

Ballad Composition in Faroese Heroic Tradition:

The Case of »Hernilds kvæði«

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The phenomenon of ballad variation has long fascinated ballad collectors and scholars. Today, most students of Anglo-American and Scandinavian ballad traditions ascribe to the Sharp and Gerould theory of communal re-creation, which posits that it is the very nature of oral ballad texts to change. Gerould proposes that there are two ways in which variation may occur:

Often, as has been suggested, singers must have forgotten musical or verbal phrases, and have repaired the gaps as best they could — sometimes admirably and sometimes to the detriment of the ballad. There is reason to believe, however, that other singers have been unable to resist the impulse to make alterations even though their memories have been extremely accurate. An old man in Somerset, whom Sharp knew, reproduced words with extraordinary fidelity but varied 'every phrase of his tune in the course of a ballad.' It was Sharp's judgement that such musical changes as those made by this man were 'nothing less than inspired invention.' They were obviously introduced because his imagination set him to playing with his themes precisely as the schooled composer develops his material, turning it this way

and that until he has secured an effect satisfying to his taste. The essential difference between the two processes lies in the unconsciousness of the folk-musician, whose experiments are not directed towards a desired end but are the random efforts of a moment. Is it too much to suppose that what some individuals have not been able to refrain from doing with melodies, other individuals have done with the words of the ballads?¹

According to this view, it is assumed that changes introduced into ballad texts by either memory lapses or creative impulses are limited, random acts: thus, widely varying texts reflect the cumulative effect of many such acts and presuppose a long history in oral tradition.

Although in most instances variant texts of a single ballad type do differ in limited, random ways, occasionally there are to be found in tradition variants that are so dissimilar that they may even be taken as representing different ballad types. One such case is the several Norwegian texts collected by Sophus Bugge, some of which were entitled »Here Pær å stolts Gunnild« (Bugge 163) and others, »Knut konungen rider ut« (Bugge 191). Leiv Heggstad and H. Grüner-Nielsen later recognized these as independent versions of the same ballad type and categorized them as such in *Utsyn yver gamal norsk folkevisedikting* (1912) under a new title »Den utruе egtemann« (Utsyn 137). In his article »'Den utruе egtemann': A Norwegian Ballad and Formulaic Composition« (1963) W. Edson Richmond has argued that the widely varying texts of »Den utruе egtemann« could not have been produced by communal recreation: the low number of texts collected (three complete texts and one fragment) would seem to indicate that this ballad type had not had a long enough life in tradition for this gradual process, as it is described by Sharp and Gerould, to have produced such profound changes. Instead, Richmond suggests that it is most likely that these changes came about by formulaic composition, a mode of performance in which singers re-

compose their ballad stories each time they sing them by means of a stock of metrical phrases, commonplace stanzas and traditional themes.² However, the picture that Richmond paints of the workings of oral ballad tradition is an unconvincing one:

....there is no doubt that both today and in the past singers have memorized texts and have suffered lapses in memory, and these lapses have resulted in the creation of ballad versions and variants which for various reasons have since been perpetuated in oral tradition. But....in additionwherever and whenever ballads are widely sung there exists a traditional manner of singing the story to which the singer feels more attachment than he does to the exact words and phrases which he originally heard. Moreover, by reliance upon the stock words and phrases which are part of this tradition, it is possible for him to reconstruct any ballad which he has heard without necessarily echoing a single expression from the text which was communicated to him.³

According to Richmond there are two change-producing processes concurrently at work in Norwegian ballad tradition — communal re-creation and formulaic composition. Ballad variants reflecting random minor changes were produced by the former, and those with more profound changes were the product of the latter. Unfortunately, this explanation raises far more questions than it seeks to answer: if there were two modes of performance, as Richmond suggests, then under what circumstances and where and when was each of these modes employed?

Although Richmond's explanation for the profound differences between variant texts of »Den utroe egtemann« seems somewhat unsatisfactory, his idea that texts such as these have much to tell us about the workings of oral tradition is nonetheless a good one. Certainly, as he submits, they call into question Sharp and Gerould's description of the ballad singer as a person who tinkers with and repairs ballad texts as best as

he or she can but whose efforts »are not directed towards a desired end.«⁴ Such widely varying texts would seem to suggest that the traditional singer is capable of larger creative acts, such as the radical recasting of a ballad. In this paper I would like to discuss the case of the Faroese ballad »Hernilds kvæði« (CCF 67), arguing that it reflects a thoroughgoing reworking of the popular »Hermundur illi« (CCF 66), in which the ballad man did not merely tell the same story in a somewhat different manner, but rather reinterpreted the relationships between his characters to such an extent that he finished by composing a new ballad.

In *The Types of the Scandinavian Medieval Ballad* (1978) »Hermundur illi« and »Hernilds kvæði« have been categorized as two separate ballad types: »Hermundur illi« is listed as motif-type E 85 »Bride rescued from unwanted marriage,« with the heading »Outlaw saves his beloved from an unwanted marriage,« and »Hernilds kvæði« as E 33 »Rescue of champion in distress,« with the heading »Champion is released from prison by reputedly cowardly brother.«⁵ In the light of these typifications and headings it would seem unlikely that any close relationship might exist between them. Nonetheless there do exist remarkable similarities, which quite naturally have been obfuscated by a traditional classification according to motif-type, a system quite successful when applied to the usually monoepisodic East Scandinavian ballads but less satisfactory for the customarily multiepisodic West Scandinavian heroic ballads.⁶ The typification of »Hermundur illi« as TSB E85 »Bride rescued from unwanted marriage« is based on only one of the ballad's several episodes, one to which there is no counterpart in »Hernilds kvæði«. Moreover, because the prose summaries of each ballad type are formulated to reflect the common elements in type-variants rather than reveal more abstract similarities between types, they too have disguised elements that these two ballads have in common. »Hermundur illi«, which has been collected in both Norway and the Faroe Islands, is summarized in TSB as follows:

