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## How Norse is *Skírnismál*? – A comparative case study

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## ABSTRACT

Frands Herschend 2018. How Norse is *Skírnismál*? – A comparative case study.

Venantius Fortunatus was a Latin, Ravenna educated, semi-political rhetorical poet active in Merovingian Francia in the late 6<sup>th</sup> century. Arriving in Austrasia from the Alps in the spring of 566, he wrote three poems, not least an epithalamium publicly performed at the wedding of Sigibert and Brunhild. This literary genre, its structure and the three addressees of his poems can be seen as a surprisingly detailed template for the Norse poem *Skírnismál*. The value of Fortunatus' poetry rests with his ability to amalgamate Germanic, Christian and Latin Roman culture in a period of transition from a pagan to a Christian society. Since these periods of transition are reoccurring, it is possible to see an education in the 10<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> century as the background for the Norse *Skírnismál* author, who probably must have read Fortunatus in order to compose his Norse wedding entertainment. *Skírnismál* is thus neither a purely Norse nor a purely oral composition..

**KEYWORDS:** Venantius Fortunatus; *Skírnismál*; epithalamium; wedding entertainment; dialogical play; Norse-Christian acculturation.

# How Norse is *Skírnismál*? – A comparative case study

## Introduction

IN THE END of the 1990s, it could be argued that the wedding, modelled on the *hieros gamos* myth and royal hierogamy described by Venantius Fortunatus in one poem to the envoy Gogo and two to the bridal pair Sigibert & Brunhild celebrating their wedding in Metz 566, had affinities with the Norse dialogical poem *Skírnismál*, composed half a millennium later (Herschend 1996a & b; on Fortunatus George 1992 & 1995; Reydellet 1994 & 1998; on *Skírnismál* e.g. Steinsland 1989; Gunnell 1995; Dronke 1997). Since *Skírnismál* centres on a lovesick fertility god and folk king, there was probably a more significant link to Norse or Frankish/Germanic myth and cult in Fortunatus' poems, than a Latin perspective on his wedding poems would allow one to infer. Michael Robert, for instance, concluded:

If the contribution of myth to our last two epithalamia [Ennonius' (510) and Fortunatus' (566)] is much reduced, it is compensated for by the elaboration of another source of imagery for the *laetitia* and *luxuria* appropriate to marriage, the vernal. Roberts (1989:345).

One may in other words wonder how purely Latin or Roman Fortunatus was. The discussion in the 1990s rested heavily on Gro Steinsland's research from the late 1980s (Steinsland 1991; see also 2000:48-82). In a general sense this meant that the Norse tradition had deep Germanic and pre-Christian roots. The affinities were interesting, but given that the myth was widespread they were neither very surprising nor were they difficult for readers interested in Norse mythology and cult to connect to interpretations, ongoing discussions, dictionaries and textbooks (see e.g. Gunnes 1974:153-155; Simek 2006; Kees

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2005:3974; Steinsland 2000:82-97; Lundager & Schjødt 1994:81-98 and further Amory 1997:326-331). Not everybody was convinced by Steinsland's analysis, see Sundqvist (2014:44-5) and it may be hoped that a renewed comparison may give us a better interpretation of the mythological dimension of *Skírnismál*.

Today, when *Skírnismál* arguably is best understood as a play (Gunnell 1995:2-10, 2006, 2007, 2010, 2013 & 2016:96-110; Phillipotts 1920:13ff; Dronke 1997:386, n.1; La Farge 2005:3; cf. Lönnroth 2016:119) there is yet another reason once more to compare the Latin and Norse texts and discuss the similarities.

When Daniel Sävborg (2006), based on its love theme discussed the date of *Skírnismál* as a poem he concluded that 'love was probably accepted as a poetic motif already in Viking Age Norse Poetry' (2006:339). Although several scholars have favoured a later terminus post quem for the composition, see Sävborg (2006:336) a 10<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> century date is not unthinkable.

The Latin poems are quoted from Reydellet (1998) and from Leo (1881) when necessary. Readers are referred to Judith George' (1995) translations of Fortunatus and to Ursula Dronke's (1997) edition and translation of *Skírnismál*. For a free translation with an emphasis on *Skírnismál* as play, see Appendix I in this article.

Since there is not much one can be completely sure about when it comes to similarities, this article, therefore, is mainly written for the sake of the argument. As in the 1990s the aim is to check whether dichotomies such as Christian/pagan, Norse/non-Norse and oral/written should be uphold. In general this attitude is not uncommon today, see e.g. Steinsland (2000); Tyler (2005) on *Encomium Emmae Reginae* and Tyler (2017) on the wider perspective or Carlsen (2015:109-110) on *Skírnismál*.

BEFORE ONE TRIES to compare the Norse text and Fortunatus' poems in connection with Sigibert's and Brunhild's wedding, one must first of all form an opinion about Fortunatus' relation with Frankish-Germanic culture. One ought to make it likely that he was relatively well-informed about Germanic ways and that he could be expected to understand them well enough to embrace them in poetry. Based on this condition, one may turn to the poems and go on to compare the two emissaries Gogo and Skírnir and their masters Sigibert and Freyr as well as Gerðr and Brunhild. If one wants to make it likely that there was a connection between Fortunatus' poems and *Skírnismál*, these are the most specific and significant comparisons.

In conclusion, it turns out that there is reason to make a conjecture about the background of the Norse author.

## Fortunatus and the Alps

### ‘IN THESE TIMES’

ERICH AUERBACH THOUGHT that Fortunatus was the last Latin-educated poet to purvey Roman styled glory to a Merovingian court (Auerbach 1965:260-62; see also Brannan 1985:59-60; George 1992 1996; Reydellet 1994). This is no doubt right. Nevertheless, one may wonder whether Frankish or Germanic ideology had influenced him significantly before he came to Metz 566. Was he so aquatinted with Germanic ways that he could immediately link Latin and Germanic traditions in a series of poems as soon as he came to Metz or was he, but a purveyor Roman style?

Venantius Fortunatus came to Metz by chance or on purpose just before the Merovingian king Sigibert and the Visigoth princess Brunhild were married. She arrived in Metz for her spring wedding after she had left her father King Athanagild’s court in Toledo accompanied by the envoy Gogo, who had gone to Spain as Sigibert’s emissary and suitor. Gogo negotiated the marriage contract and brought back the princess (see *Hist. Lib. Decem* 4:27). Irrespective of what it meant to Fortunatus, the wedding was one in a series of ceremonial and official events building the identity of a hall-centred Merovingian ‘capital’ on a collapsed Roman town (see Halsall 1995:12-18 & 231-36).

Arguably, Fortunatus had personal reasons to go to Metz. Based on his own accounts concerning his travels, his life in Italy and Paul the Deacon’s History of the Lombards, Richard Koebner (1915:122-125) in an approach different from Wilhelm Meyer’s (1901:9-15) argued that two commissioned poems (VF *Carm.* 1:1&2) composed after his education in Ravenna before he left for Metz, linked Fortunatus to Bishop Vitalis of Altinum/Altino. These poems celebrated the dedication of a church built by Vitalis. One was an oratory given at the dedication in front of an audience among others the bishop and a *dux*, a term that indicates a Byzantine military commander (Koebner 1915:123). The presence of the *dux* suggests a date after 553/4 when Ostrogoth reign ended. The other poem honoured the donor and was meant to be cut in stone as an inscription in the self-same church (see VF *Carm.* 1:1&2; Brennan 1989; Reydellet 1994; Roberts 2009:5). In the 550s, Fortunatus had in other words established himself as a Latin poet.

Koebner, who did not know where exactly south of Treviso Altino was situated, thought it was a small local town (Koebner 1915:13). Today, thanks to geophysical mapping (Ninfo *et al.* 2009) we now know that it was a quite large, c.240 hectare, harbour town and the forerunner to Venice. In all probability, it was a much smaller town in the 6<sup>th</sup> century – most towns were. Nevertheless, its situation, size, architecture and amphitheatre, that is, the relative importance of Altinum supports Koebner’s conclusion that Vitalis was Fortunatus’ first patron.

The archaeological evidence suggests that we may benefit once again from reading Paul the Deacon’s account of Vitalis. It concerns the year 565. In the

quotation, Narses' satisfaction of finally getting rid of a troublesome priest cannot be mistaken:

In these times [plague in Liguria and the death of Justinian] also Narses the patrician, whose care was watching everything, at length seized Vitalis, bishop of the city of Altinum, who had fled many years before (ante annos plurimos) to the kingdom of the Franks - that is, to the city of Aguntum [Lavanter Kirchbichl] - and condemned him to exile in Sicily. (*Hist. Lomb.* 2:4)

Koebner concludes that Fortunatus left Italy when his patron Vitalis was exiled, but he did not comment upon the town of Aguntum (Koebner 1915:125). However, if we follow modern research, for instance, Rosada (2003) who mapped all Fortunatus-related travels, and the archaeology of 6<sup>th</sup> century Kirchbichl (Kainrath 2011:192-99; Stadler 2011:67-70) it becomes evident that the Aguntum where Vitalis took refuge was Lavanter Kirchbichl on the Drava 2 km south of the Roman town that was destroyed by the Visigoths 406 (Alföldi 1974:217-19). Vitalis withdrew to the Alps and an easily defended hilltop without completely cutting himself off from eastern Veneto. From Kirchbichl over the Plöcken Pass in the Carnic Alps to Udine is c. 125 km (Cartellieri 1926), Fig. 1 & 2a & b.



Fig. 1 Map of 6th century Aguntum, today's Lavanter Kirchbichl. After Grabherr & Kainrath (2011).

<http://files.webb.uu.se/uploader/1338/Fortunatus-Fig-01.pdf>

Since Vitalis fled years before 565 and had been wanted ever since, the reason he went to Kirchbichl and the Franks seems to be connected to the secular interests of the bishop in the years after 554 when the Ostrogoths were defeated. Groups of Goths and Italo-Franks in eastern Veneto continued to form bands troubling the Byzantines as late as 561 (see Wolfram 1988:361-62; Amory 1997:192 & 439; Heather 1996:271). It is not unlikely that Vitalis belonged in these circles. Ernest Stein (1949:832-34) suggested that Vitalis was part of the Schism of the Three Chapters. Like other bishops in Northern Italy and contrary to the Emperor, he was supposed to have refused to condemn the Chapters. This is quite possible, as pointed out by Rajko Bratož (2003:383-86) when he evaluated the reasons Fortunatus could have had to leave Italy. However, the schism was not in itself sufficient reason for a bishop to seek refuge among the Franks.

It is plausible that Fortunatus' two Vitalis poems were written for a church dedication in the middle of the 550s *after* the Ostrogoth were defeated but *before* Vitalis fell out with the Byzantines. This suggests that owing to his patron's issues with the authorities, i.e. Narses, Fortunatus chose to leave for Metz and new patrons after Vitalis had been apprehended. Well in Francia, Fortunatus produced hundreds of works, not least for his new episcopal patrons, including full-scale and rhapsodizing panegyrics, inscriptions on walls and vessels as well as epitaphs. If we focus on Vitalis as a bishop engaged in building programmes and in moulding public opinion, for instance against Narses, then he lives up to Fortunatus' image of a model secularly engaged bishop (Brennan 1992; George 1987 & 1992; Coates 1998:7). Fortunatus leaves Italy, but not necessarily his Church ideals.

It is unlikely that Fortunatus did not write poems between the mid-550s and 565; rather, one would have thought that he continued to compose poetry to Vitalis or his friends and that such poems would have been compromising if Fortunatus had a Byzantine career in mind (Stein 1949:832-33). It seems rational, therefore, that he covered up his background, consciously making Vitalis a non-existing bishop of Ravenna (Koebner 1915). Similarly, in the autobiographical end of his *Vita San Martini* (VF *VSM*. IV:675-76) he refers to the 'noble'—*celsus* John in Padua, whose sons were contemporary of Fortunatus and joined him in poetry. Fortunatus chose not to reveal their names, and 'noble John' is not enough to identify them. Similarly, family and friends at home have no names (VF *VSM*. IV:668-71). However, Fortunatus refers to identifiable friends who were loyal to the Byzantines after the Lombard invasion in 568 such as Paul, who became bishop of Aquileia 557, and Felix, a friend from his Ravenna school days, who became bishop of Treviso (VF *VSM*. IV:661-67; Brannan 1989:51; Rosada 2003:333).

