CHAUCER AND THE NORSE AND CELTIC WORLDS

Through an examination of Old Norse and Celtic parallels to certain works of Chaucer, McTurk here identifies hitherto unrecognized sources for these works in early Irish tradition. He revives the idea that Chaucer visited Ireland between 1361 and 1366, placing new emphasis on the date of the enactment of the Statute of Kilkenny.

Examining Chaucer’s *House of Fame*, McTurk uncovers parallels involving eagles, perilous entrances, and scatological jokes about poetry in the *Topographia Hibernie* by Gerald of Wales, Snorri Sturluson’s *Edda*, and the Old Irish sagas *Fled Bricrend* and *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*. He compares *The Canterbury Tales*, with its use of the motif of a journey as a framework for a tale-collection, with both Snorri’s *Edda* and the Middle Irish saga *Acallam na Senórach*. McTurk presents a compelling argument that these works represent Irish traditions which influenced Chaucer’s writing.

In this study, McTurk also argues that the thirteenth-century Icelandic *Laxdæla saga* and Chaucer’s Wife of Bath’s Prologue and Tale each descend from an Irish version of the Loathly Lady story.

Further, he surmises that Chaucer’s five-stress line may derive from the tradition of Irish song known as *amhrán*, which, there is reason to suppose, existed in Ireland well before Chaucer’s time.

*Rory McTurk* is Reader in Icelandic Studies at the University of Leeds, UK.
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Preface and Acknowledgements

The germ of the idea for this book came to me as long ago as 1984, when I read in *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*, by A.D. White, 2 vols (London: Arco, 1955; first published London: Macmillan, 1896), I, 37, of how Giraldus Cambrensis (Gerald of Wales) speaks in his book on the topography of Ireland (*Topographia Hibernie*) of eagles flying so high that their wings are scorched by the sun. This reminded me of the loquacious eagle who, in Chaucer’s poem *The House of Fame*, boasts of having flown close to the sun, and led me to ponder on the idea once taken seriously by Chaucer scholars, but by 1984 no longer fashionable, that Chaucer spent part of his early career in Ireland. At much the same time my experience as a teacher of Old and Middle English and Old Norse, which began in 1969 at University College Dublin and has continued since 1978 at the University of Leeds, was bringing home to me the pedagogical value of comparing Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* with Snorri Sturluson’s prose *Edda*, particularly in the context of framed narrative. These two interests of mine converged some twelve years later, when it occurred to me that there might be a connection between the story in Snorri’s *Edda* of Óðinn’s theft of the poetic mead, in which the god Óðinn assumes the form of an eagle, and the eagles of Gerald’s *Topographia* and Chaucer’s *House of Fame*. In the meantime I had encountered for the first time the poem ‘Óm sceol ar ardmhagh Fáil […]’, by the seventeenth-century Irish Gaelic writer Seathrún Céitinn (Geoffrey Keating), and was reminded so forcibly by it of the five-stress line as used by Chaucer that I could not help wondering whether there might be a connection there as well. An invitation to lecture at the University of Ulster at Coleraine in 1997 gave me the opportunity to discuss these ideas publicly for the first time. The book was planned in something like its present form in the early part of a very enjoyable year that I spent as Visiting Professor of English at Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee, in 1998–99, and the writing of it began in earnest in the summer of 2000. Earlier published versions of parts of it are listed under my name in the Bibliography.

I am grateful to various institutions for invitations and opportunities to present some of this book’s ideas in the form of lectures and seminars: the Centre for Irish Literature and Bibliography of the University of Ulster at Coleraine (in October 1997); the Second Conference of Current Perspectives in Chaucer Research, organised by the Centre for Medieval Studies (with
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From this list I must single out two names in particular: those of Tomás Ó Cathasaigh and Peter Orton. Tomás not only did me the honour of inviting me, in his capacity as the Shattuck Professor of Irish Studies at Harvard University, to lecture there on ‘Chaucer and Norse-Celtic tradition’ in November 1998, but has also answered countless e-mail queries of mine in connection with this book, always promptly, helpfully, and good-humouredly. Peter (Dr Peter Orton), Senior Lecturer in the School of English and Drama at Queen Mary, University of London, has read large parts of the book in draft and made many valuable suggestions. To both, my sincere thanks. Such errors as doubtless remain are of course my own responsibility.

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Finally, I would thank my sister and her husband, Catriona and Michael Blaker, both of them experienced writers, for their help and encouragement; and my wife, Posy, and children, Marcus, Matthew and Freyja, for their love, patience and support.