Hermundur, the son of an earl, is very pugnacious (cN: he has killed one of his own brothers) and is therefore outlawed by the king. He falls in love with Halga, the king's daughter. By magic means Halga gets a messenger to tell Hermundur that her father wants her to marry another man. Hermundur returns and attends the wedding (F, cN: in disguise). — F: He kills the bridegroom. Hermundur is captured and imprisoned, and Halga sends word of this to his father. He urges his son Eiríkur, regarded as a coward, to act, and Eiríkur succeeds in releasing his brother. Hermundur kills the king and marries Halga while Eiríkur marries her handmaiden. — N: Hermundur kills the bridegroom (cN: who is a brother of his). When the king tries to capture him, Hermundur defeats him and forces him to give him his daughter.⁷

»Hernिल्ds kvæði«, of which we have only one text from the Faroes, has been summarized as follows:

Earl Atil has two sons. The elder, Aksal, is a weakling, while the younger, Hernild, is a keen fighter. He kills many men, and lady Elin, the daughter of a count, sees this. She urges her father to capture and kill Hernild. Hernild puts up a brave resistance but is eventually thrown into jail. Earl Atil tells Aksal that although he is such a coward he must at least free his brother. Aksal sets out, kills many of the count's men, releases his brother and takes him home. Earl Atil and his two sons set out against the count. They kill him and his men. Hernild also defeats a witch. He then takes Elin by force and makes her marry him.⁸

Looked at this way, these two ballads do not seem at all similar, but when the Faroese variants of »Hermundur illi«, especially the one from *Fugloyarbók* (CCF 66 D), are compared with »Hernिल्ds kvæði«, some remarkable similarities are revealed. To facilitate this comparison I have analyzed the *Fugloyarbók* text of »Hermundur illi« and the single extant

text of »Hernिल्s kvæði,« also from *Fugloyarbók*, numbering elements that are common to each text and bracketing those that are not.⁹

»Hermundur illi«

(1) King Atli and Earl Sigur are brothers who rule Saksland. (2) Earl Sigur has two sons; (3) the elder Heiðrikur is a coward, (4) whereas the younger Hermundur is very pugnacious and (5) kills many of King Atli's men. [(A) Atli sees the results of the carnage and goes to Earl Sigur and tells him that Hermundur may be hanged if he keeps it up. Sigur then talks to his wife, but nothing helps. Atli tells his daughter Halga and says that she may choose how Hermundur is to die. Instead, Halga advises her father to exile him, which the king does that very day. Hermundur says to the king that he would like to have him by the neck. Hermundur then goes to Halga and asks her to remember him kindly. She, however, reproaches him for the trouble he has caused, to which he retorts that if she had been a man he would have killed her. But he is upset by her words and leaves the country on his ship. Halga uses runes to force a reluctant old man Haki to find Hermundur. Hermundur sights Haki's boat and asks how Halga is faring. Haki reports that she misses him but has engaged herself to a knight named Hergeiri. Hermundur returns to Saksland and swears Haki to secrecy. Everyone is at church for the wedding, so Hermundur disguises himself in women's clothes. The wedding party returns, and Halga's handmaiden Beyða (also Hergeiri's sister) is suspicious of the disguised Hermundur. The newly married couple retires, and Hermundur hides in their bedroom. He kills Hergeiri, but (6) Beyða sees this and (7) tells everyone what has happened. (8) King Atli orders his capture, and (9) the king's men throw him with difficulty into a dungeon, where he is given neither food nor drink. [(B) Halga sends him food, and then] (10) sends

word of his plight to Earl Sigur, (11) who eggs the cowardly Heiðrikur into freeing his brother. (12) Heiðrikur fights his way to the dungeon and (13) sets Hermundur free. (14) They both attack the king's men and (15) do battle, (16) finishing by burning the king's hall with the king inside. [(C) Halga says that she does not care about her father's death as long as Hermundur is still alive.] (17) Hermundur marries Halga, [(D) Heiðrikur marries Beyða,] and (18) both brothers rule the land.

»Hernilds kvæði«

(1) Sigurlund and Earl Atil are brothers who rule Atland. (2) Earl Atil has two sons; (3) the elder Aksal is a coward, (4) whereas the younger Hernild is very pugnacious and (5) kills many man. (6) Lady Elin sees this and (7) tells her father, the Count of Hergarð. (8) He instructs her to gather men to oppose Hernild, and (9) they [(a) bind him with difficulty and] throw him into a dungeon, where he is given neither food nor drink. (10) Word of this reaches Earl Atil, (11) who eggs the cowardly Aksal into freeing his brother. (12) Aksal fights his way to the dungeon and (13) sets Hernild free. (14) Hernild wants to attack the count, [(b) but Aksal insists on first consulting with their father. Atil thinks they should avenge themselves on Elin. The count's page hears this and tells the count, who gathers a force.] (15) Both brothers together with their father battle the count's men, (16) finishing by burning the count at the stake. [(c) Earl Atil then suggests that Hernild should take Elin by force. When Hernild comes to the count's hall, a witch is there to do battle with him. He is unable to overcome her magic power and asks his father, who is an onlooker, for help. Atil prays to heaven and then tells his son to carve a cross on his sword. Hernild kills the witch and takes Elin by force.] (17) Hernild marries Elin, [(d) Aksal becomes his counselor,] and (18) both brothers rule for a long time.

This analysis shows that there are indeed striking similarities between »Hermundur illi« and »Hernिल्ds kvæði.« Both ballads tell about the career of pugnacious young man who runs afoul of the local ruler, ultimately killing him (with the help of a reputedly cowardly brother) and marrying his daughter. The principal differences between the two ballad stories are to be found in those parts dealing with the run-ins with and ultimate slaying of the ruler. If, in fact, the composer of »Hernिल्ds kvæði« did base his new ballad on a recasting of »Hermundur illi,« then he apparently telescoped the two run-ins with the ruler of his source ballad into just one:

Hermundur kills king's men.	Hernिल्d kills count's men.
King finds out.	
Halga calls Hermundur from	
exile.	
Hermundur saves Halga from	
unwanted marriage.	
Halga's handmaiden finds out	Elin finds out and tells
and tells king.	count.
King orders jailing.	Count orders jailing.
Hermundur freed by brother. ..	Hernिल्d freed by
	brother.

