

THE ORIGINS OF ANACRUSIS IN *FORNYRÐISLAG*

This article discusses occurrences of *fornyrðislag* verses with apparent anacrusis in the Poetic Edda, i.e. verses which are similar to normal verses except for an additional unstressed initial position. Suzuki's (2010) view that this phenomenon is »rule-governed and integrated into the metrical system« is examined critically and contrasted with the traditional view, which holds that such verses are largely or entirely spurious. Anacrusis as a metrical principle is demonstrated in 14th century Icelandic poetry but its use before then must be regarded as questionable.¹

1. Traditional (Sievers) analysis of Old Icelandic verse

The traditional analysis of Germanic metrics (Sievers 1893) holds that each verse essentially consists of two lifts and two drops. The arrangement of the lifts and drops divides verses into five basic types. The A type is trochaic (/ x / x) while the B type is iambic (x / x /). The C type has both lifts in the middle (x / / x) while the D type has both at the outset (/ / x x) and the E type has them at opposite ends of the verse (/ x x /). Other structural elements, namely syllable quantity, resolution² and the position of alliteration, divide the five basic types into a number of subtypes. It will be convenient to give Icelandic examples of the major subtypes at the outset. I have chosen examples from *Vǫlospá*³ but omitted rare subtypes that are unimportant for the following discussion. The general principle is that lifts are in heavy (long) stressed syllables and that alliteration is placed on the first lift.

- A1 aflu loġðo; dvergar ór iqrðo; fylliz fiqrvi (alliteration on the first lift and optionally on the second lift; first drop can be polysyllabic; optional resolution in the first lift).

¹ This study was conducted within the research project »Interfaces of Metrics, Phonology and Syntax«, supported by a grant from the Icelandic Research Fund of Rannís (the Icelandic Centre for Research) 2009–2011 (principal investigator: Þórhallur Eyþórsson). I would like to thank Seiichi Suzuki for his friendly and helpful replies to my inquiries.

² Resolution refers to the substitution of a heavy syllable with two light syllables (see e.g. Árnason 2000, p. 33).

³ Eddic citations are from Kuhn's 1962 revision of Neckel's edition. The following poems are referred to; *Vǫlospá* (Vsp), *Þrymsqviða* (Þrk), *Vǫlundarqviða* (Vkv), *Helgaqviða Hundingsbana in fyrri* (HH), *Helgaqviða Hiqrvarðzsonar* (HHv), *Helgaqviða Hundingsbana ǫnnor* (HH II), *Grípisspá* (Grp), *Brot af Sigurðarqviðu* (Br), *Guðrúnarqviða in fyrsta* (Gðr I), *Oddrúnargrátr* (Od), *Atlamál* (Am), *Rígsþula* (Rp) and *Hyndlolióð* (Hdl).

- A2l⁴ afráð gjalda; Gunnr, Hildir, Gøndul; vindheim víðan (like A1 but with a heavy first drop).
- A2k sótrauðr hani; forn spiçll fira; miðgarðz véor (like A2l but with a light second lift).
- A3 stóð um vaxinn; þeir er miðgarð; hvárt scyldo æsir (alliteration only on the second⁵ lift; first drop can be polysyllabic).
- B oc miðian dag; hvars til húsa kom; búa þeir Høðr oc Baldr (first drop can be polysyllabic).
- C1 á røcstóla; oc tól gorðo; muno ósánir (heavy second lift; first drop can be polysyllabic).
- C2 ór iqtunheimom; af veði Valføðrs; lætr hann megi Hveðrungs (resolution in the first lift; first drop can be polysyllabic).
- C3 leicr hár hiti; undir heiðvønom; þærs í árdaga (light second lift; first drop can be polysyllabic).
- D1 opt ósialdan; grund valkyrior; nái framgengna (heavy first drop; optional resolution in the first lift).
- D2 há timbroðo; Baldrs andscota; mōgo Heimdalar (light first drop; optional resolution in the first lift).
- E1 Nástrøndu á; ginnheilug goð; ámáttkar mjøk (heavy first drop).

