

Leeds Studies in English

Article:

E. L. Olszewska, 'Illustrations of Norse Formulas in English',
Leeds Studies in English, 2 (1933), 76-84

Permanent URL:

https://ludos.leeds.ac.uk:443/R/-?func=dbin-jump-full&object_id=134477&silo_library=GEN01



Leeds Studies in English
School of English
University of Leeds
<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/lse>

ILLUSTRATIONS OF NORSE FORMULAS IN ENGLISH.

Norse influence on English is seen in the adoption of formulas¹ as well as single words.² These may be classified as compounds, alliterative collocations and other formulas of various kinds.

When a formula is adopted each element may appear in English in a form corresponding to its Norse original; *a33 occ a33* in *Ormulum*, for example, corresponds regularly to OWN. *ei ok ei*. Usually, however, one or more elements occur in a form representing the corresponding native cognate.³ The difference between cognates in the two languages is often very slight; compare, for example, *Grettis saga* (ed. R. C. Boer) lxxxviii, 21 *Hann kvað já við* and OE. *Chron.* (D) 1067 *Hē cwæð ia wið*. Illustrative of this replacement are such formulas as ME. *mare (more) and minne*: OWN. *meiri ok minni*, ME. *kaste wordes*: OWN. *kasta orðum*, and ME. *sette of liue*: OWN. *setja af lífi*.

The replacement of an element in a formula by a non-cognate native synonym is rare, because the cognate was usually at hand. In alliterative collocations words are coupled by *and* replacing OWN. *ok*. Old English had no form corresponding to the Norse reflexive pronoun in the third person and consequently this is replaced by OE. *hine*, *him*, ME. *him*, etc.; compare OE. *Chron.* (E) 1003 *Gebræd hē hine sēocne* and *Fagrskinna* (ed. F. Jónsson), p. 81, | 10 (*Hann*) *brá sér sjúkum*. Another example is *als* in ME. *lete (late) als* 'to behave as if, to pretend' which serves the function of *sem* in OWN. *láta sem* of the same meaning;⁴ compare *Cursor Mundi* 8614 *In bede*

¹ For the use of the word *formula* see O. Jespersen, *Philosophy of Grammar*, p. 18 f.

² Some examples of formulas are listed by F. Kluge, *Pauls Grundriss* 1,938 (Old English only) and E. Björkman, *Scandinavian Loan-words*, p. 14 footnote 1; see also B. S. Phillpotts, 'The Battle of Maldon': Some Danish Affinities in *Modern Language Review* XXIV, 187 f.

³ For similar remodellings in Orkney Norn see H. Marwick, *Orkney Norn*, p. xxxi f., e.g. *to share the teeth*, *to clench the teeth*: Da. *skjære tænder* (p. xxxii).

⁴ Norse origin of the Middle English idiom is recognized by Tolkien and Gordon, *Gawain*, line 1281 note.

ful still sco lai, Lett als sco slep and *Grettis saga* xxi, 9 *Eigi lét Grettir sem hann vissi hvat Björn talaði um þetta.*

COMPOUNDS.

There are many examples of compounds, paralleled in Norse, of which one or both elements exist independently as part of the stock of Norse loanwords in English. Typical examples are ME. *spaman* 'soothsayer': OWN. *spámaðr* (of which the first element is represented in ME. *spa* 'prophecy') and ME. *stakgarth* 'rickyard': OWN. *stakkgarðr* (of which both elements occur separately in Middle English). Such compounds may have been formed in English from the separate elements, but it is more probable that they represent adoptions of the compounds as a whole. In some instances one element has been replaced by the native cognate e.g. ME. *meteniðing* 'one who grudges food,' recorded in *Poema Morale* (Trin. Coll. MS.) 234: OWN. *matníðingr*.