On the other hand, the composer of »Hernिल्ds kvæði« seems to have expanded the source ballad's single retaliatory battle with the king into two separate retaliatory battles, the first with the count and the second with the witch who defends his daughter:

Brothers fight king.	Brothers and father fight
	count.
They burn king alive.	They burn count alive.
 Hernिल्d fights witch with
	father's help.
 He defeats her and takes
	Elin.

On the level of plot the ways in which the ballad man changed the story of »Hermundur illi« to develop the new story in »Hernílds kvæði« do not seem everywhere well motivated. Certainly, the new ballad, without the love interest between Halga and Hermundur, is less entertaining. However, on the thematic level almost every change that the ballad man undertook in working out his new story served a single purpose — to convert a ballad about family disloyalty into one about family unity.

»Hermundur illi« is a ballad about trouble within the family: at first the pugnacious young man is seen as the trouble-maker and is punished by family members until the real villain is identified and dealt with. In the first part of the ballad Hermundur alienates his uncle by killing some of his men. Although Hermundur's parents are saddened by the turn that events have taken, they do not intercede, seeking, as his mother advises, only to tame their son somewhat and to provide him with a ship should he need to escape his uncle's wrath:

- 20 »Lat tá knørr á lunni ganga,
og hartil reyðargull reka,
kjósa so tær eitt fimmhundrað
og taka til tín son spekja!¹⁰

Even his cousin Halga, of whom he is quite fond, seems hostile: it is she who picks his punishment when asked to do so by her father:

- 21 »Hermundur hefur okkum neisur vunnið,
nú stár hans lív í versta,
hvat skulum vær til útländ gera
ella slíta ímillum hestar?«

- 22 Sváraði jomfrú Halga:
»Og tað gerst minni vandi,
gerið hann heldur til útlända
burtur av tygara landi!«¹¹

When Hermundur visits his cousin to say goodbye, she has no kind word for him, reproaching him instead for getting himself exiled. Outlawed and quite literally driven from the bosom of his family, he leaves the country. The second part of the ballad deals with the identification and punishment of the real villain in the family — Hermundur's uncle, King Atli. Although the ballad man is often silent about the motives of his characters, we may suppose that it is now King Atli who commits the disloyal act. Even though he sees that Halga is thinking of Hermundur, he has set himself against their marriage because of Hermundur's past obstreperous behavior:

- 73 Kongurin so til orða tekur,
væl kan orðum stilla:
»Má hin Halga hugsa tað
at syrgja Hermund illa!
- 74 Hevði hann Hermundur sinnað seg
og greitt hans hug frá sans,
eingin maður á Sakslandi
var javnlíki hans.
- 75 Hevði hann Hermundur sinnað seg
og greitt hans hugin frá,
fullvæl var hann borin til tað,
mína dóttur at fá.«¹²

Hermundur is true to Halga and puts an end to her unwanted marriage by slaying her new husband in the bridal bed. Again, King Atli is harsh with his young nephew, throwing him into a dungeon and starving him. Halga effects a shift in family loyalty by writing a threatening letter to Hermundur's father, who responds by sending his other son to help Hermundur against Atli. The two brothers kill their uncle. Hermundur marries his slain uncle's daughter and Heiðrikur her slain husband's sister.

In »Hernilds kvæði« the ballad man has moved the trouble outside the family group — the conflict here is between two

different families, and loyalties do not shift throughout the course of the story. It is interesting to note that »Hernilds kvæði« opens in the same manner as its source ballad, by telling about an older generation of brothers; but here they are not brought into conflict because of the obstreperous son of one of them. Instead, Hernild kills the men of the non-related Count of Hergarð. The count and his daughter act together to imprison Hernild, and Hernild's family is totally loyal in its efforts to free him. Family unity is emphasized when the two brothers, refraining from rushing off to take revenge on the count, seek advice from their father first. The count's response when he hears of Earl Atil's plan to attack his daughter is also a loyal one — he gathers a force to defend her, but is killed under the combined onslaught of the earl and his sons. The following fight to take Elin by force serves an emblematic function — Elin is helped by a witch who uses evil magic against Hernild, whereas Hernild is aided by his father, who prays to God for the means to combat the witch's spells. When Hernild defeats the witch and forces Elin to marry him, we are sure that the forces of good have vanquished the forces of evil.

Key to the ballad man's reinterpretation in his new ballad of the structure of familial relationships in »Hermundur illi« is his understanding of the perplexing Halga. To appreciate more fully how enigmatic she has become in Faroese tradition, especially in the text from *Fugloyarbók*, it is useful to compare her to her counterpart Hæge in the Norwegian reflex of the same ballad type, »Hermod Ille« (Landstad 17 A and B).