The above analysis applies to Old Norse poetry in the *fornyrðislag* meter. It is also possible to apply it to other Norse meters, such as *dróttkvætt* and *hrynhent* and indeed this is traditionally done. Each *dróttkvætt* line⁶ is then analyzed as a *fornyrðislag* verse followed by a trochee while a *hrynhent* verse is a *fornyrðislag* verse followed by two trochees. Thus a *dróttkvætt* line like *ok oddneytir úti* belongs to the C1 type while a *hrynhent* line like *yfirspennanda heima þrennra* can be classified as D1 with resolution in the first lift. The *rímur* meters are dominantly trochaic but contain occasional lines like *æpandi hljóp ylgr á braut* (E1), *ætt Háleyggja jalla* (D1) or *við Sigmundar sinnu drykk* (C1), representing vestiges of the old rhythmic system.⁷

⁴ Type A2l is also known as A2a. Suzuki (1996, p. 81–91) refers to A2k as A1s. I have retained the traditional name. Sievers' terminology for his subtypes is arbitrary and unintuitive but I think minor modifications will not serve to reduce confusion.

⁵ Suzuki (1996, p. 47–59; 2009, p. 37) and others have argued that A3 lines only contain one lift. I have not personally formed an opinion on this but since nothing in the ensuing discussion hinges on it I have presented the typology in the simpler traditional manner.

⁶ In the terminology used here, a ›line‹ in *dróttkvætt*, *hrynhent* and *ferskeytt* is the compositional unit corresponding to a ›verse‹ in *fornyrðislag* and *málháttur*.

⁷ In my view it is more productive to analyze the rhythmic patterns of late medieval Icelandic poetry with the method laid out in Árnason (2000) but to avoid introducing unnecessary complications this article uses the Sievers system throughout.

2. Definition of anacrusis

I use the word anacrusis in the sense, *optional initial drop*. A verse can be said to have anacrusis if a) it has an initial drop and b) a verse with the same structure except for the initial drop would be at least as metrical. Thus I do not regard the verses of types B and C described in section 1 as having anacrusis. The initial drops of those verses are part of their basic structure and not an optional extra. B-verses like *hvars til húsa kom* and C-verses like *leicr hár hiti* are fully metrical while verses like **húsa kom* or **hár hiti* are, at best, marginal.

To see clear examples of anacrusis in Old Icelandic verse we turn to the *rímur*. There we can find side by side examples like the following from Ólafs ríma Haraldssonar (Jónsson 1905–1922 I, p. 1–9).

Lines without anacrusis	Lines with anacrusis
12.2 bónda múg í móti	12.4 ok herða skot með spióti
21.4 frægum síóla at veita	21.2 ok kvöddu stilli enn teita
42.2 þreif sitt spiótið snarpa	42.4 við harða kóngsins garpa

Lines like *þreif sitt spiótið snarpa* are clearly the norm but lines like *við harða kóngsins garpa*, with an additional initial drop, are so frequent that they must be considered completely metrical. Thus the lines in question have anacrusis by the definition used in this article. Even the occasional non-trochaic lines have their anacrustic counterparts. The fourth line in the following stanza would be classified as type D1 in Sievers' system while the second line is a D1 line with anacrusis, an aD1 line.

ÓH. 30. Biálfa klæddiz hörðum Hundr,
ok hans sveitungar margir;
þat hafa geysi grimligt undr
gert Búfinnar argir.

We will revisit anacrusis in the *rímur* in section 7.

3. Anacrusis in Eddic *málahátt*?

Málahátt is a meter similar to *fornyrðislag* but with five metrical positions, rather than four, in the normal verse. The normal patterns are the following:

Am. 1.3 *seggir samkundu* / x / x x (Sievers D*)
Am. 2.5 *feldi stoð stóra* x x / / x (Sievers C*)
Am. 5.1 *Ólværir urðo* / x x / x (Sievers A*)
Am. 5.2 *oc elda kyndo* x / x / x (Sievers aA)

The corpus of *málahátt* poetry is small. In the Poetic Edda, only *Atlamál* is conventionally assigned to this meter.

We may ask if verses like *oc elda kyndu* should be regarded as type A *fornyrðislag* verses with anacrusis. By the definition in chapter 2 the answer

hinges on whether the initial drop can be regarded as optional, i.e. whether pure type A verses are at least as normal in *málaháttr*. There are indeed a few such verses in *Atlamál*, e.g. 53.3 *ótto alla*. Four position verses of other types also occur. Those verses are far fewer in number than the five position verses, which must be regarded as the norm, but they are not so few that they can be regarded as completely unmetrical.

