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### The Role of Prosody in the Establishment of Eddic Texts

The Poetic Edda has been edited numerous times since the seventeenth century, and a comparison of editions evidences the rise and decline of the influence of metrical analysis upon editorial practices as regards emendation of texts. Sievers (1878, 1893) pointed out discrepancies between recorded forms and their metrical treatment, and his analysis of eddic meters, specifying fairly closely for the first time what is and is not metrically regular, is what enabled subsequent editors, such as Finnur Jónsson (1888) and Sijmons & Gering (1901), to emend eddic texts in such a way as to smooth away their formal irregularities. Yet from nearly the start there were those who made little of metrical concerns, e.g. Neckel (1914; the fifth edition of 1983 is the scholarly standard), who explicitly regarded syntax and style as sufficiently important to justify ignoring some metrical evidence. In recent years editors have shown greater reluctance to emend on the basis of meter, or even alliteration. The reasons for this have not generally been made explicit by editors themselves, but certain explanations present themselves. Machan (1992: 226), for example, objects that textual reconstruction is a futile endeavor: an eddic poem's 'original' form can never be fully recovered, and at all events, to attempt to establish a poem's original form is to lend it a 'static' quality, whereas to grant authority to its form as recorded in the thirteenth-century Codex Regius is to recognize its dynamism. The textual conservatism of Dronke (1969, 1997, 2011) is underscored by her practice in the commentary of pointing out irregularities of meter and alliteration and offering reasons not to regard them as defects, thus implying a distrust of the findings of metrists. Such is not an uncommon attitude among students of Old English, an audience for which her edition is intended. Still, in eddic editions textual emendation on the basis of prosody is better justified than it is in respect to Old English poetry, the tradition most nearly comparable to the eddic one. The reason is that the commonest eddic meter, *fornyrðislag*, has much in common with skaldic meters, and in regard to skaldic poetry textual emendation on metrical grounds is on a much firmer footing, since in skaldic poetry syllable count is of the first importance, as may be discerned not only from skaldic poems themselves but also on the basis of Snorri Sturluson's account of verse construction in *Háttatal*. It is plain that in the manuscript instantiations of skaldic verse, many archaic and poetic constructions have been modernized in the course of transmission and many needless function words added, disrupting the syllable count. It is only natural to suppose that the same sorts of alterations have affected eddic poetry. Moreover, arguments similar to Machan's have been offered in the much more contentious and better-documented debates about editing in Old English, and in response to them it has been pointed out that (1) it has almost never been a conjectural editor's aim to reconstruct the 'original' text but only, in most cases, to reverse such changes to the text over time as can be identified with some confidence, and (2) the terms 'static' and 'dynamic' are regrettably confused in this debate, since an emended text that is constructed to make it plain that its thirteenth-century form differs from earlier forms, for instance by indicating emendations through brackets and italics—a text like Gering's—is more dynamic, revealing layers of textual history at a glance, whereas a text that hews close to its earliest recorded form is more static, privileging a single layer in the text's history. For these and other reasons, greater variety of editorial practices than those currently employed in the establishment of eddic texts is to be desired.