MEETING THE OTHER IN NORSE MYTH AND LEGEND

John McKinnell
MEETING THE OTHER
IN NORSE MYTH AND LEGEND
In memoriam
Minnie Horne McKinnell (1915–59)
matribusque defunctis et viventibus
MEETING THE OTHER
IN NORSE MYTH
AND LEGEND

John McKinnell

D. S. BREWER
# Contents

Abbreviations vii  
Foreword ix  

**Part One: Aims, Methods and Sources**  
1. Introduction 1  
2. Methods 11  
3. Sources 37  

**Part Two: The Vanir**  
4. The Vanir Patterns: Ritual Origins 50  
5. Misalliance and the Summer King 62  
6. The Goddess and Her Lover 81  
7. The *Völva* 95  

**Part Three: The Æsir**  
8. Fighting the Giantess: Þórr 109  
9. Þórr and the Bear’s Son 126  
10. Seducing the Giantess: Óðinn 147  
11. Seduced by the Giantess: the Odinic Hero 172  
12. The Helpful Giantess 181  

**Part Four: Encounters with the Dead**  
13. Consulting the Dead 197  
14. The Dead Lover’s Return 218  

Afterword 232  

Appendix: Summaries and Translations of Sources 235  
Bibliography 248  
Index 267
FIGURES

1. Guldgubber 58–59
2. Þórr, the hag and the funeral ship 115

TABLE

1. The charms in Svipdagsmál, Hávamál D and Sigrdrifumál 216–217
# Abbreviations

A summary of the relevant part of the text so marked appears in the Appendix.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AEW</td>
<td>de Vries, 1977</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANF</td>
<td>Arkiv för nordisk filologi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASPR</td>
<td>The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bdr</td>
<td>Baldrs draumar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bs</td>
<td>Bósa saga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CS</td>
<td>Clerk Saunders (ballad, Child no. 69)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSI</td>
<td>The Complete Sagas of Icelanders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CV</td>
<td>Cleasby and Vigfússon, An Icelandic-English Dictionary, 1957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DM</td>
<td>Dýkninn á Myrká (folk tale, Jón Árnason I, 270–2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DNM</td>
<td>Simek, Dictionary of Northern Mythology, 1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DR</td>
<td>Danmarks Runeindskrifter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flt</td>
<td>Flateyjarbók</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FG</td>
<td>Fæstemanden i Graven (ballad, Danmarks gamle folkeviser no. 90)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fs</td>
<td>Fóstbræðra saga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FSN</td>
<td>Fornaldarsögur Nordurlanda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gs</td>
<td>Gull-Póris saga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hkr</td>
<td>Snorri Sturluson, Heimskringla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HH II</td>
<td>Helgakviða Hundingsbana II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HHj</td>
<td>Helgakviða Hjorvarðssonar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hv</td>
<td>Hervararkviða</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HN</td>
<td>Historia Norwegiae</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hrs</td>
<td>Hrólf's saga kraka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hp</td>
<td>Hauks þáttr hábrókar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IF</td>
<td>Íslenzk fornit, Reykjavik: Hið íslenzka fornitafélag, 1933–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kjs</td>
<td>Kjalnesinga saga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KLNLM</td>
<td>Kulturhistoriskt lexikon för nordisk medeltid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lb</td>
<td>Landnámabók</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LP</td>
<td>Sveinbjörn Egilsson, Lexicon Poeticum, 1966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MRN</td>
<td>Turville-Petre, <em>Myth and Religion of the North</em>, 1964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGL</td>
<td>Norges gamle Love, 1846–95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ÓsH</td>
<td>Ólafs saga helga (<em>Flateyjarbók</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ÓsT</td>
<td>Ólafs saga Tryggseonar (<em>Flateyjarbók</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Øþ</td>
<td>Orns þattir Stórolfssonar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RÅF</td>
<td>Krause and Jankuhn, <em>Die Runeninschriften im älteren Futhark</em>, 1966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RK</td>
<td>Riddarin Klæmint (ballad, <em>Færøya kvædi</em> no. 145)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMR</td>
<td>McKinnell, Simek and Düwel, 2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SG</td>
<td>Sijmons and Gering, eds., <em>Die Lieder der Edda</em>, 1924–31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sigdr</td>
<td>Sigdrífrumál</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skj</td>
<td>Finnur Jónsson, ed., <em>Den Oldnorske-Islandske Skjaldedigtning</em>, 1908–15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skm</td>
<td>Skáldskaparmál</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SM</td>
<td>The Suffolk Miracle (ballad, Child no. 272)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SR</td>
<td>Södermanlands Runinskrifter, ed. 1924–36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>st., stt.</td>
<td>stanza(s); references to Old Norse verse are by stanza or stanza and line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Svipd</td>
<td>Svípdagsmál</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWG</td>
<td>Sweet William’s Ghost (ballad, Child no. 77)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tr.</td>
<td>translated, translation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UG</td>
<td>The Unquiet Grave (ballad, Child no. 78)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vsp</td>
<td>Völuspá</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vs</td>
<td>Vatnsdœla saga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WLUW</td>
<td>The Wife of Usher’s Well (ballad, Child no. 79)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ys</td>
<td>Ynglinga saga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yt</td>
<td>Ynglingatál</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þd</td>
<td>þórsdrápa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QOs</td>
<td>Órvar-Odds saga</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The idea for this book came to me during an afternoon’s fishing. A fisherman confronts the alien realm of the sea rather as gods and men in Old Norse myth and legend confront creatures of the Other World. Often, such encounters also involve the Otherness of opposite gender. But although there is a great variety of cross-gender encounters with the Other World, each god has his own typical experience. Usually, only the Vanir marry giantesses, only Þórr fights them, only Óðinn seduces them. I decided to look into the nature of these stereotypes and consider what needs might have produced them in the heathen period, why they continued to be used after the conversion to Christianity, and to what extent individual poets were at liberty to adapt or contradict them.

I would like to thank the Arts and Humanities Research Board and the University of Durham for supporting the periods of research leave when much of the book was drafted, and the trustees of the Dorothea Coke Memorial Fund and the English Studies Research Committee, University of Durham, who provided grants for its publication. I have been much helped by Caroline Palmer of Boydell and Brewer, and have had many fruitful discussions with my Socrates exchange partners, Ásdis Egilsdóttir, Maria Elena Ruggerini and Rudolph Simek. Other scholars who have helped me include Sean Burke, Margaret Clunies Ross, Margaret Cormack, Roberta Frank, Terry Gunnell, Joseph Harris, Elizabeth Jackson, Bob Layton, Else Mundal, Richard North, Teresa Paroli, Christopher Sanders, Stefán Karlsson, Gro Steinsland, Clive Tolley, Margrethe Watt and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne. Eva Koch and Liz McKinnell provided the line-drawings, and Professor Watt gave me permission to use those by Eva Koch. I would like to express my warm thanks to all of them, and especially to Judy McKinnell and the rest of my family, who have been patient and supportive throughout the book’s long gestation period.

The failings of this book are mine. There has proved to be too little space to pursue my last question fully – but it may be no bad thing to leave some unanswered questions at the end of a book. It used to be said that there are more fish in the sea than ever came out of it, and in terms of academic ideas, it remains true.

John McKinnell
Durham
Feast of St Olaf
29 July 2004
CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Omnia agentia necesse est agere propter finem.
‘Everything that is done must be done for some purpose.’
Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica I.2, art. 2

1. What was Old Norse mythological poetry for?

Since most of this book will be concerned with Old Norse narrative on mythological and legendary subjects, I shall begin with a simplistic question: in the society of its composers and first audiences, what was such literature for?

If the same question were posed about other literary genres in Old Norse, it would be possible to give some fairly convincing answers. Skaldic poetry was usually either a bargain between the poet and his lord, in which the poet sought to immortalise the lord’s reputation in return for reward and preferment, or an attempt to secure the posthumous reputation of the poet himself. Early historical writing often seems concerned to consolidate the political power and self-image of the Icelandic aristocracy.2 Landnámabók justifies existing patterns of land-ownership and clarifies family relationships so that land-owning families could arrange religiously acceptable marriages.3 Family sagas served to enhance social cohesion while people worked together in a confined indoor space.4 Such answers may sometimes tell us only what is obvious, and they may be amplified or modified by further study, but they seem unlikely to be contradicted by it.