I am disinclined to regard *málaháttr* as having anacrusis. *Atlamál* contains a mix of five position verses and four position verses, but there is no general principle where the long verses are derived from the short ones by adding an initial beat. There is no dispositive reason to see the pattern x / x / x as derived from an A verse by adding an initial drop any more than to see it as derived from a B verse by adding a final drop. I don't see why it should be seen as derived from anything in particular, at least on a synchronic view. The pattern is simply basic to *málaháttr*.

4. Anacrusis in Eddic *fornyrðislag* – the traditional view

In Eddic *fornyrðislag*, anacrusis is traditionally regarded as unmetrical. Such instances as seem to exist in the corpus are, on this view, to be dismissed as spurious. It is to be kept in mind that the Eddic poems were preserved for generations in oral tradition until they were collected and written down in the 13th and 14th century. Oral tradition is liable to introduce all manner of changes. Scribal mistakes are also to be reckoned with and it must be remembered that even the *Codex Regius* is a copy of an earlier manuscript.

4.1. Errors in the manuscript tradition

Is it possible that mistakes in the transmission can give rise to verses with anacrusis where they did not exist before? It is certainly easy to imagine, for example, how a C2 verse could be turned into an A verse with anacrusis (aA) through a minor modification. But there is no need to stop at speculation because this can be confirmed as having happened. In the case of *Vǫlospá* we are in the enviable position that a majority of the text exists in more than one manuscript.

The *Vsp.* 44.2 verse *fyr Gnúpahelli*, a C2 verse, occurs in *Hauksbók* as *fyrir Gnúpahelli*,⁸ an aA verse. Verse 5.10, which in *Codex Regius* and in *Hauksbók* reads *hvat hann megins átti* (a C2 verse), appears in *Codex Trajectinus* as *hvat hann megnis átti*. A simple letter substitution has given us an aA verse. Similarly, verse 10.8, which the main manuscripts give as *sem Durinn sagði* (C2), appears in *Codex Trajectinus* as *sem Durmenn sagði* (aA). Yet another

⁸ Here as elsewhere I use normalized spelling. *Hauksbók* does not normally mark vowel length but *gnúpa* (·of peaks·) is a valid word and a plausible name component for a cave while **gnupa* would be meaningless.

mistake in Codex Trajectinus is verse 53.5 *enn bíáni Belia* (aA) where the other manuscripts have *enn bani Belia* (C2). Finally, verse 28.13, which the Codex Regius of the Poetic Edda gives as *af veði Valföðrs* (C2) has the form *af veiði Valföðrs* (aA) in the Codex Regius of the Prose Edda.

Another way to create a spurious aA verse through a minor alteration would be to add a syllable after the first lift of a C1 verse or the second lift of a B verse. We can see something similar in the *Vǫlospá* attestations. The verse which the Codex Regius gives as *við Míms hófuð* has the unmetrical form *við Mímis hófuð* not only in Codex Trajectinus but also in Codex Upsaliensis. If we imagine for a moment that the poet used the archaic form *haufuð*, the result would be an aA1 verse.

We have seen how minor scribal mistakes, in most cases the addition of a single vertical stroke, can introduce verses with anacrusis or other metrical irregularities. In the case of *Vǫlospá* we are in the happy position of having multiple attestations of the text so mistakes in an individual manuscript can be easily identified as such. Most of the Eddic corpus, however, is only preserved in one manuscript, Codex Regius. We must not imagine that its scribe never made mistakes or that there were no mistakes in his exemplar – indeed the *Vǫlospá* text of Hauksbók is preferred by editors on multiple points.

4.2. Errors in the oral tradition

What about oral tradition? If verses with anacrusis were felt to be unmetrical by the poets then we would imagine that the people who learned the poems and transmitted them to us also felt it to be unmetrical. Might we not then expect that the transmitters would not alter the poems in a way that introduced anacrusis? And might we not expect that even if such verses were accidentally introduced they would be corrected somewhere along the line? We can certainly reckon with some corrective force of this kind but it would be a mistake to think that oral preservation never introduces metrical errors.

The people who learned and transmitted the poems cannot be assumed to have had, as their primary concern, the transmission of a metrically correct text. Indeed, in many cases they were transmitting a text which was metrically correct at an earlier stage in the language but had become metrically defective through linguistic changes. One well-known example is the loss of initial /v/ in the /vr/ cluster, leading to verses with defective alliteration. Another example is vowel contraction in hiatus, leading to verses with an unusual syllable structure (see Fidjestøl 1999 for an overview). We can even observe a process of this kind that led to the creation of a verse with anacrusis. In the Flateyjarbók text of *Hyndlolióð* we have the verse Hdl. 32.1 *eru vǫlvor allar*, an aA1 verse. By projecting this back to an earlier stage of the language we get *eru vǫlor allar*, a normal C2 verse.

