil geseit –*

[...] proves that both metres are identical, or, in other words, that Mr. Morris has adopted the “Langzeile”, the long line of the old Germanic poem, with such modifications as the genius of the [English] language or his individual bias seemed to require.<sup>39</sup>

Similarly, Ennis claims that “[t]he metre used in *Sigurd the Volsung* is based on the metre of *Das Nibelungenlied*.”<sup>40</sup> This would connect the form of Morris’ poem with the Sigurd cycle in a different way than through the Old Norse “route”; moreover, the *Nibelungenlied* is also used as a source in other aspects of the poem. According to Marion Gibbs, “Morris uses some important details from the *Nibelungenlied* to support the material that is essentially derived

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<sup>39</sup> Ennis 228.

<sup>40</sup> Ennis 228.

from the *Volsunga saga*.”<sup>41</sup> However, neither Hueffer nor Ennis mention the fact that the structure of the German *Langzeile* is primarily based on alliteration and stress, much like in *fornyrðislag* and the other Old Norse metres, with which, as it has been mentioned, *Sigurd the Volsung* appears to share some characteristics. Apart from those already discussed, i.e. the irregular number of syllables in each line and rhythm being determined by stress, it should also be noted that the number of stressed syllables per line can be seen as relatively consistent – in most cases, there are six stresses in one line:

She said: “I am she that loveth: I was born of the earthly folk,

But of old Allfather took me from the Kings and their wedding yoke [...]” (p. 160)

Again, this can be seen as a feature reminiscent of Old Norse poetry: the number of stressed syllables per line in the eddic metres is mostly fixed as well.<sup>42</sup>

Another feature that marks a clear connection between *Sigurd the Volsung* and eddic poetry is the use of alliteration. The greatest similarity between its employment in Morris’ work and in the eddic poems is that in *Sigurd the Volsung*, the respective vowels and consonants often appear to alliterate with each other only within one line, such as in the following examples:

So stilleth the wind in the even and the sun sinks down in the sea,

And **m**en abide the **m**orrow and the Victory yet to be. (p. 85)

Then was Sigurd stirred by his glory, and he strove with the swaddling of Death;

He turned in the pit on the **h**ighway, and the **g**rave of the **G**littering **H**eath [...]

(p. 141)

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<sup>41</sup> Marion Gibbs, “Morris, William,” *The Nibelungen Tradition: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Francis G. Gentry, et al. (New York/London: Routledge, 2011) 273.

<sup>42</sup> Alternatively, the tendency to place six stressed syllables in each line could be associated with skaldic poetry: in the skaldic metre *dróttkvætt*, each half-line contained three stresses, i.e. there were six stresses in each long line.

This is similar to the principles of eddic metres, where alliteration was used to link two half-lines together, and so the vowels and consonants in each pair of half-lines interacted, forming a single long line; and in *ljóðahátttr*, alliteration in the full lines only occurred within a given full line, never reaching anywhere beyond nor stretching over several lines. Morris appears to have applied a similar rule in his work. Unlike in eddic lays, however, in *Sigurd the Volsung* alliteration is placed on both stressed and unstressed syllables; even though the stressed syllables appear to have been preferred, as they alliterate more frequently than those without stress:

Then Regin answered and said: “Thy kin of the Kings of yore  
Were the noblest men of men-folk; and their hearts would never rest  
Whatso of good they had gotten, if their hands held not the best.  
Now do thou after my counsel, and crave of thy fosterers here  
That thou choose of the horses of Gripir whichso thine heart holds dear.” (p. 88)

There is a certain amount of resemblance to be found between the strophic structure of Morris’ poem and that of eddic poetry as well, especially when the structure of the individual lines is examined. Regarding its form as a whole, *Sigurd the Volsung* does not consist of regular strophic units. Rather, the text is divided into units of unequal length, some of which may only be represented by a single line or two lines, while others can be over ten lines long. This way of composition, it seems, is mostly governed by the content, so that each unit may express a separate thematic element, such as the description of an event or a character’s speech. In this way, Morris’ work differs from most eddic forms.

However, the inner structure of the lines in *Sigurd the Volsung* bears a slight similarity to the eddic poems in that while Morris’ poem can hardly be divided into regular strophes or even “half-strophes,” it is possible to compare the individual lines of the poem to the long lines

found in Old Norse poetry. In *Sigurd the Volsung*, a caesura can be found in the middle of each line, so that the line can be divided in two halves, or “half-lines” of sorts:

So therein the maidens enter, | but Gudrun all out-goes,  
As over the leaves of the garden | shines the many-folded rose:  
Amidst and alone she standeth; | in the hall her arms shine white,  
And her hair falls down behind her | like a cloak of the sweet-breathed night,  
As she casts her cloak to the earth, | and the wind of the flowery tide  
Runs over her rippling raiment | and stirs the gold at her side.  
But she stands and may scarce move forward, | and a red flush lighteth her face  
As her eyes seek out Queen Brynhild | in the height of the golden place. (p. 173)

It should be added that these “half-lines” usually only express the full meaning when joined together in the complete, “long” line, which is a phenomenon that can be found in *málahátt* as well. The other aspects of the form that Morris uses in his work, which are discussed above, also seem to imply that of the four eddic metres, it is *fornyrðislag* that *Sigurd the Volsung* resembles the most. Another quality of the metre in *Sigurd the Volsung* that suggests the same is its loose, free-flowing character supported by a consistent rhythm, which conveys a stream-like sense of the narrative that both *fornyrðislag* and *málahátt* are known to have been used for. Moreover, the lack of a fixed number of syllables per line, the regular number of stresses per line, and the consistent use of alliteration seem to imply that the metrical structure *Sigurd the Volsung* is in fact inspired by the metrics of Old Norse poetry, and that the work could therefore be counted among examples of accentual, rather than accentual-syllabic, verse. The division of each line into what resembles the half-lines found in Old Norse poems also suggests that Hueffer’s point about Morris’ use of “the long line of the old

Germanic poem”<sup>43</sup> should not be wholly discarded. On the other hand, the properties of the poem that suggest its affiliation with accentual verse could also explain the confusion about the metrical pattern used in Morris’ work, while also showing that the discussion of and the search for a classical metrical pattern is probably futile.

Thus, returning to the original question as to whether *Sigurd the Volsung* displays traces of Old Norse influence, the answer seems to be positive. When the text is examined in detail, it can be seen that Morris makes use of multiple elements of Old Norse poetry, but that he does so in a relatively subtle manner and combines them with features that the late 19th century audience would be more familiar with, such as the use of rhyming couplets, possibly for the sake of better accessibility of the poem.

### **3.4 The Metrical Structure of The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún**

In the case of Tolkien’s work, there is nothing unclear about the author’s intention regarding the metrical form, as Tolkien himself stated his intention with the text. He did so in a postscript in his letter to W. H. Auden from 29 March 1967, which suggests that the creation of the two lays in *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún* was motivated especially by Tolkien’s interest in the metrics of Old Norse (more specifically, eddic) poetry:

Thank you for your wonderful effort in translating and reorganising *The Song of the Sibyl*. In return again I hope to send you, if I can lay my hands on it (I hope it isn’t lost), a thing I did many years ago when trying to learn the art of writing alliterative poetry: an attempt to unify the lays about the

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<sup>43</sup> Ennis 228.

Völsungs from the Elder Edda, written in the old eight-line fornyrðislag stanza.<sup>44</sup>

Furthermore, in an editorial note to the aforementioned letter, Humphrey Carpenter mentions another “letter to Auden dated 29 January 1968,” in which Tolkien described his work as “written in fornyrðislag 8-line stanzas in English: an attempt to organise the Edda material dealing with Sigurd and Gunnar.”<sup>45</sup> The fact that the *fornyrðislag* metre was connected with Old English poetry (as discussed on p. 20) and therefore with what Tolkien was concerned with as a scholar might partly explain his decision to use it in his work. However, a question arises whether the results of his attempt to compose poetry in *fornyrðislag* correspond with the eddic poems in *fornyrðislag*, and whether his view of the metre was completely accurate.

Much of Tolkien’s own thoughts on *fornyrðislag* can be found in Christopher Tolkien’s “Introduction” to *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún*:

There are three metres found in the Eddaic poems, *fornyrðislag*, *málahátt*, and *ljóðahátt* [...];<sup>46</sup> but here we need only consider the first [...]. The name *fornyrðislag* is believed to mean ‘Old Story Metre’ or ‘Old Lore Metre’ – a name which, my father observed, cannot have arisen until after later elaborations had been invented and made familiar; he favoured the view that the older name was *kviðuhátt*, meaning ‘the “manner” for poems named *kviða*’, since the old poems in *fornyrðislag*, when their names have

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<sup>44</sup> J.R.R. Tolkien, “Letter 295: To W.H. Auden,” *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006) 379. *The Song of the Sibyl* that Tolkien is referring to in the letter is the translation of “Völuspá” (“The Seeress’s Prophecy” in Larrington’s translation).

<sup>45</sup> Carpenter, “Notes” 452.

<sup>46</sup> Here Christopher Tolkien does not mention the fourth eddic metre (*galdralag*).

any metrical import, are usually called *~kviða*: hence his [Tolkien's] names *Völsungakviða* and *Guðrúnarkviða*.<sup>47</sup>

The ancient Germanic metre depended, in my father's words, on 'the utilization of the main factors of Germanic speech, *length* and *stress*';<sup>48</sup> and the same rhythmical structure as is found in Old English verse is found also in *fornyrðislag*. That structure was expounded by my father in a preface to the revised edition [...] of the translation of *Beowulf* by J.R. Clark-Hall [...].<sup>49</sup>

In another passage of the "Introduction," Tolkien's description of the structure of Old English poetry from the preface to the translation of *Beowulf* (mentioned above) is provided. In it, Tolkien first points out that "[t]he Old English line was composed of two opposed word-groups or 'halves'," i.e. half-lines (like those found in Old Norse poetry), and notes that "[e]ach half was an example, or variation, of one of six basic patterns."<sup>50</sup> He then moves on to describe the structure of these patterns, claiming that

[t]he patterns were made of *strong* and *weak* elements, which may be called 'lifts' and 'dips'. The standard lift was a *long stressed syllable*, (usually

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<sup>47</sup> Tolkien's view on the name of the metre can be seen as somewhat astonishing if the fact that a different metre with the name *kviðuhátt* existed is taken into account. *Kviðuhátt* was a metre used in skaldic poetry and its relation with *fornyrðislag* is the exact opposite than Tolkien assumed: as Turville-Petre writes, *kviðuhátt* "appears to have developed from the *Fornyrðislag* [...]." Turville-Petre xxxiii.