The traditional answer to the same question as applied to Old Norse mythological poetry would be that it reflected the mythological system which was an essential part of pre-Christian Norse religion. Certainly, the

1 See Faulkes.
2 See Art’s Íslandshátíð; Hungryfox; cf. ÍF 1, Inngangur xviii–xx; Gunnar Karlsson; McKinnell (1993), esp. 120–4.
3 Jon Johannesson 12.
4 Hermann Pálsson (1962).
author of Snorra Edda uses eddic and skaldic verse to provide a ‘true’ picture of the pre-Christian mythology that a successful skaldic poet needed to know.

Unfortunately, this answer raises some problems.

1. It assumes that by Snorri’s time there was a definable ‘canon’ of mythological poetry. This presupposes a clear generic division between mythological and legendary verse, and this is questionable (see Chapter 3). Such a ‘canon’ may in fact be a construct of the Christian period, perhaps influenced by the division of the Bible into Old and New Testaments. It has often had the unfortunate result of excluding mythological and semi-mythological verse which survives in fornaldarsögur, histories and other sources.

2. It does not explain why Christian scribes went to the trouble and expense of copying heathen mythological poetry. It seems hard to believe that it survived only for the instruction of would-be skalds. Equally, if mythological poems were designed to embody and perpetuate heathen belief, why did they not become the object of ecclesiastical hostility after the Conversion?

3. Until quite recently, most critics regarded the mythology in the Poetic Edda as a single system that was accepted as ‘truth’ by the poets and most of their society. They therefore assumed that most mythological poems are the work of heathen poets. A few poems are still usually accepted as genuinely heathen (for example, the stanzas describing the hanging of Óðinn in Hávamál) and one (Völuspá) may be a thoughtful heathen’s response to the approach of Christianity. But poems such as Skírnismál, Lokasenna and Hymiskviða, which were generally accepted as heathen compositions until the mid-twentieth century, have more recently been seen as the work of twelfth- or thirteenth-century poets who must have been Christian in their everyday lives. Poets of this period cannot have intended to promote heathen belief, and it is embarrassing, to say the least, that it remains difficult to distinguish objectively between pre- and post-Conversion poems.

4. Having assumed that the ‘canonical’ poems represented a single, genuinely heathen system, the tradition of scholarship initiated by Jacob

---

5 Steblin-Kamenskij even includes the manuscript scribes in the supposed circle of believers. Discussions of ‘godless men’ and of rivalries between cults (for example, MRN 263–8, 211), usually treat them as exceptional; van Hamel’s idea (142–5) that Old Norse atheism was a survival from an ancient religious system based on magic without any gods has gained little support.

6 Even this has been disputed (see Chapters 10, 13).


8 See Bihre (dating Skírnismál to the twelfth century); Ruggerini (1979), 154–62 (dating Lokasenna to the twelfth century); del Zotto 99–105 (dating Hymiskviða to c. 1075–1150); Hallberg dates Bryniskviða to the thirteenth century.

9 None of the criteria evaluated by Fidjestøl (1999), 330–2, is conclusive.
Grimm then asserted, on the basis of comparisons with other Indo-European languages and mythologies, that this system was very ancient. This supposition has led to many attempts to discover the structures of a common Indo-European mythological system (see Chapter 2) – a project which has often diverted scholarly attention away from the surviving sources themselves.

It no longer seems possible to explain the genesis and survival of the Old Norse mythological poems in terms of the continuation of an ancient belief system. To be worth preserving in written form, mythological poems must have had some continuing relevance for Christians. Some scholars have therefore turned to anthropological or psychological explanations of why so much heathen mythological poetry survived in the Norse-speaking world, and these ideas will be considered in Chapter 2.

But if such theories are to be used effectively, we must identify what is typical in stories of particular kinds. I shall consider only one type of narrative: stories about encounters with the Other World in which the figure who represents the ‘Other’ is of the opposite gender to the divine or human protagonist. My main task will be to establish what is typical in the patterns of these cross-gender encounters. I shall often ignore the traditional divide between ‘mythological’ and ‘legendary’ sources (see Chapter 3 on my reasons for this), but shall limit consideration to narratives within the Old Norse tradition or clearly derived from it, except when related traditions such as that of Old English can elucidate the Old Norse patterns.

The sources do not always transmit myths in full, or in a traditional way. For example, Snorri’s account of the wooing of Gerðr is clearly based on parts of Skírnismál, but it omits the bribes and threats that Skírnir employs in the poem, and thus changes the import of the story. Similarly, Hávamál contains two references to Óðinn’s theft of the mead of poetry, but the first is turned into a warning against excessive drunkenness, while the second illustrates the sexual deceitfulness of men (Hávamál 12–14, 104–10). Both look like witty reuses of the myth for purposes very different from any ‘original’ meaning it may have had.

10 Gylfaginning ch. 36 (ed. 30–1; tr. 31–2).
2. This World and the Other – the narrative patterns

He that is not with me is against me, and he that gathereth not scattereth.

Luke 11,23

Most Old Norse mythological narrative shows a dualism of outlook which divides living beings between ‘us’ and ‘them’, ‘This World’ and ‘The Other’. There are exceptions (see, for example, the discussion of the goddess and her dark sister in Chapter 6), but in general, this antagonistic dualism is one of the basic assumptions of Norse myth.

It is usually easy to recognise the representatives of the two worlds. Gods and human beings belong to This World: the gods are its creators, and the makers of the first human beings. They protect the world from destruction by the giants, and selected human warriors are chosen by Óðinn to join their last great battle. But the gods are also mortal and subject to Fate. Most Germanic royal families claimed divine ancestry, and the exploits of legendary heroes often resemble those of the gods (see Chapters 5, 9, 11). In short, men and gods are equivalent (if different in power and status) as representatives of This World.

Ranged against them are the representatives of the Other World: monsters, giants and trolls, dwarfs, the dead, and völur ‘prophetesses’; and just as gods and men are linked, there is a tendency to equate the representatives of the Other World. Giant hags can give birth to monsters; either giants or dwarfs can appear in order to demand goddesses as their brides; and dwarfs, who live in the earth and rocks, sometimes have names which link them with giants or the dead. In sagas of Icelanders, völur are itinerant fortune-tellers or enchanters, but in mythological poetry they are usually linked to giants and/or the dead (see Chapter 7). Sometimes, as in Baldur’s dream, they are actually dead, and one, in Hel’s Brynhildar 1–3,
INTRODUCTION

speaks like a dwarf, out of a stone. The representatives of the Other World are therefore equally easy to recognise.

Conventional patterns of male–female encounters with the Other World fall into clearly distinct types, which I shall discuss in Chapters 4–14. Although some survive in clearer and more numerous examples than others, they can be listed as follows:

1. One of the Vanir or their royal descendants marries a giantess.
2. A man of noble ancestry gains wisdom or aid from a giantess with the help of a goddess (one of the Vanir), who is his lover.
3. A god or king consults a hostile prophetess.
4. A prophetess predicts the fate of a young man, who resents her prophecy.
5. Þórr or a man resembling him destroys one or more giantesses (and a male giant).
6. Þórr or a man resembling him receives help from a motherly giantess.
7. Óðinn seduces a giant’s daughter, usually for some ulterior motive.
8. A human protégé of Óðinn has an affair with a giant’s daughter, who bears him a son.
9. A human being raises a dead relative from the grave in order to gain magical protection.
10. A human woman summons her lover back from the dead for one night.

I shall exclude one group of myths, namely those in which a goddess is abducted by a giant (for example, Þóun’s abduction by Þjazi in Þjóðólfr of Hvín’s Haustlòng 10–13 and Snorri’s Skáldskaparmál ch. G56). These belong to a larger pattern in which a giant steals or threatens to steal something vital to the gods. The theft of Þóun is a disaster for the gods, not primarily because of the dishonour of the abduction itself, but because Þóun guards the apples of perpetual youth, without which they quickly grow old. Similarly, the gods cannot afford to relinquish Freyja to the Giant Builder (Völuspá 25–6) because she is the patroness of sexuality, without which the generation of offspring would be impossible.

Not all myths of this kind involve a goddess: in Þrymskviða, the giant steals Þórr’s hammer Mjöllnir, and although his ulterior purpose is to marry Freyja, there is no abduction. These myths primarily concern the theft of objects or powers that are vital to the gods and/or the world. The abducted goddess is rarely an active character, but behaves as if she were herself an object. The single exception, in Þrymskviða 12–13, actually underlines the point, when Freyja furiously makes it clear that she has no intention of being traded as an object and obediently marrying a giant. I shall not, therefore, discuss this pattern further in this book. I shall also ignore a single myth that does not fit into any of these types, that of the

18 The hag addresses the dead Brynhildr, and is presumably also dead herself.
19 Skj I B, 16–17; Skáldskaparmál, ed. I, 1; tr. 60.
swan-maidens in *Völundarkviða*, which is almost certainly of non-Scandinavian origin.  