When a memory lapse or other mistake led to the introduction of a metrically unusual verse (such as one with anacrusis) the people transmitting the poem, if they gave any thought to the irregularity, might simply have regarded

it as an archaism. The Eddic corpus, as it has come down to us, contains multiple examples of blatantly defective verses, including verses lacking in alliteration without justification in a previous language stage. Examples of such errors introduced by oral tradition can be more directly observed in late medieval Icelandic poetry, where they are abundant (Þorgeirsson 2010, p. 323–324).

5. Anacrusis in Eddic *fornyrðislag* – Suzuki's view

On the traditional view, mistakes of the kind described in section 4 are sufficient to account for the presence of occasional verses with anacrusis in the Eddic corpus as it has come down to us. Suzuki (2010, p. 160) dissents from this view and believes he has »refute[d] the traditional view that largely questions (if not categorically rejects) the metrical legitimacy of anacrusis in *fornyrðislag*«. The present article is critical of aspects of Suzuki's work so it will be helpful to state at the outset that I respect Seiichi Suzuki as a metricist and I think he has made valuable contributions to the field. I would like to explicitly reject Liberman's (2006) criticism of Suzuki's work, which he derides as »isolationist« and implies to consist mostly of pointless exercises in classification. On the contrary, I think painstaking collection and analysis of data in the manner conducted by Suzuki is both desirable and necessary. Even the article I am criticizing has much going for it. Looking at the three paragraphs in its conclusion, I largely agree with the first and the third, while I cannot accept the second.

5.1. Anacrusis as an »exceptional phenomenon«

Suzuki uses three different phrasings for the view or views he is arguing against. He rejects the idea that anacrusis should be described as any of the following:

- a) »a vestige without any structural value in the Norse metrical system«
- b) »a randomly occurring, exceptional phenomenon«
- c) »due to textual corruption« (Suzuki 2010, p. 164)

Suzuki does not go into any substantive discussion of transmission issues and argues instead against the views described with a) and b). Suzuki never explicitly formulates what we would expect to see if a) and b) were true but from his attempted refutation of those possibilities the following must be inferred.

Anacrusis is a randomly occurring, exceptional phenomenon if and only if verses with and without anacrusis otherwise have the same typical properties. Thus, aA1 verses are an exceptional occurrence if they are, apart from the initial drop, indistinguishable from A1 verses.

Suzuki conceives of this »exceptional phenomenon« view as the traditional position and sets about to refute it. But I don't at all agree that this is the traditional view. If anything, I think the traditional position entails that this formulation is false. If anacrusis were a legitimate but rare phenomenon in *fornyrðislag* then the »exceptional phenomenon« prediction is what I would, by default, expect to see by my definition of anacrusis in section 2. But if anacrusis is spurious, then I would not necessarily expect to see this. If, say, most of the apparent examples of aA1 verses were due to minor modifications of C2 verses, then I would expect aA1 verses to have properties similar to those of C2 verses. If, to build a slightly more plausible model, aA1 verses came about through a mix of corrupted C2, C1, B and A1 verses in the proportions 40%–20%–20%–20% then I would expect them to have properties resembling no verse type in particular.

I thus disagree with even the premises of Suzuki's argument so it is not surprising that I disagree with the conclusion. Nevertheless it is instructive to examine the matter in more detail.

5.2. Patterns in the data?

In order to refute the »exceptional phenomenon« idea, Suzuki's searches for some pattern in the data to distinguish verses with anacrusis from those without. He is, in particular, looking for something to distinguish aA1 verses from their A1 counterparts. Starting with some patterns which the aA1 type displays in Beowulf, Suzuki checks to see if they also hold true in *fornyrðislag*. In Beowulf, the aA1 type is characterized by occurring in the a-verse. Is this also true in Eddic *fornyrðislag*? It turns out that it is not. In Beowulf, aA1 is also characterized by being accompanied by double alliteration. Does this hold in the Edda? It does not. In Beowulf, the initial drop of aA1 is typically realized by a verbal prefix or the negative particle *ne*. Does the Eddic corpus of aA1 verses display this property? No, not at all.