Of especial interest are compounds containing an element which is part of the native vocabulary but does not occur there with the meaning it bears in the compound. An example is ME. **laghtermilde* 'generous with laughter,' recorded only in *unlaghtermilde* in *Cursor Mundi* 3283 *O maidens sagh he cum on raw; þe formast was vnlaghter milde, Hir semed na wight to be wilde.* This corresponds to OWN. *hlátrmildr* 'free with laughter.' OE. *milde*, ME. *mild(e)* does not appear to have had the specific sense 'liberal' which is frequent in Old Norse. Moreover ON. *mildr* occurs in many compounds in the sense 'generous with,' as OWN. *fémildr* 'liberal,' *tármildr*, OSw. *tärmilder* 'tearful.'

Another example is ME. *care-bed* 'sick-bed, especially that of those bedridden on account of old age,' occurring, for example, in the metrical homilies in *Archiv* LVII, 299/2 line 36 *Ffel aunter þat he wox seke . . In care bed he lay so longe . . þat he drouh faste to þe deþ.* (The altered form *bed of care* occurs in *Cursor Mundi* 3612 *I lig her now, in bedd o care . . It bes not lang þat I ne dei;* also *ibid.* 5434 *Now lijs iacob in bedd o care And helds fast to his ending*). The element *care* represents OWN.

ker 'sick-bed' used chiefly in the phrase *liggja í ker* 'to lie bedridden (especially on account of old age).' The compound *kerbeðr* is instanced once in a verse in *Egils saga* (ed. F. Jónsson) xxxi, 14 where it occurs as a kenning for an egg.⁵ OWN. *ker* is probably to be referred to the same stem as Sanskrit *jará* 'old age, weakness from old age,' (see A. Torp, *Nynorsk Etymologisk Ordbok* s.v. *Korlegen*), and consequently it is related to the same group of words as OWN. *karl*, OE. *ceorl* and not to OE. *cearu*. In Middle English, however, there is obviously association with *care* 'grief' (< OE. *cearu*), e.g. *Sir Perceval* 1062 *The kyng to carebedd es gane For mournynge es his maste mane*. The same compound survives in Orkney Norn *kirr-bed* (see H. Marwick, *Orkney Norn*, s.v.). OE. *goldwrecen*⁶ 'inlaid with gold' is a similar example. This is probably an adaptation of OWN. *gullrekinn*, of which the second element is generally considered to be in origin the past participle of *reka*=OE. *wrecan* (see Egilsson-Jónsson s.v. *rekinn*), but the past participle of the native verb is nowhere else recorded in this use.⁷

ALLITERATIVE AND OTHER FORMULAS.

Many formulas are common to Norse and English, e.g. OE. *cuman on unwær* 'to take one by surprise,' OWN. *koma á úvart*. In examples such as ME. *sette to boke* (cf. OWN. *setja til bókar*) it is probably only fortuitous that they are not recorded in Old English. An instance where a formula owes its form partly to English and partly to Norse is ME. *rede drem* 'to interpret a dream,' cf. OE. *rædan swefn* and OWN. *ráða draum*.

When a Norse loanword is adopted into English naturally it usually appears in contexts similar to those in which it is used in Norse and consequently often in formulas paralleled in Norse. OWN. *grið* is borrowed into Old English and OWN. *setja grið* appears as OE. *settan griþ*, ME. *sette griþ*. ME. *ill* adj. and *ille*

⁵ The explanation of the kenning is probably that just as the man who lies *í ker* seldom leaves his bed, so the sitting bird seldom leaves the egg; so K. Gislason, *Udvalg af oldnordiske Skjaldekvað*, p. 53.

⁶ D. Whitelock, *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, no. xxvii, 7 a *goldwreken spere*.

⁷ So Whitelock, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

adv. (: OWN. *illr* and *illa*) are elements in a number of formulas, for example in *ille farande* and *give him ille* (see below), in the compound *illwill* (: OWN. *illvili*) and in the adverbial phrase *il(le) hail(e)* 'disastrously, in an evil hour' (: OWN. *illu heilli*) as in *Music Song* 51 in *Reliquiæ Antiquæ* I, 291 *Il hayl were þu boren*.⁸ Similarly when verbs are borrowed, Norse prepositional constructions are often represented in English, as OE. *tacan on* 'to touch': OWN. *taka á*, OE. *tacan wiþ* 'to receive': OWN. *taka við*, and ME. *ware in* 'to lay out on' (see N.E.D. s.v. *Ware* v.²): OWN. *verja í*.