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Author’s Note

Citations of Chaucer’s works throughout this book are based on The Riverside Chaucer, i.e. Benson 1988 (see the Bibliography). The abbreviation CT is used for The Canterbury Tales in cases where confusion might otherwise arise, and the abbreviations AS and D&R are used for Stokes 1900 and Dooley and Roe 1999 respectively (see the Bibliography). Classical references, unless otherwise indicated, are by book and line number to the relevant works as edited in the Loeb Classical Library series, and biblical references are by chapter and verse to The New English Bible. Other references follow the author-date system.

The spelling of proper names occurring in early Irish literature usually follows that of the most accessible English translations, to which reference is made (as well as to editions) at appropriate points in the text. While this policy has resulted in some inconsistency, it is has been chosen as the one least likely to cause confusion to newcomers to the subject who may wish to follow up the references in question.

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1.1 Analogies and Analogues

In a recent discussion of Old English studies by various writers, a distinction appears to be made between ‘analogies’, defined as ‘resemblances in style, structure, mood or idea between works which have no other connection’ (Lapidge 1997, 20), and ‘analogues’, defined as ‘two or more texts which draw either immediately or at greater distance upon the same source, although none is in the same line of transmission from that source as another’ (Scrugg 1997, 40). In the second section of this chapter I shall argue for certain analogies, in the sense of the term just indicated, between Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales, composed mainly in the last two decades of the fourteenth century, and the prose Edda, composed by the Icelandic writer Snorri Sturluson (d. 1241), most probably in the third and fourth decades of the thirteenth. In the third section I shall consider the possibility that one of the stories told in the part of Snorri’s Edda known as Skáldskaparmál (‘The language of poetry’) is an analogue, also in the sense just indicated, to Chaucer’s poem The House of Fame, composed probably in the late 1370s.

While I may be unusual in discussing Chaucer’s work in relation to Snorri’s Edda, I am not the first to do so. Barakat (1964) referred in passing to Snorri’s Edda in suggesting that the Germanic god known as Óðinn in Old Norse-Icelandic sources was the model for the mysterious old man encountered by the three revellers in the Pardoner’s Tale, one of Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales. Barakat, as I understand him, was not arguing for the influence of Snorri’s Edda itself on Chaucer, but for the possibility that certain aspects of Óðinn as described in various Old Norse-Icelandic accounts, including Snorri’s Edda, derived from traditions which became known to Chaucer independently, and were used by him in the Pardoner’s Tale; in other words, that the Old Norse-Icelandic accounts on the one hand and Chaucer’s account on the other descended independently of each other from a common source, the precise nature of which – whether oral or written – could not easily be determined. Snorri’s prose Edda, in Barakat’s view, would thus have been an analogue, in the sense of the term used here, to Chaucer’s Pardoner’s Tale. Barakat’s arguments were disputed by Schmidt, P. (1966), but were supported by Harris, R.L. (1969),
who, however, came nearer than Barakat to suggesting that Chaucer’s account derived from a literary source of Old Norse-Icelandic origin.

Taylor (1990) drew attention to the word *scathe* ‘a shame’, ‘a pity’, used twice in *The Canterbury Tales* in connection with the Wife of Bath, a narrator, like the Pardoner, of one of the Tales. He further noted the resemblance of this word to *Skaði*, the name of a giant’s daughter who features in *Gylfaginning* (‘The tricking of Gylfi’) and *Skáldskaparmál*, the first two parts of Snorri’s *Edda*. Pointing out that the Wife of Bath and Skaði, as portrayed by Chaucer and Snorri respectively, both regard beautiful feet as a desirable quality in a husband, Taylor (p. 79) argued that this predilection of the Wife of Bath’s, as expressed in the Prologue to her Tale, derived from a ‘folk-tale reflection of Nordic myth in fourteenth-century England’, thus implying that Snorri’s account of Skaði was an analogue, as the term is understood here, to Chaucer’s account of the Wife of Bath. Taylor’s arguments will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4, section 4.3, below.

I have myself argued elsewhere (McTurk 1994, 16) that the arrangement in the part of Snorri’s *Edda* known as *Gylfaginning* whereby the protagonist, Gylfi, must prove himself wiser than his three interlocutors, Hárr, Jafnhár and Þriði, by asking them questions to the extent of exhausting their store of narrative information, might be compared with the pact made by the pilgrims in the General Prologue to Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* to the effect that whoever tells the best tale on the pilgrimage to Canterbury will win a free supper on the return journey; and in two articles published still more recently (McTurk 2002b; 2003), I have laid the basis for the arguments offered in the second and third sections, respectively, of the present chapter.