<sup>48</sup> Stressed syllables were indeed a central part of the structure of *fornyrðislag* (and similar forms in other Germanic literatures); by "length," Tolkien is probably referring to syllable length (see below in the text). Surprisingly, he makes no mention of alliteration, even though he uses it all throughout his two poems.

<sup>49</sup> Christopher Tolkien, "Introduction," J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún* (London: HarperCollins, 2010) 45.

<sup>50</sup> Tolkien, "Introduction" 46. The distinction of patterns regarding stress in half-lines in Germanic poetry was first introduced by the German philologist Eduard Sievers and is to this day known as Sievers' analysis. However, Sievers only recognised five patterns, unlike Tolkien, who divides the type D into two subtypes (see below in the text).

with a relatively high tone). The standard dip was an *unstressed* syllable, long or short, with a low tone.<sup>51</sup>

Here it should be determined what exactly is meant by syllable length, which also occurred in Old Norse poetry. Turville-Petre gives the following explanation with Old Norse examples:

Syllables may be grammatically long or short, sometimes called ‘slow’ and ‘quick’. A long syllable is one which contains a long vowel or a diphthong followed by one or more consonants, e.g. the first syllables of *skóku*, *skálmir*. A syllable is also long if it has a short vowel followed by a consonant group or by a double consonant, e.g. the first syllable in *festu*, and the syllable *full*. A syllable is short if it has a short vowel followed by a single consonant, e.g. the first syllables in *loða*, *koma*, *bera*. Syllables are also counted short if they contain a long vowel followed by another vowel without intervening consonant, e.g. the first syllables of *róa*, *búa*, *bláan*. Intervocalic *j* would be counted as a consonant, so that the first syllables in *æja*, *heyja* would be reckoned as long.<sup>52</sup>

In comparison, the usual view of the rules of syllable length in Old English poetry can be provided. According to D. P. O’Donnell, there were three types of long syllables in Old English verse: “long by nature,” “long by position,” and “‘long’ by resolution.”<sup>53</sup> O’Donnell explains that

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<sup>51</sup> Tolkien, “Introduction” 46. R.D. Fulk comments on the significance of syllable length in Old English metre: “Since before the time of Sievers the general assumption among metrists has been that the primarily phonological correlate of ictus [i.e. the “lifts” and “dips” that Tolkien mentions] in Old English verse is stress. Syllable length plays a contributory role, inasmuch as short full lifts are exceptional; but otherwise the pattern of lifts, half-lifts, and drops in Sievers’ five metrical types is determined solely on the basis of stress. [...] Now it appears that syllable length plays a greater role than previously imagined [...]” R.D. Fulk, *A History of Old English Meter* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992) 223.

<sup>52</sup> Turville-Petre xiv.

<sup>53</sup> Daniel Paul O’Donnell, “Old English Metre: A Brief Guide,” University of Lethbridge, May 2012 <<http://people.uleth.ca/~daniel.odonnell/Tutorials/old-english-metre-a-brief-guide>> 10 May 2018.

[s]yllables are long by nature when they contain a long vowel (marked with a macron in many textbooks and dictionaries). Stressed syllables that are long by nature (marked in **bold**) include: **wīc**, ‘habitation, dwelling’, **wēpan**, ‘to weep’, **hālig**, ‘holy’ [...] Syllables are long by position when they are followed by two or more consonants in the middle of a word or one or more consonants at the word boundary. Examples [...] include: **giestas**, ‘strangers’ (plural of *giest*), **eo**h, ‘horse’, **edg**, ‘edge’ [...] Resolution is a purely metrical phenomenon where by short stressed syllables are counted as long if they are followed by an unaccented syllable that is not necessary for the metre [...]. The following examples [...] are all long because they can be “resolved” using the following (unstressed) syllable (*italics*): **metudaes** maecti [...], **ōr** *āstelidæ* [...], **heben** til hrōfe [...] Resolution depends on the metrical context: some sub-types allow the [presence] of short stressed or unstressed syllables. The following example [...] does not show resolution: on camp**stede** [...] <sup>54</sup>

As can be observed, there is some similarity to be found between the general rules of syllable length in Old Norse and Old English metrics, especially regarding the position of long vowels and consonants or consonant groups in or immediately after long syllables. Therefore, it can be said that in this respect, Tolkien’s comparison of *fornyrðislag* with Old English verse seems to be justified to some extent.

Concerning stress, Tolkien provides an example in modern English for each of the six patterns, defining the patterns classified as A, B, C, D (with subtypes *a* and *b*), and E as “falling-falling,” “rising-rising,” “clashing,” “falling by stages” and “broken fall,” and “fall

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<sup>54</sup> O’Donnell, “Old English Metre.”

and rise,”<sup>55</sup> based on the positions of stress in each half-line. For instance, the “falling-falling” pattern (type A) is demonstrated in the half-line “knights in | armour” where the stressed syllables (underlined) indicate where the “lifts” are positioned. Their initial position with a subsequent “dip” (unstressed syllable) seems to justify the term for this pattern – according to Tolkien, the “high tone” of the lifts would be followed by the “low tone” of the dips, the result indeed being a “falling-falling” effect, both in terms of the amount of stress and in terms of cadence, which is presumably what is meant by the “high tone” and “low tone” in Tolkien’s description. He also adds that “A, B, C have equal feet, each containing a lift and dip. D and E have unequal feet: one consists of a single lift, the other has a subordinate stress [...] inserted.”<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, he asserts,

[t]he line was [...] essentially a *balance* of two equivalent blocks. These blocks might be, and usually were, of different pattern and rhythm. There was in consequence no common tune or rhythm shared by lines in virtue of being ‘in the same metre’. The ear should not listen for any such thing, but should attend to the shape and balance of the halves. Thus *the roaring sea rolling landward* is not metrical because it contains an ‘iambic’ or a ‘trochaic’ rhythm, but because it is a balance of B + A.<sup>57</sup>

In connection with the six patterns described above, Christopher Tolkien remarks that according to his father, “[t]hese patterns are found also in *fornyrðislag*, and can be readily identified in my father’s Norse lays.”<sup>58</sup> In other words, Tolkien seems to have connected the theory of the structure of the half-line in Old English poetry<sup>59</sup> with the similarity between Old English and Old Norse poetry, and thus he has applied the same theory to his own attempt at

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<sup>55</sup> Tolkien, “Introduction” 46.

<sup>56</sup> Tolkien, “Introduction” 46.

<sup>57</sup> Tolkien, “Introduction” 47.

<sup>58</sup> Tolkien, “Introduction” 48.

<sup>59</sup> That is to say, Tolkien’s theory that was based on Sievers’ analysis

composing poetry in an Old Norse metre. His primary intention with *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún* was, as he himself explained, “to unify the lays about the Völsungs from the Elder Edda.”<sup>60</sup> The work can be seen as an attempt to “fill” the missing part of the Codex Regius manuscript (see introductory chapter), with poems that would ideally resemble the form of the original lays in the *Poetic Edda* as much as possible. In this light, it would seem understandable that Tolkien – being sure about profound similarities between Norse and English poetry – applied his theories of the structure of *fornyrðislag* to his work in order to ensure what he was convinced would be the most faithful imitation of the eddic metre.

Obviously, the one major difference is that Tolkien wrote in modern English instead of Old Norse; at the same time, it is this fusion of the rules of Old Norse poetics with modern English that makes *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún* a unique and impressive work of literature, since, as Tolkien also admits in his account of the structure of Old English verse, “[t]hese are the normal patterns [...] into which Old English words naturally fell, and into which modern English words still fall.”<sup>61</sup> In this way, it would seem that Tolkien’s view of the affinity between Old Norse, Old English, and modern English had a strong impact on the final form of his two “eddic” lays. In other words, it is his view of the affiliation of modern English with the other Germanic languages that made it possible for him to complete such a work; in connection with this, his preference for words of Germanic origin in both poems, which might indicate the influence of Morris (who had used the same strategy),<sup>62</sup> can be considered self-explanatory, as the use of such words would ensure a more effective application of the Old Norse metrical rules.

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<sup>60</sup> Tolkien, *Letters* 379.

<sup>61</sup> Tolkien, “Introduction” 46-47.

<sup>62</sup> Examples from *Sigurd the Volsung* include words such as “carle,” “weal,” “dearth,” or the verb “wax”; in Tolkien’s work, words such as “shroud,” “rede,” “doughty,” or the verb “mete” can be found. This aspect of the works of Morris and Tolkien is discussed in greater detail in the chapter dealing with the style of the poems.

Christopher Tolkien also provides an example of his father's use of the "basic patterns" found in Old English and Old Norse poetry, using lines 2-6 of stanza 45 of "Guðrúnarkviða en nýja":

A        runes of healing  
D(a)    words well-graven  
B        on wood to read  
E        fast *bids* us fare  
C        to feast gladly<sup>63</sup>

Line 1 exemplifies the "falling-falling" pattern, with stress on the first and third syllable (underlined); in line 2, the first foot is stressed, while in the second foot, a subordinate stress (marked in italics) can be observed, the pattern therefore being D(a), "falling by stages." Line 3 represents an example of the "rising-rising" type, with two dips (the first and third syllable) and two lifts (the second and fourth syllable). In line 4, the "fall and rise" pattern can be found, with a primary stress followed by a secondary stress in the first foot, and a single lift in the second. Finally, the fifth line demonstrates the use of the "clashing" pattern, where in the first foot, a dip is followed by a lift, while in the second, a lift is found before a dip. What can also be noticed in the example given above is the word order, which is somewhat unusual and suggests that the natural word order (in which e.g. the fourth line would probably read "bids us fare fast" instead) had to be modified to fit the scheme, rather than "falling naturally" into it, as Tolkien suggested.<sup>64</sup>

To compare, an example from the *Poetic Edda* that Larrington uses in her definition of *fornyrðislag* (stanza 20 of the heroic lay "Helgakviða Hundingsbana II" – "A Second Poem of Helgi Hundingsbani") can be shown:

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<sup>63</sup> Tolkien, "Introduction" 48.

<sup>64</sup> Tolkien, "Introduction" 46-47.