Fortunatus describes the way he leaves the Italy of his childhood and youth in two ways. First, as a journey in the wider sense of the word, comparable to a journey of life with symbolic and ideological components, and in the middle

of this poetic perspective, as an itinerary from Kirchbichl to Reutte, where the Breuni live peacefully (Wopfner 1936; Rosada 2003; VF VSM IV:642a-50a)<sup>2</sup>.

Hermann Wopfner analysed this trip based on Fortunatus' own description of significant places (1936:21-25). He started in Noricum and Kirchbichl, which he says can be reached by two different roads from Veneto. Since the hexameters make up the boundary between a journey in general and the Alp trip, which again becomes a general journey from Reutte and onwards, the two roads into the Alps can be interpreted as political alternatives (Italo-Frankish vs. Byzantine). The one out of the mountains was the Frankish consequence of Fortunatus' choice, since he sided with Vitalis.

Apart from the strategic quality of Kirchbichl, Fortunatus describes the place in a positive value perspective in a context that proves it to be a castellum:

*Per Drauum itur iter, qua se castella supinant*

*Hic montana sedens in colle superbit Aguntus.* (VF VSM IV:649-50)

Through the Drava valley leads a road, along which forts are lying and in these mountains, Aguntum is sitting proudly on a hill. (My translation).

From Kirchbichl through Noricum, Fortunatus proceeded along the Drava and the Rienz to Raetia *ubi Byrrus vertitur undis*—‘where the Rienz revolves in waves’ (i.e. the rapids at Mühlbach) and further on to *Templum Valentini*. This is the shrine of the holy Valentinus of Raetia in Merano or rather in Castrum Maiense above the town. From this central place he continued to where *ingrediens rapido qua gurgite volvitur Cenus*—‘the Inn tumbles running rapidly in a whirlpool’, that is, to Imst over the Reschen Pass, which he does not mention. From Imst the road goes to Reutte. Fortunatus describes Reutte as the place where the Alps open up and the Breuni live as neighbours to the Brenners – a quiet life that stands out as a contrast to the proud Aguntum, i.e. the Kirchbichl that he left.

For one writing in the late 6<sup>th</sup> century, Fortunatus' “atmospheric realism” (Auerbach 2003:468-77) is not underdeveloped<sup>3</sup>. His itinerary is real and its reference points are realistic scenes chosen for their atmosphere. In addition, his realism is also one of a transformation starting from a safe house in the Carnic Alps on the border of a southern world of multiple roads. When he sets out, he passes rapids and reaches a centre of spiritual gravity. Leaving this centre takes him past new rapids before he comes to an opening in the Alps with access to a new lands. In Fortunatus' poem, the rapids are soundscapes and scenes symmetrically placed on each side of Valentinus' shrine where

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<sup>2</sup> Technically speaking, Fortunatus describes a trip over the Alps in the direction from Augsburg to Aguntum because it fits his Life of Saint Martin. Nevertheless, already Paul the Deacon, who had read Fortunatus' poems and wrote an epitaph in his honour, knew that he described his trip from Aguntum towards Augsburg (*Hist. Lomb.* Book 2:13)

<sup>3</sup> Despite his interest in realism, Auerbach (1965:260-62) does not comment on Fortunatus' atmospheric realism. Far from being a literary 19<sup>th</sup> century phenomenon, the reality of the Alps or for that matter the Sahara is easy to describe, but also rewarding to translate into an experience of or a relation with oneself.

he found time to contemplate. However, they also delimit the border zone between the Byzantine and the Frankish world. Thus transformed by the Alps of his atmospheric realism he travels through Bavarian lands to Augsburg and further on until he arrives in Metz in the spring of 566, Fig. 2A&B. In Metz, he probably suggested an entertaining epithalamium to Gogo who would have taken it to Sigibert.

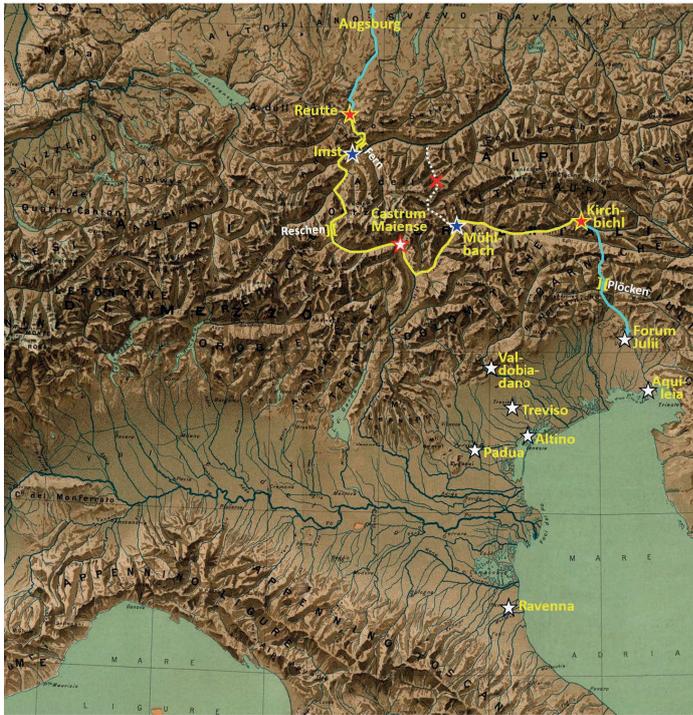


Fig. 2A Overview of the eastern Alps and northern Italy showing principal roads and Fortunatus' trip in the Alps. <http://files.webb.uu.se/uploader/1338/Fortunatus-Fig-02a.pdf>

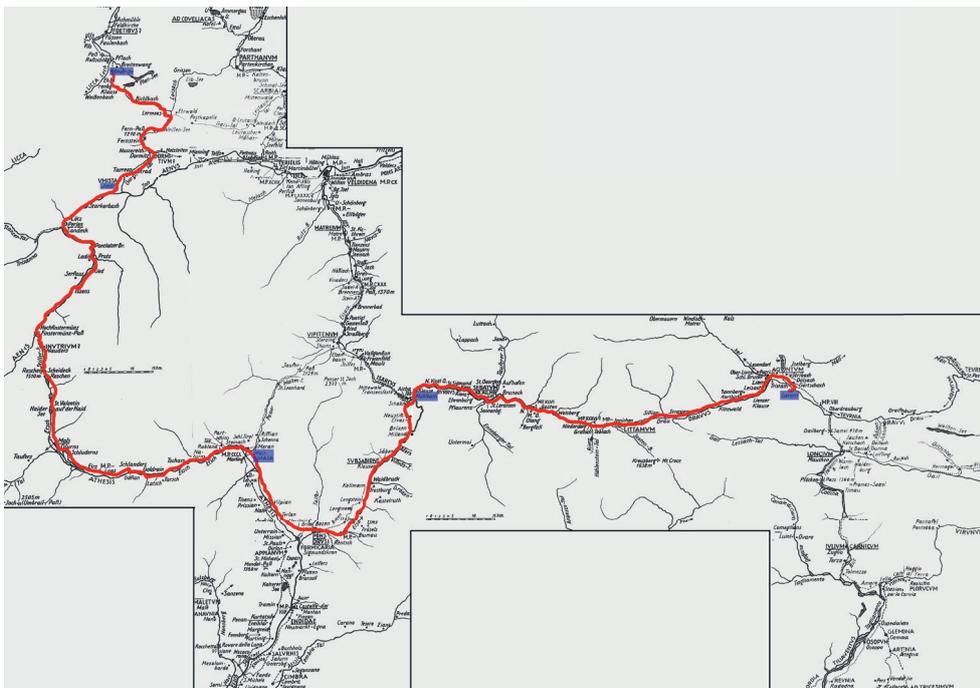


Fig. 2B. Cartellieri's (1926) detailed map of relevant Alpine place names and roads. <http://files.webb.uu.se/uploader/1338/Fortunatus-Fig-02b.pdf>

Notably and contrary to what one might have expected, Fortunatus did not use the Brenner Pass, i.e. he did not turn north at Mühlbach. Instead, he made a detour, which added c. 150 km to his trip through the Alps making it 370 rather than 220 km long. Even if he wished to visit the grave of the holy Valentinus in Merano, it would still have been 75 km shorter to return and use the Brenner Pass rather than proceed to Reschen. It would seem, therefore, that Fortunatus consciously refrained from using the obvious route. His own explanation that he wanted to use a road that was marked by shrines rather than *mansiones*—‘night quarters’ is not wholly convincing (Brennan 1985:54-55).

Given that Vitalis was probably Fortunatus’ patron, who lived among the Franks in in Lavanter Kirchbichl, which Fortunatus saw as the positively charged self-proclaiming Aguntum, it seems clear that when his patron was apprehended and exiled to Sicily, Fortunatus left Kirchbichl and went to Francia. He did not take the obvious road; instead, he travelled over Merano and the Reschen Pass. Merano (Castrum Maiense) was a border station under Frankish control from 536/7 and onwards. It had a strategic value, for instance, during preparations for attacks on Italy (Gleirscher 2013:25-27). In 565, therefore, Fortunatus was not primarily crossing the Alps; instead, he went further into the mountains to the securely Frankish or Frankish/Bavarian, non-Byzantine border settlement, which he praised for its religious institution rather than its military importance. Faced with the choice between Byzantines and Franks he simply opted for the latter, since he had lived in the Alps for several years. Not surprisingly and for what it is worth, he defines himself as *exul ab Italia*—‘exiled from Italy’ in a poem to Duke Lupus, written 9 years after they met in Metz 566 (Reydellet 1998:100; VF *Carm.* VII:9:7). Finally, in the middle of the 580s he described how he continued from Castrum Maiense:

*Finibus Italiae cum primum ad regna venirem  
te mihi constituit rex Sigiberthus opem,  
tutior ut graderer tecum comitando viator  
atque pararetur hinc equus inde cibus.* (VF *Carm* X, 16:1–4)

From the Italian border, as soon as I came to the kingdoms, King Sigibert had set you up as a resource for me. Thus safe, I advanced with you, accompanying wayfarer, and (you) even provided me, here with a horse, from there with food. (My translation)

The envoy who accompanied him on this pleasant trip was Sigoald, one of Sigibert’s retainers. Fortunatus wrote the poem when Sigoald was made a count in the mid-580s; in effect, two decades after the itinerary described in *Vita San Martini* (Reydellet 2004:95n. 190; Brennan 1985:67). In the poem to Sigoald, Fortunatus comes from the Italian border, i.e. the Mühlbach – Merano – Imst zone and the Reschen pass down to the Frankish kingdoms and the Bavarians, where Sigoald met up with him in the northern foothills of the Alps. It would seem, therefore, that Fortunatus went from Merano down to Ruette and

Sigoald. The four lines suggest that Fortunatus had been sitting in Castrum Maiense perhaps during the winter until arrangements had been made for him to go to Reutte. Some prior contacts must have made people in Metz aware of a possible wedding poet wintering in Castrum Maiense.

This case against Fortunatus suggesting (1) that relying on Frankish contacts he left Italy from Kirchbichl going to Castrum Maiense and the Franks when Vitalis was apprehended, (2) that he did so because of his connections with those who opposed the Byzantines and (3) that he cunningly covered up his past – this may not have stood up in court. Nevertheless, it strongly indicates that Fortunatus used his poetic licence to contextualise truth, cautiously blurring his background in order not to become an embarrassment to future patrons. The fact that he survived in Merovingian Francia for decades as a semi-political poet, dying of old age without falling into oblivion, suggests that he knew what he was doing even in 565.