In the second section of this chapter I shall be pointing out what I would claim are analogies between *The Canterbury Tales* and the prose *Edda*, in the sense of the term indicated above. In the third section of the chapter, on the other hand, in discussing part of *Skáldskaparmál* in relation to *The House of Fame*, I shall be arguing that these are analogues to one another, also in the sense of the term used here.

### 1.2 Snorri’s *Edda* and *The Canterbury Tales*

The proposed analogies may be discussed under the three headings of framed narrative, literary anthology, and pilgrimage. Since most of what I have to say that is new falls under the first of these headings, I shall say considerably more under that heading than under the other two.
It is clear that both Snorri’s *Edda* and Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* are examples of framed narrative, that is, they both involve stories told within a framing story, with the consequent use of different levels of narrative. It is true that this is more consistently the case with *The Canterbury Tales* than with the prose *Edda*; in the former the tales, the stories told by the pilgrims, which are clearly the main point and focus of the work, are told within the framework of the story of the pilgrimage to Canterbury, which imparts a unity to the work as a whole. Snorri’s *Edda* is not unified in quite the same way; nor is storytelling as such quite as major a preoccupation of the entire work in the case of Snorri’s *Edda* as it is in that of *The Canterbury Tales*, as will be shown below.

In *The Canterbury Tales* it is possible to distinguish at least four levels of narrative. This may be illustrated by the Nun’s Priest’s Tale. The first level is that on which the story of the pilgrimage to Canterbury, which provides the framework for the Nun’s Priest’s Tale as well as for the tales told by the other pilgrims, is itself told. This framing story is told by a first-person narrator who presents himself as having taken part in the pilgrimage and hence as a witness to its events. Because of the convincing personality of this narrator it is tempting, though not necessarily correct, to identify him with Chaucer (cf. Genette 1980, 213). The second level is that on which the Nun’s Priest, a character within the story of the pilgrimage, tells his tale. It is in fact on this level that all the Canterbury Tales are told, including those contributed by the first-level narrator of the story of the pilgrimage in his capacity as a character within that story; this narrator thus appears, along with the other pilgrims, as a second-level narrator within the story he tells on the first level. The third level is that on which the cockerel Chauntecleer, a character within the Nun’s Priest’s Tale, tells the hen Pertelote about an ominous dream he has had which seems to foreshadow what later turns out, in the story told on the second level, to be his encounter with a fox; on the third level also he tells her a story which he attributes to an anonymous writer, ‘Oon of the gretteste auctour that men rede’ (VII. 2984), about two pilgrims who stayed at separate lodgings and of whom one dreamt, as later turned out to be true, that the other had been murdered. The fourth level is that on which the murdered pilgrim, a character within this story told on the third level by Chauntecleer, tells his companion, to whom he appears in a dream, that he has been murdered, and where his body is to be found.

In addition to these four clearly marked levels of narrative it may be said that at least two other levels are hinted at, if not fully realised, in the Nun’s Priest’s Tale. One of these is arguably represented by the anonymous writer cited by Chauntecleer as a source for his account of the two pilgrims. I am
reluctant to take this writer as representing a separate level of narrative, however, partly because it is not at all clear whether Chauntecleer is quoting him word for word – one has in fact a strong impression that it is Chauntecleer, rather than the writer he refers to, who is telling the story – and partly because this writer can hardly be said to be a character in a story told by Chauntecleer, in the sense that each of the narrators taken here as representing the second, third and fourth levels of narrative respectively (Nun’s Priest, Chauntecleer, murdered pilgrim) is a character in the story told on the immediately preceding level in the ordinal sequence. Another level of narrative arguably hinted at rather than realised in the Nun’s Priest’s Tale is that on which the story of the pilgrim’s dream is likely to have been made available to the anonymous writer referred to by Chauntecleer. As Cooper (1996, 347) points out, ‘dreams cannot be known about unless their narratives are told by their dreamers’, and if the story of the pilgrim’s dream is to have the authority Chauntecleer wishes to claim for it – he tells it in order to convince the sceptical Pertelote that dreams are indicative of the joys and tribulations of waking life – it must be assumed to have been narrated at some stage by the pilgrim who experienced it in order to have become known to the writer Chauntecleer refers to. This level of narrative may perhaps be glimpsed in the words of this pilgrim to the people of the town in which his companion had been slain, making it clear that he knows from his dream where the body is to be found. Although the two narrative levels just discussed are in my view implied rather than fully present in the Nun’s Priest’s Tale, they may be taken together with the four clearly marked narrative levels discussed above as an indication that among the preoccupations of the Nun’s Priest’s Tale is the very concept of narrative level itself.