Some of the Norse formulas were introduced into English as part of legal terminology, e.g. OE. *beran up māl* and *cuman tō wiþermāle*. Those recorded in Old English generally do not survive in Middle English, and those found in Middle English have become part of the ordinary vocabulary also. An example is ME. *þwert nai* 'a direct denial' (cf. OWN. *setja þvert nei* 'to deny flatly,' Mod. Sw. *tvärt nej*). This is found in thirteenth century legal records (see N.E.D. s.v. *Thwert-out*), but it also occurs in Peter's denial of Christ in *Cursor Mundi* 15921 *Ful eber thuert nai . . . Ne wist i neuer quat he was sin i was born in land*. Similarly ME. *bla* and *blodi* and probably also *god* and *gode men*.

Many alliterative collocations derived from the common stock of Germanic verse are evidenced both in Old English and Old Norse. An example is OE. *land and lēode* 'land and people,' OWN. *land ok lýðr*; in this instance Middle English has both the native *land and lede* (see N.E.D. s.v. *Lede* 1b) and the borrowed *land and lith(e)*.⁹ It is only rarely that both significant words in an alliterative collocation are Norse loanwords, as in OE. *mund and mǣldæg*. Many examples in which one word is a loan may have arisen independently in English, for example *litill and lawe* in *Wars of Alexander* 1868 (cf. OWN. *lágr ok lítill* in *Snorra Edda* (ed. F. Jónsson), p. 57 line 21) or *gloppene and grete* 'to be downcast and weep' in *Anturs of*

⁸ Fritzner s.v. *heill* n. quotes *illu heilli vartu skapað* and *þu vart heilli versto i heim borin*.

⁹ So E. Björkman, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* V, 504.

Arther 91 and 92 (cf. *Atlamál in grænlenzko* in G. Neckel, *Edda* I, p. 253 line 6 *glúpnðu grimmir, ok grétu þeygi*).¹⁰ When a loanword is recorded in English only or chiefly in an alliterative formula, adoption of the Norse formula is probable rather than new formation in English. ME. *min(ne)* 'less' occurs very frequently, but only in collocation with *mare*, *more* (although the related word *minning* 'diminution' is recorded once); *nais* 'disgraced' occurs only in collocation with *naked*, *lith(e)* 'people' only with *land*, *sife* 'grief' rarely except with *sorw*.

Below are given examples¹¹ of alliterative collocations and other formulas which are probably Norse in origin:—

a33 occ a33, constantly. Frequent in *Ormulum*, e.g. 3212 *Hiss drinnch wass waterr a33 occ a33*. Cf. OWN. *ei ok ei* (Fritzner s.v. *ei*), OSw. *ä ok ä*.

[*and(e)*] *drawe and(e)*, to breathe, draw breath. *Bestiary* 310 *Ne drageð ge non onde*; *Cursor Mundi* 531; etc. Cf. OWN. *draga end*, *anda* (Vigfusson s.v. *önd*), Mod. Da. *drage aande*, Mod. Sw. *draga andan*.

bale and bote. See N.E.D. s.v. *Bale* sb.¹ 6, 7 and Björkman, *Scandinavian Loan-words*, p. 14 footnote 1.

bla and blodi, bruised and bloody. *Leges Quatuor Burgorum* in *Acts Parl. Scot.* I, 37 *Si quis verberando fecerit aliquem blaa et blodi* etc.; *Pricke of Conscience*, etc. (see N.E.D. s.v. *Blae*). Cf. OWN. *blár ok blóðugr*, OSw. *blár ok blōþogher*. This is a legal formula in Norse (e.g. *Norges Gamle Love*, ed. R. Keyser and P. A. Munch, etc., I, 357 *Ok er hon blo eda blodog þa er han sæckr .iij. morkum*; *ibid.* I, 73, 167, II, 324), as elsewhere in Germanic, e.g. MLG. *bla en blodich*.