## FAREWELL TO BYZANTINES

BORN IN VALDOBBIADENE north of Treviso by the river Piave at the foothills of the Dolomites in the 530s, educated in Ravenna in the 540s with a possible 5 to 10 year experience between 554 or 561 and 565 of living with Vitalis in Kirchbichl, Fortunatus emigrated to Castrum Maiense as if he were a political refugee. From there, owing to his connections, he continued partly accompanied by Sigoald to Francia and Austrasia. When they arrived in Metz, Fortunatus became an instant success since he could write elegant occasional poems and formal panegyrics with a personal touch. It would seem that he amalgamated Roman, Christian and Germanic ways of expressing himself rather than simply being the last educated poet to purvey Roman styled glory to a Merovingian court as Auerbach thought (Brannan 1985:59-60; George 1992 1996; Reydellet 1994; Auerbach 1965:260-62). Probably living among Franks in Kirchbichl and Castrum Maiense had prepared him.

For the actual wedding feast he wrote a *carmen* or a song that included an *epithalamium* and immediately before and after the wedding two more poems. They were personal panegyrics – one to Sigibert & Brunhild and one to Gogo, who, in addition to being Sigibert's envoy and Brunhild's escort, was the counsellor responsible for the wedding arrangements.

Despite being rhetorical compositions, the two panegyrics have a personal tenor, which *topos* and *dulcedo* (see e.g. Curtius 1953:70 & 412-13) shrouded in textual virtuosity cannot obscure. The contrast between the official *epithalamium* and the personal panegyrics was intended. Indeed, now and again planning and intention make Fortunatus' poetic constructions somewhat predictable. Although he is good at couplets or a short series of couplets, his one-liners are better.

In all the three poems discussed, Fortunatus uses elegiac couplets. They consist of a hexameter followed by a pentameter, Fig. 3. Nevertheless, the last and dominant part of the official wedding poetry, the *epithalamium* (ll. 25-143) consists of hexameters only.

Vere novo, tellus fuerit dum exuta pruinis  
 Se picturato gramine vestit ager.

Fig. 3. Scansion of the elegiac couplet.

<http://files.webb.uu.se/uploader/1338/Fortunatus-Fig-03.pdf>

## Fortunatus' wedding poems

### THE EPITHALAMIUM

ORIGINALLY, AN EPITHALAMIUM was a poem meant to be sung to the bride by a choir just outside or inside and just before or when she entered her husband's bedchamber and the bed, where the couple finally consummated their marriage (see Roberts 1989 on epithalamia). This kind of poem would allude to the nuptial pleasures about to take place, the lasting love they will inspire and the offspring they will produce. Fortunatus' poem, nevertheless, celebrates the royal marriage in a poem primarily praising the bridegroom. Only when he draws the poem to a close, the key lines introducing the last twelve-line section spoken by Venus become more in line with the genre:

*Ite diu iuncti membris et corde iugati,  
 ambo pares genio, meritis et moribus ambo* (VF *Carm* VI, 1:132–33)  
 Go, be joined in body and joked in heart, both in spirits, in merits and  
 in virtues, equal. George (1995:31).<sup>4</sup>

At a traditional Germanic wedding feast, the most important guests and family members are entitled to see that the couple is actually lying under the duvet before these guests-witnesses have seen enough to convince them of leaving. Fortunatus' epithalamium does not refer to this fact, but then again ceremonies and feasts are open to variation, because they are not always conventional (on legal weddings see e.g. Drew 1991:41-43).

Including the epithalamium, the carmen comprises 143 lines. It is divided into three parts. The first seven couplets (ll. 1-14) describe spring in Metz, at the time of the wedding, during nature's wonderful reproductive season – reproduction being a central theme in spring ceremonies as well as in any royal

<sup>4</sup> These are two of Fortunatus' well-composed lines. In the first, he makes Sigibert & Brunhild one in embrace (lit. 'joined in limbs') and (consequently?) in their hearts. To match these marital pleasures, their minds are united as if they were yoked (e.g. like oxen). Having introduced one meaning of the yoke metaphor, Fortunatus goes on in the next line to demonstrate another – the scales balanced by two equal weights. By putting *ambo* – 'both' at each end of this line, *ambo* becomes two equal loads suspended from a yoke made from spirits, merits and virtues. In the following lines, however, Fortunatus feels obliged to drive home this message with rhetorical stubbornness.

marriage. The following five couplets (ll. 15-24) bring the guests – the audience – into the hall:

*Cunctorum adventu festiva palatia fervent,  
coniugio regis gens sua vota videt.* (VF *Carm* VI, 1:21–22)  
With everyone's arrival, the festive palace teems, his people see their  
heart's desire in the king's marriage. George (1995:27)

By calculation, this section ends when Fortunatus, falling back on a topos of inferiority, addresses the royal and elevated couple, as if he and his poetry were but seeds in the ground and in great need of water during springtime. That is why he asks the King and his Queen to listen favourably to him, their judgement being so consequential:

*Vos quorum inrigui fontis meat unda, favete  
iudicio vestro crescere parva solent.* (VF *Carm* VI, 1:23–24)  
You, whose fountain flows abundantly with water, look on with  
favour; through your judgement small things are wont to grow. George  
(1995:27).

Indeed, no successful spring and growth without water, and no Fortunatus either! In 12 couplets (ll. 1-24) therefore, the combined spring and wedding ceremony of which the audience is a part has been summed up by a prologue, who now turns to King and Queen.

These first 12 couplets have functioned as an overture in the crowded and noisy wedding hall and consequently, the actual epithalamium, i.e. the rest of the performance, is constructed as a small play, in which Cupid and Venus are the main characters. This change of format is the reason why Fortunatus changes his prosody from couplet to hexameter. Dropping couplets allows him to write a more fluent dialogue, ending and beginning a line at the end or in the middle of a hexameter, rather than at the end of a couplet.

In the play, the role of the poet is mainly to pilot the audience through the spectacle, but first of all he allows himself 12 hexameters (ll. 25-36) – a second prologue as it were – to introduce the scene of the epithalamium and Sigibert as a forever young almost-fertility-god turned monogamous family man (cf. George 1995:27, n10, 11 & 12). The scene is situated just outside the bridal chamber, where the formidable, youthful and chaste Sigibert, created *ad gaudia nostra*—‘to give us joy’, *cui nil sua subripit aetas*—‘from whom his age stole nothing’, in a union in which *non peccat amor*—‘love does not sin’ will renew the use of the marriage bed and produce an offspring and a family home where a young heir will be playing. Unsurprisingly, these 12 lines of model marriage infested with all kinds of overtones are matched by the 12 final ones (ll. 132-143), in which the couple is told to go to bed and get on with their model lives in a world where our spokeswoman Venus hopes that love, peace and concord may rule supreme (George 1995:31).

So far, however, in line 37, with one fourth of the time allotted to the performance having passed, we are still waiting for the more light-hearted part of the epithalamium. The following 96 hexameters up to line 132 are about to remedy this dearth, as Cupid and a little later, Venus enter the scene. To begin with, we are introduced to a Merovingian pantomime (see Hen 1995:229-30). Our poet-guide gives us some background information (ll. 37-40a) and tells us what we see (ll. 40b-49a). The pantomime is a representation of Sigibert in love after he has been inflamed by one of Cupid's arrow. The tableau starts to dissolve into dialogue when Cupid turns to his mother Venus (l. 49b), and while he speaks, even a Brunhild appears in the pantomime. This happens between lines 52 and 54.

When Cupid has finished, Venus mixes violets with a heavenly balsam and stores roses in her bosom (ll. 60-61), thus preparing herself for her own and Cupid's decent from heaven to earth, that is, to the earthly bedchamber, in front of which the pantomime with the actors representing Sigibert and Brunhild must have taken place. Similar to a rhetorician who explains himself several times for the benefit of his audience, Fortunatus tells the spectators what is happening, because it is not always self-evident.

As prescribed by tradition, Venus and Cupid descend to earth in order to enter into a *lis*, that is, a verbal strife, a quarrel or a lawsuit (l. 67a). Cupid champions Sigibert and Venus Brunhild. They compete standing in the hall in front of the bedchamber, addressing themselves to the real couple who are probably sitting in their high seat. In line 67b, Cupid starts to harangue Sigibert, and in line 99a, Venus begins to praise Brunhild and marvel at the wonderful fact that this princess, a daughter of Venus', a Visigoth and a Christian of the Arian creed, i.e. an almost pagan non-Catholic princess from Arian Toledo is about to end up in an earthly marriage bed in Catholic Metz with chaste Sigibert. This brings us to the last 12 hexameters and the end of the epithalamium when Venus tells the couple to consummate their marriage. Since her verdict, which brings the context or *lis* between herself and Cupid to an end, is a draw, she declares Sigibert and Brunhild equal (*ambo pares* in l. 133). Obviously there was no real strife going on – just ritual quarrel.

If we want to link the last words of the epithalamium with a specific moment in the end of a modern wedding ritual, we may hear a wedding march commencing and see the married couple walking down the aisle into a happy and fertile future with many more children than the heir we expect in nine months:

*Sic iterum natis celebretis vota parentes*

*et de natorum teneatis prole nepotes.* (VF *Carm* VI, 1:142–43)

Thus again you may, as parents, fulfil vows with children, and may you embrace grandchildren, offspring of your children. George (1995:31).

## THE PANEGYRICS

THE 21 COUPLETS that make up the panegyric to Sigibert and Brunhild were recited to them on her conversion before the wedding feast (Reydellet 1994:IX, n.9). Fortunatus recited the poem in his capacity as a poet and rhetorician visiting the court (Brannan 1985:60). Actually, he addresses Sigibert rather than Brunhild and in the first 14 couplets, only the successful King. In the final seven couplets, he describes Brunhild to Sigibert. Talking to an ambitious, chaste and aggressive king, who has conquered enough and wants to settle down and form a political alliance since that is a rational thing to do, the first 14 couplets add nothing to the man in love. The last seven couplets, on the other hand, are important because according to the overarching structure of the myth (Steinsland 2000:59-60), the aim is to introduce a young foreign or alien woman into a new context. Fortunatus' description of Brunhild does just that and in the epithalamium, Venus is also duly impressed.

The 25 couplets of the panegyric written to Gogo are structured in the same way. The first 17 couplets are addressed to a splendid, well-educated and socially gifted counsellor. The last eight couplets (ll. 35-50) refer directly to Gogo's recent success, his intimate knowledge of Sigibert and his qualities as a suitor and wedding planner. The concluding three couplets are built on a conventional modesty topos: If (in public) I have been silent, it is because my silence – a reflection of my modesty – lauds you! This choice of topos gives away the panegyric as a piece of literature – a hexameter letter more or less – meant to be read by Gogo after the wedding rather than publicly recited by Fortunatus. This means that there was no public occasion on which a poet could praise a counsellor for doing his job well. All three poems are in other words carefully contextualised according to the addressees' social status, to the occasion, to the audience and to performance.

## Gogo's and Skírnir's mission

IN THE CONTEXT to which Fortunatus' epithalamium belongs, the consummation of the marriage has not yet taken place, but in hindsight of the panegyric to Gogo we review the marriage process and may conclude that Gogo's endeavour, the consummation and consequently even Fortunatus' texts were successful.

In *Skírnismál*, the idyllic reproductive cycles, celebrated in the combined spring and wedding feasts in Metz, are ostentatiously non-existent. Instead, we the wedding guests are left with a cliffhanger. Skírnir has not been completely successful, the bride has not arrived and there is nothing to consummate. The technical reason why this is the case rests with the fact that Fortunatus writes in a rhetorical way about an event in which he himself, two mimes and two actors and everybody else takes part. The *Skírnismál* poet on the other hand writes about a fictitious historical event with different possible outcomes. This allows

the Norse poet to derail his narrative and create suspense. Fortunatus' position is here and now with a view to understanding the complex relation between the royal marriage and the divine world, whereas the Norse poet writes about distant mythic gods, rulers and giants in relation to something as commonplace as a wedding.

Nevertheless, the role of the main characters as well as the texts as narratives with a relation to the wedding feast, are the same.

## THE CHARACTERS

IN FORTUNATUS' POEMS, Sigibert is silent and Freyr has not much to say in *Skírnismál*. Yet we can describe both men as rulers with divine as well as human components, i.e. as lords in love. We even know how they perceive the woman they fall in love with and how they fell for her.