In Landstad's B text, which is the one most like the Faroese version of the story, Hæge's feelings are portrayed from the very beginning as loving.¹³ When her father threatens the two harshest forms of punishment for Hermod, she is dismayed and suggests a third much milder one:

- 8 Deð var Serklánds kongin
han dömer dómen den verste:
anten skal de no Hermoð hengje
ellá slíte með heste.
- 9 Til svarað Hæge fruga,
i breiðe benkin hon stoð:
skal Hermoð sá af garði fara
deð tikist vera sá vont.
- 10 Inki skal du Hermoð hengje,
og inki slíte með heste,
men lat en laupe lande-milljom
deð tikist meg vera deð beste.¹⁴

The situation appears quite different in the Faroese text of »Hermundur illi« from *Fugloyarbók* (st. 21 and 22 cited above), because we are not told anything about Halga's kind feelings for Hermundur. Moreover, when her father asks her to choose one of two punishments for Hermundur (exile or being pulled apart between horses), she simply picks one of the proffered options, exile, with the comment that »it will be less trouble.« There is no reason in the Faroese text not to believe that Halga is merely trying to help her father deal with his troublesome nephew. The impression that Halga does not care at all for Hermundur deepens when in a subsequent scene he goes to say goodbye to her:

- 27 Hermundur stendur á hallargólvi
við fagnað, tukt og sinni:
»Sit væl, jomfrú Halga,
tú mást væl á meg minnast!«
- 28 »Tað eru hvørki tjóvar ei trælur,
ei friður í hesum landi,
fyri hvat skal eg minnast á teg,
í útlandi ert tú vandur?«

- 29 Hermundur stendur á hallargólvi
 við slíðrabundnum knívi:
 »Hevði tað verið sonur til faðir tín,
 so skuldi tú látið lívið.«¹⁵

This interaction between Hermundur and Halga parallels the immediately preceding scene in which the hostile King Atli passes sentence on his nephew at court and is then threatened by him. The purpose of both these scenes seems to be the same: to show how harshly Hermundur is treated by antagonistic family members. The corresponding scene in Landstad's B text of »Hermod Ille« is very different. Here, Hæge reciprocates Hermod's affection and becomes his lover. In this version their angry words are nothing but a lover's quarrel, after which they make up and sorrowfully part, promising to remain true to each other:

- 14 Eg plaga no aldri vera sá rædd
 eg tikist i hugin skjæve,
 eg tor fulla gange i högan loft
 og röða með fruga Hæge.
- 15 Dei lág ihóp den lange nott
 alt með kvoraðres síðe,
 notti leið og sóli kom
 dei skjuldest með sorg og kvíðe.
- 16 Tjóvanne og trælanne
 dei hava no freð i lande,
 ferutan du Ille Hermod
 du aukar deg sjave din vande.
- 17 Tjóvanne og trælanne
 dei hava i landi freð
 feruttan du Ille Hermod
 du fær inki notte-greð.
- 18 Og deð var Ille Hermod
 han riste pá sylvgjurðe sverð:
 var du inki Hæge fruga
 fara sille du ei ferð!

- 19 Og deð var Ille Hermoð
riste pá sylvgurðe hnív,
var du inki Hæge fruga
láte sille du dit lív!
- 20 Og deð var Ille Hermoð
skreidde seg framtil með taki:
no gjorðe meg Hæges orði verr
hell alle míne löynde sakir!
- 21 Og deð var Ille Hermoð
skreidde seg framtil með borgi:
no gjorðe meg Hæges orði verr
hell alle mine löynde sorgir.
- 22 Dei gekk dá ivir den vestre brúi,
som Guð gav dei til ráðe
sá gave dei kvoraðre si trú
og eiðen svóre dei báðe.¹⁶

By sending a messenger to Hermoð when her father betrothes her to Hermoð's brother, Hæge in Landstad's B. text remains true to the promises she made to her lover. Her behavior here is completely consistent with that of the first part of the ballad. However, in the Faroese version from *Fugloyar-bók* Halga's sending for Hermundur is not so readily understood. For one thing, there is no stanza (such as st. 32 above from »Hermod Ille«) telling the reason for her action. Furthermore, her behavior here is inconsistent, for in the first part of the ballad she is quite hostile to Hermundur. The confusion is compounded when the messenger, in answering Hermundur's questions about everyone back home, says that Halga misses him, but has promised herself to another man:

- 49 »Enn livir jomfrú Halga
av so miklum villa,
allar sínar dagarnar
syrgir hon Hermund illa.«

53 Til tað svaraði Haki kall:

»Enn vil eg siga meir,
Halga hevur seg ein riddar lovað,
og nevndur Hergeiri.«¹⁷

However, after Hermundur returns to Saksland Halga is clearly loyal to him: she helps him evade discovery at court and sends a letter to his father to bring about the escape from prison.

The ending of »Hermundur illi« causes special problems for the interpretation of Halga's character: Hermundur does not become reconciled with Halga's father as in the Norwegian texts, but instead kills him, and Halga expresses her approval of the deed:

111 Svaraði jomfrú Halga,

sum øllum tókti undur:
»Eg skoyti ikki um faðirs deyða,
so livir Hermundur.«¹⁸

Throughout the *Fugloyarbók* text of the ballad Halga's shifting loyalty makes her a very difficult character to sympathize with and understand. Indeed, the ballad man himself expresses his own sense of perplexity at her response to her father's death when he reports in the second line of stanza 111: »sum øllum tókti undur« (which all thought strange).

Not only does the ending of »Hermundur illi« render Halga's behavior reprehensible, it also casts quite an equivocal light on the ballad's hero, Hermundur. In slaying King Atli he kills his own blood relative, a deed sternly dealt with in Faroese ballad tradition. For example, sometimes the slaying of a kinsman is seen as the result of a cruel, unavoidable fate, and the slayer himself dies soon thereafter, as in »Gríms táttur« of *Sniolvs kvæði* (CCF 91) and »Norna-Grímur« (CCF 56). Elsewhere the slayer is depicted as an evil man who afterwards dies a violent death, as in »Snæulvs ríma« (CCF 92). Indeed, the only justification in Faroese tradition for the killing of a

blood relative is the taking of vengeance for the slaying of a still closer relation, as in »Guttormur í Hattarmóti« (CCF 58). Thus, it would appear that the treatment of kin slaying in »Hermundur illi« is somewhat unusual: Hermundur kills his uncle and takes ostensibly as reward the hand of the princess. This ballad is unsettling, for it deals in an ambiguous manner with the most serious of crimes. Perhaps for precisely this reason it has proved popular, fascinating audiences throughout the Faroe Islands: the moral of the story is unclear, prompting each listener to make his or her own judgment of the actions of the characters.¹⁹