Each pattern is distinct, and usually linked to a particular god or family of gods, or to their human descendants, transformations or protégés. Marriages with giantesses are particular to the Vanir and their descendants, as are sexual alliances between a human landowner and a goddess to gain wisdom from a giantess. Stories in which a god or king compels a hostile *völva* to prophesy are complicated by the exceptional cases of *Völuspá* and *Baldurs draumar*, but are usually related to the Vanir. The pattern in which the *völva* insists on prophesying the fate of a young hero probably evolved from that of the god/king and the *völva* (see Chapter 7).

Tales involving fights with giantesses are nearly always associated with Þórr, or with transformations of him, who may be called Thorkillus or Þorsteinn, or fight with weapons which resemble Þórr’s, like Ormr Stórólfsson’s magical gloves of strength. Balancing and sometimes accompanying this pattern is another in which the protagonist receives aid from a helpful giantess; again, when the main figure representing This World is a god, he is always Pórr.

Seductions of giants’ daughters are characteristically Ódinic; they are nearly always successful, and are motivated by some ulterior purpose (see Chapter 10). Related to this is the pattern in which a human protégé of Óðinn has a sexual relationship with a giant’s daughter (see Chapter 11).

One might not have expected stories in which a human being calls on a dead relative for magical protection to be linked to any god. In fact, they are usually associated with Óðinn: either the living human is his protégé, or (in Hávamál 138–41, 146–63) Óðinn himself takes on the role of protagonist. Although the pattern in which a living woman summons her dead lover back from the Other World for one night may be more recent origin, it too is probably related to the cult of Óðinn, or to post-Conversion imaginings of it (see Chapters 13–14). Where the protagonist is human, his or her relationship with the god is equally distinctive within each pattern. In those associated with the Vanir, he is typically one of their descendants. In the Pórr patterns, he is usually a transformation of Pórr himself; this made it possible to appeal to the sympathies of medieval audiences by allowing him to become a Christian. In the Ódinic patterns he is generally one of Óðinn’s chosen protégés (or occasionally, in later sources, one of his Christian opponents).

*  

20 Jón Helgason 27–48; Hatto; Motz (1986); McKinnell (1990).

21 See, for example, Saxo VIII.xiv–xv, ed. I, 238–47; tr. I, 262–70; Þorsteins þáttr usafóts chs. 10–12 (ÍF 13, 359–65; CSI IV, 349–52).

22 Orms þáttr Stórólfssonar chs. 8–9 (ÍF 13, 415–18; CSI III, 464–6).
But although each pattern seems distinct, they are alike in two important respects. First, the representative of This World is nearly always male. There is a notable absence of heroic females such as are found in many Christian legends, like Juliana (who beats up the devil who tempts her in prison) or Margaret of Antioch (who is devoured by a dragon, which then bursts and lets her out unharmed). The only consistent exception is the pattern in which a woman calls back her dead husband or lover, and this looks like a development of the later Middle Ages, when the romance ethic of loyalty to one’s sexual partner had begun to take priority over that to one’s family.

Elsewhere, the female protagonist is rare; the one exception, Hervararkviða, uses gender-role reversal and male disguise as major features of a highly individual poem. Otherwise, female protagonists are avoided. The pattern of a goddess helping a human aristocrat to gain information from a giantess probably reflects worship of the female Vanir, but it does not present a female protagonist or an exact parallel to the marriage between a male Vanic god and a giantess. Instead, the goddess has a sacred sexual liaison with the human protagonist, and it is his concerns, not hers, that are central to the action.

The virtual absence of female protagonists may result from the fact that it was regarded as normal for women to be subordinate in sexual relationships: thus several skaldic references to Óðinn’s seduction of Jörr present human kings as forcing the land (= Jörr) into sexual submission (see Chapter 10). It was not regarded as tolerable for a giant or dwarf to exercise such control over a goddess, and so myths in which giants seek relationships with goddesses become abductions or unacceptable demands of marriage. Giants are associated with cold and sterility, and marriage to a giant was a hideous prospect for any woman. Even Gerðr, herself a giantess, yields to Freyr’s advances when Skírnir threatens her with celibacy or marriage to a three-headed frost giant (Skírnismál 31).

Another reason why the female is typically the representative of the Other World may be that giantesses were often associated with the forces of nature, and with the land itself. The giantess-names Geysa ‘Gusher’ and Gjálp (probably ‘Roarer’) have been connected with dangerous rivers.Similarly, in Lokasenna 34 Hymir’s girls (giantesses = rivers) are said to have pissed into Njörðr’s mouth (i.e. the sea).

24 But such tales were not always believed; for example, the author of the South English Legendary doubts whether the St Margaret story can be wholly true (St Margaret 157–70, ed. I, 297).
25 AEW 166, 170–1; DNM 107, 111. Similarly, in Lokasenna 34 Hymir’s girls (giantesses = rivers) are said to have pissed into Njörðr’s mouth (i.e. the sea).
26 AEW 480; de Vries (1956–7), II, 335–40; DNM 287.
that she was a patroness of fenced-in land.\textsuperscript{27} Because of menstruation and childbirth, the female was commonly associated with the seasons and the forces of wild or productive nature. Brother Peter’s story of the demon Bovi (see Chapter 10) suggests that at times of childbirth women might identify with the seduced giantess. This allowed them to celebrate their kinship with nature, and to give acceptable ritual expression to the anarchic female desire to seduce in order to fulfill one’s self by giving birth. In a similar way, modern women sometimes feel licensed to behave at a hen-party, the night before a friend is married, in ways of which they would themselves disapprove on any other occasion.

The second common feature of these narrative patterns is that they are usually morally ambiguous. The protagonist is rarely accorded uncritical admiration, and this may point towards one of the basic functions of myth: the sacred resolution of otherwise insoluble problems (see Chapter 2).

Narratives of the marriages of the Vanir are usually critical of both parties in ways which cannot be explained as due simply to Christian distaste for the sexual function of the Vanir. In \textit{Skímismál}, Freyr luxuriates in the self-indulgence of his obsession and Gerðr shamefully agrees to have sex with her brother’s killer. \textit{Lokasenna} \textsuperscript{42} mentions Freyr’s loss of his sword as an example of the folly of sexual passion. Similarly, Snorri’s story of Njörðr and Skaði is an absurd burlesque, a reversal of ‘normal’ wooing patterns in which a grotesque bride secures a husband by force and chooses him blindly, and neither husband nor wife can bear to live in the home of the other. Similarly, where the protagonist is a royal descendant of the Vanir, he often breaks his word or otherwise behaves unjustly (see Chapter 5).\textsuperscript{28} A similar sense of injustice pervades Saxo’s account of King Snio (VIII.xi–xiii).\textsuperscript{29}

Corresponding moral reservations often seem implicit in other patterns. Þórr’s confrontations with giantesses are usually embarrassing or compromising: he may be in danger of being washed away by their urine or menstrual fluid (\textit{Þórsdrápa}), or unable to match their physical strength (\textit{Gylfaginning} chs. 46, 49), or it may be seen as disgraceful to fight women (\textit{Hárbarðsljóð} 38). On a mythic level, female monsters are often more dangerous than male ones, but when gods and giantesses are regarded as men and women, the attitudes of everyday life reassert themselves. Women are usually weaker than men and rarely learn to handle weapons, so it is disgraceful for a man to fight them, and even more so if he is in danger of losing.

\textsuperscript{27} \textit{AEW} 164; \textit{DNM} 105.
\textsuperscript{28} See \textit{Ynglinga saga} chs. 13–19 (ÍF 26, 28–39).
\textsuperscript{29} Ed. I, 235–8; tr. I, 258–62.
Relationships with giantesses also seem to have created mixed feelings; thus both börsdrápa and Hymiskviða avoid identifying the helpful giantess as Þórr’s mother. The same unease can be seen in some stories involving human transformations of Þórr, in which the giantess becomes a sexual partner and/or mother-in-law. In Saxo’s story of Thorkillus, those who succumb to the blandishments of the beautiful giantess daughters of Guthmundus either lose their minds or are overwhelmed with misfortune (VIII.xiv.9–10, 19). Other stories deny that the giantess is ‘really’ a giantess at all: her mother was human (Hálfdanar saga Brønufóstra’), or she is a human princess transformed by a magic spell (Gríms saga lodínkinna’). Perhaps it was not thought proper for the hero to be indebted to a female who really was a giantess, although that was clearly a feature of the basic pattern (see Chapter 9).