Suzuki next checks to see if aA1 verses more commonly occur in the Eddic poems dealing with material associated with West Germanic tradition. Do aA1 verses appear more frequently there than elsewhere? The answer, we learn, is no.

Suzuki now tells us about the pattern he believes he *has* found. It turns out that all 26 examples of aA1 which Suzuki has found in the Eddic corpus have the property that the internal drop is monosyllabic. By contrast, only some 75% of normal A1 verses have a monosyllabic internal drop. This difference, Suzuki tells us, is statistically significant and thus the »exceptional phenomenon« idea is refuted.

It is well to remember at this point that I do not think the »exceptional phenomenon« theory is the traditional view or that it is even particularly consistent with the traditional view. To go into details, I would like to point out that if aA1 verses typically come about through corruption of C verses, an idea I have flirted with in previous sections, a monosyllabic first drop is

exactly what we would expect. Corrupted C verses would always give us a monosyllabic first drop while corrupted B verses would do so almost all the time (say 95%). For corrupted A1 verses we can use Suzuki's 75% number. If we plug these numbers into the model⁹ from section 5.1 we get the expectation that 94% of aA1 verses should have a monosyllabic first drop – the difference from Suzuki's observation of 26 verses with monosyllabic first drops is not statistically significant. The position I laid out in section 4 is thus by no means refuted.

But there are more issues I would like to raise. A fundamental methodological problem with searching for patterns in a dataset is that even a random collection of data will always display *some* pattern. If we observe a sequence of six die throws and see the sequence 1-6-1-6-1-6 then we have an interesting pattern. With a simple calculation we can see that the odds of getting this pattern are less than 0.003%. It is astonishingly unlikely to occur by chance! Do we conclude that the die throw is not fair? No, because there are any number of other results that would have constituted just as interesting a pattern; say 2-4-2-4-2-4 or 6-6-6-6-6-6 or 6-6-5-5-4-4 or 6-5-4-3-2-1. In order to evaluate, after the fact, whether the interesting 1-6-1-6-1-6 pattern can plausibly be a coincidence we would have to add up the probabilities of all equally interesting patterns, something that would be difficult, but not impossible, to define in some principled way.

The reader will now understand my skepticism about Suzuki's result. It seems to me that some interesting pattern can easily occur by chance in a set of 26 verses. From Suzuki (2010) and Suzuki (2009) I infer that many patterns would have counted as salient enough to establish metrical legitimacy. Some patterns that could have occurred, in addition to the Beowulf patterns already found to be lacking, would include a preference for single alliteration, a preference for a monosyllabic initial drop, a preference for a polysyllabic initial drop, a preference for a grammatical ending in the internal drop, a preference for a separate word in the internal drop, a preference for occurring in the b-verse, a preference for resolution in the first lift, a preference for not having resolution in the first lift etc. Or why not, say, a preference for a finite verb in the initial lift? Or some other identifiable word class in some particular position? Or maybe something to do with sentence structure. It has been noted that verses with anacrusis in Old English poetry have a greatly increased tendency to violate Kuhn's laws – wouldn't this have been an interesting pattern as well? The possibilities, while not endless, are certainly very many. That one dog – a preference for a monosyllabic internal drop – should bark is much less impressive when we notice all the equally interesting dogs that did not bark.

Suzuki, no doubt aware of this methodological issue, attempts to account for the pattern he discovered in some principled way, suggesting that "anacru-

⁹ I claim no particular accuracy for this model, I just offer it as an example of something consistent with the traditional view and the observations in sections 4.1.–4.2.

sis was licensed under the condition that resulting anacrusic verses should deviate minimally from the canonical four positions« (2010, p. 168). Insisting on a monosyllabic internal drop would then serve the goal of minimal deviation. At first glance this may appear plausible, but when we look at the dataset it becomes less so. Why, if the poets were concerned with minimal deviation, did they not outlaw polysyllabic anacrusis as in Þrk. 4.2 *þótt ór gulli væri* or Od. 25.6 *þar er þeir koma né scyldoð*? Wouldn't this serve to draw attention to the deviation? And what about the verse Vkv 38.3 *enn ókátr Níðuðr* where the internal drop is realized by a heavy root syllable?