<u>Hér</u> má <u>Hoð</u> broddr	<u>Helga</u> <u>kenna</u> ,
<u>fló</u> ttá <u>trauð</u> an,	í <u>fl</u> ota <u>mið</u> iom;
<u>hann</u> hefir <u>eð</u> li	<u>æ</u> ttar <u>þ</u> innar
<u>arf</u> <u>Fiö</u> rsunga,	<u>und</u> sic <u>þ</u> rungrit. <sup>65</sup>

‘Here Hodbrodd may recognize Helgi,  
the fighter who does not flee, in the midst of the fleet;  
the homeland of your kin,  
the Fiorsungs’ inheritance, he has conquered.’<sup>66</sup>

The stressed syllables (underlined) demonstrate a similarity with Tolkien’s verse: for instance, the first long line, or the half-line “ættar þinnar” are a clear example of the “falling-falling” type (pattern A), with stressed and unstressed syllables alternating in each half-line. The half-line “arf Fiörsunga” appears to reflect the D(a) type, with a lift in the first foot and another in the second, which is then followed by a secondary stress (italicised) and an unstressed syllable. Nevertheless, if Tolkien’s concept of the long line consisting of “a *balance* of two equivalent blocks [...] of different pattern and rhythm”<sup>67</sup> is to be taken into consideration, there does not seem to be much “balance” to speak of, as the majority of the “blocks” (i.e. half-lines) appear to be following the “falling-falling” pattern.

Therefore, it would appear that regarding the structure of the half-lines, Tolkien’s work differs from the eddic poems in the way that its scheme is assembled in what could be called a scholarly fashion, with lots of careful attention to detail. In comparison, eddic poetry gives a more “organic” impression, which is obviously also caused by the difference between the authors and factors such as the circumstances of the respective poems’ creation (the historical period, the language, the purpose of the poems, etc.). However, if the general metrical rules of

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<sup>65</sup> Larrington xxviii.

<sup>66</sup> *The Poetic Edda* 132.

<sup>67</sup> Tolkien, “Introduction” 47.

*fornyrðislag* are taken into consideration, it is not difficult to see that they are all respected in Tolkien's work, which can be demonstrated by stanza 18 from the "Upphaf" ("Beginning") section of "The Lay of the Völsungs":

Ever would Ódin  
on earth wander  
weighed with wisdom  
woe foreknowing,  
the Lord of lords  
and leaguered Gods,  
his seed sowing,  
sire of heroes.<sup>68</sup>

As can be seen, the strophe consists of eight half-lines (mostly with four syllables), linked in pairs by alliteration (bold); the Old Norse rule regarding alliteration between consonants versus vowels<sup>69</sup> also seems to be adhered to, which can be observed in the first line (*e* in "ever" alliterates with *ó* in "Ódin"). Each half-line carries two stresses (underlined); in each pair of half-lines (i.e. a long line), the first half-line contains two alliterating syllables, while the second half-line contains only one alliterating syllable which is placed on the first fully stressed syllable. In short, the cited example demonstrates firm adhesion to the general metrical principles of *fornyrðislag*. Tolkien also uses the metre in the same type of narrative poems that it was originally used for in the *Poetic Edda*.

However, his "exemplary" use of the metre may give off a nearly mechanical impression in places, as he is very consistent in writing precisely according to his rules and – unlike in eddic poetry – irregularities are rare in his work. Furthermore, despite Tolkien's claim that modern

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<sup>68</sup> J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (London: HarperCollins, 2010) 65. All future page references will be to this edition and will be included in parentheses in the text.

<sup>69</sup> See footnote on p. 21 in this chapter.

English is suited for the metrics of Old English and Old Norse poetry, the language appears somewhat strained and unnatural in places, especially in terms of word order. Therefore, while the author's objective to compose two poems in *fornyrðislag* can be considered fulfilled and carried out with remarkable precision, it cannot be said that the results of this endeavour are wholly faithful to the forms of the eddic poems they were meant to resemble. *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún* should therefore be seen primarily as a scholarly work: an outstanding study and exemplification of the metre of the eddic heroic lays.

## 4. Style

### 4.1 The Style of the Eddic Lays

#### 4.1.1 General Stylistic Characteristics of Eddic Poetry

Contrary to what might be assumed (e.g. in relation to the mythical and heroic themes it addresses), the overall style of eddic poetry certainly cannot be characterised as excessively ornate or convoluted. In the words of Carolyne Larrington, “the poetry is not difficult to understand: its language is neither obscure nor complex, but often strikingly simple and direct.”<sup>70</sup> While this also means that there is a fairly low word count per stanza, the poems can still be found to effectively express all that is needed to be said without any omissions, and the absence of any redundant words helps expose and emphasise the meaning, rather than concealing it or reducing its power. The result is what could perhaps be called a terse, economical, or “condensed” style. It can be illustrated by the following example from “Brot af Sigurðarkviðu” (“Fragment of a Poem about Sigurd”), which describes the events following the murder of Sigurd committed by Gudrun’s brothers Guthorm, Gunnar, and Hogni:

Dead was Sigurd on the south side of the Rhine,

a raven called out loudly from a tree:

‘Atli will redden his blades in your blood,

your oaths will destroy you, you warlike men.’

Outside stood Gudrun, daughter of Giuki,

and these were the first words that she said:

‘Where is Sigurd, lord of warriors,

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<sup>70</sup> Carolyne Larrington, “Introduction,” *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Carolyne Larrington (Oxford/New York: OUP, 2014) ix.

since my kinsmen now are riding ahead?’

Hogni alone gave her an answer:

‘Sigurd we’ve hacked into pieces with a sword,

still the grey horse droops his head over the dead prince.’<sup>71</sup>

This style may also be considered an advantage in the sense that the simplicity of the language used in the poems ensures their relative comprehensibility even for a modern reader.<sup>72</sup> It is therefore possible that the distinct style of eddic poetry played a significant role in its popularity among readers in later centuries in contrast to the more complex skaldic poetry. It may also have contributed to the abundance of the poems’ adaptations in modern literary works.

However, the economy of phrase that the eddic lays are characterised by also suggests that the authors must have found a different means of expressing their thoughts in satisfactory depth, as well as a means of avoiding frequent repetition of certain words or phrases. As will be shown, both types of Old Norse poetry, eddic and skaldic, indeed had a particular method of overcoming such issues: the use of two kinds of circumlocutory devices, known as heiti and kennings (see below). Having developed a remarkably broad poetic vocabulary, the Old Norse poets were able to utilise it with the help of these devices to add another dimension to their works, the style of the poems remaining simple without becoming plain or inexpressive. While the skalds are known for having used heiti and kennings in their poems with greater frequency and complexity than can be found in the eddic lays, the devices appear in both types of Old Norse poetry to such an extent that they are commonly regarded as one of its most typical features.

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<sup>71</sup> *The Poetic Edda* 169-170.

<sup>72</sup> Perhaps with the exception of certain stylistic devices typical of Old Norse poems (see below in the text), which a reader unacquainted with such poetry, or with the Old Norse culture in general, may find somewhat difficult to decipher.

#### 4.1.2 Heiti

In very simple terms, a heiti (literally “name” or “designation,” also known as *ókent heiti*) can be described as a one-word substitute for a particular noun. This substitute was typically a synonym or a near-synonym for the noun. Gary Holland describes heiti as “poetic vocabulary substitutions.”<sup>73</sup> According to Helena Kadečková, “heiti [...] are essentially one-word poeticisms and tropes, known from any poetry: an ordinary expression [...] is replaced by a poetic one.”<sup>74</sup>

Certain patterns, or basic principles, can be identified regarding the choice of such “vocabulary substitutions.” Holland points out that “metonymy is the principal source for *heiti*.”<sup>75</sup> He also provides a more elaborate explanation of the mechanism of heiti with several examples:

(*Ókennt*) *heiti* is the term used for those words for ordinary objects which are found in poetic usage. There are many hundreds of these terms, preserved in the poetic corpus [...], but a few examples will have to suffice. For ‘horse’, *hestr* or *hross* in prose usage, such *heiti* as *jór*, *blakkr*, *fákr*, are found, respectively ‘horse’, ‘dun-colored horse’, and ‘sturdy horse’. For ‘battle’, *örrustr* [sic!] in prose, we find among many other terms *róma*, *dynr*, *gnýr*, *morð*, *víg*, *dolg*, the first three *heiti* referring to the noise of the battle, the next two to the killing, and the final *heiti* to the hatred that engenders battle. For ‘ship’, *skip* in prose, *heiti* such as *kjölr* [sic!] ‘keel’

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<sup>73</sup> Gary Holland, “Kennings, metaphors, and semantic formulae in Old Norse *dróttkvætt*,” *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 118 (2005): 131.

<sup>74</sup> „[...] *heiti* [...] jsou v podstatě jednoslovné poetismy a tropy, jaké známe z jakéhokoli básnictví: běžný výraz [...] se nahradí výrazem básnickým.“ Helena Kadečková, *Dějiny severských literatur I. – Středověk* (Prague: Karolinum, 1993) 58-59. My translation.

<sup>75</sup> Holland 131.

and *rá* ‘yard-arm’ are used. For ‘fire’, *eldr* in prose, the archaic *fýrr* and *funi* are found. It is clear [...] that some of the *heiti* are simply archaic inherited words for the objects they designate (*jór*, *funi*), while others are metonyms (*gnýr*, *dynr*) or represent the results of synecdoche (*kjölr*, *rá*).<sup>76</sup>

Like Holland, Kadečková recognises several categories of words used as *heiti*, although her classification does not wholly correspond with Holland’s:

The following were used as *heiti*: 1) Archaisms, mostly of common Germanic origin [...] and loans from Irish and Latin. 2) Common nouns that acquired a broader or an altogether different meaning in poetry. For example, the word *brúðr* “bride” would denote a woman in general; for the sea, which obviously played a major role in Viking poetry, there was a nearly infinite number of periphrases, e.g. words referring to all aspects of the sea, such as wave, surf, bay, but also to any other water source, e.g. river, lake, etc., or to mythical beings associated with the sea, such as *Ægir*, the ruler of the sea [...]. Women and men could also be described with names of trees (connected with the myth of the creation of man from tree trunks). The multitude of synonymous names for the gods, especially *Odin*, can also be included in this category. 3) Poetic neologisms, mostly compound nouns.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Holland 132.