Óðinn’s seductions could be seen as either admirable or disreputable. Some heathen poets probably admired his purposeful begetting of sons (and Eyvindr skáldaspillir’s Háleggjatal 3–4 even extends this motif by inventing a seduction of Skaði as part of the ancestry of the jarls of Hlaðir). On the other hand, the seduction of Gunnlöð in Hávamál B ends with a statement of Óðinn’s disgraceful unreliability (Hágamál 110). Saxo finds Óthinus’s wooing of Rinda ludicrous and disgraceful, both in itself and because Óthinus employs magic. Lokasenna 20,6 may imply that Óðinn’s seduction of Gunnlöð involved an element of male prostitution (since Loki echoes Hávamál 108,6 and thereby implicitly compares Óðinn sleeping with Gunnlöð to Gefion’s prostitution in return for a jewel).

The protégés of Óðinn who have sexual relationships with giants’ daughters are never blamed by the girl’s parents, but the liaison rarely turns out well. In Ketils saga hœngs ch. 4, the seduced giantess reproaches Ketill with having gert fyrir um fundi okkra ok samvistir í lauslyndi þinni ok óstaðfestu ‘negated our meeting and life together in your fickleness and lack of steadfastness’. They usually produce a son, but the relationship between him and his father is often difficult.

We may be inclined to look sympathetically on the bereaved child who calls a parent back from the dead, but even here the moral situation can seem ambivalent. The heroine in Hervararkviða is headstrong and foolish, and in Svipdagsmál Gróa asks her son what disaster has happened that might justify calling her back from the dead (Grógaldr 2,4–6). There may have been a sense that calling on the dead is always wrong, however understandable. Similarly, some stories of the lover’s return from the dead

---

31 Skj II B, 60.
32 FSN I, 257.
33 SG I, 196.
try to exonerate the heroine by omitting her summons to him to return, even though this damages the coherence of the story.

But there is a problem here. How far is the ambivalent attitude towards the protagonist an inherent part of the story patterns, and how far may it be explained by the outlooks of individual authors? How far, indeed, can the patterns be said to contain any inherent moral attitudes or meanings? There is no single answer to these questions. Only by looking at as many examples of each pattern as possible can we hope to determine what is usual and what is the creation of individual authors. And beyond that problem lies another: the ‘usual’ patterns must have evolved because they were in some way useful, but to return to my opening question, what kind of usefulness did they have? Before studying these questions, I must explain further the methods and sources that I propose to use, and these will be the subjects of the next two chapters.
CHAPTER TWO

Methods

1. The prehistoric mirage

Die echtheit der nordischen mythologie anfechten wäere eben
so viel als die echtheit oder selbständigkeit der nordischen
sprache in zweifel ziehen.

‘To dispute the authenticity of Nordic mythology would
amount to the same thing as questioning the authenticity or
separate identity of the Norse language.’

J. Grimm, Deutsche Mythologie I, 9

In his claim of ‘authenticity’ for Old Norse mythology, the pioneering
nineteenth-century scholar Jacob Grimm states a profoundly held belief
that Old Norse mythological sources can give an accurate picture of what
Norse heathenism was really like. He then argues that all the pre-Christian
Germanic peoples shared a common poetic, religious and mythological
tradition that was grounded in the natural world. He seeks to prove the
antiquity of this system by demonstrating linguistic links with other Indo-
European languages. For example, the Old Norse god-name Týr has the
same root as Sanskrit Dyaus, Greek Zeus and Latin Jove and divus.1 Simi-
larly, later scholars pointed out the correspondence between Old Norse
Ymir, the primeval giant from whose body-parts the cosmos was created,
and the Iranian Yima and Sanskrit Yama.2 These names are taken to mean
‘twin’ (cf. Latin geminus), and related to Tuisto,3 the first ancestor of the
Germani in Tacitus’s Germania, and to the myth told in Vafþrúðnismál 33,
where a boy and girl grow together under Aurgelmir’s arm, while one of
his legs begets a six-headed giant on the other. Snorri states that Aurgelmir
is identical with Ymir (Gylfaginning ch. 5),4 though we do not know
whether this is based on a lost source, or is merely his own assumption.

1 Grimm ch. 9, I, 175–82.
2 MRN 275–8; AEW 678; but cf. Sarkhosh Curtis 2.4–6.
3 On Tuistoas ‘Hermaphrodit’ see DNM 336.
4 Ed. 10; tr. 10.
But these philological facts are hardly evidence for a common Indo-European religion. Since the Indo-European languages are related, it is not surprising that they share a root meaning ‘a divine being’. It does not follow that Dyaus, Zeus, Jovis and Týr are ‘the same god’, whatever that might mean. Admittedly, the Norse creation myth of Ymir shows some resemblance to some Iranian ones: in Gylfaginning ch. 6, Ymir is nourished by the milk of the cow Auðhumla,5 while the ancestor of all animals and plants in Zoroastrian mythology is the uniquely created bull.6 Some Iranian sources suggest that the cosmos was made from the body of Gayomartan, the first anthropomorphic figure7 but the Avesta Yasht says only that he and the uniquely created bull were killed by the Evil Spirit, Angra Mainyu, and that their purified seed later generated animals and plants (the bull) and the first man and woman (Gayomartan). While Old Norse Ymir is a primeval giant, the Sanskrit Yama is the first man (who chooses to die and becomes the King of the Dead), and the Iranian Yima is an early heroic king of this world, which he enlarges three times when it becomes overpopulated. Eventually, Yima tells a lie and becomes mortal, but he is not killed by the ancestors of the gods, as Ymir is.8

But in linking these figures we risk assuming the common ancient system that we have set out to prove. Because of the existence of Tuisto (cf. English ‘twist’ and perhaps the numeral ‘two’), the etymology which interprets Ymir as ‘twist’ is preferred to the equally possible ‘roarer’ (from Old Norse ymja). Because Ymir is the primeval giant from whom the world was made, the same ancient function is assigned to Yama and Yima, although they are not primeval giants in the surviving myths. Because of the supposed link between Ymir and Yima, a link is assumed between the uniquely created bull and the cow Auðhumla, and so on. Some such links may indeed be ancient, but to assume that all similarities are significant while discounting all differences is to fall into circular argument. It is equally possible that Ymir has nothing to do with Yima and Yama beyond a (possibly) shared linguistic derivation, or that the Norse traditions about Ymir and Aurgelmir were independent of each other and only conflated by Snorri. Similarly, the uniquely created bull and the cow Auðhumla could be unrelated, the one reflecting an idea of sexual potency, the other that of milk as a basic food in pastoral societies.

Grimm has cast a long shadow on later scholarship, especially as regards the supposed common identity of Germanic heathenism. Of course some of the gods identifiable in Old English, Old High German and other

5 Ed. 11; tr. 11; in verse, Auðhumbla appears only in Bula IV 4.3–4, where she is the oldest of cows (Kock I, 334 and Skáldskaparmál, ed. I, 131; tr. 165).
7 MRN 278.
8 Sarkhosh Curtis 24–6.
Germanic languages have the same names and relationships as in Old Norse. Óðinn and his wife Frigg are paralleled in Old English *Woden* and *Frig*, Old High German *Uodan* and *Friia*,9 Old High German *Uodan* and *Friia*,10 and Langobardic Latin *Godan* and *Frea*,11 and the Óðinn figure seems to be the chief god in each case. But wherever we find such correspondences there are also differences. Alongside *Uodan* and *Friia* in the eight lines of the Second Merseburg Charm, we also find Uodan’s companion Phol (possibly a male doublet of Old Norse *Fulla*), Friia’s sister Volla (whereas Old Norse *Fulla* is Frigg’s serving maid),12 and two other goddesses, *Sinthgunt* (manuscript *Sinhtgunt*) and *Sunna*, of whom the first is unknown in Old Norse, the second unknown under that name. They may be personifications of the moon and sun,13 but if so, the Old High German myth about the moon must have differed from the Old Norse one, where *Máni* is masculine.14 The sparse sources for pre-Viking Anglo-Saxon heathenism include references to two other goddesses, the spring goddess *Eostre* and Erce mother of Earth,15 who are unknown in Old Norse. Such evidence as we have suggests that, with no canonical scriptures and no organisation to enforce orthodoxy, Germanic heathenism was constantly shifting and might contain differing traditions even within the same culture and period. *Snorra Edda* gives it a more unified appearance, but that is a work of the Christian Middle Ages and sometimes reveals its author’s orthodox Christian faith (see Chapter 3).