The use of framed narrative in Snorri’s prose Edda may now be discussed. Snorri’s purpose in his Edda seems to have been to provide an introduction to the language, subject matter and metrical forms of skaldic and (to a lesser extent) eddic poetry, the two major genres of Old Norse-Icelandic poetry; it is thus taken up to a considerable degree with explanations and illustrations of metre and poetic diction. Since, however, skaldic poets in particular made frequent use of the circumlocutory expressions known as ‘kennings’, which often involved a knowledge of Old Norse mythology (such as Ægis dætr, ‘Ægir’s daughters’, for ‘waves’, Ægir being a sea-giant) (Faulkes 1998, I, 36; 1987, 91), the prose Edda often appears to deal more with mythology than directly with poetry, and it is largely through the medium of storytelling that the mythological background to the poetry is conveyed. It consists of a Prologue and three parts, namely Gylfaginning (‘The tricking of Gylfi’), Skáldskaparmál
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(The language of poetry) and Háttatal (List of poetic forms). In all of these three parts, framed narrative is used to a greater or lesser extent, and it is in Gylfaginning that it is used in the most sustained and consistent way. In the Prologue, which does not make use of framed narrative, an anonymous narrator describes the migration of a people called the Æsir, descendants of the Trojans, to Scandinavia from their original home, Asia Minor or Turkey. In Gylfaginning, the anonymous narrator tells how the Swedish king Gylfi visits the Æsir at their Scandinavian stronghold, Ásgarðr — built on the model of their former home, Old Ásgarðr or Troy — in order to find out whether their apparent ability to make everything go according to their will is due to their own nature, or to the gods they worship. They are aware in advance of his coming, and subject him to various optical illusions, the purpose of which is apparently to trick him into believing that they, the human Æsir, are identical with the divine Æsir, their gods (McTurk 1994, 6–8). He is received by three of their number, Hár (‘High’), Jafnhár (‘Just-as-high’) and Þriði (‘Third’), whose names, they later reveal to him, are among those of the god Óðinn (Faulkes 1982, 21, 22; 1987, 21), and Hár tells him that in order to depart unharmed Gylfi must prove himself wiser than they. Gylfi proceeds to ask them questions about (among other things) their gods, as much with a view to exhausting their store of knowledge as to satisfying his curiosity, and their replies are for the most part what are today regarded as the major stories of Old Norse mythology, told on the second level of narrative. Among them is one told by Þriði in which the god Þórr, competing with his hosts in feats of strength at the castle of the giant Útgarðaloki, succeeds neither in draining a drinking-horn nor in beating an old woman at wrestling. Later, after Þórr has left the castle and is no longer a threat to it, the giant reveals to him that he has been using optical illusions to conceal from Þórr what he had been drinking out of the horn was in fact the sea, and that the old woman whom he had failed to defeat was Elli (‘Old Age’). When Þórr, furious at having been so deceived, raises his hammer to smash Útgarðaloki and his castle, both vanish. When Gylfi finally brings Hár and his companions to the point where they can answer no more of his questions, they too vanish, as Útgarðaloki had done in the story Þriði was telling (Faulkes 1982, 37–43, 54; 1987, 37–46, 57). Gylfaginning can thus be seen to work on three levels of narrative: the first level, on which the story of Gylfi’s visit to the Æsir is told by an anonymous narrator whom it is tempting, but not necessarily correct, to identify with Snorri (cf. Genette 1980, 213); the second level, on which Hár, Jafnhár and Þriði, characters within the story told on the first level by the anonymous narrator, tell Gylfi, another character in that story, the stories
of Old Norse mythology; and a third level, on which Útgarðaloki, a character in one of these stories told on the second level, tells Æórr, another character in these stories, the story of how he had been deceived as to the nature of his combatants at Útgarðaloki’s castle.