<sup>77</sup> „Jako *heiti* se užívaly: 1) *Archaismy* vesměs celogermánského původu [...] a výpůjčky z irštiny a latiny. 2) *Běžná apelativa*, která dostávají v básnictví širší nebo úplně jiný význam. Např. slovo *brúðr* = nevěsta označovalo ženu všeobecně; pro moře, které hrálo ve vikinské poezii samozřejmě veledůležitou úlohu, existovalo takřka nekonečné množství opisů, např. slova, označující všechny podoby moře, jako vlna, příboj, záliv, ale i jakýkoliv jiný vodní zdroj, např. řeka, jezero atd., anebo mýtické bytosti s mořem spojované, jako vládce moře *Ægi* [...]. Žena i muž se mj. opisovali názvy stromů (souvislost s mýtem o stvoření lidí z kmenů stromu). Do této kategorie můžeme zařadit také dlouhou řadu synonymických jmen bohů, zejména *Ódina*. 3) *Básnické novotvary*, většinou složená substantiva.“ Kadečková 59. My translation.

It can be inferred from the definitions and examples given above that the use of heiti allowed the eddic and skaldic poets to achieve a greater variety in their vocabulary (as discussed above), but also to give their work a specific meaning based on their choice of heiti, which would hardly be accomplished if the same was to be told only in neutral terms. As a result, the use of heiti could contribute to a work's greater impact on the audience. Furthermore, the application of heiti enabled the authors to compose poetry according to the complex Old Norse metrical rules more effectively. Holland asserts, “[i]t is universally recognized that the *heiti* are used for their metrical convenience in addition to the heightened or charged effect that they create on the lexical level,”<sup>78</sup> and Turville-Petre states that “[t]he choice of the *heiti* may be determined by the exigencies of alliteration, rhyme, or metre [...]”<sup>79</sup> It can therefore be said that the presence of stylistic devices such as heiti in Old Norse poetry is closely connected with the poems' metrical features (as discussed in chapter 3).

#### 4.1.3 Kennings

To quote Turville-Petre, the kenning (also known as *kent heiti*) was “an even more colourful feature”<sup>80</sup> than heiti were. In general, as Holland writes, “[h]eiti differ from kennings in that they consist of only one element.”<sup>81</sup> In other words, kennings were always composed of at least two elements, or nouns. Of these, one was the basic word (*stofnorð*); this word, which could itself be a heiti, was closer defined by the second element, the determinant (*kenniorð*). The verb *kenna* was used to designate the determinant's task, hence the term “kenning.”

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<sup>78</sup> Holland 132.

<sup>79</sup> Turville-Petre xlii.

<sup>80</sup> Turville-Petre xlv.

<sup>81</sup> Holland 132.

Kennings can be categorised into several groups; Kadečková identifies three kenning types.<sup>82</sup> According to her, the first type included cases where a proper noun was determined by an expression of kinship or ownership between two individuals. This technique was often used when referring to the Norse deities. For instance, Odin could be described as “Baldr’s father,” and Thor as “Sif’s husband,” based on their relationships with other gods or goddesses.<sup>83</sup> A second group of kennings was represented by cases where the basic word was an agent noun, and the person in question was defined by an activity typical for them. An example of this type would be the kenning for a warrior, “destroyer of shields,” or another for a prince, “breaker of rings.” The third type comprised kennings based on metaphors. In this case, the basic word either retained its usual meaning and the new, metaphorical meaning was only conveyed by the kenning as a whole, or the basic word became a metaphor of its own. Thus, blood could be called “sword-liquid,” with no metaphorical shift in the basic word, or “sword-sweat,” where there is a metaphorical transition in the basic word: “liquid” becomes “sweat” based on the resemblance between the two.

As it has been mentioned, kennings were generally composed of at least two elements, but there are also numerous instances of kennings made up of more than two words. Such kennings were described and arranged into separate categories by Snorri in the *Prose Edda*. According to him, if a kenning was made up of only two components (e.g. *fleinbrak* “spear-clash,” a kenning for the word “battle”), it was simply called a *kenning*. If a kenning contained a double determination (e.g. *fleinbraks fúrr* “fire of the spear-clash,” a kenning for a sword) it was called *tvíkennt* (meaning “twice determined”), and if there were more elements still in the kenning, it was called *rekit* (lit. “driven;” usually known as “extended” in

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<sup>82</sup> Kadečková 59-60.

<sup>83</sup> Turville-Petre notes that “[s]ome of the kennings [...] require a rudimentary knowledge of legend or myth, but they might be used in poetry or prose of any kind. (Similarly, we may call Christ ‘Son of God’, or even the King of England ‘Duke of Cornwall’.) It is characteristic of such expressions that one aspect of the person is emphasized. Magnús the Good was not only ‘prince of Jutes’; he was also king of Norway.” Turville-Petre xlvi.

English).<sup>84</sup> Turville-Petre points out that “[i]n the commentary to the *Háttatal* [...] poets are told that they should not use kennings of more than five elements, although it is admitted that ancient poets did.”<sup>85</sup> Indeed, the extended kennings found in Old Norse poetry could comprise up to seven elements, although it should be noted that such examples are relatively rare.

In this respect, a contrast should also be drawn between the kennings used in eddic poetry and those used by the skalds. The fact that most examples of extended kennings are found in skaldic poetry, while eddic poems mostly contain only two-word kennings,<sup>86</sup> suggests that there is indeed a difference to be found in the treatment of kennings by eddic and skaldic poets. Larrington writes:

The kind of elaborate phrasing typical of skaldic diction, whereby the term (known as a kenning) ‘battle-fish in the hawk’s perch’ means ‘sword in the hand’, is normally eschewed in eddic verse. In the heroic poetry a warrior may be denoted as ‘powerful apple-tree of strife’, but such periphrases are relatively easy to decode. Eddic poetry depends for its effect rather upon stress and alliteration.<sup>87</sup>

Again, it appears that the general characteristics of each of the two types of Old Norse poetry are reflected here. As in other aspects, skaldic poetry also displays greater intricacy and complexity regarding its use of kennings, undoubtedly owing to the skalds’ artistic perception of poetry. Thus, in skaldic poems we may find kennings such as “the flames of the landing place of the falcon” (“battle”)<sup>88</sup> or “the acorn of the life-cliff” (“heart”).<sup>89</sup> In comparison, the

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<sup>84</sup> Finnur Jónsson, ed. *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar* (Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel, Nordisk Forlag 1931) 215.

<sup>85</sup> Turville-Petre xlvi.

<sup>86</sup> Kristýna Králová and Magda Králová, eds. *Nesmrtelní vikingové: staroseverské motivy v novodobé literatuře* (Prague: Herrmann & synové, 2017) 13.

<sup>87</sup> Larrington xxviii.

<sup>88</sup> Rory McTurk, ed. “Anonymous Poems, *Krákumál 7*,” *Poetry in fornaldarsögur: Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 8*, ed. Margaret Clunies Ross (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017) 730.

kennings in eddic poetry appear relatively simple, which corresponds with the overall style of the poems. Examples of eddic kennings include “the hawk-bearer’s friend” (“warrior”)<sup>90</sup> or “necklace-tree” (“woman”).<sup>91</sup>

It should be mentioned that other qualities of eddic poetry are also considered less complex than those of skaldic poems, such as the case of metrical forms, of which skaldic poetry has the greater share, as well as having the upper hand in terms of the complexity of metrical rules. As it has been shown (see chapter 3), such contrasts can be explained by the difference in the purpose of each type of poetry, with eddic poetry having the role of “cultural texts” as opined by Jan Assmann. Therefore, similarly to other qualities of eddic poetry that differ from what is found in skaldic poetry, perhaps the simplicity of “eddic kennings” can also be ascribed to the poems’ primary purpose of preserving cultural identity, rather than achieving artistic excellence.

#### **4.2 The Style of *Sigurd the Volsung***

From the very start of the poem, it is quite clear that it was not Morris’ intention to emulate the terse style of eddic poetry; in fact, Morris’ work may appear excessively wordy in comparison with the eddic lays. Nevertheless, for the most part, the poem still retains a strong sense of rhythm and even a certain dynamic pace which weaves through the lines, keeping the narrative moving forward. Apart from the metrical structure (addressed in chapter 3), one of the factors contributing to this dynamic quality of *Sigurd the Volsung* is undoubtedly the use

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<sup>89</sup> Kari Ellen Gade, ed. “Rognvaldr jarl and Hallr Þórarinnsson, *Háttalykill* 30,” *Poetry from Treatises on Poetics: Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 3*, ed. Kari Ellen Gade and Edith Marold (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017) 1039.

<sup>90</sup> *The Poetic Edda* 200.

<sup>91</sup> *The Poetic Edda* 183.

of end rhyme,<sup>92</sup> which supports the rhythm in the poem and brings order to the lines that might otherwise seem disorderly and cluttered. Thus, even though the overall style of the poem differs from the eddic style, in the end an impact is still achieved, although by different means than what is usually found in eddic poetry. To demonstrate the difference between the terse eddic style and Morris' elaborate verse, two strophes can be cited from "Grípisspá" ("Gripir's Prophecy"), which recounts the young Sigurd's dialogue with his uncle Gripir about Sigurd's fate. In these particular strophes, Sigurd asks about his future deeds that will earn him renown, and Gripir gives a prophetic reply that can be seen as remarkably brief, considering the significance of his words:

‘Tell me, shining king, kinsman  
so wise, as we speak thoughtfully:  
do you see Sigurd's mighty deeds ahead  
the highest under heaven's corners?’  
  
‘You alone will kill the shining serpent,  
the greedy one who lies on Gnita-heath;  
you will be the killer of both Regin and Fafnir;  
Gripir tells what is true.’<sup>93</sup>

In comparison, Morris describes the same scene in the following lines:

Then great in the hall fair-pillared the voice of Gripir arose,  
And it ran through the glimmering house-ways, and forth to the sunny close;  
There mid the birds' rejoicing went the voice of an o'er-wise King

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<sup>92</sup> As well as (sporadically) eye rhyme in lines such as: "And now would I foster Sigurd; for, though he be none of thy blood, / Mine heart of his days that shall be speaketh abundant good" (p. 86), or "So they leap to the saddles aloft, and they ride and speak no word, / But the hills and the dales are awakened by the clink of the sheathèd sword" (p. 237).

<sup>93</sup> *The Poetic Edda* 140.

Like a wind of midmost winter come back to talk with spring.

But the voice cried: “Sigurd, Sigurd! O great, O early born!

O hope of the Kings first fashioned! O blossom of the morn!