Several variants of »Hermundur illi« reflect the interest of singers of these texts in resolving the ballad's moral ambiguity by either apologising for or indicting characters involved with the kin slaying. On one hand, the texts from Skúvoy and Sandoy (CCF 66 Ca and b, Ea and b) vindicate Hermundur: in them he slays only his father's foster brother. The texts from Sandoy also exculpate the two women, Halga and Beyða, who by their marriage have seemed to approve of the killings of their father and brother. First, the E-texts justify somewhat Halga's marriage to Hermundur, the slayer of her father, by stressing from the very outset that they love each other:

- 10 Kongurin eigur eina dóttur,
runnin er upp í ský,
hagar leggur Hermundur
allar ástir í.
- 11 Kongurin eigur eina dóttur,
runnin er upp sum lilja,
hagar leggur Hermundur
ástir og allan vilja.
- 12 Tá leið ikki longur um
enn eina so lítla stund,
nú leggur hann ást við Halgu
í teirri grønu lund.

- 13 Tá leið ikki longur um
 enn eina so lítla tíð,
 nú leggur hann ást við Halgu
 í teirri grønu líð.²⁰

Thus, Halga in the E-texts is a woman whose choices are made difficult because her loyalties are divided between her father and her childhood sweetheart. This is a very different figure from the Halga of the D-text from *Fugloyarbók* discussed above, who has capriciously shifted her loyalty during the course of the ballad story from her father to a new boyfriend. Second, Beyða, who in all other texts is Hergeiri's sister, is presented in the E-texts as merely Halga's handmaiden, so that her marriage to Heiðrikur has nothing to do with the issue of kin slaying. Furthermore, she is described in the E-texts as much less hostile to Hermundur, her future brother-in-law, than in any of the other texts — she is not suspicious of his disguise; she repents of having given the alarm about the killing of Hergeiri; and later she is sent by Halga to the earl to get help for his imprisoned son, and aids the rescuer in finding his way.

The composer of »Hernिल्ds kvæði« went much further than the traditors of the D and E-texts of »Hermundur illi« in attempting to resolve the moral crux. Whereas they sought to understand the crimes of the hero and heroine in terms of their characters and motives, the composer of »Hernिल्ds kvæði« considered these crimes incomprehensible from any viewpoint and chose rather to reconstruct the ballad story so that it might be more edifying, telling about families that were loyal to each other rather than those that were not.

In working out his new ballad the composer of »Hernिल्ds kvæði« used as his point of departure a variant of »Hermundur illi« very similar to the D-text in which the hero kills his father's brother for the sake of a woman of less than admirable character. His moralizing reinterpretation of the characters' interrelationships led the composer to make two important

changes in his source: (1) his Hernild is not related to the count, and (2) he based his portrayal of Elin only on the Halga that we find early in the source ballad — loyal to her father and hostile to Hermundur. Therefore he deleted in his reworking of the source ballad all of the sections bracketed in the analysis above — namely, the king's warning to his brother, who is the father of the obstreperous hero, and the entire story about the love between Halga and Hermundur (Section A); the help that Halga gives Hermundur while he is in prison (Section B); Halga's heartless words at her father's death (Section C); and Heiðrikur's marriage to Beyða (Section D). Likewise, the ballad man's reinterpretation of his source led him to insert into his new ballad several scenes to make his point all the more clear: to emphasize family solidarity he added one scene in which the hero and his brother seek the advice of their father (Section b) and another in which the king's daughter, rather than submit to the hero, resists and has to be overcome by force (Section c). The ballad man chose to end his new ballad just like the old, by mentioning the fates of both brothers; but owing to the omission of the story about Halga and Hermundur's love and loyalty, in which a second woman plays a role, he had no one to pair Aksal with and had to content himself with mentioning that Aksal, now in the role of counselor, continues to help his brother (Section d). Section a was added to the new ballad simply as gratuitous embellishment of the capture scene.

If »Hernilds kvæði« is in fact a deliberate recasting of »Hermundur illi,« then it is interesting to note how few stanzas these two ballads have in common: of the total seventy-six stanzas in »Hernilds kvæði« only fifteen have close counterparts in the source ballad. The particularly close relationship already posited for thematic reasons between »Hernilds kvæði« and the D-text of »Hermundur illi« is further evidenced by the fact that six of these fifteen stanzas are only to be found in the D-text and the rest also have without exception their closest parallels there.²¹ The composer of »Hern-

ilds kvæði« could have made much more frequent use of stanzas from his source ballad. A prime example of this is to be found in the beginning of both ballads: thematically they are exactly the same, but although the opening stanzas are virtually identical, those that follow describing the cowardly older brother and pugnacious younger one vary considerably:

»Hermundur illi« (the D-text)

- 6 Heiðrikur vaks í sín faðirs garði,
sum øll plaga yvir hann hoyra,
hann var so ræddur í sín hug,
hann tordi ikki síggja mann vreiðan.
- 7 Hann var so ræddur í sín hug,
hann tordi ikki síggja mann bløða,
í teim víggjum vildi hann ei vera,
tá hjórtur varð skudt til dæda.
- 8 Hermundur vaks í sín faðirs garði,
við tað fór hann fram,
hann tók sær ikki tann dag heilan,
hann blógvaði tá ikki mann.
- 9 Hermundur vaks í sín faðirs garði,
sum søgur ganga frá,
hann tók sær ikki tann dag heilan,
hann blógvaði ikki ein ella tvá.
- 10 Hann var ikki meir enn tólv ár,
hann beiddist seg út við svørði,
legði seg uppi við Atla liði
og skoytti ikki, hvat ið hann gjærdi.²²

»Hernilds kvæði«

- 5 Aksal eitur tann eldri,
ræddur var hann blant manna,
hann torir ikki á víðan vøll,
og aldri við váknum kannu.