Sigibert's virtues are many and lengthily described by Fortunatus. He is the perfect king for his people, and in the last but one couplet of the introduction, he and his wedding are linked to a spring ceremony centring on reproduction, and:

*Cunctorum adventu festiva palatia fervent,  
coniugio regis gens sua vota videt.* (VF Carm VI, 1:21–22).

With everyone's arrival, the festive palace teems, his people see their heart's desire in the king's marriage. George (1995:27).

Allegedly, the people and quite a number of dukes (ll. 16-17), i.e. *all* people, has come together to see their king, the folk ruler, marry a perfect young woman and consummate his marriage. However, in the expression *sua vota videt* – 'sees what it had wished/vowed for', *vota* implies that which forms a part in every devotion to a deity. This implies that in addition to the fact that in line 79 he is *cardinis occidui dominans in flore iuventae*—'holding sway over the western quarter in the flower of his youth' sword in hand expanding the realm (ll. 73b-83), Sigibert also bears a resemblance to a fertility god in the combined spring and wedding ritual. Thus, he reminds one of the kind of Germanic ruler who is associated with the *fró* concept of rulership. In reality, however, he is a typical lord or *herro* for his people (see Dennis Green 1965, 19-21 & 405-488 on these concepts, but also Sundqvist (2014:47-8).

In *Skírnismál*, Freyr, who in strophe 38 is called 'Njǫrðr's dilating son', is obviously a fertility god, but he is also described as a *fólkvaldi* (*Skírnismál* st. 3:2), a lord in the sense of being 'the keeper of the people' or 'he who handles the people', or indeed a warrior for his people (Cleasby and Vigfusson 1876). As such, a *fólkvaldi* could be called a folk ruler – or *herro* – and as such, he is not unlike Sigibert. The *hieros gamos* myth in itself does not imply that Freyr must be a *fólkvaldi*. Actually, it would have been more reasonable to describe him as one of the Vanir, a fertility god who had fallen in love with a giantess with an eye to having a *hieros gamos* affair with her. Generally speaking, moreover, one would have thought that a fertility god during a spring festival

without much ado would have made any Gerðr pregnant with a Fjölfnir (Manifolder), a parallel name to Freyr and allegedly the offspring of Freyr and Gerðr, as well as the first king of the Ynglingas (Steinsland 2000:61-63 with refs; Sundqvist 2014:49-52). As Steinsland has pointed out, Freyr in *Skírnismál* is not just a fertility god, but also a powerful ruler. In addition, although the balance between divine and human is shifted in Sigibert, both ruler characters are the outcome of the dynamic interaction “divine::human”. When Sundqvist (2014) reviews the source material concerning Freyr from a critical point of view (2014:45-6), he concludes that Freyr is a ruler who combines fertility and power, and points out that these components could be weighted differently in time and space (2014:62-3). In Fortunatus’ poems, Sigibert could also be understood as a balance between fertility and power. If a Scandinavian author wished to transform Sigibert into a component of Old Norse mythology, Freyr is not an unreasonable choice.

When Sigibert and Freyr fall in love, the phenomenology of their passion is characterized by similarities. Because it is acted out in front of our eyes, Sigibert’s infatuation is described as witnessed, that is, progressively:

*Regalis fervebat apex nec nocte sopora  
Cordis erat requies. Oculis animoque recurrens  
ad vultus quos pinxit Amor mentemque fatigans  
saepe per amplexum falsa sub imagine lusit.* (VF *Carm* VI, 1:1:43–46)  
His royal head burned, in the night he neither fell asleep nor was his heart at rest. With eyes and mind, he was returning to the image that Love had painted, and [since it was] vexing his judgement, he often mimicked himself in the embrace of an invisible ghost (My translation).<sup>5</sup>

Freyr does not embrace an invisible lover, but he is in the same state of anhedonia or disorderly mood, derived of pleasure while looking at an image no one else can see (*Skírnismál*, Intro. & str. 3-7).

Although he is the personified interaction between god and ruler, the “god::ruler” Freyr-in-love does nothing but sit in the hall and the high seat,

<sup>5</sup> George (1995: 27-28) translates: ‘The king’s head raged with fever, there was no rest for his heart in the drowsy night, with eyes and with mind (45) reviewing the visage Love painted, and, wearying his thoughts, often he dallied in an embrace with an illusory image’. In my translation, rather than metaphorically describing Sigibert’s mood, I want to stress the diagnostic enumeration of the symptoms of lovesickness and the fact that in reality there is nothing to see. Reynaud *et al.* 2010 conclude: ‘Love addiction, or excessive and suffering romantic attachment to a love object, has been described in literature for centuries’ (p.266). ... ‘There are no recognized definitions or diagnostic criteria for love addiction, but its phenomenology has some similarities to substance dependence: euphoria and unrestrained desire in the presence of the love object or associated stimuli (drug intoxication); negative mood, anhedonia, and sleep disturbance when separated from the love object (drug withdrawal); focussed attention on and intrusive thoughts about the love object; and maladaptive or problematic patterns of behavior (love relation) leading to clinically significant impairment or distress, with pursuit despite knowledge of adverse consequences. [...] There are currently insufficient data to place some cases of ‘love passion’ within a clinical disorder, such as love addiction,’ (p. 261).

staring at the visage/image love has painted, see strophe 6. Sigibert's judgement and mind is similarly affected; he can neither sleep nor take his eyes from the invisible image of his love. This behaviour is reminiscent of an addiction, rather than what is to be expected from a dutiful folk ruler, or a god. Like Cupid and Venus in the epithalamium, Freyr and Skírnir are travestied pagan figures.

Nevertheless, the audience in Metz as well as in Iceland may wonder what the lovesick young man sees. Freyr tells Skírnir what he saw when he sat in the high seat:

In Gými's court I saw walking, the girl I desire. Bright shone her arms  
and so, all air and water. (St. 6).

Correspondingly, Venus explains that Sigibert saw Brunhild as *clarior aethera ... lampada fulgens* – 'more brightly resplendent than the radiant heavens' and goes on to say that *lactea cui facies incocta rubore coruscat*—'your milky complexion glows tinted with red' (ll. 101 & 107, George, 1995:30).

Regarding godly folk rulers's falling in love, both poets share the odd topos, notably the radiant and fair-skinned beauty of the maid preferred by upper classes, royalty and gods. This kind of beauty appealed not least to Óðinn in *Hávamál* (str 92 and 161) or *Hárbarðsljóð* (strophes 30 through 32). Eventually even earls too, like Jarl in *Rígsþula* (strophes 36 through 40), prefer blondes.

In both poems, moreover, there is also a maturity topos, which link in with the idea of the journey as a way of becoming civilised (Herschend 1998). In Norse mythology this is shown, for instance, in the way a warrior king such as Óðinn acts in the East and the West respectively (see Bandlien 2005:24 n15). Contrary to ordinary men who on their journey of civilisation may go anywhere foreign, be successful, return and settle down, the East-West topos signifies the primal divine coming of age. We also find this topos in Fortunatus' epithalamium:

*Hic nomen avorum  
extendit bellante manu, cui de patre virtus  
quam Nablis ecce probat, Thuringia victa fatetur,  
proficiens unum gemina de gente triumphum,  
... ..  
Cardinis occidui dominans in flore iuuentae,* (VF *Carm VI*, 1:73b–76 & 79)

He spreads abroad the name of his sires with his warring hand, to him came his father's valour, which the Naab declares, and conquered Thuringia cries forth, affording a single triumph from two peoples. ... .. holding sway over the western quarter in the flower of his youth. George (1995:29)

This is not one of Fortunatus' most transparent passages, perhaps because the historical facts behind the hexameters are complex, perhaps because they are difficult to fit into the coming-of-age topos. Irrespective of these problems,

the poet wants to point out that in the beginning of his career, Sigibert, like his ancestors before him campaigned successfully in the East – the Naab is a possible border river just east of the Frankish Alps in Thuringia. Now, in the blossom of his youth, he rules the Western lands, (Austrasia), which relative to Thuringia is indeed the western lands (Reydellet 1994:46-7 with notes; George 1995:29 with notes). Fighting in the East and ruling in the West equals campaigning among Giants when you are young and settling down as a leader among the Æsir when you return thus experienced. The “East-West” topos is shorthand for deities and royalties coming of age. In Fortunatus, the use of this topos belongs to the official and public epithalamium. However, in the first nine couplets of his personal panegyric to Sigibert & Brunhild he describes Sigibert’s military success in a purely Roman fashion with Latin metaphors and topoi (George 1995:31-32, ll. 1-18). The way the *Skírnismál*-author writes Cupid and Venus out of the plot without losing the divine falling-in-love component shows literary competence, and so does the way Freyr takes over some of Sigibert’s powerful royal qualities. Using the epithalamium as a template would have been impossible without this skill.

Since the descriptions of Brunhild and Gerðr compare in the young men’s vision, there is reason to look for other similarities. The most striking one is the political character of the alliances they are about to form. Venus marvels at the fact and interrupts herself in the middle of a hexameter with a rhetorical question directed to Germania, who is represented by the guests in the hall.

*Quis crederet autem*

*Hispanam tibimet dominam, Germania, nasci,*

*Quae duo regna iugo pretiosa conexuit uno?* (VF *Carm* VI, 1:117–19)

Who would believe, indeed, that your mistress, Germany, was born a Spaniard, she of great price who united one kingdom under one bond.

George (1995:30)

Creating an alliance between Visigoth and Franks, between Christians of the Arian and Catholic creed respectively, is a political achievement on par with an alliance between Ásgard and Jotunheim. In this alliance, Vanir and Æsir are the old Franks and new Merovingians, while the Giants are Visigoths. As political alliances go, that between Sigibert and Brunhild is similar to that of Freyr & Gerðr. Venus continues:

*Non labor humanus potuit tam mira parare:*

*Nam res difficilis divinis utitur armis.*

*Longa retro series regi hoc vix contulit ulli:* (VF *Carm* VI, 1:120–22)

No human effort could bring about such a great achievement; for the difficult matter requires divine weapons. The generations long past have scarce afforded this to any king. George (1995:30)

In essence, she points to the forceful, armed intervention of the gods.

In his decidedly Christian panegyric to Sigibert and Brunhild, Fortunatus prefers to attribute the success of their marriage to Christ's intervention:

*Reginam meritis Brunichildem Christus amore  
tunc sibi coniunxit, hanc tibi quando dedit.  
Altera uota colens melius quia munere Christi,  
pectore iuncta prius, plus modo lege placet.* (VF *Carm VI*, 1a:31–34)

Christ then joined the Queen Brunhild to Himself in love, for her merits, when He gave her to you, responding all the better to that second wish, since through Christ's gift, she who was first joined by her heart, now gives all the more delight joined legally. George (1995:31)

Besides alluding to his prime concern – Brunhild rejecting the Arian creed – Fortunatus points out that when this happened, that is, when Christ joined himself to Brunhild, who thus became a Catholic, it was all the more rewarding to give her to Sigibert in a legal wedding, that is, legal in a traditional Merovingian as well as in a Catholic sense. The alternative, concubinage, not uncommon among those who could afford it, such as Merovingian kings and princes (e.g. Brundage 1987:128-30; Dailey 2015:101-17) is not something Fortunatus advocates. Irrespective of whether we look at the wedding from a pagan Germanic or Catholic Christian point of view, it is the result of divine intervention.

Similarly, although Freyr thinks that the gods are against his marrying the giantess, those who follow the dialogue in *Skírnismál* understand that the gifts Skírnir offers Gerðr, i.e. eleven of Iðunn's apples and Óðinn's ring Draupnir, must in fact have been gifts from the gods, from Freyr's kin. If Sigibert in his infatuation was seen by his surroundings as being beside himself and in need of Gogo's help, it is as though the infatuated Freyr has been declared incommunicado by the other gods because it suited their political purpose to let Skírnir help him.