Short day and long remembrance, fair summer of the North!

One day shall the worn world wonder how first thou wentest forth!

“Arise, O Sigurd, Sigurd! In the night arise and go,

Thou shalt smite when the day-dawn glimmers through the folds of God-home’s foe:

“There the child in the noon-tide smiteth; the young King rendeth apart,

The old guile by the guile encompassed, the heart made wise by the heart. [...]”

(p. 125-126)

The lines cited above clearly demonstrate Morris’ elaborate, ornate diction, which stands out significantly in comparison with the style of the eddic poems; it can also be seen how both of the excerpts display a dynamic pace of their own. The strophes from “Gripir’s Prophecy” are curt and their uncomplicated phrasing contributes to a particularly striking impact the lines have on the reader. The result is a brisk and resolute tempo that moves the story forward and helps the dialogue between the two characters appear less drawn out and more captivating. Morris does not describe Gripir’s foretelling as a dialogue between him and Sigurd, where Sigurd asks Gripir questions about his fate and Gripir answers them (as seen in the eddic poem), but rather as Gripir’s monologue, while Sigurd is standing, “lean[ing] on the hidden Wrath<sup>94</sup>” (p. 125) and listening to him. In this sense, Morris’ rendition may appear to have a somewhat monotonous and “inflated” quality to it, since it lacks the dynamics provided by the means of conversation between two characters. On the other hand, as can be seen in the cited passage, there is still a sense of rhythm pervading the lines: the end rhyme links the lines

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<sup>94</sup> In *Sigurd the Volsung*, Sigurd’s sword is named Wrath.

together and creates an impact that might otherwise be lost amid the convoluted phrases, and the pace is kept up by the means of the regularity of stresses in each line as well.

Generally speaking, the language of *Sigurd the Volsung* may have been inspired by skaldic, rather than eddic, poetry due to its elaborateness of phrase, which can be said to have an almost decorative or illustrative effect. Morris' diction helps him create a particular type of imagery and thus evoke a particular atmosphere, as can be shown in the second stanza of the poem, which describes the hall of Volsung, "the King of the Midworld's Mark" (p. 2) and Sigurd's grandfather:

Thus was the dwelling of Volsung, the King of the Midworld's Mark,  
As a rose in the winter season, a candle in the dark;  
And as in all other matters 'twas all earthly houses' crown,  
And the least of its wall-hung shields was a battle-world's renown,  
So therein withal was a marvel and a glorious thing to see,  
For amidst of its midmost hall-floor sprang up a mighty tree,  
That reared its blessings roofward, and wreathed the roof-tree dear  
With the glory of the summer and the garland of the year.  
I know not how they called it ere Volsung changed his life,  
But his dawning of fair promise, and his noontide of the strife,  
His eve of the battle-reaping and the garnering of his fame,  
Have bred us many a story and named us many a name;  
And when men tell of Volsung, they call that war-duke's tree,  
That crownèd stem, the Branstock; and so was it told unto me. (p. 2)

It can be observed how the cited passage manages to capture a specific ambience of the place it depicts by describing not only the hall itself, but also by placing it in a particular timeline

and connecting it with various characters and events. By doing so, Morris gives Volsung's dwelling a history, and presents it as a place full of memory; this can also be seen in the way he works with words or phrases pertaining to past events or time in general. The reader is told there are "wall-hung shields" to be found in the hall, which represent memories of great deeds on the battlefield in the past; the Branstock is described as a "mighty tree," which implies it has been growing there for countless years. The line that mentions "the glory of the summer and the garland of the year" again amplifies the same sense of time: both the time that has already passed, and the time that is passing, summer by summer and year by year, as the tree goes on growing. The lines that address the life of King Volsung also provide the place with a temporal dimension. Again, they do so by describing his life metaphorically, referring to events that signify the passing of time: "dawning of fair promise," "noontide of the strife," "eve of the battle-reaping," and even "the garnering of his fame" – all of these are used to depict Volsung's life as the events of one day. Finally, the line that follows claims that these events "[h]ave bred us many a story and named us many a name," which once again places emphasis on the long span of years which Volsung's hall is associated with. By adding a temporal dimension to the space he describes, Morris lets the image of Volsung's hall "come to life," so to speak; the time-related imagery helps the whole scene become remarkably vivid and multifaceted. As a result, it could be said that the verse resembles an artwork, an illustration of the scene, which is gradually revealed and perfected with each line.

Futhermore, all of the time-related terms Morris uses can be considered a means by which he creates a sense of a time long gone; the fact that his description with such an effect is included in the beginning of the poem implies that this is a desired effect, and that it was Morris' intention to evoke the atmosphere of a distant past in which the story would take place. This could be seen as his view of the Old Norse heroic past, i.e. that he perceived the "Old Norse spirit" as something distant and ancient, and therefore it could be said that his ultimate goal in

*Sigurd the Volsung* was not to make the story appear lifelike or to create the impression that the story is taking place in the present time. Neither does it seem to have been his objective to draw the audience into the narrative to the point of the story seemingly becoming a “firsthand experience” for them. Rather, Morris makes a point of presenting the narrative in a way that the opposite effect is achieved, i.e. he strives to give the work the appearance of an ancient tale being recounted in the present time; in a sense, he is travelling back to the past and narrating the story with vivid imagery, yet some distance from the events and characters themselves is always maintained. Therefore, it would perhaps be more accurate to claim that although *Sigurd the Volsung* is set in the heroic past, it is narrated with the “present era” (i.e. the 1870s) in mind; the author is aware of his actual surroundings and his actual audience, and he is telling the tale by looking back on the past and presenting a stylised, transformed image of it that corresponds with the trends and the expectations of the audience of his own time. In other words, *Sigurd the Volsung* is without doubt an attempt to revive the “Old Norse spirit,” yet that spirit is brought to life by the means of retrospection in general and archaization in particular, as will be shown.

Despite the overall contrast between the style of eddic poetry and that of *Sigurd the Volsung*, there are similarities to be found between the texts as well; the fact that Morris makes use of kennings in his work can be counted among them. Some of the kennings that he uses are fairly simple, such as “swan-bath” or “swan-mead,” meaning the sea, or “blood-reeds” and “saw of battle,” both of which refer to swords; others are more elaborate, such as “the sails of the storm of battle,” i.e. shields, or “the fair-stained sea-beast’s tooth,” which, as Ennis explains, signifies “ivory stained with red” and was “sometimes used to describe a woman’s complexion when she blushes [...]”<sup>95</sup> The kennings Morris uses are for the most part not of his own making; rather, they appear to be taken from other works of Old Norse literature: for

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<sup>95</sup> Ennis 404.

instance, “the flame of the sea,” a kenning for gold that appears in *Sigurd the Volsung*, can also be found in many skaldic poems.

Unlike kennings, heiti do not seem to appear in Morris’ work. Again, if his goal to make the poem accessible to a wider audience is taken into consideration, it is understandable, as the use of this device would make the text difficult to read and to decipher. Instead, Morris uses a specific method of evoking the “Old Norse spirit” in the poem: wherever it is possible, he uses words of Germanic origin, which includes archaisms that were not in use anymore at the time *Sigurd the Volsung* was published. Thus, lines such as “So they make the yoke-beasts ready, and dight the wains for the way” (p. 172), or “But nought will the Niblungs tarry; swift through Atli’s weal they wend” (p. 352) may appear in the text.

Morris made use of the same technique in his other works, including his translations of Old Norse texts, in which the use of archaisms is admittedly even more prominent than in *Sigurd the Volsung*. This aspect of his works became subject to much criticism. One of the earliest critics of Morris’ archaising style was the historian Archibald Ballantyne, who published an article in *Longman’s Magazine* in 1888 titled “Wardour Street English.”<sup>96</sup> In it, Ballantyne likened Morris’ style to the Wardour Street wares, labelling it as “a perfectly modern article with a sham appearance of the real antique about it.”<sup>97</sup> J. N. Swannell comments on the issue:

What people really mean, I think, when they complain of William Morris’ archaic English, is the language of the later prose romances [...]. Here we do find a special language, a vocabulary and syntax peculiar to Morris. [...] And how did he acquire this highly individual prose style? There is no doubt at all: it is the language of Morris and Magnússon’s translations from Old Norse. We find it, fully grown, in the first translation, *The Story of*

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<sup>96</sup> Wardour Street is a street in London which in the 19th century was known for its antique shops, including those that sold imitations.

<sup>97</sup> Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator’s Invisibility: A History of Translation* (London: Routledge, 2008).

*Gunnlaug*, and in all the sagas which followed. We do not find it in *Aslaug* or in *Gudrun*, or even in *Sigurd the Volsung*; in these poems we have only what I have called the usual, conventional archaisms: betide, brand, clave, dight, eld, erewhile, eyen, weal, whiles, wot, and the like; but in the saga translations we are at once confronted by curious words and turns of phrase, almost all of them disguised Norse words and idioms, which we find elsewhere only in the later prose romances.<sup>98</sup>

Thus, according to Swannell, the archaising style found in Morris' words may stem from his interest in the Old Norse culture, and therefore it can perhaps be considered another means by which Morris attempted to recreate the "Old Norse spirit." Despite the fact that the archaisms in *Sigurd the Volsung* are, as Swannell calls them, "conventional," they work in the same way in that they evoke the same sense of ancient times being recalled. In other words, it could be said that the archaisms function as relics and reminders of the Germanic heroic past. In this way, Morris' use of archaisms could be compared to the use of heiti in Old Norse poetry: specifically, to the type of heiti that encompassed archaic expressions, which were also of common Germanic origin. Thus it can be concluded that Morris does in fact use a particular type of heiti in his work, while making sure his heiti are accessible to the public of the Victorian era in the way that while the "heiti" (or archaisms) may be difficult to understand, the audience are still capable of comprehending the effect they create.

Morris' use of kennings and heiti, as well as his specific diction in general, can be considered a means of achieving certain continuity and a connection with the eddic lays. At the same time, however, this technique could also be seen as a means of archaization, as those features are ascribed an archaic quality in the poem. They function as representatives of the "Old Norse past," whereas in the original Old Norse texts they were not archaic by themselves,

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<sup>98</sup> J.N. Swannell, *William Morris and Old Norse Literature* (London: William Morris Society, 1961) 17.

perhaps with the exception of the archaic type of heiti. Therefore, it would seem that like in the case of the metrical properties of the poem, Morris also utilizes some of the stylistic elements of Old Norse poetry and combines them with aspects more familiar to the audience of his time, so that the overall result is the retelling of an ancient Old Norse tale that manages to evoke the atmosphere of the distant heroic past, although it is being recounted in stylised terms by a late 19th-century writer.