Other levels of narrative than the most obvious ones are sometimes hinted at, if not fully realised, in Gylfaginning, as they also are in the Nun’s Priest’s Tale. In Gylfaginning the anonymous first-level narrator and each of the three second-level narrators quote narrative passages of poetry as sources for the information they supply; the first-level narrator quotes two passages of skaldic poetry, naming in each case the author of the passage (Faulkes 1982, 7; 1987, 1–2), and the second-level narrators quote many passages of eddic poetry, often identifying by title the poems from which they are quoting. These quotations differ from Chauntecleer’s reference to an unnamed author, discussed above, in being for the most part identifiable as word-for-word quotations from works other than that in which they are quoted, and hence as belonging primarily to other narrators than those in whose mouths they are placed in Gylfaginning; none of them gives the impression, to the extent that the relevant part of Chauntecleer’s narrative does, of a narrator making thoroughly his own the source to which he refers. In these respects they certainly seem to hint, perhaps more than Chauntecleer’s reference does, at a level or levels of narrative other than that on which each of them is introduced. On the other hand they cannot, in my view at least, be regarded as forming part of the system of narrative levels in Gylfaginning, because their primary ‘speakers’, i.e. the personae who give voice to them in the poems from which they are quoted, are not characters in the stories told by the narrators who quote them in Gylfaginning, in the sense that Hár, Jafnhár and Æríði are characters in the story told anonymously on the first level, and Útgarðaloki a character in a story told by Æríði on the second level, etc. The sybil, for example, who in the eddic poem Völuspá (‘The sybil’s prophecy’) makes a number of narrative statements which are quoted in Gylfaginning by one or other of the three second-level narrators, does not herself feature as a character in any of their narratives. Once this point has been made, however, it may be noted that a narrative passage of verse spoken by a character in Gylfaginning as an integral part of the story in which he or she features, rather than as a quotation, may legitimately be regarded as representing a level of narrative, even if it is in fact identifiable (outside the context in which it appears, i.e. by the reader of Gylfaginning) as a quotation; an example, albeit with little narrative content, might be the stanza from the eddic poem Skírnismál (‘The lay of Skírnir’) spoken by the god Freyr as part of the story of Freyr and Skírnir told by Hár on the second level of narrative
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(Faulkes 1982, 31; 1987, 32). Another example, with perhaps rather more narrative content and from no known source, would be the stanza of eddic poetry spoken by the giantess Dökk in the story of Baldr, also told by Hár on the second level (Faulkes 1982, 48; 1987, 51). These verse passages may thus be said to represent the third level of narrative in Gylfaginning.