This brings us to the travel arrangements and the distance that must be overcome: How does one travel from far-off Toledo to Metz or from a hall in Ásgard to Gými's distant farm in Jotunheim? Venus describes the first journey as a surprisingly difficult mountain experience, considering that travelling in the Visigoth kingdom along the Mediterranean coast would seem to be a more obvious and pleasant trip:

*Per hiemes validasque nives, Alpenque, Pyrenen,  
perque truces populos vecta est duce rege sereno,  
Terrenis regina toris.* (VF *Carm VI*, 1:113–15a)

Judith George translates the lines:

Through winter weather, through deep snow, over the Pyrenean mountains, and through fierce peoples, she has been borne, the

glorious king guiding her path, a queen for a foreign bridal bed. George (1995:30)

Marc Reydellet translates the lines:

À travers frimas et congères, par Alpes et Pyrénées, parmi de peuples  
féroces, elle a fait route, guidée par un roi aux cœur serein pour être reine  
dans la couche d'un mortel. Reydellet (1998:49).

The problem is how to translate *duce rege sereno*. The *rex serenus* is King Sigibert, who is in Metz, while Gogo accompanies Brunhild over the Pyrenean Mountains from Toledo to Metz. In some way or other, therefore, Sigibert as well as Gogo is with her. *Vecta est* refers to the way she is helped through the perils on her way as Venus' daughter to her terrestrial (see Blomgren 1971, pp. 119 f.; Reydellet 1998:49) bridal bed. In a note Reydellet (1998:49, n. 9) asks the fair question: 'que faire de *duce*?'—what to do with *duce*? *Duce* is either the verb *duco*—I lead/guide or the noun *dux*—a leader. George and Reydellet see *duce* as a verb and translate: 'she is born/makes way, the glorious/serene king guiding her', i.e. metaphorically speaking. This means that the king, without really being there is doing two things, he carries or conveys Brunhild and he shows the way. Gogo does not seem to be there, although we know that it was he who in reality did what the king seems to be doing (see *Carm VII*, 1:41–44 or below). Instead of reading a metaphor, we could allow *duce* to refer to Gogo in his capacity as the leader of the trip. If so, we may translate *duce rege sereno* as two ablatives: 'with the guide, with the serene king'. Given what it says in the corresponding passage in *Carm VII*, 1 this makes perfect irrational sense, because from a Germanic point of view there is no reason to doubt that one body may contain several persons. Already Magnus Olsen (1909) pointed out that Skírnir was a hypostasis of Freyr.

Sigibert is being lovesick in Metz and far from serene. However, in Gogo he is present in his (usual) serene capacity. Gogo acts as if he were both himself and the serene Sigibert. This means that the serene king is present in the tour leader. To a Germanic or Norse audience this is an ontological truth and not a metaphor. The interactive constellation Sigibert :: Gogo is the same as Freyr :: Skírnir. It seems likely that the ambiguity in *duce rege sereno* was intended.

The Alp metaphor seems a bit misplaced; the Pyrenees are impressive in themselves, but the metaphor probably came instantly to the poet mountaineer who would not mind comparing his own life-changing mountain trip to Brunhild's. Crossing a mountain range on foot combines topos and reality to most people.

Although Skírnir never escorted Gerðr, his journey over mountains, and consequently hers too, crossed monster-infested lands as he explains to his horse before they set out on their mission (*Skírnismál*, st.10):



Fig. 4. Two travel routes between Metz and Toledo. It would seem that Gogo and Brunhild followed the western route.

<http://files.webb.uu.se/uploader/1338/Fortunatus-Fig-04.pdf>

‘It’s dark out there, I’d say it’s time we leave,  
 over misty mountains, over the ogre’s folk land  
 we both get through – or he takes both of us! That loathsome giant.’

The journey to and from Ásgard was in other words as difficult as and very similar to Brunhild’s and Gogo’s journey from Toledo, Fig. 4.

This finally puts us face to face with the two envoy characters Gogo and Skírnir and their mission. When Brunhild travelled with Gogo, she travelled with someone who guided her as the serene King. Since Norse *skír* and Latin *serenus* is the same word and since Skírnir arrives at Gými’s farm on Freyr’s horse carrying his sword and thus a ‘divine weapon’, it is reasonable to understand his serenity as a his own as well as that of his master, who, similar to Sigibert, was

not in his serene mood when Skírnir left him. On the contrary, Freyr was vexed because he too was in love.

The reason why both Gogo and Skírnir possess this serenity has to do with their close relation to their respective folk ruler and their intimate knowledge of the way their minds work. Fortunatus describes Gogo and his capacity in the panegyric:

*Principis arbitrio Sigiberthi magnus haberis:  
iudicium regis fallere nemo potest.  
Elegit sapiens sapientem et amator amantem  
ac veluti flores docta sequestrat apes.  
Illius ex merito didicisti talis haberi  
et domini mores serve benigne refers.  
Nuper ab Hispanis per multa pericula terris  
egregio regi gaudia summa uehis.  
Diligis hunc tantum quantum meliora parasti:  
nemo armis potuit quod tua lingua dedit.* (VF *Carm* VII, 1:35–44)

You are considered great in the judgement of the prince, Sigibert, no-one can deceive the judgement of the king. The sagacious man has chosen a sage, one who loves a lover, just as the wise bee singles out the flowers. From his virtues you learnt to be reckoned as such (40) and you reflect back the ways of your master, gentle servant. Just now you bring the greatest joy for the noble king from the lands of Spain, through a myriad of dangers. You love him so much that you have won better fortune for him: no-one has been able to give him by force of arms what your tongue has bestowed. George (1995:58).

Behind Fortunatus' conventional *dulcedo* – which does not imply a homoerotic relationship between lover Sigibert, the bee, and lover Gogo, the flower – there is a close relationship and it seems likely that Sigibert by his example have taught Gogo to become just as excellent and serene as he stands out. There is symbiosis between Gogo and Sigibert. When in line 40 it says that 'you reflect back the ways of your master, gentle servant'—*domini mores serve benigne refers*, there is more in *refers* than just a reflection. Gogo gives back to Sigibert what Sigibert has given Gogo, that is, he gives back Sigibert his serenity. Gogo can do that because there is symbiosis between them. The last four lines, which refer to the way Gogo brought Brunhild to Metz, exemplify Gogo's capacity and must be read in tandem with the above lines, *Carm* VI, 1:113–15a. In the panegyric to Gogo, the context is metaphorical; in the epithalamium, it is ontological.

When Sigibert fell lovesick, he lost his serenity, but since Gogo also possessed his serenity, owing to his symbiosis with Sigibert, the servant had a Sigibert within him as he went to Spain. Now that he has returned from Spain where Sigibert's serenity was crucial, he cures Sigibert's lovesickness with Brunhild and gives back (*refero*) his serenity.

In the end, Fortunatus points out that normal weapons, as opposed to the divine ones in *Carm VI*, 1:121, could never have brought about this. He may be right, but that did not stop Merovingians from relying on strife and warfare. In fact, it seems mandatory for Fortunatus to praise Sigibert for his military campaigns and martial, non-serene, capacity.

If we turn to *Skírnismál* (str. 3-8), Skírnir is in essence the same kind of close friend, servant and problem solver as Gogo. However, he could neither cure Freyr of his lovesickness nor give him back his serenity (st.42). Although he was not able to bring back Gerðr, he did get a positive answer and made an agreement without actually using his sword or touching Gerðr. Skírnir is non-violent, albeit threatening and verbally abusing. He seems very different from Gogo, who may also have been a tough negotiator.

The great difference between Gogo and Skírnir has to do with the entertainment. Gogo, although he does not take part in the performance, is the perfect emissary indirectly referred to in a rather conventional play, in which the only burlesque component is the mime, who shows the lovesick Sigibert. Skírnir, on the other hand, is a pompous, almost useless emissary with no serenity whatsoever. He is a burlesque malicious portrait of a corrupted pre-Ragnarök envoy.

## WEDDING FEAST PERFORMANCE

FORTUNATUS' EPITHALAMIUM IS an occasional theatrical performance centring on dialogue and staged at a wedding feast. The prologue, probably read by the poet himself, is the link between play, scene, players and the audience. Reciting the 143 lines of the whole *carmen* will take 15-20 minutes and if we allow for the acting to take some time as well, we end up with a 25-30 minute entertainment just before Sigibert & Brunhild leave for their marriage bed. Although we know relatively little about Merovingian performances, the context is reasonable (Hen 1995:224-231).

It would seem that the play is performed in a spectacular way that moves Cupid and Venus from an elevated position in the hall, where they can be seen and heard, to the floor and closer to where Fortunatus is standing, i.e. between the door to the wedding chamber and the married couple. The audience is addressed collectively, but the actors turn specifically to bridegroom and bride. The play, therefore, is an integrated part of the wedding feast and the hall room – the aula in Metz:

*Sic modo cuncta favent, dum prosperitate superna  
regia caesareo proficit aula iugo*

(VF *Carm VI*, 1:15-16)

Thus all things favourably inclined with good fortune from above the royal hall contributes to Caesar's bond. (My translation).

George (1995:26) translates:

‘Thus now all is propitious, as with blessings from on high the royal palace prepares for Caesar’s marriage’.

However, since we may suggest that the epithalamium is addressed to an audience with a Germanic background and not necessarily a specifically Christian or Latinized audience, I have preferred to translate *prosperitas*—‘good fortune’, *proficio*—‘contribute’ and *aula*—‘hall’, thus favouring a Germanic interpretation.

*Caesareo iugo* – ‘Caesar’s bond’ is Sigibert’s marriage, *regia aula* – ‘the royal hall’, refers to the agency of the Germanic hall building of which even the epithalamium is a part because it belongs to the nuptials in the hall. *Sic modo cuncta favent* – ‘thus all things favourably inclined’, refers to the effect of the hall and everything else on the overwhelmingly fertile spring season described in the first 5 couplets of the *carmen*. *Dum prosperitate superna* – ‘with good fortune from above’ refers to the ability of the hall to channel the hopes of divinities as well as to the spectacular descent of Venus and Cupid in line 63 when *venere simul thalamos ornare superbos*—together they cleave the clouds with light wings (George 1995:28). Finally, referring to Caesar, Fortunatus’ quest for acculturation gets a foothold in the grand Roman past (see George 1995:26 n5).

*Skírnismál*, which arguably is a play, is also composed of description and dialogue. Descriptions are prose and form a link between play, scene and players and the audience. The dialogue is strophic. The descriptive parts are comparable to the Prologue’s part in the *carmen*. In both plays, the descriptive element introduces the scenes and guides the audience. The epithalamium involves a pantomime (ll. 37-66a) in which a mime creates the lovesick Sigibert while another mime figures as an image of Brunhild before the spectacle turns into a dialogue. In *Skírnismál*, an equally enigmatic lovesick man is sitting in a high seat in a hall at the beginning of the play before the dialogue starts. Since Fortunatus tells the audience what it sees, and since the prose in *Skírnismál* does the same, both audiences understand what may not be obvious, namely, that this is what lovesickness looks like. When explained, the pantomimes are revealing, humorous and pointed.

Not surprisingly, “male lovesickness” is not a rhetorical topos. It is more likely to be a mimical topos referring to an onstage performance. Zanobi (2014:23-24) discussing ‘the two-dimensional process of generic enrichment between literary and sub-literary genres’ points out lovesickness as a farcically twisted mimetic topos already in Apuleius, in the 2nd century AD, and probably earlier.

In *Skírnismál*, the strophic dialogue is vivid and burlesque. The play is meant to be performed in connection with a wedding feast (*Skírnismál*, st. 42). It takes place on the first of the three traditional Icelandic wedding nights (Cleasby & Vigfuson 1876:304, *hýnótt*; :267, *hjú*; :265, *híbýli*). Contrary to the epithalamium, *Skírnismál* is performed *before* the nuptials commence. The bride, as it happens, has not yet arrived. We are given to believe that she will

arrive and she may in fact be on her way, but not in the company of Skírnir. If we knew the time it took Skírnir to ride from Gými's farm to Ásgard, we could calculate her time of arrival by subtracting the time it took Skírnir to return, from nine nights. In principle, if Gerðr does not turn up she breaks the marriage contract.