Grimm’s pan-Germanic view was a vision of the future he hoped for as well as the past he imagined:

> Sie sollten aber schon der gegenwart gehören, die ich mir nicht denken kann, ohne dass unsere vergangenheit auf sie zurückstrahlte, und an der die zukunft jede geringschätzung der vorzeit rächen wurde.

> ‘but they [i.e. my books] ought to be relevant even to the present, which I cannot think of without our past being

---

9 For *Woden*, see The Nine Herbs Charm (ASPR VI, 120); Frig survives only in Frigedæg ‘Friday’ (Ælfric’s *Fricg* in De Falsis Diis 177, ed. 686, is the Old Norse goddess).
10 The Second Merseburg Charm (ed. in Schlosser 108).
11 Paulus diaconus, Historia Langobardorum I. 8 (ed. 22–5).
12 Gylfaginning ch. 35 (ed. 29; tr. 29). *Fulla* appears in kennings by Eyvindr skáldaspillir, Kormákr Ögmundarson (both mid- to late tenth century) and so forth, but none of them clarifies her relationship to Frigg.
13 MS *Sinhtgunt* may mean ‘the Night-walking One’ (*DNM* 285–6); with *Sunna* cf. Old Norse *Sól*, whom Snorri calls a goddess (Gylfaginning ch. 35, ed. 30, tr. 31). In Old Norse poetry it is often difficult to decide whether *Sól* is a name or a common noun (see, for example, Vafþrúðnismál 23, 1–3, where she and *Máni* ‘Moon’ are children of *Mundilfœri*).
14 For example, Vafþrúðnismál 23,1–3 and the giantess-kennings *Mána bríðr* ‘Moon’s bride’, Egill, Sonatorrek 13 (Skj 1B, 35–6).
15 For *Eostre* see Bede, De Temporum Ratione ch. 15, *DNM* 74–5; for Erce see A Charm for Unfruitful Land 51 (ASPR VI, 117), and possibly Erce on the Franks Casket (ASPR VI, 116, RMR N5, 105–6), *DNM* 75.
The bloody history of Europe since Grimm’s time may make us uneasy about such romantic nationalism, but in their day such ideas were widely admired (and not only in Germany). This raises a question which we shall meet again: is it possible to analyse myth without joining the long line of myth-makers who have preceded us?

Later nineteenth-century scholarship was dominated by ‘nature mythology’, whose leading exponent was F. Max Müller. The basic ideas of this approach were:

1. ‘Primitive man’ was chiefly concerned with nature, especially the heavenly bodies, the seasons, day and night and the weather. Müller himself identified the sun as the main focus of early mythic thought, but others made similar claims for the moon, clouds, storms or thunder and lightning.

2. The mythological language of ‘primitive man’ had two complementary tendencies. The first was ‘polyonymy’, whereby a single word could stand for a wide range of concepts. Thus the ‘divine’ root which Grimm had identified in Sanskrit Dyaus, Greek Zeus and Old Norse Týr might be understood to mean god, sky, sun, air, dawn, light or brightness, or any combination of these.

3. The second complementary tendency was ‘homonymy’, in which many poetic attributes were attached to a single object. These led to poetic metaphors, which became myths when the metaphors were taken literally. Thus the rays of the sun were called fingers, and this allowed ‘rosy-fingered dawn’ to evolve into a female character, Eos or Aurora. Such creation of myth from metaphor was often referred to as a ‘disease of language’.

The nature mythologists were troubled by the survival among civilised Greeks of ‘primitive’ myths such as that of Ouranos, Kronos and Zeus, which included elements like incest and cannibalism which the mythologists found revolting. They concluded that these myths had concealed ‘natural’ meanings. The marriage of Ouranos and Gaea represented a mythical time when heaven and earth were united. Kronos’s castration of his father Ouranos and swallowing of his own children signified the heaven devouring the clouds; and the triumph of Kronos’s son Zeus, who forces his father to regurgitate his siblings, depicted the final separation of heaven and earth.

But this did not really explain why the ‘civilised’ Greeks repeated such ‘primitive’ myths, since there was no evidence that they were aware of

---

16 Grimm I, Einleitung xlviii.
17 For a survey of Müller’s ideas, see Dorson.
these ‘natural’ interpretations. If Kronos (who is in fact probably pre-Hellenic) symbolised anything to them, it would have been Time, the obvious folk-etymology of his name (though it cannot actually have had this meaning). Time, after all, swallows all things. The idea of ‘polyonymy’ allowed such licence for interpretation that it could be used to arrive at almost any predetermined conclusion that the mythologist wanted to prove. In any case, semantic boundaries vary between languages, and it was only the self-centred position of the mythologists themselves that defined modern English or German as the standard against which the polyonymy or homonymy of ‘primitive’ thought was defined. The theories of obsession with the weather and of the ‘disease of language’ also remained impossible to prove.

A more recent counterpart to Grimm’s approach can be seen in the work of Georges Dumézil. He asserts that Indo-European heathenism is broadly speaking a single ancient system, which can be reconstructed from its Indo-Iranian, Italic (i.e. Graeco-Roman) and Germanic descendants. He is not concerned with individual names, but argues that these three mythological traditions share a common structure, with the three divine ‘functions’ of priest/king, warrior and farmer:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Indo-Iranian</th>
<th>Italic</th>
<th>Germanic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Priest/king:</td>
<td>Religious: Varuna</td>
<td>Jupiter (Horatius coles)</td>
<td>Óðinn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Legal: Mitra</td>
<td>Dius Fidius (Mucius scaevola)</td>
<td>Týr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Warrior: Indra</td>
<td>Mars (Hercules) (Romans)</td>
<td>Þórr (Starkaðr)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Farmer: Nasatyta twins</td>
<td>Quirinus (Dioscuri twins (Greek) (Sabine women)</td>
<td>Njorðr Freyr Freyja</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(a fertility goddess, Iranian only)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are typically two priest/king figures, one concerned with the religious/magical and the other with the legal role of kingship. The warrior is an essential defender of his society, but is also guilty of three crimes: defiance of his king (a crime against the first function), an act of cowardice (a failure in his own function), and an assault, usually sexual, on a representative of the third function. The farming/fertility function is typically

18 Cary et al. 476.
19 Steblin-Kamenskij 22 points out that Empedocles did in fact see this meaning in the myth.
20 See esp. Dumézil xi-xv.
fulfilled by two related male figures and their female relative. Social hierarchy is explained by the myth of a war between the gods, in which the gods of the first two functions defeat those of the third function and subject them to themselves. Dumézil also identifies two specialised types of Indo-European deity: gods of beginnings and endings, and the trickster god with his victim and his dupe. His Germanic representatives of these are Heimdallr and Loki respectively.

Dumézil’s system is impressively neat and comprehensive, but his selections and interpretations of Norse and Classical myths and legends often seem obscure or odd. In the sources, Týr’s chief characteristic is courage, and Dumézil’s assertion of his legal function rests on two pieces of evidence, both of which are better explained in terms of a god of battles or duels. Two other Norse deities preside over the law: Ullr (patron of the ring on which oaths were sworn, Atlakviða 30,8), and Forseti (‘he who presides’, Grímnismál 15). The derivation of his name does suggest that Týr was at one time more important in the Norse pantheon than he is in the surviving sources, but his supposed legal role is probably imaginary. Dumézil’s main Norse representative of the warrior’s three crimes is Starkaðr, but he is unambiguously the protégé of Óðinn (in Gautreks saga he is even his foster-son), and the enemy of Þórr. His first crime is the treacherous murder of his lord, King Víkarr, and Saxo and Gautreks saga agree that this was a ritual hanging ordered by Óðinn. His clear status as an Odinic hero contradicts his place in Dumézil’s tripartite structure.