The second part of Snorri’s Edda, Skáldskaparmál (‘The language of poetry’), deals more directly than Gylfaginning with poetry, but also makes use, if not as consistently as Gylfaginning, of a narrative framework in which mythical stories are told. An anonymous narrator tells how Ægir, who is here described as a man from the Danish island of Læse, visits what appears to be yet another Ásgarðr, the mythical home of the divine Æsir, the gods worshipped by the human Æsir. At the banquet held to welcome him Ægir finds himself sitting next to Bragi, the god of poetry, from whom he learns, among other things, about how the god Óðinn gained access to the poetic mead of which the giantess Gunnlög had been placed in charge by her father Suttung, drank it, and taking the form of an eagle flew with it in his body to Ásgarðr, the abode of the gods, where he spat out part of it but also expelled part of it backwards (‘sendi apr suman mjöðinn’) (Faulkes 1998, 1, 5; 1987, 64). This story (which will be discussed in the next section of this chapter in the context of analogues rather than analogies) is told to Ægir by Bragi in the course of a question-and-answer dialogue comparable to the dialogue of Gylfi with Hár, Jafnhár and Þriði in Gylfaginning. It would thus appear, at least at first sight, that there are two levels of narrative in Skáldskaparmál comparable to the first two of the three identified above in Gylfaginning: a first level on which the anonymous narrator tells the story of Ægir’s visit to the divine Ásgarðr (cf. the account of Gylfi’s visit to the Scandinavian Ásgarðr), and a second level on which Bragi tells stories in reply to Ægir’s questions (cf. the replies of Hár, etc., to Gylfi’s questions). Now while it is true that in Gylfaginning some of the stories told to Gylfi by Hár, Jafnhár and Þriði are long enough and enthralling enough to make the reader temporarily forget the story of Gylfi’s visit to the human Æsir, which provides the framework in which they are told, it is also true that this story is maintained throughout the whole of Gylfaginning; it is always clear that it is Gylfi, under his assumed name of Gangleri, who asks the questions, and that it is one or other of his three interlocutors who answers them; and the story is brought to a clear, if surprising conclusion with the sudden disappearance of these three just as Gylfi has reached the stage where he is in a position to claim a triumph over them in having exhausted their store of knowledge. In Skáldskaparmál, by contrast, the framing story of Ægir’s visit to the divine Æsir is neither clearly nor consistently sustained. The
main purpose of *Skáldskaparmál* seems to have been to provide a systematic account of kennings and of the non-periphrastic poetic expressions known as *heiti* (such as *targa*, ‘targe’, for *skjöldr*, ‘shield’) (Faulkes 1998, I, 122; 1987, 160), partly with the help of prose narratives of the kind found in *Gylfaginning*, their function being to explain the mythological and legendary background of much poetic diction, and partly with the help of frequent quotations from skaldic poetry, which not only serve to show by example how the relevant poetic expressions are used, but which also serve, in a number of cases, to fill in this background. The question-and-answer form of a dialogue is in fact continued until near the end of *Skáldskaparmál*, though more sporadically than in *Gylfaginning*. However, it is only in the part of *Skáldskaparmál* just outlined, i.e. the introductory part (Faulkes 1998, I, 1–5; 1987, 59–64), and in one other passage occurring somewhat later in the work (Faulkes 1998, I, 20–25; 1987, 77–83), that the questioner and the answerer are identified by name as Ægir and Bragi respectively. Elsewhere in *Skáldskaparmál*, the dialogue form is used anonymously; that is to say, the questions and answers are neither attributed to named speakers, nor even signalled by any such statement as ‘he (or she) said’; nor is there in *Skáldskaparmál*, as there is in *Gylfaginning*, any clear conclusion to the narrative that might help to confirm or clarify who has been speaking to whom. This raises the question of who precisely the speakers of the unattributed dialogue are supposed to be. One might initially think that they were Ægir and Bragi, with their names simply omitted by the anonymous narrator; and that this narrator and Bragi were continuing to speak on the first and second levels of narrative respectively, as they appear to be doing when they are introduced at the beginning of *Skáldskaparmál*. An objection to this view, however, is the fact that the speakers of the unattributed dialogue sometimes refer to Ægir and Bragi in the third person, and that on one occasion the answering party in this dialogue refers retrospectively to an event – Ægir’s return invitation to the Æsir, three months after his visit to Ásaró – which can only have taken place after the dialogue between Ægir and Bragi has itself taken place (Faulkes 1998, I, 40–41; 1987, 95). The question thus arises as to whether, in the passages of unattributed dialogue in *Skáldskaparmál*, the anonymous narrator has taken on the dual persona of questioner and answerer, and if so to what extent; these passages sometimes read like a continuation of Ægir’s dialogue with Bragi, it is true, but sometimes also as if the anonymous narrator is having a question-and-answer session with himself, in the manner of a catechism. For these reasons it is by no means always clear whether the anonymous questioner and answerer in *Skáldskaparmál* are supposed to be Ægir and Bragi respectively,
or whether it is the anonymous narrator who is asking the questions as well as answering them, or whether – to introduce a more complicated possibility – the introduction of the unattributed dialogue, in which the answering party appears to be the anonymous narrator, betrays the presence in *Skáldskaparmál* of a concealed, hitherto unnoticed, first-level narrator, also anonymous, who is telling a story of which this dialogue constitutes the principal action (cf. Ross 1990, 220–21), and whose presence, once acknowledged, would make it necessary to relegate to the second and third levels, respectively, what have up to now appeared to be the first and second levels of narrative, themselves represented respectively by the anonymous account of Bragi’s dialogue with Ægir, and by Bragi’s replies to Ægir’s questions. This means in turn that it is never entirely certain on which level of narrative the replies to the questions in either dialogue are being given.