5.3. Scansion

Suzuki lists 37 verses in the Eddic corpus which he analyzes as having anacrusis against 5822 (99.4%) that are, in his view, without anacrusis. This figure of 0.6% of the corpus is, in my view, within the bounds one could imagine as arising by transmission problems. But it is still worthwhile to look more closely at Suzuki's examples. In many cases his scansion is not the only one possible and sometimes I think it would be fair to describe it as novel.

I disagree with Suzuki's analysis of the following verses as aA2l:

Grp. 45.5 *en Brynhildr þicciz*
 Od. 18.4 *sú er Brynhildr átti*
 Od. 20.4 *sem Brynhildr scyldi*

It is more natural to analyze the first syllable of *Brynhildr* as short and scan those verses as C2. In this I am in agreement with Pipping (1903, p. 5), Ent (1924, p. 158–159) and Gering (1924, p. 178, 210).

I disagree with Suzuki's scansion of Þrk. 13.7 *Mic veiztu verða* as aA1. I scan the verse as A3 without anacrusis. Neither Sievers (1885, p. 35), Pipping (1903, p. 69), Ent (1924, p. 26) nor Russom (1998, p. 10, 49) scans the verse as having anacrusis. In my view, there is no particular reason to expect double alliteration here, cpr. Þrk. 17.3 *Mic muno æsir*. The same applies to the following three verses, which I scan as A3 rather than aA1.

HH. 1.5 *þá hafði Helga*
 HH. 53.11 *sá hafði hilmir*
 HH. II 37.1 *Svá hafði Helgi*

If we have a choice between the extremely common A3 type and the extremely rare aA1 type the mere presence of possible alliteration in the second syllable should not be enough to tilt the scales towards the latter – certainly not when the word in question is a weakly stressed finite verb. Pipping (1903, p. 66) scans the three verses above as I do and Russom (1998: 10, 49) finds no examples of anacrusis in HH. or HH. II. Gering (1924, p. 40, 45) hedges his bets.

I disagree with Suzuki's scansion of Þrk. 8.1 *Ec hefði Hlórriða* as aD. This is a fairly normal C3 verse and was analyzed as such by Sievers (1885, p. 34).

Pipping (1903, p. 91), to my surprise, agrees with Suzuki but Ent (1924, p. 25, 64) and Gering (1924, p. 14) do not and neither, it would seem, does Russom (1998, p. 10, 49). In my view the presence of a weakly stressed word starting with /h/ in the initial drop is fortuitous. The same applies to HH. II 3.1 *Nú hefjir hǫrð dæmi* and Gðr. I 8.7 *svá at mér maðengi*, which I scan as C1 verses. Pipping (1903, p. 95) scans HH. II 3.1 as I do but his scansion of Gðr. I 8.7 is based on an emendation and not comparable. Gering (1924, p. 46, 190) scans both verses as I do.

I disagree with Suzuki's scansion of Rp. 47.1 *Þá quað þat kráca* as aA1. The formula *þá quað þat X* occurs, by my count, 21 times in the Poetic Edda, always in the a-verse and in every case the word *X* alliterates with the following verse (e. g. Prk. 15.1–2 *Þá quað þat Heimdallr / hvítastr ása* or Br. 11.1–2 *Þá quað þat Guðrún / Giúca dóttir*). Suzuki's analysis implies that in 20 of the cases where this formula occurs we should analyse the word *quað* as without stress but in one case we should analyze it as stressed. I find this implausible. Pipping (1903: 63) and Gering (1924, p. 20) scan the verse as I do as does, implicitly, Russom (1998, p. 10, 49).

I have now rejected 11 of Suzuki's anacrusis examples, bringing the total down to 26. Several more examples could at least be quibbled over but this is enough for the point I wanted to make. It is entirely possible that Suzuki's scansion represents an advance over the work of previous scholars but before I can accept his results I need to at least understand his method. Unfortunately, Suzuki's article does not go into any substantive discussion of scansion – relegating the list of examples to a footnote. For the theoretical basis of his work, Suzuki refers to his books on Beowulf and the Heliand but I worry that methods developed in work on the West-Germanic poems will not always prove applicable to the Norse material.