- 6 Tað var hildi Aksal,
sum einki so vildi hann,
hann var so ræddur í sín hug,
hann tordi ikki at blógva mann.
- 7 Aksal var so ræddur í hug,
sum so ganga søgur frá,
hann torir ikki við svørði leika,
ei bera brynju blá.
- 8 Hernild eitur tann yngri,
eitt sterkt megí hevði hann pá,
tá ið hann var fjúrtan ár,
drap hann, hvat hann sá.
- 9 Hernild eitur tann yngri,
og sterkari var hann,
tá ið hann var fjúrtan ár,
tá drap hann, hvat hann fann.
- 10 Tann yngri hann eitur Hernildur,
sum væl kann við at fara,
hvat sum hann fyri eygum sær,
tað fellir hann niður til jarðar.
- 11 Tá ið hann var fjúrtan ár,
tá gav hann mongum knekk,
tá ið hann var fimtan ár,
tá drap hann, hvat hann fekk.²³

What we must try to explain is this: why did the ballad man open »Hernilds kvæði« with four stanzas that have their models in his source ballad and then suddenly strike off on his own, forging a series of new stanzas? We can eliminate from consideration the possibility that he was thematically motivated to create new stanzas to describe Aksal and Hernild, for they are the exact counterparts of Heiðrikur and Hermundur. Furthermore, the fact that none of the new stanzas is a commonplace suggests that they were not composed by

an improvisational technique such as the one described by Parry and Lord's theory of oral composition. In addition, to say that the new stanzas may be simply the result of a lapse of memory fails to account for the absence of any stanzas that seem half-remembered. Instead, it appears likely that the ballad man did not make a concerted effort to utilize in his new ballad all thematically appropriate stanzas from the old one, but that he often preferred to compose his own. In his sparing use of stanzas from »Hermundur illi« he seems to express an awareness that although his ballad is rooted in the old, it nonetheless has a separate identity. He also expresses this awareness in his choice of names for his characters — some of them seem derived from names in »Hermundur illi« and some do not. On one hand, the names of the brothers Sigurlund and Earl Atil and the hero Hernild of »Hernilds kvæði« seem very similar to a like set of characters in the source ballad — Earl Sigur, King Atli and Hermundur illi. The derivation of the name Hernild from Hermundur illi is suggested by the rhymes of the following related pair of stanzas:

»Hermundur illi«

- 5 Jallurin eigur tógva synir,
gitnir av góðari giftu,
annar eitur Heiðrikur
og annar Hermund illi.²⁴

»Hernild kvæði«

- 4 Atil jall eigur synir tveir,
gitnir í góðum gildi,
annar hann eitur Aksal,
og annar eitur Hernild.²⁵

On the other hand, the names Aksal, Elin and the Count of Hergarð in »Hernilds kvæði« are not related to the names of any characters in the source ballad.

Sometime prior to 1854 when Hanus Hanusson from Fugloy compiled his *Fugloyarbók*, a ballad man, most likely also from one of the northern islands, was inspired by a local variant of the widely sung »Hermundur illi« to compose a new ballad, »Hernilds kvæði.« Even though students of Faroese heroic ballads rarely can operate with anything more definite than a *terminus ante quem*, such as the one above, there is some reason to believe that »Hernilds kvæði« is of relatively recent composition. The fact that it is found in only one variant, although not proof of youth, speaks rather for than against a short life in tradition. Compare »Hernilds kvæði« in this respect to its source, »Hermundur illi,« which by virtue of its close relationship to the Norwegian »Hermod Ille« is assumed to belong to the oldest layer of Faroese ballads: this ballad exists in eight variants from all over the Faroe Islands.²⁶ The language of »Hernilds kvæði« also suggests that it is young: eight percent of its rhymes are formed with words that have been borrowed into Faroese from Danish, probably via the rhymes of Danish ballads which became popular in the islands with the publication of Peder Syv's *Et hundrede udvalde danske viser . . . forøgede med det andet hundrede* (1695).²⁷ Again, compare this with the variants of »Hermundur illi,« none of which contains more than four percent of Danish rhyming words.²⁸ Furthermore, since none of these Danish rhymes in »Hermundur illi« is found in more than one of its major variants, it seems likely that they are all later accretions. The few indices available for assessing the age of a Faroese heroic ballad point to the first half of the nineteenth century as the most likely period during which »Hernilds kvæði« may have been composed.²⁹

There is nothing in »Hernilds kvæði« that sets it apart from other Faroese heroic ballads. Likewise, there is nothing to suggest that its composer was anything other than a member, albeit a very creative one, of some Faroese ballad community on one of the northern islands. A comparison of his ballad and the one he used as his model shows him to be quite unlike the

folk artist described by Sharp and Gerould — unconscious and randomly creative. On the contrary, the changes that he wrought in »Hermundur illi« were purposeful, springing from a desire to depict its characters without ambiguity and to present the story in a more straightforward moral climate. Moreover, in composing the text of his new ballad he did not depend stanza-by-stanza on his source but often preferred to compose his own stanzas independently. Indeed, it is very difficult to distinguish the creativity of this Faroese ballad man from that of a literary artist reworking a piece from another era. If the artistic products of an unlettered folk tradition are different from those of a literary tradition, it is not because of the relative »unconsciousness« or »self-consciousness« of the artists. It is because of the differing conditions under which these works of art are produced and enjoyed, the differing esthetic rules governing their formulation and the differing constraints obtaining in the communities which receive them.

NOTES

¹ Gordon Hall Gerould, *The Ballad of Tradition* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1932; rptd. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1957), p. 187. The two quotations in this passage are from Cecil James Sharp, *English Folk-Song: Some Conclusions* (London: Simpkin & Co., 1907), pp. 17, 21 and p. 24. The idea that traditional narrators are usually seen by folklorists as creative only in the sense that they recombine components of a traditional, finite stock has been criticized by Robert A. Georges in »The Kaleidoscopic Model of Narrating: A Characterization and a Critique,« *Journal of American Folklore*, 92 (1979), 164—171.