Dumézil compares Snorri’s story of how Týr lost his right hand to Livy’s tale of the Roman hero Mucius Scaevola (‘the left-handed’). Týr places his right hand in Fenrir’s mouth as a pledge that the gods will release the wolf from the fetter Gleipnir (‘the Deceiver’) if he cannot break it; when they break this promise, the wolf bites off Týr’s hand. Mucius is captured while trying to kill the Etruscan leader Porsenna. According to Livy, he thrust his right hand into the altar-flame to affirm that he was only one of three hundred Roman youths who had sworn to sacrifice their lives to kill Porsenna. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, on the other hand, says that Mucius

21 See Page (1978–9).
22 Only he dares to sacrifice his right hand in order to bind Fenrir (Gylfaginning ch. 25, ed. 25; tr. 24–5; ch. 34, ed. 28–9; tr. 28–9); this myth may also appear on a tenth-century hogback from Stockburn, Co. Durham (Bailey 134–6; McKinnell (2001c), 329, 344).
23 The dedication Marti Thincso ‘to Mars, god of meetings’, on a Roman military altar from Housesteads, Northumberland, uses Mars as the equivalent of an unnamed Germanic deity; but þing ‘meeting’ here probably means ‘battle’: see Page (1978–9), 55–6. Loki’s reproach in Lokasenna 38,2–3, that Týr has never been able to berá til med tvír ‘decide justly between two parties’, probably refers to settling disputes by duelling; see McKinnell (1987–8), 247–8.
24 Saxo VI.v.1–2, 6–7 (ed. I, 151–3; tr. I, 170–2); Gautreks saga ch. 7 (FSN III, 24–8; tr. 38–41). For Starkaðr’s relations with Óðinn and Þórr, see MRN 205–11.
25 Gylfaginning ch. 34 (ed. 27–8; tr. 28–9).
swore a deceitful oath to Porsenna, but does not make him lose his hand. The comparison with Týr depends on combining the two incompatible versions of the Mucius story, and the possibility that pledging the right hand might occur independently in two cultures is not mentioned by Dumézil.

Dumézil rarely makes comparison between different Norse sources, probably because his Indo-European mythic structures are assumed to be so ancient that differences of a few centuries seem insignificant. This assumption of long-term stability seems very dubious: even within a single period, myths can often be told in widely different ways, especially in pre-literate societies. It is a particularly vulnerable assumption when we consider the crucial relationship between the Æsir and the Vanir. Snorri makes the war between them inconclusive, and says that it ended with an exchange of hostages; but our oldest source, Völuspá, makes the Vanir victorious, and this contradicts Dumézil’s theory. In any case, the relationship between the Vanir and the Æsir in the surviving mythology may be relatively recent. Tacitus writes that several northern Germanic tribes are distinguished by their worship of Nerthus, or Terra mater ‘Mother Earth’, and the name Nerthus is identical with Njörðr, the oldest of the Vanir. He implies that other Germanic peoples do not worship this deity, but does not say whether these northern tribes also worshipped ‘Mercury, Hercules and Mars’ (by whom he probably means the earlier Germanic equivalents of Óðinn, Þórr and Týr), who are identified in Germania as the major gods of the Germanic peoples as a whole.

According to Dumézil’s analysis, Tacitus must be mistaken, but there is reason to doubt this (see Chapter 4). Tacitus also says that the Germanic tribes nearest the ocean are called Ingaeones or Ingaevones (‘descendants of Ingvi’ or ‘followers of the law of Ing’), which implies that the Vanir were the most important deities in that area. There are also signs of cult-change in the picture stones on the Baltic island of Gotland. The earlier ones (for example, at Martebo) have an axe-head shape and are usually dominated by a large sun-disc. But after c. 700 there is a different iconography, with round-headed stones, Ódínic images, and often a large ship under sail, or a mounted warrior being greeted by a female figure.

27 For variants of the myth of Þórr’s fishing expedition, see McKinnell and Ruggerini 24–5; for a modern comparison, cf. three different versions of the Australian aboriginal myth of Wanaliri’s vengeance for the owl, all collected at the same place by Layton in 1977 (Layton (1992), 41–2).
28 Ynglinga saga ch. 4 (IF 26, 12–13; tr. 8–9); Gjöfaginning ch. 23 (ed. 23; tr. 23).
29 Ed. Anderson; tr. 93, 292–4; see also Chapter 4 below.
30 Tr. 80–1, 157–61.
31 See Magnus Magnússon 12.
32 For examples, see MRN plates 24–7.
Two fifth-century Norwegian runic inscriptions probably use Ing- as a name element, but the names of Þonar and Wodan are found only in Germany until the Viking age, when elements such as bór- and Grim- first become common in Scandinavia. The element Ás- does appear in early Scandinavian inscriptions, but is rare and problematic. This suggests that although the Vanir and the Æsir were probably both familiar in early Scandinavia, there may have been a change in the dominant cult pattern during the centuries before the beginning of the Viking period.

Nor is there much evidence for pre-Viking Age worship of the Vanir outside Scandinavia and Schleswig-Holstein, except among the Angles and Goths, who originated from those areas (see Chapter 4). Saxon-colonised parts of England produce place-names referring to cult-places of Woden, Pumor, Titw (= Tyr) and possibly Frige (= Frigg), but none that name any of the Vanir. There was some knowledge of Ing/Ingui among migration-age peoples who had originated from Scandinavia and Schleswig-Holstein; but in other Germanic areas there is evidence only for worship of the Æsir (for example, Frea in Paulus diaconus’s Historia Langobardorum represents Old Norse Frigg, not Freyja). It thus remains possible that the Vanir have a separate cult history from that of the Æsir, which would imply that they cannot have represented Dumézil’s third function in any ancient Indo-European system. No doubt there were other deities of sexuality and physical well-being among the Æsir – Old High German Volla and Phol look suitable candidates for this role – but we know little about them, because in the surviving Norse mythology they have been largely replaced by the Vanir.

The Vanir are apparently regarded by the Æsir as social inferiors, and a similarly disdainful approach towards the Nasatya is adopted by Indra and his companions in Sanskrit, but it is difficult not to see modern ideas of class struggle in Dumézil’s analysis. His theory that the ruler and the

33 igijon (Steinstad stone, Telemark, c. 450, RÅF no. 81, 185–7), iñuboro (Opedal stone, Hordaland, early fifth century, RÅF no. 76, 174–8).
34 Both appear on Nordendorf fibula I (Bavaria, RÅF no. 151, 292–4; RMR B4, 48–9).
35 asau (Vimose buckle, Fyn, Denmark, c. 200, DR 208; RÅF no. 24, 59–61; RMR B2, 47) may represent Ass, but Moltke (91–3) rejects this. Ás- next appears in two male personal names: osugasdin (Myklebostad stone, Møre and Romsdal, Norway, c. 400, RÅF no. 77, 178–80); osugisalas (Kragelul spearshaft, Fyn, Denmark, early sixth century, DR 196, RÅF no. 27, 64–8; RMR A4, 42–3). Although most name-element combinations in Old Norse are arbitrary, ‘guest of the Æsir’ and ‘hostage of the Æsir’ could both suggest knowledge of the hostage-exchange myth, but would refer to the Vanir. Later examples reflect a period when the cult of the Æsir had become dominant: haegas (Eggja stone, Sogn and Fjordane, Norway, c. 700, RÅF no. 101, 227–35; RMR Y4, 163–5) probably refers to Óðinn; and cf. the personal name osmut (= Old Norse Asmundr, Sölvesborg stone, late eighth century, Blekinge, Sweden, DR 356; Moltke 157, 160).
36 Cameron 120–2; Gelling 158–61.
37 AEW 142–3; ed. 22–5.
19 military class conspire to subject and manipulate the producers of material well-being probably tells us more about the ideology of the left in twentieth-century France than about either the Viking age or the ancient Indo-European past. Again, the mythologist has become a myth-maker without admitting it.

The last word on the attempt to reconstruct a common ancient mythology may be given to the Danish scholar Saxo grammaticus (c. 1200). In his discussion of the names of the days of the week he points out that if Thor is identified with Jove and Othinus with Mercury in the conventional way, Norse tradition would make Jove the son of Mercury, while the Romans maintain the reverse.39 The orthodox opinion of his time (see, for example, Ælfric’s *De Falsis Diis*)40 was that where the Norse and Roman mythologies disagree, the Norse version is simply wrong. That opinion was based on a similar ‘synthesising’ impulse to the modern one. But Saxo reaches a more rational conclusion: *Thor alium quam Iovem, Othinum quoque Mercurio sentiesse diversum* (‘We must realise that Thor is a different personage from Jupiter, as is Odin from Mercury’). Quite simply, the two systems seem to be independent of each other.

Mythology depends on narrative, and therefore on the preservation of written texts. With the cautious use of recognised motifs in graphic art, we may perhaps extend our knowledge backwards by a few centuries within a given language community. But in the end we must accept that in societies without a tradition of written texts or a centralised organisation to ensure orthodoxy, the myths of Indo-European peoples were likely to be subject to constant change, most of which cannot now be reconstructed.

2. Custom and myth

There are nine and sixty ways of constructing tribal lays,
And every single one of them is right.