This is the most significant difference between the two weddings and their poetry. Fortunatus brings the wedding to a happy formal end. Those who ought to be present are indeed present. The *Skírnismál* author has made the bride and the groom mythical persons and even if the audience in the wedding hall may suspect that Freyr and Gerðr are the burlesque mythological equivalents of bridegroom and bride in love, the audience is nevertheless left with a cliff hanger. Of course, a reasonable way of solving this problem is to let the actual wedding, bride and groom take over the scene.

The traditional Germanic marriage is in essence a purchase contracted between an adult freeman and a free adult women (Drew 1991:41-43). Formally, it aims at moving the woman from one legal guardian, usually her father, who took her under his tutelage when she was born, to a new guardian, her husband. Love may or may not be involved (Bandlien 2005:1-17). Since this contract contains two acts, we can define what takes place in the performances in relation to the wedding as a contract. *Skírnismál* takes place before and during betrothal but most importantly in the betrothal phase, that is, between the purchase of the bride and the nuptials, which finally legalises the marriage. *Skírnismál*, therefore, ends between the two necessary marriage acts. The epithalamium on the other hand belongs to the end of the nuptials just before the sexual intercourse that concludes the second act and inaugurates cohabitation.

Closely reading Fortunatus' panegyric to Sigibert and Brunhild we see how carefully he sorts out the two acts of marriage and their interdependence:

*Altera vota colens melius quia munere Christi  
pectore iuncta prius, plus mode lege placet.* (VF *Carm* VI, 1a:33–34)  
Responding all the better to that second wish, since through Christ's gift, she who was first joined by her heart, now gives all the more delight joined legally. George (1995:31)

Gogo negotiated Brunhild's consent and his words, spoken as the serene king backed up by Christ, made her love Sigibert. This first vow marked the conclusion of the first act of the marriage. When Brunhild joins Sigibert – in marriage in front of God as a Christian or in marriage under the duvet in Metz as a pagan would have done – she honours the second vow and concludes the second act of marriage; that which makes it lawful.

The first act is the bargain part. It ends with a combined sales and supply agreement stating the date that defines the end of the betrothal phase. On this date, the bride will be delivered to her new family and its bridegroom by her “*mundium* holder”, or someone who stands in for this guardian, that is, the

person under whose tutelage the unmarried woman has hitherto lived (Drew 1991:41-43). In principle, because marriage law is based on the flexibility of a contract, Gogo may have stood in for Brunhild's guardian. In practice, however, she delivered herself, thus honouring the first part of the contract. In a parallel way, Skírnir negotiated Gerðr's consent and his words, spoken as the lovesick serene folk king backed up by the gods, made her love Freyr (st. 37). When Gerðr agrees to meet Freyr in nine days, she too concludes the first act of the contract betrothing herself to Freyr. We must assume – although it is deviant – that her position is such that her consent to the proposal is something Gýmir, her absent father and guardian, will accept (see Eames 1952:195 ff. on *mundr* and 1952:207-8). In practice, she who gave her consent to the betrothal phase having fallen in love with Freyr vows to deliver herself to the second act, that is, the nuptial, at the end of which we have reason to expect that she too *mode lege placet*—pleases lawfully. This chimes in with the fact that she stands to inherit her father (because her brother is dead) and that she, rather than her non-existent mother is “the lady with the mead cup” in her father's hall (see Enright 1996:283:87). Compared to conventional weddings among free men and women (see e.g. Lönnroth 1977:177; Steinsland 2000:60-61), the ones presented in the two plays are deviant, unconventional and political. They are divine upper class or royal weddings, in which ‘love’ and ‘consent’ are considered pivotal and divine involvement prerequisite.

The epithalamium refers to the final act of the wedding. *Skírnismál*, on the other hand, refers to the liminal insecurity between contract in Jotunheim and nuptials in Ásgard. From a conventional point of view, Freyr's frustration in strophe 42 is difficult to understand, since it is not unreasonable to agree that a daughter is delivered to the bridegroom in nine days' time. In the epithalamium, having overcome the significant liminal insecurity between contract in Toledo and nuptials in Metz, the wedding is obviously a great relief and Venus stresses Brunhild's emancipatory strength when she broke away from her Visigoth identity and crossed the mountains. The fear that something may go wrong during betrothal is thus present in both stories.

From a dramatic point of view, the epithalamium is light-hearted and rather dull, although the mimes and Cupid do their best to entertain. *Skírnismál*, on the other hand, will fit a much more dramatic performance. Its dialogue is burlesque and unpredictable, but also amusing and ironic like the pantomime in the epithalamium. For instance, at one point in their negotiations Skírnir threatens to kill Gerðr's father if she does not marry Freyr. Skírnir draws his sword, albeit just enough to allow the giantess to see the blade and take in the deadly weapon (str 23 through 25). Had Skírnir drawn the sword from its scabbard, the threat would definitely have been more potent. The reason he does not draw the sword is ironic. The sword is Freyr's. He gave it to Skírnir to protect him from the dangers and giants that lurk outside Ásgard. It was a precious gift, because Freyr's sword swings itself against giants if the bearer is brave (st. 8). If Skírnir ventures to draw the sword from its scabbard, there is a risk that it will swing itself against the giantess, kill her and ruin his mission.

If it does not swing itself, then Skírnir is perhaps not brave (enough). This fact is implicit and the situation thus ironic and slightly comic, not least because Skírnir very ostentatiously repeats his gesture as though Gerðr had not understood. Since she is neither impressed nor frightened, she has probably understood whose sword it is, and wondered who Skírnir is. In strophe 24 she as much as hints that Skírnir is not brave enough, because she suspects that if Skírnir and her father fight with each other, they will both die.

Both plays are humorous. The epithalamium is integrated with the gaiety of the wedding party. In *Skírnismál* the ironies and the fact that the audience consists of guests at a wedding would seem to promise that the feast following the play will proceed as happy nuptials the moment the real 'Gerðr' dressed as a bride enters the hall.

As occasional wedding performances, both the epithalamium and *Skírnismál* mix straightforward narrative with a specific kind of performance. Dramatically speaking, this is the interesting part of the entertainment. Cupid and Venus perform a *lis*, a verbal strife in which they praise each their champion (ll. 67b-131; George 1995:28 n21). Skírnir and Gerðr perform the Germanic equivalent, that is, a *flyting*. Gerðr champions herself, Skírnir his master. Their quarrel is a tough verbal duel in which the two participants exchange all kinds of innuendo, abusive insults and threats (*Skírnismál* str 17-40). In a flyting, irrespective of what was said, the winner is unquestioned (see Clover 1980:465-67), and since it is modelled on the lawsuit there can be no physical violence involved, i.e. no swords (Glover 1980:459-65). Both Skírnir and Gerðr can only insult, abuse and threaten verbally. Since Gerðr gets the last word and has reduced Skírnir to repeating her last words verbatim (*Skírnismál*, st. 41), she has won the flyting because she has in effect silenced her opponent. The verdict is in the silence. However, it may well be that her victory owes something to the mead which she persuades Skírnir to drink. The magic qualities of a giantess' cup of mead when, like Gerðr, she expects her visitor to be her brother's murderer cannot be ruled out. Nevertheless, Skírnir has lost and must ride home alone.

Be this as it may, Skírnir's last threat and the end of the flyting is puzzling:

St. 36 Skírnir: I carve 'Ogre', and three characters (not specifically runes),  
'lust' and 'rage' and 'impatience' on you; as I carve it off, so I carve it on,  
if it needs to be done

St. 37 Gerðr: Boy! (i.e. 'Skírnir!') I'd rather greet you now, come take the  
rimy glass, full of the old mead. Yet I had decided that I would never love  
a Vaningian (one of the Vanir) well.

St. 38 Skírnir: My whole message I shall have to know, before I ride home  
from here. When and where will you, be disposed to meet, Njǫrðr's  
dilatating son?

St. 39 Gerðr: 'Barri', is, as both of us know, a grove by the calm road.  
And after nine nights, there to Njǫrðr's son will, Gerðr grant his pleasure.

Skírnir is only threatening to write on Gerðr's body. Notwithstanding, the stage whisper in the second half of strophe 37, a comment addressed to the audience rather than Skírnir, who is gulping the mead, is puzzling. Gerðr speaks in the perfect tense although she and Freyr are not yet lovers over and under each other: *þó hafðak ek þat ætlat, at myndak aldregi unna vaningja vel*—‘Yet I *had* decided that I *would* never love a Vaningian well’. Does this mean that now, despite her decision, she *has* loved Freyr well? Skírnir, who may be influenced by the mead he just drank, is obviously not quite sure that Gerðr has changed her mind. Anyway, in strophe 39 Gerðr closes the first marriage act when she too refers to Freyr as Njǫrðr's son. From a marital point of view, this is the correct behaviour because she refers to the head of the family of her new guardian. It is by Njǫrðr's pleasure only that she becomes a family member (Brundage 1987:128). Consequently, she stipulates the date of her delivery to the bridegroom and she declares that she will legalise the marriage by granting Freyr his pleasure. True to their Germanic roots, Brunhild *modo lege placet*—pleases lawfully and Gerðr *unna gaman*—grants pleasure at *þingi*<sup>6</sup>. This means that they both accept the sexual intercourse that traditionally legalises marriage and cohabitation, since it concludes the second marriage act (Brundage 1987:129). But does Gerðr love Freyr and how in that case could she fall in love during a *flyting*?

The answer is yes, because of divine favour! It is reasonable to believe that owing to Freyr being called *skírr* in *Grimnismál* st. 43 that he is present in Skírnir, for instance, when he shows Gerðr the sword. We must also ask ourselves whether Skírnir's aggressive mood is in fact Freyr's lovesickness, when he thinks that Gerðr is about to turn down the proposal. If, moreover, we are into Freudian interpretations of the subconscious (or indeed, if we believe in divine intervention) there is an easy point to score rereading strophe 36 through 38. In advance or *firstly* we accept that Skírnir is the serene image of the god Freyr. Skírnir's aggressive words are his own, but they emanate from a lovesick fertility-ruler and god-king. *Secondly*, it is clear that Freyr/Skírnir treats the girl Gerðr as a sexual object. She is a Semiramis to Jupiter (Dronke 1970:99-100), a Sabine to Romulus (*Ab urbe cond.* 1:9), a Mary to God (*Héliand* vv. 243-338) or a Brunhild to Sigibert. *Thirdly*, we can read the rhythmical 9-syllable long line in strophe 36, the longest in the whole poem: *ergi ok aði ok óþola*—‘lust and rage and impatience’, as a sexual act. This is followed, *fourthly*, by the second half strophe in which the potent Freyr/Skírnir brags that he can do it again and again – ‘as I carve it off, so I carve it on, if it needs to be done’:

<sup>6</sup> The expression in strophe 38: *á þingi*—‘in a meet’ is a law phrase signifying the intended coming together with someone, for instance, on a thing place for legal purposes. If it were just a matter of visiting someone, *fara á fund e-s* or *fara til fundur við* would have been appropriate. *Á þingi* indicates a formal meeting that both parties will attend and as a metaphor, *á þingi* has juridical connotations.

36. 2. Þurs rist ek þér ok þrjá stafi,  
 3. ergi ok æði ok óþola;  
 4. svá ek þat af rist, sem ek þat á reist,  
 ef gerask þarfar þess

St. 36 Skírnir: 2 I carve ‘Ogre’, and three characters, 3. ‘lust’ and ‘rage’ and ‘impatience’ on you; (4.) as I carve it off, so I carve it on, if it needs to be done.

The *fifth* point, Gerðr offering Skírnir the mead in strophe 37, is as close as Freyr/Skírnir gets to a cigarette, when afterwards he and Gerðr are lying down looking up into the ceiling. The *sixth* point, Gerðr’s remark about ‘loving well’, is her way of expressing satisfaction having felt how well Freyr/Skírnir may be loved. This scene ends in the first half of strophe 38. Predictably, since Skírnir/Freyr is about to return home, there is ambiguity in this half strophe: *Ørindi mín / vil ek ql vita / áðr ek riða heim heðan*. This may simply mean: ‘I want to know all of my message before I ride homewards’ taking *ørindi*—‘errand’ to mean ‘message’ rather than ‘mission’. But *ørindi* could also mean ‘breath’ and *viti* to ‘see’ or ‘try’, that is, ‘check’ rather than ‘get to know’ (Cleasby & Vigfuson 1876). After having been a human stand-in for a fertility god and gulped a cup of giant mead, Skírnir’s words in this half strophe could also mean: ‘I want to catch my breath fully before I ride homewards’. Focussing on a parallel, secondary and punning meaning, this interpretation befits the after-love-making scene.