### **4.3 The Style of *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún***

As has been shown, there is a clear connection to be found between the heroic lays of the *Poetic Edda* and Tolkien's work as to the metre, and the metrical form of *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún* has much to do with Tolkien's own theories on the subject of Old Norse metrics and their similarity with Old English prosody. Therefore, it would seem fitting to quote from Tolkien's own lecture on the *Poetic Edda* in order to investigate whether the style of his work is also based upon his own views of the eddic style:

There remains [...] the impact of the first hearing of [eddic poetry] after the preliminary struggle with Old Norse is over and one first reads an Eddaic poem getting enough of the sense to go on with. Few who have been through this process can have missed the sudden recognition that they had unawares met something of tremendous force, something that in parts [...] is still endowed with an almost demonic energy, in spite of the ruin of its form. The feeling of this impact is one of the greatest gifts that reading of the Elder Edda gives.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> J.R.R. Tolkien, "Introduction to the 'Elder Edda,'" J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún* (London: HarperCollins, 2010) 17.

Tolkien therefore also appears to have perceived the particular striking effect much of eddic poetry possesses. He addresses this directly in the lecture by comparing this property of Old Norse poetry to that of Old English: “Old English verse has an attraction in places that is immediate. But Old English verse does not attempt to hit you in the eye. To hit you in the eye was the deliberate intention of the Norse poet.”<sup>100</sup> Likewise, Christopher Tolkien quotes another of his father’s lectures where the same topic is discussed:

[M]y father wrote of it: ‘In Old English breadth, fullness, reflection, elegiac effect, were aimed at. Old Norse aims at seizing a situation, striking a blow that will be remembered, illuminating a moment with a flash of lightning – and tends to concision, weighty packing of the language in sense and form, and gradually to greater regularity of form of verse.’

[...] In my father’s Lays the strophic form is entirely regular, and the half-line tends to brevity and limitation of syllables.<sup>101</sup>

From the above, it can be observed that Tolkien was not only well aware of the economical style of eddic poetry, but that it was also his intention to use the same style in his own work. This would again correspond with his primary objective to create poems that would resemble those in the *Poetic Edda*, and it seems that he did not only consider it important to implement the Old Norse metrical rules in his work, but also the style. In other words, it is likely that he saw the metrics and the style of the eddic poems as inherently connected, which is logical, given the fairly strict rules of the eddic metres regarding numbers of syllables and stresses per line – the style is essentially dictated by the form. Thus, if the two lays in *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún* are to be analysed regarding their style, it can be said that the qualities of Old Norse verse given above are easily recognisable all throughout the two poems that

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<sup>100</sup> Tolkien, “Introduction to the ‘Elder Edda’” 17-18.

<sup>101</sup> Tolkien, “Introduction” 48-49.

Tolkien wrote; as an example, the stanzas that record the prophetic words of the dying Sigmund to his wife Sigrlinn can be used:

‘From wanhope many  
have been won to life,  
yet healing I ask not.

Hope is needless.

Ódin calls me  
at the end of days.

Here lies not lost  
the last Völsung!

Thy womb shall wax  
with the World’s chosen,  
serpent-slayer,  
seed of Ódin.

Till ages end  
all shall name him  
chief of chieftains,  
changeless glory.

Of Grímnir’s gift<sup>102</sup>  
guard the fragments;  
of the shards shall be shaped  
a shining blade.

Too soon shall I see

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<sup>102</sup> Grímnir is one of Odin’s names; Sigmund is referring to his sword which was a gift from Odin.

Sigurd bear it  
to glad Valhöll  
greeting Ódin.’ (p. 95-96)

In the cited passage, the “concision” and “weighty packing of language in sense and form” that Tolkien himself attributed to Old Norse poetry is especially reflected in the fact that a speech such as Sigmund’s is here told in three succinct stanzas that sum up everything that must be said in a masterful way. In the first cited strophe, Sigmund tells Sigrlinn that he is mortally wounded and dying; the half-line “Hope is needless” is especially impactful here, as it discards any chances of a positive outcome of the situation in a merciless manner. In other words, as Tolkien himself said, upon reading this line we are “hit in the eye” by its relentless simplicity. However, the sense of hopelessness it evokes is soon subverted by the last two half-lines: “Here lies not lost | the last Völsung!” These lines already predict what will be mentioned next: Sigmund’s successor. Thus, the other two stanzas are prophetic; in them, Sigmund predicts the birth, the famous deeds, and the death of Sigurd, all in the span of sixteen lines.

To compare, an excerpt from Morris’ version of Sigmund’s pre-death speech can be shown. The speech is presented as an answer to Sigmund’s wife, and in its entirety it is recounted in 33 lines.

She said: “Thou livest, thou livest! the leeches shall heal thee still.”

“Nay,” said he, “my heart hath hearkened to Odin’s bidding and will; [...]

And now do I live but to tell thee of the days that are yet to come:

And perchance to solace thy sorrow; and then will I get me home

To my kin that are gone before me. Lo, yonder where I stood

The shards of a glaive of battle that was once the best of the good:

Take them and keep them surely. I have lived no empty days;  
The Norns were my nursing mothers; I have won the people's praise. [...]  
Now these shards have been my fellow in the work the Gods would have,  
But today hath Odin taken the gift that once he gave.  
I have wrought for the Volsungs truly, and yet have I known full well  
That a better one than I am shall bear the tale to tell:  
And for him shall these shards be smithied; and he shall be my son  
To remember what I have forgotten and to do what I left undone. [...]" (p. 70)

It is quite clear that both adaptations have used the same source for the depiction of this scene, namely *The Saga of the Volsungs*. In the saga, the scene is described as follows:

That night, after the battle, Hjordis went out among the slain and came to where King Sigmund lay. She asked if he could be healed. He, however, answered: "Many a man lives where there is little hope, but my luck has forsaken me, so that I do not want to let myself be healed. Odin does not want me to wield the sword since it is now broken. I have fought battles while it pleased him." She answered: "I would lack nothing, if you were healed and took revenge for my father."

The king said: "That is intended for another. You are carrying a son. Raise him well and carefully, for he will be an excellent boy, the foremost of our line. Guard well the broken pieces of the sword. From them can be made a good sword, which will be called Gram. Our son will bear it and with it accomplish many great deeds, which will never be forgotten. And his name

will endure while the world remains. But my wounds tire me and I will now  
visit our kinsmen who have gone on before.”<sup>103</sup>

The cited passage displays the typical style of the Old Norse sagas (including *The Saga of the Volsungs*), which is characterised by its dry, objective, and emotionless tone. This characteristic trait, which can be found in much of Old Norse prose, can be seen as being echoed to some extent in Tolkien’s poetic rendition of the tale, with its simple, striking style that has a similar impact on the reader. In any case, there is certainly more resemblance between the scene as it is described in the saga and in Tolkien’s work than there is between the saga and *Sigurd the Volsung*. This again proves that Tolkien is aiming for the “Old Norse authenticity” of the whole work, whereas Morris’ aim lies elsewhere, as seen above.

Nevertheless, Tolkien also makes extensive use of words of Germanic origin, much like Morris does. In Tolkien’s case, this is made possible primarily thanks to the form of the poems, which was obviously tailored specifically for Germanic languages. Thus, the use of such words in Tolkien’s work should not be viewed only as a stylistic choice, but rather as something of a necessity if the form is to be adhered to. Another difference between the two authors is that unlike Morris, Tolkien does not make such frequent use of archaisms. Again, his language can be compared to that of the eddic lays in terms of its relative simplicity. Therefore, although there are archaisms to be found throughout the work, they do not function in any obstructive manner, and the sense of the text remains fairly easy to grasp. The following strophe from *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún* could be considered a typical example regarding Tolkien’s use of archaisms and words of Germanic origin:

The fire flickered;  
flame wavered,

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<sup>103</sup> *The Saga of the Volsungs*, trans. Jesse L. Byock (London: Penguin Books, 1999) 53-54.

sank to silence  
slaked and fading.  
Swart lay the shadow  
of Sigurd riding  
in helm of terror  
high and looming. (p. 149)

Again, it would seem that Tolkien was more interested in creating the same impact that eddic verse has, rather than expanding his text with the help of complex and ornate phrases. What can be considered quite striking in relation to his attempt at authenticity, then, is that his work does not display frequent use of heiti or kennings by any means. In this respect, too, the language is kept simple and unadorned. One possible explanation is that it was precisely this simplicity of language that Tolkien was aiming for in his work. In other words, it could be concluded that it was this aspect of striking simplicity that he wished to highlight as an authentic Old Norse feature in his own poems, so that the effect of “being hit in the eye” like he observed in eddic poetry would be achieved in his work as well.

## 5. The Narrator

### 5.1 The Narrator in Eddic Poetry

Although the poems found in the *Poetic Edda* do feature narrators, they are most often covert narrators and do not appear in the poems conspicuously. There are however examples of overt narrators in eddic poetry as well; in this case, the narrator usually recounts his or her memories in the poem. Possibly the best known eddic narrator is the seeress in “Völuspá” (“The Seeress’ Prophecy”), who recites the whole poem and at the bidding of Odin speaks about the past and the future of both mankind and the gods. She is therefore the first-person speaker in the poem:

I remember giants born early in time  
those nurtured me long ago;  
I remember nine worlds, I remember nine giant women,  
the mighty Measuring-Tree below the earth.<sup>104</sup>

Another well-known example of a prominent narrator appears in “Hávamál,” where Odin himself narrates parts of the poem:

I know that I hung on a windswept tree  
nine long nights,  
wounded with a spear, dedicated to Odin,  
myself to myself,  
on that tree of which no man knows  
from where its roots run.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> *The Poetic Edda* 4.

<sup>105</sup> *The Poetic Edda* 32.