6. Corpus vs. individual poems

Suzuki's article treats the Eddic poems in *fornyrðislag* as a single corpus, to be compared as a whole with the long individual works Beowulf and the Heliand. I think this is a legitimate way to proceed and that the short length of the individual Eddic poems renders it, to some extent, necessary. But it is not, of course, an approach without problems. The oldest Eddic poems may date to the 9th century while the youngest may be as young as the 12th century. Some were definitely composed in Iceland while at least one was composed in Greenland and a reasonable case can be made for some of them to have been composed in Norway. We would not necessarily expect poets spread across such distance in time and space to conform to the same poetic conventions.

We may now ask: Even if the theory that anacrusis was in general (albeit rare) use among the poets is to be rejected, isn't it possible that some individual poets did use this device? The data, in my view, are too sparse to allow

for a definite answer but it is instructive to look at what appears, at first glance, to be the most promising example.

6.1. Hyndlolióð

When we look only at verses the scansion of which there can be no doubt about, the only poem which shows a variety of verses with anacrusis is Hyndlolióð. It not only has A1 verses with anacrusis but also clear examples of two other types:

- Hdl. 42.8 *at regn um þrióti* (aA1)
- Hdl. 45.6 *á þriðia morni* (aA1)
- Hdl. 3.4 *oc manvit firum* (aA2k)
- Hdl. 23.6 *oc tveir Haddingjar* (aD1)

Suzuki also lists Hdl. 9.6 *svá at scati inn ungi* (aA1) which I regard as less clear but don't feel justified in rejecting. I am more tempted to dismiss Suzuki's scansion of Hdl. 44.3 *þó þori ec eigi* as aA1 since elision of the vowel in the pronoun is very well motivated historically (Jónsson 1933, p. 40–44) and would give a C2 verse.¹⁰

But there are actually even more examples in the manuscript. In verse 29.4, *Geymis* is conventionally emended to *Gymis*, changing an aA1 verse to a C2 verse. In the obscure verse 38.4, it is tempting to read *sónar*, along with some early editors, rather than *sonar*. Seeing that there are already so many verses with anacrusis in the poem, a metrical objection to this would not necessarily be justified. In verse 3.2 the manuscript is ambiguous but the reading *en svinnum aura* is perhaps the most straightforward and gives good sense. Finally, the first caesura in stanza 49 is sometimes placed before rather than after the word *skal* (thus e.g. Sigurðsson 1998, p. 405). We are now up to a total of ten verses with possible anacrusis, even if we categorically reject *en vǫlvor allar* as an anachronism.

But even if we go with Suzuki's more modest count of six examples of anacrusis that still seems like a lot and indeed Hyndlolióð has more examples of anacrusis than any other poem, whether we go by Suzuki's scansion or my own. This is all the more impressive when we consider that the poem is only of average length. It is especially striking to see the aA2k and aD1 verses. Those would not easily come about through corruption of C verses, as I have suggested for the aA1 verses.

Isn't it, then, justified to conclude that the poet who composed Hyndlolióð regarded anacrusis as a valid metrical device? In my view this is not what we should assume. On the traditional view, where anacrusis arises by transmission errors, what we would expect to see is that the poem with the most instances of anacrusis is the most poorly preserved, found in the latest manu-

¹⁰ It also doesn't seem inconceivable that a line-initial 'þó' preceding a finite verb could carry the alliteration and indeed the Edda does seem to have an example of this: HHv 28.1–2 *þrennar núundir meyia / þó reið ein fyrir*.

script and showing independent signs of alterations. This is exactly what we do find. Hyndlolióð is only preserved in Flateyjarbók, written in the last two decades of the 14th century. All the other poems in Suzuki's corpus are preserved in older manuscripts. The text of the poem, like that of most traditional poetry in Flateyjarbók, is notoriously corrupt. The conventional view is that the Hyndlolióð we now have preserved is a conflation of two originally independent poems. The fact that there are so many instances of anacrusis in the preserved text of Hyndlolióð is thus far from refuting the traditional view that anacrusis should be regarded as spurious. On the contrary, it tends to support that view.

But there are even more specific reasons to regard the anacrustic verses in the preserved text of Hyndlolióð as late alterations to the poem. Before discussing those we must introduce some more data.

7. Anacrusis in late medieval Icelandic poetry

On the traditional view, which I adhere to, anacrusis is not used in Icelandic poetry until the 14th century, when it starts to indisputably occur in poems with end-rhyme. Its presence in these poems is no great mystery, the anacrusis was taken over from foreign models along with other novel elements (see the examples in Ólason 1976).