Having made love to each other it occurs to most people, as the seventh point, to inquire when and where to meet again (st 38, second half strophe). When Skírnir has regained his breath and his humanity, he asks this question on behalf of his master Freyr in Ásgard. Now that she has come to love Freyr, Gerðr’s suggestion amounts to asking Skírnir/Freyr as the *eighth* point to tell the real Freyr to prepare his bedchamber, where mentally speaking Gerðr has just been, on the *ninth* night (st. 41).

Since Skírnir can be said to be both Freyr and himself, it is possible to see the whole confrontation between Gerðr and Freyr/Skírnir as symbolising the god’s courtship and holy wedding. The next stage will be the lawful royal hierogamy, that is, the second act of the marriage contract, to which we the wedding guests are invited. Two things speak in favour of the above interpretation: (1) The subtext in *Skírnismál* is a typical and appalling “male phantasy” in Klaus Theweleit’s sense of the expression (1989:346-422). (2) The *Skírnismál* poet has gone out of his way to slip an Old Norse variety of the complementary realities that sexuality and power give rise to, into his play – *nota bene* in a flyting.

Fortunatus’ poems and *Skírnismál* show affinities with wife abduction or “Raubehe”, a legal Germanic form of marriage in which the bride is forced to marry without the consent of her father or herself. Raubehe, nevertheless, includes a grey zone between violating and convincing a woman into marriage

and many cases are singular (Hübner 1918:593-94; Kalifa 1970; Brundage 1987:129).

In the story about Brunhild, the affinities with *Raubebe* concerns the forced political marriage. When Gogo arrives in Toledo, Athanagild simply accepts the situation unconditionally and gives away Brunhild equipped with gifts to Sigibert. This is not the expected outcome of a traditional marriage contract and the fact that none of her family delivers her to Metz is atypical. We are told that Athanagild was pleased and that Brunhild was in love with Sigibert. However, love is not a legal issue and like Venus, we must wonder about this kind of long-distance love. She explains it as a result of divine intervention and that is probably the only possible explanation. The wedding poet exerts himself explaining the situation, but one may still expect that Athanagild or Brunhild had to accept and fall in love or face a political crisis.

If this way of reasoning about Brunhild is circumstantial, but suggestive, the *Skírnismál* suitor seems more bluntly inclined to force the girl to marry irrespective her father's consent and her own feelings. Snorri Sturluson said as much in *Gylfaginning*, Chp. 37 where Freyr declares that Skírnir must bring back Gerðr with or without her father's consent. Like Fortunaus, supported by a *lis*, the *Skírnismál* author supported by a flyting, solves the abduction problem by means of love and (probably) divine intervention.

## Conclusion

BOTH AUTHORS CENTRE their narratives on desire, in these cases on complex forms of love. "Desire" is behind the interaction between Brunhild and Sigibert as well as Gerðr and Freyr, but in the complexity of love and because of the authors' narrative techniques "deceit" is a reality that must not be ruled out. This allows us to go further into the literary structure of the two works using the analytical framework of René Girard (1965:1-52 on the concepts of "desire", "deceit" and "the mediator"). This immediately discloses the importance of the "mediator" – in these cases the divine – and the way it dominates human interaction. It is the divine mediator, the generalised fertility god Freyr and the generalised godly ruler Christ, who makes the lies disappear and the desire of the lovers triumphant. Both works are examples of what Girard would have called *la vérité Romanesque* and this triangular structure, in these cases "woman – man – divinity" gives the works a modern character, because the mediator is considered a generalized other, that is, a role you take when interacting with others, rather than a distant supernatural (See Mead 1934: Section 20. *Play, the game and the generalized other*, on this concept).

Nevertheless, a fertility god who falls madly in love by happy political chance and dispatches an abusive suitor as the serene image of himself is amusing because it is a burlesque travesty of divine behaviour. We can explain this phenomenon with reference to Gustav Mensching when he argues that those who represent an old declining folk religion when it has reached its

best before date are often profaning it (Mensching 1947:79ff.). It is far more difficult to explain how the story about Sigibert's marriage became the template of this travesty.

Fortunatus' epithalamium is a light-hearted performance wrapped in *dulcedo*, but *topoi* and the fact that *Skírnismál* is a burlesque dialogical play deprived of *dulcedo* does not mean that it lacks any of the components that Gro Steinsland has shown characterises hierogamy among royalty (Steinsland 2000:57 – 69 with refs). However, the death motive is not present in Fortunatus' poems, except perhaps for the dangers in the Pyrenees among its raw people (VF *Carm.* VI, 1:113-15).

Fortunatus' wedding story with its amalgamation of Roman, Christian and Germanic values is in itself quite unusual in medieval Latin, and to my knowledge it is not easy to find a better template for *Skírnismál*, which in Norse mythology is also an unusual story (see Steinsland 2000:59-61 or Bandlien 2005:28-9).

The fact that Gerðr and Brunhild fall in love, avoid abduction, give their consent to and perform the same astonishing personal, political and ideological emancipatory journey cannot be explained as standard marital or even *hieros gamos* behaviour. However, if we consider that during the decades before Brunhild's marriage, the Franks had checked the Visigoths (see Wood 1994:169-75; Collins 2004:40-43) as the Æsir checked the Giants, it makes historical sense in *Skírnismál*, based on the epithalamium, to equate Æsir with Franks and Giants with Visigoths. It would seem, therefore, that the *Skírnismál* poet made use of a piece of history once told as news by Venantius Fortunatus.

The similarities between Gogo and Skírnir, which go all the way down to what they are called – Gogo is *serenus* as Skírnir is *skír* – is a clue to the intentions of the Norse poet. Sticking to the “*skírr/serenus*” concept and the “love-based/law-based” marriage model irrespective of how the contract is negotiated is equally suggestive. Both details indicate that the Norse poet took a c. 400 year-old wedding play, intended to bridge pagan and Christian traditions in an unorthodox way, and made use of its basic notions and narrative structure.

Perhaps he knew about Brunhild's reputation as a long-lasting ruthless political player (Wood 1994:126-36), but not necessarily. Her determination showed already when she accepted to become Sigibert's queen and entered the political scene. Her decision surprised Venus as Gerðr's decision surprises us.

This ancient proof of a holy royal marriage in accordance with Gro Steinsland's definition has affinities with the conventional marriage contract that later developed into a common and not particularly holy marital norm among the upper classes and the odd royalty (see e.g. *Rígsþula*, str. 36-40 or *Helgakviða Hiörvarzsonar*, Intro – st. 6). This amounts to saying that the *Skírnismál* poet composed a travesty set among ancient gods in days of yore before Ragnarök, that is, in the days of Venantius Fortunatus.

The Norse poet is not in favour of the way the old marriage arrangements were sometimes negotiated and like Fortunatus, he applauds the idea that a

marriage should be arranged because a young woman in love gives her consent. This strongly indicates that the Norse audience, like the one in Metz, consisted of guests with a semi-Christian or ‘modern’ attitude, at a wedding feast where paganism could still be acceptable, albeit as entertainment. Since the Norse play is burlesque we cannot exclude that the abusive Skírnir in his agitated state has adopted his master’s deeply felt love. For all we know, Gogo in some way or other may have done the same. Old-fashioned, ever-present and magic love rather than male abuse seems still to have been part of the game and hopefully, love will save the day when Gerðr enters dressed as the bride she is, and Freyr turns out to be the bridegroom. The burlesque entertaining part of the play is over, the masks have fallen and the second act of the marriage contract – the nuptials – can proceed as they did in Metz.

The epithalamium and *Skírnismál* are both entertainment at the nuptials and their common denominator is the link between the upper-class wedding we attend as guests and the distant mythical holiness of its roots.

There are five specific points that suggest that the *Skírnismál* author used Fortunatus’ poems as template and inspiration in order to compose his own play.

1 The particular pair of key words related to the marriage contract: *serenus/skír* and *placet modo legelguma gaman at þingi*.

2 The parallel characters: *Brunhild/Gerðr*, *Sigibert/Freyr* and *Gogo/Skírnir*.

3 The structure: The core issue in both plays is the myth and legality of the holy marriage and royal hierogamy.

4 The genre: The epithalamium as well as *Skírnismál* are dialogical plays. They are both guided by descriptions, include a pantomime and they centre on a normative *lis* or *flyting*.

5 The occasion: Both works are composed as entertainment at a wedding.

In addition, there are some shared *topoi*. They are general similarities, albeit very old ones.

## SOME PERSPECTIVES

IF WE THINK that there was a myth about Freyr and Gerðr, we may wonder whether the *Skírnismál* poet invented it. There are some indications that this was not the case, although he did contribute to the myth by writing the play. Nevertheless, the value of the story about Gerðr and Freyr may be doubted, see Simek (2003:475). Notwithstanding, it is interesting if *Skírnismál* is a 10<sup>th</sup> century travesty of a mythological theme. Following Sahlgren (1927-28:250-51; also Steinsland 1991:48-49) in his discussion of the name *Skírnir* as a parallel to or dependant on Freyr who is called *skírr* in *Grimnismál*, st 43, it would seem that the author contributed a purely fictional Skírnir character to the myth about Freyr and Gerðr. The poem *Hyndluljóð*, Snorri’s Edda (*Gylfaginning* chp 37) and *Ynglingasaga* make it plain that some parts of the mythology around Gerðr and Freyr were not really used by the *Skírnismál* poet, although they could have contributed to the myth about Gerðr. She had a father and a mother and a nameless brother who was killed by Bele.

Moreover, she had a history with Freyr that resulted in a son. The author needs this common background knowledge, because he wants to introduce Skírnir into a known, but not too elaborate story. At the same time, he must keep the background characters out of the plot because some of them – her brother, if we were not sure he was dead, and her father were he there – would inevitably have interfered with the Skírnir character. It can be argued, therefore, that the author needed the basic facts of the *first* king in a royal genealogy and *nothing more* in order to develop Freyr and Gerðr and anchor his fictitious characters Skírnir, the maid and the shepherd in his burlesque plot. To this end, he freely adds common-place mythological hints concerning Óðinn, Þórr, Skaði, Njörðr, Giants, high seats, swords, rings, apples, horses and so forth. He is using Freyr as the mythological equivalent of a ruler, such as Sigibert. Given Sundqvist's analysis of Freyr as a 'synthetic deity' (2014:63), this seems uncontroversial.

When Steinsland (2014) suggests a connection between *Skírnismál* and *Genesis*, the connection may thus be with the wider mythical complex rather than with the play and generally speaking, there are source-critical problems taking for granted that *Skírnismál* represents a common myth (e.g. McKinnel 2005:64-67). The interpretation of *Skírnismál* as a burlesque and ironic play or an entertainment obviously questions or deconstructs a number of serious mythological interpretations. Owing to Snorri's contribution in the beginning of the 13th century when Snorri wrote, perhaps 300 years after the composition of the play, it would seem that in part he considered *Skírnismál* a reasonable mythological source and Skírnir more than a burlesque character in an ancient half-heathen occasional play.