Rudyard Kipling, ‘In the Neolithic Age’, from *The Seven Seas*, 1895

In the 1890s nature mythology was challenged by the first comparative anthropologists, notably Andrew Lang (1844–1912) and Sir James Frazer (1854–1941). Lang’s classical education at St Andrews, Glasgow and Oxford must have been very similar to Frazer’s at Glasgow and Cambridge.41 Both were products of a sceptical and rather literal-minded educational system, born from the Scottish Presbyterian Reformation and

40 *De Falsis Diis* 141–9 (ed. II, 684–5).
refined by eighteenth-century scepticism and nineteenth-century ideas about evolution and practical utility. Not surprisingly, they share the view that mankind’s intellectual history has passed from magic to religion and from religion to science, and they are in no doubt that this represents progress and improvement.

Lang believed that survivals of the ‘primitive’ in ancient myth, peasant folklore and modern ‘savage’ societies could be used to reconstruct early stages of human culture, just as a Darwinian palaeontologist could reconstruct extinct species of animals from their fossilised bones. He maintained that ‘magical religion’ is the primitive equivalent of natural science, and is of three types:

1. Animism: the community personifies a natural object or force as a god;
2. Totemism: the community adopts a species of animal as its patron and protector;
3. Fetishism (or Shamanism): a representative of the community is initiated into mystic contact with the gods and makes a spirit migration, usually with the help of a symbolic ‘animal’ costume, to gain information from them.

These ideas can easily be exemplified in Old Norse mythology. The personification of Jörd ‘Earth’ as the mother of Þórr involves animism (see Chapter 10). Ottarr may be disguised as a boar in Hymndlafōð because that animal is a totemic representative of the Vanir and their descendants (see Chapters 5–6). The völva’s trance in Vóluspá and elsewhere is often associated with shamanism (see Chapter 7).

Frazer sought to relate myth to social ritual, which, he thought, always preceded myth. Ritual was applied magic, needed for practical purposes; unless it was performed, ‘primitive man’ believed that the sun would not shine or the crops grow. Myth grew up to explain pre-existing ritual, but the narrative or re-enactment of myth in poetic or dramatic form could itself become the ‘necessary’ ritual. Thus ancient Greek drama was seen as having evolved from the performance of myth as a ‘necessary’ social ritual.

It is easy to find parallels to Frazer’s ritual patterns among the surviving Old Norse myths (compare, for example, his idea of the annual sacrifice of the king with Chapter 5). His ideas influenced a number of Old Norse scholars, notably Bertha Phillpotts, who even proposed that some eddic poems contain ‘the actual shattered remains of ancient religious drama’. More recently, Terry Gunnell has revived the idea that some mythological
eddic poems should be regarded as drama, and even if we no longer see them as rituals of the prehistoric past, it is worth remembering that eddic and skaldic poetry certainly originated as performed genres rather than as written texts.

Frazer’s explanation of myth in terms of the practical needs of the societies that produced it was a step forward, but field studies in surviving oral cultures have not always confirmed the primacy of ritual. It now seems that some rituals are associated with particular mythic texts (which are not necessarily performed during the ritual); others allude to a myth without evoking any particular text; others again seem to have no connection with any known myth.

Lang and Frazer share two assumptions that now seem rather unhelpful:

1. Although both work mainly with classical and Semitic sources which are much older than the Old Norse ones, they are still constantly looking back to the hypothetical past, and tend to overlook the contemporary contexts of the poems and plays that actually survive.

2. Their concern with the ‘primitive mind’, which is essential to the idea of ritual as effective magic, tends to create artificial barriers to sympathy, insulating the modern scholar from the need to enter imaginatively into the world of the mythic texts. It also blurs the question of what is meant by a ‘primitive’ society. Technologically and socially, Mycenaean Greeks or the Germanic tribes of Tacitus’s time were much closer to the ‘civilised’ Athenians and Romans with whom they were conventionally contrasted than to the modern ‘primitive’ cultures with which early anthropologists tended to group them.

Frazer’s ideas were modified by ‘functionalist’ anthropologists like Bronislaw Malinowski (1884–1942), who suggested that myth is a charter justifying ‘moral’ action and providing models for ‘correct’ social behaviour. This does relate myth to the societies in which the texts are actually found, and it is easy to illustrate from Old Norse heroic verse (for example, the presentation of Þórr in Þrymskviða is a simple example. A few stories may have been used as Malinowski suggests (for example, the justification of violence against

---

46 Gunnell chs. 3, 4.
47 See Clunies Ross (1994–8), I, 13 and refs.
48 See esp. Malinowski 93–148: ‘Myth in Primitive Psychology’ (1925). As Steblin-Kamenskij points out (22–3), Plutarch had already interpreted classical mythology as moral allegory in the first century AD. For other functionalist approaches to myth, see Kaberry.
sorcerers implied in the Snjófríðr story; see Chapter 6); but on the whole, his approach does not seem fruitful for this study. However, some other functionalist anthropologists have suggested that transitions in social status are often expressed in terms of a dangerous mythic journey, and this idea will be useful (see Chapters 5, 8–9).

A more generally persuasive development of ‘functionalism’ appears in the work of Margaret Clunies Ross, who argues that much Norse mythology existed to reinforce the authority of dominant male members of aristocratic families. This can be seen in the ‘negative reciprocity’ of marriage and sexual relationships. Male Æsir can have sexual partners of any origin, but rarely marry anyone except the Ásynjur (female Æsir). By contrast, when giants and dwarfs want to marry goddesses, this is regarded as an outrage which the Æsir must prevent at all costs (see Chapter 1). Male Vanir are forbidden to marry the Ásynjur or to continue the incestuous relationships which they enjoyed before joining the Æsir, and are thus forced into marriages with giantesses, which are usually disastrous (see Chapter 5). The female representative of the Vanir (usually Freyja) is even more restricted: not sought as a wife by the Æsir, denied to the giants and forbidden to commit incest, she can only be a divine whore or the partner of aristocratic human beings.

Clunies Ross also points to a number of myths in which creation is attributed to the male Æsir alone (see, for example, Völsplá 4–18). Here she sees the dominant male group reinforcing its authority by appropriating the biologically female role of ‘procreation’. She then discusses sacrifice, arguing that this is typically carried out by the Æsir. Sacrifice of others (for example, the killing of Ymir in Vafthrúðnismál 21, Grimnismál 40–1, the attack on Gullveig in Völsplá 21–2), is done to destroy threateningly ‘female’ elements in the lineage or behaviour of the Æsir themselves. Sacrifice of the gods themselves (for example, Óðinn’s self-hanging in Hávamál 138–41, Óðinn’s sacrifice of one eye and Heimdallr’s of part of his hearing in Völsplá 27), is a male equivalent of the pain of child-bearing.

Clunies Ross describes the myths accurately and supports her view with an impressive weight of research. If the myths are used to illustrate the structures of the society that produced them, ‘negative reciprocity’ in marriage seems highly significant. But such things are usually an assumed social background rather than what the poets are actually concerned with. Óðinn’s seductions of giantesses are no mere exercise of droit de seigneur to demonstrate his social position; they are performed at great personal risk to gain things that the gods need. The assumption that Óðinn has ‘the right’

49 Van Gennep 18; Douglas 96.
50 Ynglinga saga ch. 4 (FF 26, 13; tr. 9).
51 Clunies Ross (1994–8), I, 189.
to seduce giantesses and need not marry them or pay compensation does no doubt proceed from the hierarchic society in which the poets lived, but it is not what the myths are actually ‘about’.

The idea of the creation myths as a male usurpation of the credit for procreation seems less convincing. Clunies Ross tends to take the word ‘procreation’ to refer to the exclusively female act of giving birth rather than the mutual act of conception. This is understandable in a period when the traditional Deist sense of ‘a man and a woman combining to act as proxy creators on behalf of (a traditionally male) God’ no longer seems acceptable. Modern critics do not necessarily believe in a God of either gender, but they often have decided social views about the primacy of the mother in parenting. These myths do occasionally focus on the mystery of conception, as in the myth about Aurgelmir’s legs (see above), but not on that of giving birth. Usually, the Æsir make living beings out of pre-existing materials (the world from the body-parts of Ymir, dwarfs from the earth, man and woman from trees found on the shore); the imagery is of craftsmanship – house-building, pottery, sculpture or woodworking – not of giving birth.