[*bon(e)*, sb.] *bidde bone*, to ask a prayer. *Bestiary* 101 *Bidden bone to gode*; see also N.E.D. s.v. *Boon* sb.¹ 1. Cf. OWN. *biðja bónar* (*bænar*) (Vigfusson s.v. *biðja*).

[*bon(e)*, adj.] *wel bon(e)*, well equipped, excellent. *Lazamon* 14294 *Heo weoren swiðe wel ibon*; *Havelok* 2355 *wel o bon*; *Robert of Brunne's Chronicle* (Rolls) 8861 *wel bone*. Also *mid*

¹⁰ ME. *king and kaisere* probably shows the substitution of a Norse form in an English collocation (OE. *cāsere and cyning*).

¹¹ The examples are from Middle English, unless OE. is prefixed.

golde ibon, ornamented with gold. *Lazamon* 25788. Cf. OWN. *vel búinn* (Fritzner s.v. *búinn* 1), *búinn gulli*, *gullbúinn*, OSw. *gulbōin*. Cf. F. Madden, *Lazamon's Brut* III, *Glossarial Remarks* to line 6168.

OE. *bregdan hine sēocne*, to feign illness. OE. *Chron.* (E) 1003 *Ðā sceolde se ealdorman Ælfric lædan þā fyrde ac hē tēah forð þā his ealdan wrenceas . . gebræd hē hine sēocne.* (F. Hē . . *cwæd ðæt hē sēoc wære*); *Lazamon* 6667 *Ðe king hine bræid sæc alse þeah hit seoð weore.* Cf. OWN. *bregða sér sjúkum* (Fritzner s.v. *bregða* 5). (So Madden, *op. cit.*, III, *Glossarial Remarks* to line 6667).

brent gold, pure gold. *Robert of Brunne's Chronicle* (Rolls) 10042; *Parlement Thre Ages* 131; etc. Cf. OWN. *brennt gull* (Vigfusson s.v. *brenna*).

[*farande*] *wel* (ille) *farande*, well (ill) fitting or favoured. *Handlyng Synne* 9380 *Ðe lettres were weyl farande*; *Sir Perceval* 848 *Siche ille farande fare*; etc. Cf. OWN. *vel* (illa) *farandi* (Vigfusson s.v. *fara*). (So Björkman, *op. cit.*, p. 209).

[*gersum*] *gold and gersum*. *Lazamon* 939; see further Tolkien and Gordon, *Gawain*, line 1255 note. Cf. OWN. *gull ok gorsemi*, OSw. *gul ok görsem*.

god and gode men. OE. *Chron.* (E) 1137 *Forþi luueden him god and gode men*; see further C. T. Onions, *Times Literary Supplement*, 13 Aug., 1931, p. 621. To the parallels he cites from OIc. and OSw. may be added an example from *Norges Gamle Love* III, 22 *þa er þæt gudi kunnict ok godom mannum at*, etc.

gon on hande, to submit. *Lazamon* 28963 *Alle heo eoden an honde þan kinge Gurmunde*. Cf. OWN. *ganga á hend e-m* (Fritzner II, 185/2 s.v. *hönd*), OSw. *ganga á hand* (Söderwall s.v. *hand* 4).

graiþe gang, to go. *Cursor Mundi* 5191 *Graid your gang* (v. rr. *graiþe our gang*, lat vs *gang*). Cf. OWN. *greiða gengu* (Vigfusson s.v. *greiða*).