IF THE *SKÍRNISMÁL* author was aware of Fortunatus' poems, it was hardly because they were performed or recited. It is much more likely that while studying Latin, the poet had read Fortunatus as an example of old literature typical of a transition period in which a pagan Germanic society transformed itself into a Christian one. His idealised picture of bishops in 6<sup>th</sup> century Francia signifies such a society (Brennan 1992:138-39; George 1987:203-04). Although Fortunatus was better known on the continent, Dudo of St. Quentin (\*960s) in his *History of the Normans* frequently copied him (Curtius 1953:163; Christiansen 1998:xxxiv f. & notes 27, 50-1, 139, 142, 224, 230, 369, 430, 433 & 455), he was not unknown in Anglo-Saxon England (Hunt 1979; Lapidge 1979; Fell 1991:177-9; Coates 1998; Milfull 2006:55-57). Be this as it may, there is no way of knowing the background of the *Skírnismál* author, how he came to learn Latin or Norse or for that matter how he became acquainted with Norse mythology. He may have been a non-Scandinavian forced to migrate to Iceland. He may have been a Scandinavian with Norman or Anglo-Danish contacts in the 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century (or Irish or generally speaking Continental connections) and there is nothing to say that the *Skírnismál* author was not a Christian and a kind of Fortunatus.

If, however, we follow scholars such as Elisabeth van Hoots (e.g. 1983; 1992; 2000) or Elisabeth Tyler (e.g. 1999; 2000; 2017) we can argue that Norman and/or Anglo-Danish courts in the 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century were possible hubs where Norse and Latin culture could interact with each other. If, therefore, a literate and educated Scandinavian with the ability to read Latin, albeit perhaps not to compose a Latin text, has composed *Skírnismál*, then the consequences are not necessarily far-reaching, inasmuch as *Skírnismál* is no more than a reflection of the court hubs – not least the queen's household.

The above line of argumentation, nevertheless, suggests a dissolution of cultural borders, and that in its turn may be difficult to accept. In principle, therefore, the consequences are important, because they indicate a relatively early end to the purely oral Norse tradition in which we usually include the Eddic poems. The intellectual inspiration that may result in the composition of a work of art, moreover, is no longer purely Scandinavian, nor is it situated solely in the traditional society. Instead, factual history, such as the historicity of Fortunatus' poems, becomes an effective source of inspiration for critical historical fiction. This kind of inspiration is patent to Norman and Anglo-Danish courts and late 10<sup>th</sup> and early 11<sup>th</sup> centuries (see v. Hoots 1983 ; 2000. Tyler 2005; 2017). Thus, the comparison may suggest that a poet or an author aiming at a Norse reception might well have contemplated using an old Latin work as a template for a burlesque Norse play supposed to entertain guests at something as traditional and varied as the nuptials. Even a possible genre, the occasional play as hall-life entertainment (see also Gunnell 2006 on performance in the hall) might have been inspired by Latin mimetic theatre in addition or in parallel to traditional seasonal rituals and ceremonies such as spring/summer marriage (Gunnell 1995:135-140).

Finally, if the educated poet or playwright was inspired by a book, it is neither incomprehensible nor odd if he chose to copy the Latin text and write down his one work on parchment in Norse using the Latin alphabet.

How Norse then is *Skírnismál*? The answer must be: Very Norse! but not entirely since it probably used a c. 500 year old dialogical poem and play as a template in order to create an interesting and conscious historicity in a piece of burlesque nuptial entertainment. *Skírnismál* is enhanced Norse tradition, the result of having used a distant past to mirror the present in a historical play.

## Appendix I

This is a free prose translation of the Eddic poem *Skírnismál* or *För Skírnis*<sup>7</sup> inspired by the interpretation of the poem as meant to be staged as an occasional entertainment. I have based it on Ursula Dronke's edition and translation, on the work of the research team around Klaus von See, as well as on Gustaf Neckel's edition<sup>8</sup>. In addition, I have consulted a number of English translations.<sup>9</sup> A few philological questions are discussed in the notes.

### FÖR SKÍRNIS

PROSE INTRODUCTION: One day Freyr, the son of Njörðr, sat by himself in Hliðskjálf<sup>10</sup> gazing into all the realms. He looked into Jotunheim and there he saw a lovely girl who went from her father's hall to the 'skemman'<sup>11</sup>. Seeing her made him lovesick.

Skírnir was Freyr's servant. Njörðr asked him to go and talk to Freyr. Then Skaði spoke:

\*

St. 1 Skaði: Get up Skírnir go and request some speech from our boy and inquire with whom the gifted young heir is so very upset.

St. 2 Skírnir: Harsh words I expect from your son, if I go and ask permission to inquire with whom the gifted young heir is so very upset.

\*

St. 3 Skírnir: Please tell me Freyr, the gods' folk ruler, because I long to learn why you my lord are sitting, alone in the long halls?

St. 4 Freyr: Why should I tell you, a man still young, of my heart's great grief when the elves' beam shines every day, yet not on my longing.

St. 5 Skírnir: Your longing I think is not so great that me, the messenger you cannot tell. Since we were young together in the past, we two can trust each other.

St. 6 Freyr: In Gými's court I saw walking, the girl I desire. Bright shone her arms and so, all air and water.

St. 7 I long for the Maid more than any man, who was ever young; Of Æsir and Elves no man wishes that we are together.

St. 8 Skírnir: Then give me the horse that bears me through darkness, wise flickering flames, and the sword that can swing itself against the giants.

St. 9 Freyr: I give you the horse that bears you through darkness, wise flickering flames, and the sword that can swing itself, if the bearer is brave.

PROSE BETWEEN STROPHE 9 AND 10: Skírnir talked with the horse:

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7 *Skírnismál* is 'Skírnir's speech'. F ör Skírnis is '*Skírnir's*' journey. I prefer the latter as the title of the play.

8 Dronke (1997); v. See et al. (1993) and Neckel (1927).

9 Bellows, trans. (1923:107-21); Taylor & Auden, trans. (1969); Dronke (1997:376-85); Larrington, trans. (2014); Crawford, trans. (2015).

10 That is, the high seat.

11 A *skemman*, probably from *skammr*—short, is a small detached building. See Weinmann (1994:327); Valtýr Guðmundsson (1889:247).

St. 10 Skínir: It's dark out there, I'd say it's time we leave, over misty mountains, over the ogre's folk land, we both get through – or he takes both of us! That loathsome giant.

PROSE BETWEEN STROPHE 10 AND 11: Skírnir rode into Jotunheim to Gými's courts. There were angry dogs bound before the gate of the paling surrounding Gerðr's hall. He rode to where a shepherd sat on a mound and summoned him:

St. 11 Skínir: Now tell us shepherd sitting there on the mound and watching every which way. How shall I converse with the young wench when Gými's dogs bark?

St. 12 Shepherd: What are you? Doomed! Or are you gone already [... ... ...] Nourish no hope ever to converse with Gými's good daughter.

St. 13 Skínir: There's a better choice than sobbing for men, who are keen to travel. Down to a day my future was fashioned, and my whole life laid out.

\*

St. 14 Gerðr: Who's making the noise that I am hearing now penetrating our house. The earth quakes and with it trembles all of Gými's farmstead<sup>12</sup>.

St. 15 Maid: Out there a man has dismounted from horseback letting his horse graze the ground.

St. 16 Gerðr: You ask him to enter into our hall, and drink the famous mead. Yet I must fear that, standing there outside, is my brother's killer.

\*

St. 17 Gerðr: What son of elves or Æsir's offspring or wise Vanir's is this? Why come alone across the violent fire to see our homestead?

St. 18 Skínir: I am no elves' son, no Æsir's offspring or son of wise Vanir, but I came alone across violent fire to see your homestead.

St. 19 Age-healing apples, golden, have I here and them I will give you Gerðr, thus buying peace, that you may say that Freyr is not the most loathsome man.

St. 20 Gerðr: Age-healing apples I never accept for any man's pleasure. Freyr and I shan't as long as both of us live settle in together.

St. 21 Skínir: I'll give you the ring, that which was burnt, with Óðinn's young offspring. Eight equally heavy will drop from it, every ninth night.

St. 22 Gerðr: I won't take the ring, though it was burnt, with Óðinn's young offspring. Gold won't be lacking in Gými's farmsteads when his wealth is dispensed.

St. 23 Skínir: See this sword blade young woman, slim and sign-marked, that I am having in my hand? Hack your head, off from your neck I shall, if you do not make peace with me.

St. 24 Gerðr: I shall never suffer bondage, for any man's pleasure, but this I guess: If you meet with Gýmir willing to battle, you will both end up killed.

St. 25 Skínir: See this sword blade young woman, slim and sign-marked, that I am having in my hand? By its cutting edge the old giant will bow down, your father meet with fate.

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12 A very Icelandic earthquake strophe.

St. 26 With taming rod I'll spank you and I shall break you, a wench to my pleasures. Thither you shall go where the sons of men, will never look again<sup>13</sup>.

St. 27 Early on Eagle's hill, there you shall sit, turned away from realms, hankering for hell loathing food more than any man, a shiny snake among men.

St. 28 You will be a spectacle; when you go out Hrímnir will glare at you, every creature stare at you. You will become more well-known than the guard to the gods when you gape through the gates.

St. 29 Foolish and shouting, plagued and impatient, your tears are growing with grief. Come sit down, and I shall tell you of heavy waves of grief and double sorrow.

St. 30 Fiends shall bent you, the whole hideous day, on giants' homesteads. To the frost ogre's hall you shall creep, every day without virtue, creep without means. Instead of pleasure you shall be weeping, and bring along grief with your tears.

St. 31 With a three-headed ogre you shall thenceforth live, or be without husband. Hanker'll size you, grief consumes you. Be like the thistle that was thronged away, at the end of the labour<sup>14</sup>.

St. 32 Into the wood, to a sapling I went, to get a wonder twig – got a wonder twig.

St. 33 Óðinn's wrath is on you, the wrath of Æsir's Prince, and Freyr he hates you, you cruel monstrous girl you who have gained the wonder wrath of gods.

St. 34 Listen giants, listen frost ogres, the sons of Suttung's, the very Æsir host how I forbid, how I deny her, men's happy sound, men's happy fruit.

St. 35 Frostgrim the ogre's called, he who shall have you, down below Nágrindr. There the wretched thralls, at the roots of the tree, serve you goat urine. A better drink, you shall never get girl – should you wish for it, girl – should I wish for it.

St. 36 I carve 'Ogre', and three characters, 'lust' and 'rage' and 'impatience' on you; as I carve it off, so I carve it on, if it needs to be done<sup>15</sup>.

St. 37 Gerðr: Boy! I'd rather greet you now, come take the rimy glass, full of the old mead. Yet I had decided that I would never love a Vaningian well<sup>16</sup>.

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13 Having abused her sadistically and by implication sexually, guilt will force her out of society and Skírnir goes on to describe this place outside society in greater detail.

14 This metaphor alludes to the daily preparation of the dried harvest, which was divided into (1) grain, (2) food for the animals and (3) the rest, including thistles that were thrown away. As it happens, ecofacts and artefacts recovered in the hall at Borg suggest that this sorting procedure took place in the hall room. Hansson (2003).

15 Since this is done with a sap-filled twig 'carve' means 'write' on her skin with the sap. Comparing the usage in *Hárbarðsljóð* st. 20 with the way *gambanteinn* is used in *Skírnismál*, makes it reasonable to see the teinn as a twig that brings about mental disruption.

16 The second part of this strophe: 'Yet ... ..' is stage whisper probably called for while Skírnir concentrates on gulping down the mead. In my opinion Dronke (1997: 413) is right, there's a joke hiding here: 'Vaningian' alludes to the gelded *Bos Taurus* offered to the Vanir. Freyr, despite being a Vanir, is nevertheless considered a potent fertility god.

St. 38 Skírnir: My whole message I shall have to know, before I ride home from here. When and where will you, be disposed to meet, Njǫrðr's dilating son?

St. 39 Gerðr: 'Barri' is, as both of us know, a grove by the calm road. And after nine nights, there to Njǫrðr's son will, Gerðr grant his pleasure.

PROSE BETWEEN STROPHE 39 AND 40: Then Skírnir rode home.

Freyr stood out of doors, spoke to him and asked for news.

St. 40 Freyr: Now tell me, Skírnir, before you unsaddle the steed and take one step forward: what did you accomplish, in Jotunheim, to your and my delight?

St. 41 Skírnir: 'Barri' is, as both of us know, a grove by the calm road. And after nine nights, there to Njǫrðr's son will, Gerðr grant his pleasure.

St. 42 Freyr: A night's long, yet longer two, how can I suffer three? To me a month was often shorter, than this half wedding night.

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