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**Darraðarljóð and Njáls saga**

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An apparently traditional, anonymous poem spoken by valkyries, exulting in the death of kings, is quoted in full in one of last chapters of the Icelandic saga *Njáls saga*. The prosimetric shift disturbs the generic expectations of the *Íslendingasögur* on a number of levels: poetic quotations are conventionally of only a single stanza, spoken by characters in the saga; the narrative context at this point in the saga is a pious account of the death of the Irish king Brian boru; and the circumstances described in the poem do not correspond neatly to the prose account. This lecture will explore why such an unexpected poem might have been incorporated into the saga.

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**Abstract**

The eleven-stanza poem *Darraðarljóð* is preserved as a quotation within the final phase of the prose narrative of *Njáls saga*. Its inclusion is unusual on a number of counts. Most of the *Íslendingasögur* favour single-stanza quotation of verse in skaldic style, usually presented as the composition of one of the characters in the saga. *Darraðarljóð* is apparently quoted in full, it is voiced by a company of valkyries, it is in eddic style and it is anonymous. In addition, what references there are within the poem to people and events cannot be readily aligned with the action described in the saga, which at this point (chapter 157) is a hagiographically inclined account of the death of the Irish King Brján at the battle of Clontarf interleaved with the ongoing tale of retribution after the burning of Njáll Þorgeirsson in Iceland, as Kári Sölmundarson hunts down the last of the burners across the western isles. The ideology of the poem is forthrightly pagan — valkyries exult in the deaths of warriors they do not favour — yet it is contextualized in the saga as a simultaneous vision experienced on Good Friday 1014 in both Caithness and the Faroes. In Caithness the chanting valkyries are witnessed by a man whose name, Dǫrruðr, appears to be a misunderstanding of the poem’s conceit: the mythological figures weave battle-fates for warriors, referring to their activity using the kenning for battle, *vefr darradar* (web of war-banners, or possibly spears). In this lecture I will explore how we might understand this particular prosimetric shift in the narrative of *Njáls saga* (one that is preserved in the majority of manuscripts of the saga), arguing that the dissonance it creates opens up a number of interpretive possibilities which go beyond the familiar quest to align the action of the poem with an historical event.