The difficulty of identifying a neat, systematic use of narrative level in *Skáldskaparmál* further complicates discussion of the numerous verse passages quoted in this part of Snorri’s *Edda*. As in *Gylfaginning*, there are in *Skáldskaparmál* occasional examples of verse passages spoken by characters as integral parts of the stories in which they feature, and each of these may be regarded, to the extent that it has narrative content, as representing a level of narrative other than that on which it is introduced, though which level it represents is in each case hard to say, since the narrative levels in *Skáldskaparmál* cannot confidently be identified by number (first, second, etc.), as those in *Gylfaginning* can. Examples are: the stanza of eddic poetry spoken by the god Þórr as part of the story of his adventure with the giant Geirrœðr, told by Bragi to Ægir in reply to one of his questions (though it has to be said that the narrative content of this stanza is slight) (Faulkes 1998, I, 25; 1987, 82); and the two stanzas from the eddic poem *Fáfnismál* spoken by the birds in the story of Sigurðr’s slaying of the dragon Fáfnir, told anonymously as part of the unattributed dialogue in reply to the anonymous questioner (Faulkes 1998, I, 47; 1987, 101–02). The great majority of verse passages in *Skáldskaparmál*, however, are quotations from skaldic poetry given by the answering party in the unattributed dialogue (who, as shown above, seems to function sometimes in the same role as Bragi, and sometimes as an anonymous narrator). They are most often introduced in each case by a statement in the prose which constitutes a minimal narrative (such as *Svá kvæð Egill Skalla-Grimsson* ‘Egill Skalla-Grimsson said’, or *sem Kormakr kvæð* ‘as Kormakr said’) (cf. Ross 1990, 221). In the frequent cases where a verse quotation itself has narrative content, the question may arise as to whether the quotation represents a narrative level other than that on which it is introduced, in the
same way as Bragi’s narratives at the beginning of *Skáldskaparmál* appear to represent a second level of narrative, introduced by an anonymous narrator speaking on the first level, and reporting Ægir’s questions, which in turn elicit Bragi’s answers. Close investigation reveals, however, that the verse quotations in *Skáldskaparmál* cannot easily be said to parallel Bragi’s narratives, at least as far as narrative level is concerned. Their speakers, the poets whose names are often specified in the text in the manner just indicated, and who are in many instances identifiable as historical figures, in no case function as characters within a story, as Ægir and Bragi do. Their poems are quoted as sources of information on various aspects of Old Norse mythology and poetic diction, but they, the poets, are not presented as characters interacting with each other or with other characters in a story or stories, in the way that Ægir and Bragi are. Nor is there the same organic relationship between the verse passages quoted and the dialogue that provides the context for their quotation as there is between, on the one hand, Bragi’s stories, which involve certain activities of the gods, and, on the other, the setting for their narration, his dialogue with Ægir in the hall of the Æsir at Ásgard, a naturally appropriate environment for the telling of such stories. This is partly because of the anonymous character of the unattributed dialogue which frames the verse quotations, and partly because the quotations vary considerably among themselves in content, having been chosen for inclusion – more often, it would seem, with their wording than with their content in mind – from a wide variety of works by different poets; it would be relatively difficult, perhaps, to find a framing context that would unite them. Even more of a contrast to this situation is provided by *Gylfaginning*, where, as has already been signalled and as will be shown more fully below, the stories told on the second level of narrative actually have a bearing on events in the story of the dialogue between Gylfi and his three interlocutors, told on the first level. It may further be noted that, whereas in *Gylfaginning* the verse quotations in most cases have the function of filling in the details and background of the stories told by the speakers of the framing dialogue, this is relatively rarely their function in *Skáldskaparmál*. It is true that the lengthy quotations from the so-called ‘mythological skaldic poems’ *Haustlöng* (‘Autumn-long’) by Þjóðólfr of Hvinir (Faulkes 1998, I, 22–24, 30–33; 1987, 80–81, 86–88), *Pórsdrápa* (‘Þorr’s lay’) by Eiðfr Guðrúnarson (Faulkes 1998, I, 25–30; 1987, 83–86), and *Ragnarsdrápa* (‘Ragnarr’s lay’) by Bragi Boddason (Faulkes 1998, I, 50–51; 1987, 106), and the quoting of the anonymous eddic poem *Gróttasöngdr* (‘The mill song’) (Faulkes 1998, I, 52–57; 1987, 107–09), for example, do seem to have this function in *Skáldskaparmál*, but in the first three of these cases, at least, the poems seem to be quoted as
much for their diction as for their narrative content, and it is indeed for the purpose of illustrating diction rather than narrative content that the great majority of the verse quotations in *Skáldskaparmál* seem to be given.