² W. Edson Richmond, »Den utrue egtemann': A Norwegian Ballad and Formulaic Composition,« *Norveg*, 10 (1963), 62. In this article Richmond applies the theory, but not the methodology, of oral-formulaic composition, formulated by Milman Parry and Albert B. Lord.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

⁴ See note 1.

⁵ Bengt R. Jonsson, Svale Solheim and Eva Danielson, eds., in collaboration with Mortan Nolsøe and W. Edson Richmond, *The Types of the Scandinavian Medieval Ballad: A Descriptive Catalogue*, The Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture in Oslo, ser. B, vol 59 (Oslo, Bergen, Tromsø: Universitetsforlaget, 1978), pp. 235 and 216.

⁶ The editors of TSB have minimized this problem with regard to Faroese ballads by cataloging separately the different *tættir* (chapters) into which the longer heroic ballads are usually divided.

⁷ Ibid., p. 235.

⁸ Ibid., p. 216.

⁹ I have not had access to *Fugloyarbók* for the texts of these two ballads, but have relied upon *Føroya kvæði: Corpus Carminum Færoensium*, ed. Christian Matras (Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1945), III:2, 70—75, 89—93.

¹⁰ Trans.: (20) »Let that ship onto the ramp, and have it worked with red gold, so choose for yourself some five hundred, and venture to tame your son!«

¹¹ Trans.: (21) »Hermundur has done us great harm, now his life is in jeopardy; shall we rather exile him or tear him apart between horses?« (22) Lady Halga answered: »Oh, it will cause less trouble — send him rather to foreign lands, away from your country.«

¹² Trans.: (73) The king begins to speak, well can he choose his words: Halga must hold that in mind, to sorrow for Bad Hermundur! (74) If Hermundur had controlled himself and behaved with good sense, no man in Saksland would be his match. (75) If Hermundur had controlled himself and behaved with any thought, he was full well born to that, to marry my daughter.«

¹³ In Landstad's A-text Hæge plays no role in this section of the ballad dealing with Hermoð's early crime and exile.

¹⁴ Trans.: (8) It was the king of Serkland, he passes the worst sentence: they shall either hang Hermoð or tear him apart with horses. (9) To that answered Lady Hæge, she stood by the broad bench: »If Hermoð must thus leave the estate, it seems to be so bad. (10) You are not to hang Hermoð and not to tear him apart with horses, but let him wander from land to land, that seems to me to be the best.«

¹⁵ Trans.: (27) Hermundur stands on the hall floor with gladness, decency and composure: »Be well, Lady Halga, you must think of me kindly!« (28) »There are neither thieves nor thralls, no peace in this land, why should I think of you, you are bound for exile?« (29) Hermundur stands on the hall floor with a sheathed knife: »Had you been your father's son, so you would have lost your life.«

¹⁶ Trans.: (14) »I am usually not so scared, I seem to shake in my shoes, I dare to go into the high-ceilinged room and speak to Lady Hæge.« (15) They lay together all night long, right by each other's side, the night passed and day came, they parted with sorrow and pain. (16) »The thieves and the thralls, now they have peace in the land, except for you Bad Hermoð, you make things worse for yourself. (17) The thieves and the thralls, they have peace in the land, except for you Bad Hermoð, you

won't get peace at night.« (18) And that was Bad Hermoð, he scratched on his silver sword: »If you weren't Lady Hæge, you wouldn't be going anywhere!« (19) And that was Bad Hermoð, he scratched on his silver knife: »If you weren't Lady Hæge, you would lose your life!« (20) And that was Bad Hermoð, he strode out by the gable: »Hæge's words are worse for me than all my hidden worries.« (21) And that was Bad Hermoð, he strode out by the fortress: »Hæge's words are worse for me than all my hidden sorrows.« (22) They walked over the western bridge, which God put at their disposal, they gave each other their pledge of faith, and they both took an oath.

¹⁷ Trans.: (49) »Lady Halga lives on in so much perplexity, all of her days she grieves for Bad Hermundur.« (53) To that answered old man Haki: »I still have more to say, Halga has engaged herself to a knight and he is named Hergeiri.«

¹⁸ Trans.: Lady Halga answered, which all thought strange: »I don't mind about my father's death, if only Hermundur lives.«

¹⁹ There are at least eight extant texts of »Hermundur illi« from Suðuroy, Skúvoy, one of the northern islands and Sandoy.

²⁰ Trans.: (10) The king has one daughter, she has grown so tall, on her has Hermundur set his whole heart. (11) The king has one daughter, she has grown like a lily, on her has Hermundur set his heart and all his will. (12) Not much more time went by than a short while, when he shares his love with Halga in yon green glade. (13) Not much more time went by than a short interval, when he shares his love with Halga in yon green field.

²¹ The stanzas in »Hernिल्s kvæði« and their counterparts in the D-text of »Hermundur illi« are as follows: 1:1, 2:2, 4:5, 23:91, 24:92, 25:94, 35:103, 36:104, 50:106, 51:107, 52:108, 53:108, 54:109, 55:110 and 75:112. I have italicized the six stanzas which have no counterparts in any other variant of »Hermundur illi.«

²² Trans.: (6) Heiðrikur grew up on his father's estate, as all have heard about him, he was so cowardly in his heart, he didn't dare look at an angry man. (7) He was so cowardly in his heart, he didn't dare look at a man bleed, he didn't want to be in those contests when a hart was shot to death. (8) Hermundur grew up on his father's estate, and at that point he went off, he didn't let a day go by when he didn't bloody a man. (9) Hermundur grew up on his father's estate, as many tales are told, he didn't let a day go by, that he didn't bloody one or two. (10) He wasn't more than twelve years old, when he set out with his sword, he threw himself at Atli's troops and didn't care what he did.