One more example of an overt narrator from eddic poetry can be given, which, unlike the previous two, is found among the heroic poems rather than the mythological ones. In “Guðrúnarkviða II” (“The Second Poem of Gudrun”), it is Gudrun herself who narrates the poem, grieving over the misfortunes of her past life:

I was a girl of girls – my mother brought me up  
– radiant in the women’s quarters;  
I loved my brothers greatly, until Giuki endowed me with gold,  
endowed me with gold and gave me to Sigurd.<sup>106</sup>

It should also be noted that many of the heroic poems with covert narrators display a sense of detachment from the story on the narrator’s part. This is usually in order to emphasise that the events recounted in those poems came to pass long ago, and it is often featured in the respective poems’ initial lines. Examples from such poems include lines such as “It was long ago that Gudrun intended to die, | when she sat sorrowful over Sigurd”<sup>107</sup> (from “Guðrúnarkviða I,” “The First Poem of Gudrun”), “Long ago it was that Sigurd visited Giuki”<sup>108</sup> (from “Sigurðarkviða in skamma,” “A Short Poem about Sigurd”), or “I heard said in ancient tales, | how a girl came to Mornaland”<sup>109</sup> (from “Oddrúnargrátr,” “Oddrun’s Lament”). All of these are used to make the audience aware of the distance in time between the narrative voice and the events mentioned in the narrative. The same method was also used in one of the adaptations, as will be shown.

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<sup>106</sup> *The Poetic Edda* 191.

<sup>107</sup> *The Poetic Edda* 172.

<sup>108</sup> *The Poetic Edda* 177.

<sup>109</sup> *The Poetic Edda* 199.

## 5.2 The Narrator in *The Saga of the Volsungs*

There is not much to be said on the subject of the figure of the narrator in this saga, as it is also a concealed narrator that only appears in the story through the use of phrases that structure the narrative. Thus the very first sentence reads, “Here we begin by telling of a man who was named Sigi [...]”<sup>110</sup>; similarly, phrases such as “[n]ow it is said that [...]”<sup>111</sup> or “[i]t is now to be told that [...]”<sup>112</sup> occur relatively frequently throughout the saga as well. There is a similarity to be pointed out between the use of such phrases and the technique found in some of the eddic poems (described above) that was used to create a sense of detachment and distance from the story. The phrases cited here can be considered as having a similar effect on the reader, since they also act as a subtle reminder for the reader that the story is in fact being narrated and thus being recalled from the past, instead of seemingly taking place at the same time as the reader is experiencing it. In this way, the eddic lays mentioned above and the saga can be linked together to some extent.

## 5.3 The Narrator in *Sigurd the Volsung*

It can be said that Morris introduces a prominent narrator in his work. Despite the fact that this narrator does not appear often during the story and there is very little to be known about his or her person, throughout the poem the reader is constantly aware of the narrator’s existence. This is because *Sigurd the Volsung* as a whole is essentially a framing narrative. Despite making an occasional appearance during the story, the narrator’s voice is most obvious in its beginning and end. It is especially striking in the beginning, as this is where the

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<sup>110</sup> *The Saga of the Volsungs* 35.

<sup>111</sup> *The Saga of the Volsungs* 96.

<sup>112</sup> *The Saga of the Volsungs* 44.

narrator is established as an essential part of the work. Thus the second stanza of the poem (which is also discussed in chapter 4) ends with the following couplet:

And when men tell of Volsung, they call that war-duke's tree,  
That crownèd stem, the Branstock; and so was it told unto me. (p. 2)

The last line of the stanza clearly demonstrates the role of the narrator, who speaks in the first person, as a storyteller, a person whose task is to recount “the story of Sigurd” to their audience. Although the narrator is not explicitly stated to be Morris himself, it is possible that he viewed himself as such. Having translated the *Saga of the Volsungs* and the corresponding eddic poems, he may have decided to take on the role of the narrator here, posing as someone to whom the story has been “told” (referring in this way to his earlier study and translation of the Old Norse texts), and who wishes to relate it to others as well. His wish for a greater awareness of the tale among British citizens is generally well-known, and can easily be proved by his own words from the preface to his and Eiríkr Magnússon’s translation of *The Saga of the Volsungs*: “[...] [T]his is the Great Story of the North, which should be to all our race what the Tale of Troy was to the Greeks.”<sup>113</sup> The same saga translation also includes a prefatory poem written by Morris, titled “A Prologue in Verse.” Apart from revealing some of the aspects of the story that is to follow, Morris also makes it clear that it is the people of Britain to whom he is dedicating his translation, as the poem’s first and last stanza illustrates:

O, hearken, ye who speak the English Tongue,  
How in a waste land ages long ago,  
The very heart of the North bloomed into song  
After long brooding o’er this tale of woe!  
Hearken, and marvel how it might be so,

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<sup>113</sup> *The Volsunga Saga*, trans. William Morris and Eiríkr Magnússon (London, Stockholm: Norrœna Society, 1907) 27.

That such a sweetness so well crowned could be  
Betwixt the ice-hills and the cold grey sea.

[...]

So draw ye round and hearken, English Folk,  
Unto the best tale pity ever wrought!  
Of how from dark to dark bright Sigurd broke,  
Of Brynhild's glorious soul with love distraught,  
Of Gudrun's weary wandering unto naught,  
Of utter love defeated utterly,  
Of Grief too strong to give Love time to die!<sup>114</sup>

It is therefore quite clear that Morris intended for the Old Norse tale to become better known among those “who speak the English Tongue,” i.e. that the translation was not only meant to be read by a narrow audience of scholars or artists, but by everyone. This again corresponds with Morris' belief in the importance of art being accessible to all. It can perhaps be assumed that in *Sigurd the Volsung*, Morris took a similar stance, and seeing himself as the mediator between Old Norse culture and English literature, he posed as the narrator in the work. Throughout the poem, he does not forget to remind the reader of their role as listener. He does so in a subtle manner, repeatedly using words such as “lo” (as seen in the line “When lo, from floor to rafter went up a shattering shout,” p. 10, or “Till, lo, the voice of the Volsung, and the speech came forth from him,” p. 274), or “hark” (“Hark now, how the horns of battle for the clash of warriors yearn,” p. 210, or “Hark! his voice mid the glittering benches and the wine-cups of the Earls,” p. 330). From time to time, the narrator's own person emerges from the narrative, such as in the line “Lo, such was the Son of Sigmund in the days whereof I tell” (p.

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<sup>114</sup> William Morris, “A Prologue in Verse,” *William Morris Archive*, University of Iowa Libraries <<http://morrisedition.lib.uiowa.edu/volsungasagatext1870.html#Prologue>> 9 May 2018.

263), restoring the sense of detachment from the story, which may be fading as the reader grows more invested in the story itself. In this way, the reader's impression of being told a tale from the ancient past (as addressed in chapter 4) is strengthened as well. This is reminiscent of the technique used in some of the eddic heroic poems and *The Saga of the Volsungs*, as discussed above, and it is likely that Morris was inspired by those texts, since his aim was similar: he too wished to accentuate the fact that the story takes place "ages long ago," as he wrote in his "Prologue in Verse."

Finally, in the last stanza of *Sigurd the Volsung*, the narrator makes one last appearance:

Ye have heard of Sigurd aforetime, how the foes of God he slew;  
How forth from the darksome desert the Gold of the Waters he drew;  
How he wakened Love on the Mountain, and wakened Brynhild the Bright,  
And dwelt upon Earth for a season, and shone in all men's sight.  
Ye have heard of the Cloudy People, and the dimming of the day,  
And the latter world's confusion, and Sigurd gone away;  
Now ye know of the Need of the Niblungs and the end of broken troth,  
All the death of kings and of kindreds and the sorrow of Odin the Goth.  
(p. 392)

Despite the fact that Morris' narrator does not explicitly state who his audience is like he does in the prefatory poem to the translation of *The Saga of the Volsungs*, dedicated to "English Folk," a parallel can still be drawn between that poem and the stanza above. In both cases, the narrator speaks directly to the audience and clearly reaffirms his own role in the poem. It could even be said that in both instances, the narrator is "revealed" in front of the audience, and a direct connection between him and the listeners or readers is formed. The question arises as to what is the purpose of the narrator's appearance at the end of the poem. Firstly,

the fact that – as has been mentioned – *Sigurd the Volsung* is a framing narrative implies that the ending is where we are brought back from the embedded narrative (the story of Sigurd) into the “frame” which the poem started out with, i.e. the context or setting for the story. In this case, the setting could be imagined as a gathering of sorts, with Morris’ narrator recounting Sigurd’s tale and the audience listening to him.

Moreover, if the content of the last stanza is taken into account, it is quite obvious that one of the reasons for the narrator to speak to the audience the way he does here is to provide them with a sense of closure. This can easily be deduced from the fact that the narrator sums up the main points, or events, of the story he has just told, and reminds the audience that they “have heard” all of them, i.e. that the story is now finished. The last stanza of the poem can therefore be considered a means of loosening the grip of the story the audience have been listening to until this point by drawing their attention away from the story itself to its narrator. In this way, their attention is brought back to the present time and their surroundings. It is also possible that by addressing them directly, the narrator manages to take the audience’s focus off the characters in the story, whom they may have identified with or even become attached to throughout the narrative, and thus return their self-awareness. At the same time, this can be seen as a means of increasing the aforementioned sense of detachment and distance from the heroic past where the story itself takes place, so that the overall impression of having looked far back in time at ancient places, events, and people is absolute.

#### **5.4 The Narrator in *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún***

In Tolkien’s work, the figure of the narrator is also present, and Tolkien’s approach to the narrator appears to have been inspired both by eddic poetry and *Sigurd the Volsung* to some extent. Bearing in mind that *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún* was created with the intention

to emulate the style of eddic poems, it would seem logical that the representation of the narrator in Tolkien's work would undergo the same treatment, and this does seem to be the case to a certain degree.

In the "Commentary on Guðrúnarkviða en nýja," Christopher Tolkien states the following:

The relation of the Lay of Guðrún [i.e. "Guðrúnarkviða en nýja"] to its ancient sources is not essentially different from that of the Lay of the Völsungs ["Völsungakviða en nýja"], but in this case the sources are very largely extant in the poems of the Edda, and the *Völsunga Saga* is of far less importance. In its content the Lay of Guðrún is essentially a complex interweaving of the Eddaic poems *Atlakviða* and *Atlamál*, together with some wholly independent developments.