[*griþ*] OE. *griþ settan*, to make peace. OE. *Chron.* (C) 1002 *Hē . . gryð wið hī gesette*; *Ormulum* 87 *He sette griþþ & friþþ*

Bitwenenn heffne & erþe. Cf. OWN. *setja grið (ok frið)* (see Vigfusson s.vv. *grið* B, *friðr*).

gull and grene (literally, yellow and green), see quotations. Gospel of Nicodemus (EETS.) line 70 *Dire Iewes . . ffor gram wex gulle and grene*; Mary's Lamentation 149 in Yorkshire Writers ed. Horstmann, II, 276 *For wa I wex both gul and grene*; Metrical Paraphrase Old Testament stanza 1409 (ed. Kalén in Göteborgs Högskolas Årsskrift XXVIII, p. xxi) *For greved, both goole and grene*. Cf. Mod. Da. *gul og grøn*, Mod. Sw. *gul och grön*, used in similar contexts.

halde hand over, to protect. *Cursor Mundi* 4196 *Ioseph es now ledd out o land, Godd hald ouer him his holi hand*; *ibid.* 4804. Cf. OWN. *halda hendi yfir e-m* (Vigfusson s.v. *halda*).

[*ia*] OE. *cweþan ia wið*, to agree. OE. Chron. (D) 1067. Cf. OWN. *kveða já við* (Fritzner s.v. *já*). (So Björkman, *op. cit.*, p. 109).

[*ille*] *give him ille*, to be distressed or grieved. *Cursor Mundi* 3037 *Abraham, he said, giue þe not ill*; *Havelok* 164 *He greten and gouleden and gouen hem ille*; etc. Cf. OSw. *giva sik illa* (Söderwall s.v. *giva* 10, 11); see C. T. Onions, *Review of English Studies* V, 328 f.

cold red is quene red. *Proverbs of Alfred* 336. Cf. Chaucer, CT. B 4446. Cf. OWN. *keld eru kvenna ráð*; see Björkman, *op. cit.*, p. 14 footnote 1.

OE. *læþ and land*. See F. Liebermann, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen* III, 237/3.

[*lagu*] OE. *lecgan laga*, to appoint laws. OE. Chron. (E) 1086; *Lazamon* 6305; etc. Cf. OWN. *leggja lög* (Vigfusson s.v. *leggja*), OSw. *läggia lagh* (Söderwall s.v. *läggia*).

[*lat(e)*] *lete late*, to make a noise. *Cursor Mundi* 12496, 14608; *Gawain* 1086. Cf. OWN. *lāta látum* (Vigfusson s.v. *lāt*).

leie wordes, to urge. *Gawain* 1480. Cf. OWN. *leggja orð* (Vigfusson s.v. *leggja*). Cf. O. F. Emerson, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* XXI, 390.

to be lighter, to be delivered. *Cursor Mundi* 8593 *On a night bath lighter war þai*; see further N.E.D. s.v. *Light* a.¹ 3. Cf.

OWN. *verða léttari* (Vigfusson s.v. *léttir*) as in *Brennu-Njáls saga* (ed. F. Jónsson) lix, 1 *Fám nóttum stóðar varð Þorgerðr léttari . . ok kom þar til sveinbarn.*

[*lith(e)*] *land and lith(e)*. See N.E.D. s.v. *Lith* sb.⁴ Cf. OWN. *ljóðr ok land* (Vigfusson s.v. *ljóðr*).

[*māl*] OE. *beran up māl*, to state the grounds of an action. OE. Chron. (E) 1052. Cf. OWN. *bera upp māl* (see *Norges Gamle Love V. glossarium* s.v. *māl*); see W. H. Stevenson, *English Historical Review* II, 334.

to be man for him (refl.), to be a man. *Cursor Mundi* 4415 (Potiphar's wife to her husband) *For-þi, als þou es man for þe, On him* (sc. Joseph) *lok i wel wroken be.* Cf. OSw. *vera maþer for sik* (Söderwall s.v. *maþer* 2), early Da. *være mand for sig* (Kalkar s.v. *Mand* 3), Mod. Da. *være mand for sig selv.* OWN. has such expressions as *vera maðr fyrir e-u* and *mikill fyrir sér.*

[*minne*] *mare (more) and minne.* See N.E.D. s.v. *Min* a. Cf. OWN. *meiri ok minni*; see Tolkien and Gordon, *Gawain*, line 1881 note.