While the verse passages in *Skáldskaparmál* thus differ from those in *Gylfaginning* in a number of ways, they resemble them in the context of narrative level in doing little more than hint at the theoretical presence in this part of the *Edda* of other narrative levels than those mainly operating in it. In this respect also they resemble the passages in the Nun’s Priest’s Tale, discussed above, that seem to allow for the presence in the Tale of more narrative levels than it actually makes use of. As for the narrative levels mainly operating in *Skáldskaparmál*, these, it must be said, yield much less readily to systematisation than their counterparts in *Gylfaginning*. The virtual impossibility of reducing them to a system may well tempt the reader of *Skáldskaparmál* to accept Faulkes’s cautious suggestion (1998, I, xx) that the difficulties presented by its use of framed narrative, and discussed here, ‘were deliberately intended as a joke or included for ironical purposes, to emphasise the fictional nature of the frame story’.

The third part of Snorri’s *Edda*, *Háttatal* (‘List of poetic forms’), also makes use of an unattributed question-and-answer dialogue. It does so in a much less bewildering way than *Skáldskaparmál*, however, partly because there is no other dialogue in *Háttatal* with which this unattributed dialogue might be confused, and partly because this dialogue announces itself clearly at the very beginning of *Háttatal*, the first two sentences of which form, respectively, a question and an answer. While it may disappear mysteriously – it is abandoned altogether about a quarter of the way through *Háttatal* – the unattributed dialogue certainly does not suddenly appear mysteriously, as in *Skáldskaparmál*, after different narrative procedures seem already to have established themselves. *Háttatal* consists of a three-part poem set in the framework of a prose commentary and having a total of 102 stanzas, each of which exemplifies a different verse-form. Unlike the verse-passages in *Gylfaginning* and *Skáldskaparmál*, this poem is the work of Snorri himself. The prose commentary initially takes the form of the unattributed question-and-answer dialogue already mentioned. Questions are asked about the forms of poetry and answers are given which incorporate passages of verse, each of which constitutes, in most cases, one of the stanzas of the poem, which thus begins to take shape as the dialogue proceeds. After the twenty-fourth stanza of the poem has been given in reply to a question, however, there are no more questions, with the result that the prose text develops from dialogue into continuous expository prose interrupted only by the verse passages, which
are given one after another – mostly with prose passages in between – until the poem is complete. It may thus be said that after stanza 24 only the voice of the answering party in the dialogue is heard. The content of the poem, as Faulkes (1991, ix) has noted, ‘is praise in traditional skaldic style of Håkon Håkonarson, King of Norway 1217–63, and his co-regent and future father-in-law Earl Skúli (1188/89–1240), for their generosity and valour in battle.’ As is not infrequently the case in skaldic poetry, and as is hardly surprising in a poem composed primarily to illustrate verse-forms, the narrative content of many of the stanzas of Háttatal is slight; furthermore, the prose of the commentary differs from that of Gylfaginning and to a large extent also from that of Skáldskaparmál in being more plainly expository than narrative. It is nevertheless possible to distinguish two levels of narrative in Háttatal as a whole: a first level, which has as its story-element the unattributed question-and-answer dialogue of the prose text, in which the answering voice comes to dominate; and a second level, which has as its story-element the content, such as it is, of the 102-stanza poem, Háttatal proper, quoted in the course of that text. This view implies an acceptance of the law of narratology according to which, if I have understood it correctly, every dialogue presupposes a narrated situation – in other words a story – and hence the presence of a narrator, whether the narrator’s presence is made explicit or not (Ross 1990, 220–21).

(The idea of a ‘concealed narrator’ was briefly introduced above, in the course of the discussion of Skáldskaparmál.) In Háttatal as a whole, in this view, the situation or story of a dialogue between two unnamed speakers is narrated on the first level by a concealed, anonymous narrator, whose presence, which is never overt, may be deduced from the fact that the story consists of a dialogue. The story contained in the poem Háttatal, on the other hand, is narrated on the second level by the answering party in the unattributed dialogue. As well as speaking the stanzas of Háttatal, this second-level narrator refers at different points in the text to three poets (Þórarinn máhlótingr, Refr, and Bishop Klæringr) (Faulkes 1991, 8, 21; 1987, 172–73, 192–93), giving a brief quotation from the work of each. While each of these quotations has some narrative content, their status in relation to the narrative levels mainly operating in Háttatal is comparable to that of the skaldic quotations in Skáldskaparmál in relation to the narrative levels mainly operating there, i.e. peripheral, and for very much the same sort of reasons.

If, as has been claimed (Faulkes 1987, xi–xii), Snorri wrote Háttatal before he wrote Skáldskaparmál, and Skáldskaparmál in turn before he wrote Gylfaginning, then these three works may be said to reflect his growing mastery of framing devices in his handling of narrative levels.