My father devoted much time and thought to *Atlakviða*, and prepared a very detailed commentary (the basis for lectures and seminars) on this extraordinarily difficult text. It is a poem that he much admired. Despite its condition, 'we are in the presence (he wrote) of great poetry that can still move us as poetry. Its style is universally and rightly praised: rapid, terse, vigorous – while maintaining, within its narrow limits, characterization. The poet who wrote it knew how to produce the grim and deadly atmosphere his theme demanded. It lives in the memory as one of the things in the Edda most instinct with that demonic energy and force which one finds in Old Norse verse.'<sup>115</sup>

It should be noted that Tolkien's observations regarding the style and atmosphere of "Atlakviða" correspond with the fact that, as Larrington writes, "[t]he *Poem of Atli*

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<sup>115</sup> Christopher Tolkien, "Commentary on Guðrúnarkviða en nýja," J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún* (London: HarperCollins, 2010) 311-312.

(*Atlakviða*) is likely to be one of the oldest in the *Edda*.<sup>116</sup> The poem following “*Atlakviða*” in the *Poetic Edda* is known as “*Atlamál in grœnlensku*,” or the “Greenlandic Lay of Atli,” and while it recounts the same events as “*Atlakviða*,” it does so in markedly different terms. Most notably, the characters and events are all but stripped of the courtly context and background they possess in “*Atlakviða*,” but there is also a difference to be found in the style of the individual poems.<sup>117</sup> Again, the fact that “*Atlamál*” is a younger poem than “*Atlakviða*” can be seen as a possible explanation for such a shift. Christopher Tolkien comments on the difference between the two poems, claiming that “[*Atlamál*] has [...] undergone an extraordinary imaginative transposition: it could be said that the story has been removed from the Heroic Age and re-established in a wholly different mode.”<sup>118</sup> He also quotes his father’s words regarding this matter:

*Atlakviða* seems to preserve a most primitive (unelaborated and unaltered) version of events. There is still a sense of the great kingdom of Atli, and the wide-flung conflicts of the ancient heroic days; the courts are courts of mighty kings – in *Atlamál* they have sunk to farmhouses. [...] [I]n *Atlamál*, while the old ‘plot’ survives, the sense of an archaic and distant world, passed down through many generations, has altogether disappeared.<sup>119</sup>

It is therefore quite clear that Tolkien had greater admiration for the older of the two poems, “*Atlakviða*,” and that regarding the overall tone of his own work, it was “*Atlakviða*” that he used as one of the model texts to recreate the same “sense of an archaic and distant world,

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<sup>116</sup> *The Poetic Edda* 204.

<sup>117</sup> Larrington refers to the style of “*Atlamál*” as “colloquial and idiomatic, closer to the prose sagas in tone.” *The Poetic Edda* 211.

<sup>118</sup> Tolkien 312.

<sup>119</sup> Tolkien 312-313. Larrington also offers an explanation for the difference in the tone of *Atlamál*: “What the [poem’s] exact connection with Greenland was is unknown; clearly the compiler of the Codex Regius thought this poem had come from there and it seems quite likely that the harsh frontier conditions in the colony, so distant from the courtly world of Continental European literature, might have prompted the poem’s recasting.” *The Poetic Edda* 211.

passed down through many generations.” In other words, it can be said that for Tolkien, “Atlakviða” was one of the eddic poems rich with the original “Old Norse spirit” that he intended to revive in his work.

The implementation of a narrator in *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún* is noteworthy because it is especially through the narrator’s voice that the link between Tolkien’s work and his connection to “Atlakviða” is revealed. At the same time, “Guðrúnarkviða en nýja” holds more significance of the two poems within Tolkien’s work in this respect, as the narrator makes a direct appearance in this poem. More specifically, the reader’s attention is drawn to the narrator’s person in the very last stanza of this second poem. The last two stanzas of “Guðrúnarkviða en nýja” read as follows:

In the waves she [Gudrún] cast her,  
the waves took her;  
in the wan water  
her woe was drowned.  
While the world lasteth  
woe of Gudrún  
till the end of days  
all shall hearken.

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Thus glory endeth,  
and gold fadeth,  
on noise and clamours  
the night falleth.  
Lift up your hearts,  
lords and maidens

for the song of sorrow  
that was sung of old. (p. 308)

These are the very last lines of *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún*, and it is here that the similarity with “Atlakviða” becomes apparent, as the eddic poem’s last strophe resembles those two from Tolkien’s work:

Now this story is all told; never since has a bride  
in a byrnie acted so to avenge her brothers;  
she brought news of death to three great kings,  
that bright woman, before she died.<sup>120</sup>

As can be seen, in this stanza the narrator’s speech is very similar to that of Tolkien’s narrator, and it is likely that it was this stanza that caused Tolkien to conclude his own work in a similar manner. Being impressed by the sense of authenticity and ancientness the poem possesses, he may well have taken inspiration from it. In Tolkien’s work, those two last strophes are the only occasion where the narrator addresses the audience directly. There are several conclusions to be drawn from such an ending. A rather obvious one is that the intention behind bringing the narrator to the “front” at the very end of the poem like Tolkien does is similar to what can be found in *Sigurd the Volsung*, i.e. that the narrator’s presence helps the audience resurface from the depths of the story and bring them back to the present. The same can possibly be said about the last stanza of “Atlakviða.”

Furthermore, in the last stanza of Tolkien’s work the narrator delivers a brief conclusion, or perhaps a commentary, for the tale that has just been told (“[t]hus glory endeth, / and gold fadeth, / on noise and clamours / the night falleth”). This commentary can be interpreted as a summary of the underlying message that is present in the entire story. One possible reading of

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<sup>120</sup> *The Poetic Edda* 210.

this message is that it may be a reference to the Latin phrase “Sic transit gloria mundi”; this phrase generally has Christian connotations,<sup>121</sup> and therefore the stanza in question could be likened to the concluding stanza in *Sigurd the Volsung*, which contains a possibly Christian reference as well. It is not wholly impossible for a Christian element to appear in *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún*, however focused on the Old Norse world it may be; Tolkien himself was a Catholic, and it may have been his wish to end the story on a Christian note. In keeping with his objective to make his work resemble the poems in the *Codex Regius*, a Christian reference could then be seen as a Christian scribe’s doing, a later addition to the original poem. In fact, there are examples among the poems in the *Poetic Edda* where similar treatment of the poems can be found. Therefore, an interpretation of the narrator’s commentary as a Christian reference should not be dismissed, although it seems improbable.

However, another interpretation is possible and perhaps more likely. The lines cited above could be read as a reference to the eddic poem “Hávamál” (“Sayings of the High One”), namely to the two well-known stanzas (no. 76 and 77):

Cattle die, kinsmen die,  
the self must also die;  
but the glory of reputation never dies,  
for the man who can get himself a good one.

Cattle die, kinsmen die,  
the self must also die;  
I know one thing which never dies:  
the reputation of each dead man.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> For instance, it was used during papal coronation ceremonies between the 15th and the 20th century.

<sup>122</sup> *The Poetic Edda* 22-23. It is worth noting that a very similar passage appears in the Old English poem “The Wanderer”: “here cattle are transient / here property is transient, here a friend is transient.” (Carolyne Larrington,

By many critics, these two stanzas are considered one of the most fundamental sources regarding the approach to life and death among Norsemen.<sup>123</sup> If it was Tolkien's intention for his narrator to refer to these lines from "Hávamál," it would mean he is consistent in his attempt to give his work an authentic Old Norse tone. The idea that one's reputation is the only thing that never dies can be applied to the story, and its last two stanzas in particular, in the way that the heroic reputation surrounding Sigurd truly has not died, as he is still remembered in the "song [...] that was sung of old." In other words, the narrator is hinting at the fact that it is an age-old song that has just been told, which proves that Sigurd's fame has survived throughout centuries and that he was a true hero, worthy of being remembered. Lastly, since his renown has lived on in the story, perhaps the message in the last lines of *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún* is that the story itself is just as worthy of not only being remembered, but also being passed on, so that, like Sigurd's fame, it never dies.

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"Explanatory Notes," *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Carolyne Larrington (Oxford/New York: OUP, 2014) 286.) It is more than certain that Tolkien was familiar with both of these passages and the underlying concept they contain.<sup>123</sup> Or, if the corresponding passage in "The Wanderer" is taken into account, it can perhaps be said that such a view of life and death was not only a Norse concept, but – speaking more broadly – a concept of Germanic origin.

## 6. Conclusion

The main objective of the thesis was to explore the relationship between Morris' and Tolkien's works in respect to their approach to the Old Norse "models" which their renditions are based on, as well as to find out in what way each of the authors strives to recreate the spirit, or atmosphere, of the Old Norse heroic past in their respective poems. All of this was investigated through the means of formal and stylistic analysis, as well as the analysis of the role of the narrator in each of the works.

Generally speaking, each author appears to have grasped the "Old Norse spirit" in a different way in his work, i.e. each of them seems to give weight to a different aspect of the Old Norse sources, convinced that it is these chosen features that will help them evoke the desired atmosphere in their own writings. Overall, it can perhaps be said that Morris regards the Norse story as something foreign and distant, whereas Tolkien appears to place emphasis on the fact that the Old Norse literary works were in fact related to English poetry, and therefore he seems to perceive the story as part of his own heritage.

*Sigurd the Volsung* can be characterised as an attempt to retell the story of Sigurd in such a way that the sense of a distant, ancient past where the story takes place is emphasised. This emphasis is achieved through the means of archaization and the use of an ornate style that causes Morris' poem to resemble a series of illustrations for the story. These illustrations may be done in vivid colour and adorned beautifully, yet they still remain detached from the story itself. In other words, *Sigurd the Volsung* can be seen as an ornamental and stylised representation of the Old Norse story.

Tolkien's work represents a different approach that can be described as scholarly, or academic. His perception of where the main essence of the "Old Norse spirit" lies is that it is centralised in the simple, powerful language of the eddic lays. Furthermore, Tolkien appears

to have been aware of the firm connection between the eddic style and the metrical properties of the poems. Therefore, in *The Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún* special focus is placed on the correct use of metre and style in order to make the two lays resemble eddic poems as much as possible. However, Tolkien's firm adherence to the rules of the *fornyrðislag* metre may have a slightly different outcome than intended, as the fact that the eddic metre is paired with modern English and that it is adhered to very thoroughly can result in a style that seems less natural, or organic, than that of the eddic poems.

To achieve a complete understanding of the individual works' relation with the Old Norse sources, it would perhaps be fitting to analyse them with regard to their content as well. Nevertheless, the fact that both authors do make use of some of the Old Norse formal and stylistic features in their poems in order to evoke the "Old Norse spirit" suggests these features truly are some of the most significant components of the atmosphere of the Old Norse heroic past.

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