OE. *mund and maldæg*, marriage payment and contract. *Anglo-Saxon Wills* (ed. Whitelock) p. 82 line 6. Cf. OWN. *mundr ok maldagi* (see *Norges Gamle Love V. glossarium* s.v. *mundr*); see Whitelock, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

nais and naked. See N.E.D. s.v. *Nais*. Cf. OWN. *nökkviðr ok neiss*; see Björkman, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

OE. *settan of*, ME. *sette of*, to remove from, *sette of liue*, to kill. OE. Chron. (C) 1050 *Hē sette ealle ðā litsmen of mæle* (see Stevenson, *English Historical Review* II, 335); *ibid.* (C) 1043 *Man sette Stigant of his bisceoprice*; *Cursor Mundi* 8639 *þe dede child . . þat þi-selue of lijf has sett.* Cf. OWN. *setja af* 'to depose,' *setja af lifi* 'to kill' (Vigfusson s.v. *setja*), OSw. *sätia af*.

[*sit(e)*] *sorw and sit(e)*. See N.E.D. s.v. *Site* sb.¹ Cf. OWN. *sorg ok sūt* (Vigfusson s.v. *sūt*).

[*skill*] *can skill*, to have knowledge or discrimination. *Hand-lyng Synne* 369 *Of hancel y can no skylle*; see further N.E.D. s.v. *Skill* sb.¹ 5. Cf. OWN. *kunna skil* (Vigfusson s.v. *kunna* A.4).

take in hand(e) to shake hands, press one's hand. *Metrical*

Paraphrase Old Testament 1547 *In hand sone he hym toke and kyssyd hym curtasly.* Cf. OWN. *taka i hend e-m* (Fritzner II, 187/1 s.v. *hönd*), OSw. *taka i hand* (Söderwall s.v. *taka* 9).

take on hand(e), to undertake. See N.E.D. s.v. *Hand* sb. 42. Cf. OWN. *taka á hendr* (Fritzner II, 186/1 s.v. *hönd*).

take (to) rede, to resolve. See N.E.D. s.v. *Rede* sb.¹ 2b, c. Cf. OWN. *taka ráð, taka til ráðs* (Vigfusson s.v. *taka* A. II, IV).

[*talme*] *tonge . . talme.* *Music Song* 30 in *Reliquiæ Antiquæ* I, 291 *I donke up on dauid til mi tonge talmes.* Cf. OWN. *tunga min er tálmuð* quoted by Vigfusson s.v. *tálma*.

OE. *in ungildan ækere.* See J. Steenstrup, *Normannerne* IV, 356.

waite scape, to injure. See N.E.D. s.v. *Scathe* sb. 2b. Cf. OWN. *veita e-m skaða* 'to kill' (Vigfusson s.v. *skaði*).

[*waken*] *holde waken.* 1. trans. to keep on the alert. *Robert of Brunne's Chronicle* (Rolls) 15957 *Hertly were þey halden waken; Lantern of Light* 52 *Þei . . holden waken her ynward i3e.* 2. refl. to be on the alert. *Robert of Brunne's Chronicle* (Rolls) 9914 *þey wyþynne held þem wel waken.* See further N.E.D. s.v. *Wake* v. 5. Cf. Da. *holde en vaagen, holde sig vaagen*; Kalkar, s.v. *Vägen*, quotes *at i holder et vaaget øje over alt det.*

will of the way, astray. *Rauf Coilzear* 73 *Walkand will of his way.* Cf. OWN. *villr vega* (Vigfusson s.v. *villr*).

[*wiþermāl*] OE. *cuman tō wiþermāle*, to appear in court as defendant. See Steenstrup, *Normannerne* IV, 181, Stevenson, *English Historical Review* II, 334.

E. S. OLSZEWSKA.

Reading.