²³ Trans.: (5) The elder is called Aksal, he was frightened among men, he doesn't dare to venture on the wide field and try out some weapons. (6) That was Sir Aksal, he wasn't so ambitious, he was so cowardly in

his heart, he didn't dare bloody a man. (7) Aksal was so cowardly in his heart, as many tales are told, he didn't dare swing a sword or wear a blue byrnie. (8) The younger is called Hernild, he was mighty strong, when he was fourteen years old, he struck whatever he saw. (9) The younger is called Hernild, and he was stronger, when he was fourteen years old, then he struck whatever he found. (10) The younger is called Hernild, who knows how to handle himself, whatever came before his eyes, he felled it to the ground. (11) When he was fourteen years old, then he gave many a thrashing, when he was fifteen years old, then he struck whatever he got.

²⁴ Trans.: (5) The earl has two sons, begotten of good fortune, one is called Heiðrikur and the other Bad Hermundur.

²⁵ Trans.: (4) Earl Atil has two sons, begotten of great vigor, one is called Aksal and the other is called Hernild.

²⁶ See note 19. Jón Helgason has pointed out that our earliest trace of »Hermundur illi« is from 1639 — it was one of the ballads sent to Professor Ole Worm in Copenhagen in that year. This MS has since been lost, but Peder Syv cited several stanzas from it in his ballad edition from 1695. See Helgason's »Færøiske studier,« *Maal og minne* (1924), 29—37.

²⁷ The rhyming words of Danish origin in »Hernिल्s kvæði« are as follows: *pá*, st. 8; *knekk*, st. 11; *bý*, st. 19; *vold*, st. 72; *makt*, st. 74; *akt*, st. 74.

²⁸ The rhyming words of Danish origin in variants of »Hermundur illi« are as follows: (A) none; (B) none; (C) 2 % — *gár* in sst. 46 and 79; (D) 4 % — *stár* in st. 36; *gá* in sst. 68 and 69 and *sans* in st. 74; (E) 1 % *bý* in st. 45 and *tvang* in st. 89; and (F) 1 % — *gá* in st. 34.

²⁹ This dating of »Hernिल्s kvæði« supports Svale Solheim's view that Faroese heroic ballad tradition was productive long after it had ceased receiving fresh impulses from Norway. See his »Færøysk-norsk i folkevisediktinga,« *Fróðskaparrit*, 18 (1970), 297—306.

ÚRTAK

Onkuntíð fyr 1854, tá Hanús Hanusson hevði skrivað sína *Fugloyar-bók*, fekk ein maður, helst eisini norður á landi, hugskot til at yrkja eitt nýtt kvæði, »Hernिल्s kvæði«, eftir einum avbrigdi av tí víða kenda kvæðinum »Hermundi illa«. Hóast tey, sum granska føroysk kvæði hava sjáldan fastari um at halda til tíðarfestingar enn *terminus ante quem*, sum eitt nú í hesum føri, eru kortini góðar grundir til at ætla, at »Hernिल्s kvæði« er rættiliga ungt í gøtuni. Tað, at kvæði er til bert í einari uppskrift er, hóast tað í sjálvum sær einki prógv er, kortini ein ábending um styttri heldur enn longri lív á mannamunni. Berið her »Hernिल्s kvæði«

saman við keldu sína »Hermund illa«, sum, av tí at tað er so nær í ætt við norska kvæðið »Hermod Ille«, verður hildið vera av elstu føroysku kvæðum: hetta kvæðið er til í átta uppskriftum víðan úr landinum. Málið í »Hernिल्s kvæði« talar fyri, at tað er ungt: 8 % av rímunum eru av orðum, sum eru komin inn í føroyskt mál úr danskum, ætlandi gjøgnum rím í danskum vísum, sum vunnu yndi í Føroyum við dansku vísbókunum. Her kann aftur verða borið saman við uppskriftirnar av »Hermundi illa«: eingin teirra hevur meira enn 4 % av danskum rímorðum. Av tí at hesi dansku rímuni í »Hermundi illa« eru bert í *eini* av høvuds-uppskriftunum, er líkt til, at tey eru øll afturatkomin í seinni tíð. Tað sindrið, sum er tókt til at meta um aldur á føroyskum kvæðum, bendir á, at »Hernिल्s kvæði« man vera yrkt í 18. öld ella í fyrra helmingi av 19. öld.

Tað er einki í »Hernिल्s kvæði«, ið skilur tað frá øðrum føroyskum kvæðum. Yrkjarin, ið helst man vera úr Norðuroygjum, sýnir skapanargávur. Samanburður millum hetta kvæði og tað, hann hevði til fyrimynd, sýnir, at hann er heilt ólíkur teimum almúgulistamonnum, sum kvæðagranskararnir Cecil Sharp og Gordon Gerould umrøða sum óavvitandi og tilvildarlíga skapandi. Tvørturímóti, tær broytingar, sum hann gjørði í »Hermundi illa« vóru miðvísar, sprotnar av ynski um at lýsa persónarnar uttan tvískinning og at siga søguna í einfaldari siðaligum ljósi. Hann yrkti ikki nýggja kvæði sítt ørindi fyri ørindi eftir fyrimyndini. Hesin kvæðayrkjarin ber seg at mestsum ein rithøvundur, ið endurskapar eitt verk úr øðrum tíðarskeiði. Um skaldskapur hjá óskriftførari almúgu er øðrvísi vorðin enn hjá fólki við gomlum bókmentaarvi, kemst tað ikki av tí, hvørt høvundur og skald eru meir ella minni »óavvitandi« ella »avvitandi« í skapan síni. Heldur er orsøkin at finna í teimum ólíku umstøðum, sum hesi verk eru skapað og notin í, teimum ólíku fagurfrøðiligu reglum, ið valda tilevning teirra og teimum ólíku samfelagsligu bondum, ið liggja á teimum, ið tiggja skulu.

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