7.1. Anacrusis in early *rímur*

The earliest attested of the new end-rhymed meters, the only one to occur in a 14th century manuscript, is *ferskeytt*. The earliest extant compositions in this meter likely date to the mid-14th century though the meter may have been first introduced a few decades earlier (Þórólfsson 1934, p. 49, 298). In order to get a look at Icelandic anacrusis at its earliest observable stage I have counted occurrences of it in the first *ferskeytt* fit of each of the ten *rímur* cycles believed to be the earliest (ca. 1350–1400) namely, Sörla *rímur*, Ólafs *ríma* Haraldssonar, Völsungs *rímur*, Lokrur, Friðþjófs *rímur*, Ólafs *rímur* Tryggvasonar af Indriða þætti, Úlfhams *rímur*, Þrymlur, Geðraunir and Sigmundar *rímur* (editions in Jónsson 1905–1922; for age estimates see Þórólfsson 1934, p. 294–322).

In a total of 1148 a-lines in this corpus I find 22 instances of anacrusis (2%) while in 1148 b-lines there are 205 such instances (18%).¹¹ It is clear that at its earliest stage in *ferskeytt*, anacrusis was strongly preferred in the b-line. Wisén (1881, p. vii) investigated a corpus of somewhat younger *rímur* and noticed a similar pattern.

¹¹ The numbers are conservative, in cases where there was any doubt as to the scansion of a line I did not count it as having anacrusis.

7.2. Anacrusis in traditional meters

Anacrusis eventually came to be used as a general principle in all Icelandic poetry, including the inherited traditional meters. *Dróttkvætt* and *hrynhent* proved resistant to it for some time – likely due to the rigid structural demands and conservatism of these forms. A telling example is Einarr Gilsson, a mid-14th century poet who wrote poems in *dróttkvætt*, *hrynhent* and *ferskeytt* (Ólafs ríma Haraldssonar). While he uses anacrusis with some frequency in his *ríma* he scrupulously avoids it in the traditional meters.

We might ask if *fornyrðislag*, with its comparatively free rhythm, came to be affected by anacrusis at an earlier stage than the other traditional meters. I think there is some evidence to support such a view. In the poem *Skaufhalabálkr*, which may date to the late 14th century, there are numerous examples of anacrusis. I count some 32 examples in Þorkelsson's edition (1888, p. 229–235) and I find it hard to believe that they are all spurious. They are distributed so that 4 are in the a-verse while 28 are in the b-verse – a distribution very similar to that which we observed in the *ferskeytt* poetry.

8. Return to Hyndlolióð

We now see that when *Flateyjarbók* was written (1387–1394), anacrusis had definitely become a part of the Icelandic metrical system. Indeed, the very text preceding *Hyndlolióð* in the manuscript is Ólafs ríma Haraldssonar, with its multiple examples of anacrusis. We have thus ever less reason to be surprised that the *Hyndlolióð* text contains anacrusis.

If the anacrusis in *Hyndlolióð* is to be explained, in whole or in large part, as a result of 14th century poetic tastes, we might expect it to show a pattern similar to that observed in the early *ferskeytt* poems and in *Skaufhalabálkr*, with anacrusis strongly preferred in the b-verse. It turns out that it does display this pattern. Of the ten apparent instances I discussed in section 6.1. there are nine in the b-verse and only one in the a-verse.

While I think this pattern was worth pointing out, I concede that it may have some other explanation¹² or simply be a coincidence. A more detailed study of anacrusis in 14th and 15th century Icelandic poetry could potentially upturn some part of this particular argument but would not affect my main conclusions.

¹² Certainly, it would not be unreasonable to relate this to Suzuki's (2010, p. 169) observation that aA1 dominantly occurs in b-verses in *Atlamál*.

9. Conclusion

Can we now regard it as certain that no poet ever used a verse with the rhythm $x / x / x$ in *fornyrðislag* before the 14th century? No, of course not. It's entirely possible that some poets regarded this pattern as something they could occasionally employ. This would, however, not necessarily mean that they regarded it as standing in a close relationship with the $/ x / x$ pattern.

Perhaps some apparent examples of $x / x / x$ are due to influence from West-Germanic tradition. Perhaps they are the eccentricities of individual poets. Perhaps they are all spurious. In my view the data are too sparse and too noisy to allow us to tell. What does seem clear to me is that if the phenomenon was real, it was rare and marginal and cannot be regarded as establishing the presence of anacrusis as a metrical principle in Old Norse verse.

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