The idea that sacrifice is a defensive excision of ‘dangerous’ female influence or a male substitute for the pain of labour cannot be maintained simply by adducing parallels from unrelated societies. It is not clear that they were perceived as equivalent by speakers of Old Norse. Many Old Norse myths do seem to recognise a nature-derived female principle which is both needed and feared by male-ruled society, and which cannot be openly avowed (see Chapters 9–12); but there may be other reasons for sacrifice than a desire to emulate childbirth. Furthermore, the deities who demanded sacrifice were not always male (see, for example, Þorgerðr Holgabrúðr, Chapter 6). Those who performed the sacrifices were no doubt usually male, because most heads of families were male, but they might also be female, as in ibn Fadlan’s account of human and animal sacrifice at a Viking-age funeral (see Chapter 8). In particular, there seems to be a perception in much Norse myth that nothing can be achieved without cost (see, for example, Chapters 5–6), and this more often looks towards death than birth. Clunies Ross’s approach has provided many new insights and I shall make frequent use of her ideas, but her feminist-influenced ideology again suggests that the mythologist cannot avoid becoming a myth-maker.

The French structuralist Claude Lévi-Strauss is more interested in the mechanisms of myth than in its ritual or social function, and two of his

---

52 Clunies Ross (1994–8), I, 189; it is only in ancient Hawaiian society that she notes this association within the perception of the society itself rather than in modern analysis of it.

53 Levi-Strauss 81–106; for a guide to his thought, see Leach.
ideas seem promising for this study. They are that the important features of a myth pattern are usually repeated; and that myth exists to reconcile contradictory beliefs. He illustrates the first idea from the classical Greek cycle of Thebes, where he identifies four recurring motifs which he groups into two conflicting pairs: overvaluing of blood-relations against undervaluing of them; and the monster-slaying hero who is in some way maimed or monstrous himself. Both pairs present contradictions. He then argues that both address the same contradiction: a denial that man originates from the earth set against a continuing belief that he does.

Lévi-Strauss insists that by including all variants found in any version of a myth, regardless of date, one can discover ‘what it means’. But for whom would it have this meaning, and when? Perhaps only for someone who knew all the versions and analysed them as Lévi-Strauss does – and early audiences cannot possibly have done either. Secondly, Lévi-Strauss himself chooses the definitions which identify the repeated motifs, and their relation to the belief that man originates from the earth, which is the only link between the two pairs. We might argue that his three examples of ‘overvaluing blood-relations’ are not equivalent. Oedipus’s marriage to Jocasta certainly does overvalue blood-relations (though only as seen from outside the characters, since he is unaware that she is his mother). But Antigone, in burying her brother, is doing only what is considered right in her society. Equally, one may over- or undervalue blood-relatives without either affirming or denying that human beings are derived from the earth.

Lévi-Strauss’s example of his second idea, the use of mediators in reconciling contradictions, is drawn from the culture of the Zuni, a tribe of Pueblo Indians, and I cannot comment on it. But his theoretical diagram illustrates the principle:

---

54 Cadmus seeks his sister Europa after her abduction by Zeus; Oedipus marries his mother Jocasta; Antigone defies a prohibition on burying her brother Polynices.
55 The Spartoi kill each other; Oedipus kills his father Laius (not knowing who he is, a point that Lévi-Strauss ignores); Eteocles and his brother Polynices kill each other.
56 Cadmus kills the dragon; Oedipus kills the Sphinx.
57 Labdacus (father of Laius) may mean ‘Lame’; Laius may mean ‘Left-sided’; Oedipus probably means ‘Swollen Foot’, see Cary et al. 618.
58 See the killings of the earth-sprung Spartoi, the dragon and the Sphinx.
59 See the ‘overvaluing’ of Europa, Jocasta and Polynices, and the likeness of Labdacus, Laius and Oedipus to beings created from the earth.
60 Levi-Strauss 91.
Each of the initial pair of opposed concepts is replaced by an activity which represents it, and the first triad adds another activity which compromises between them: Hunting resembles Agriculture in that it is a means of acquiring food, but War in that it involves killing. Lévi-Strauss calls this the 'first mediator'. It then replaces one of the two initial values, each of the new contrasting pair is translated into its animal representative (herbivores representing Agriculture and beasts of prey standing for Hunting). A new second mediator is then found: carrion animals feed on flesh like beasts of prey but resemble herbivores in that they do not kill. Lévi-Strauss regards carrion animals as pivotal figures in myth, and there may be something in this, though we must remember that all such symbols are culturally specific. The raven may be a mediator for the Pueblo Indians, but in Old Norse it was a sign of Óðinn, primarily as god of war, but also as patron of intellect and inspiration.

I shall use both these ideas in Chapter 5, where parts of Ynglingatal, the Historia Norvegiae and Ynglinga saga repeat the elements of the pattern of the Summer King. Lévi-Strauss’s perception of the tension between the monster-slaying hero and the sense that the hero is himself monstrous will also be useful (see Chapter 9). But this kind of analysis can be applied only to a single cultural tradition within a single period, and it ought to rely only on obvious features of the stories that do not require theoretical definition to be brought into the same category. And any patterns of thought perceived behind these repetitions and mediators must never be regarded as ‘the meaning of the myth’, but only as a possible interpretation that leaves open the possibility of other readings. As the post-structuralist Pierre Bourdieu demonstrates from accounts of the Kabyle (Berber) farming calendar, every narrator may have his or her own version of a traditional narrative, and even a single telling of a myth may have different meanings and answer different problems for different hearers. Myth is by its nature open-ended.

For example, in Reginsmál 20–1 the raven appears in a series of battle-omens.

Óðinn’s ravens are called Huginn and Muninn ‘Thought’ and ‘Memory’ (Grímnismál 20).

Bourdieu 96–101; he suggests that native informants brought up in a particular social setting or habitus (72–3) unconsciously produce ‘dispositions’ which allow their traditional narratives to vary within strict structural limits. Any attempt to combine the versions produced by different performers into a single consistent whole must recognise that such a ‘whole’ version can exist only on paper, not in oral tradition.

See Narayan 47–8 and Bettelheim’s dictum that fairy tales are therapeutic ‘because
3. The maze of the mind

And Jesus asked him, saying ‘What is thy name?’ And he said
‘Legion’, because many devils were entered into him.

Luke 8,30

Lang’s and Frazer’s investigations of ‘primitive’ religion were paralleled in
the field of psychology by the work of Sigmund Freud (1856–1939). Like
them, Freud was inclined to see his work as a kind of archaeology, and to
associate early or regressive mental states with ‘primitive’ stages of society
and religion. In Totem and Taboo (1913), he explicitly links the mental
processes of ‘savage’ races with those of modern neurotics.

Freud’s greatest achievement is undoubtedly his discovery of the
unconscious. He sees this as consisting partly of ideas and images for
which the conscious mind has not yet found a use, partly of others which it
has repressed as unacceptable or intolerable. These ‘outlawed’ ideas find
expression in hysteria, dreams, subconsciously inspired acts and works of
art. Hysteria and dreams have four characteristic features:
1. They allow mutually contradictory ‘facts’ to coexist.
2. They can give particular objects or ideas an importance arbitrarily
different from that in the external world, or one that shifts from one
moment to another.
3. Their ‘reality’ is timeless.
4. They replace external reality with a ‘reality’ derived from within the
psyche itself.

These features of dreams and hysteria are also commonplace in myth.
The coexistence of mutually contradictory ideas may even provide one
explanation of why myths are necessary (see Lévi-Strauss, discussed
above). Myths often attribute a universal significance to commonplace
objects (a cauldron in Hymiskviða, a hammer in Prymskviða). They take place
in a timeless present (or a past which exists to explain the present, or a
predetermined future whose ‘fate’ is part of present consciousness). Their
logic is not always that of the external world: for example, why does the
Bear’s Son tear the right arm off his first adversary (Chapter 9)? Why must
the dead hero respond to his wife’s demand that he return and spend one
night with her – and why only one (Chapter 14)?

Freud saw the repression of unacceptable ideas by the self as the penalty
of civilisation, which requires us to renounce the unrestricted pursuit of
pleasure. He understood this repression primarily in sexual but also partly
in legal and political terms, and doubted whether it is worth its psychic

the patient finds his own solutions’ (Bettelheim 25).

vols. XII.1, 43–224 and XII.1, 243–340; see also Wollheim.
cost. Although it is required of all members of any civilised society, he believed that it benefits only an oppressing minority. The psychic harm that results from policing the self makes neurosis endemic in civilised societies, especially those with moralistic religions, whose teaching and myths reinforce the repression.

One obvious problem about applying Freudian ideas to myth is that he was concerned with the individual psyche, while myth is communal; but he suggests that repression can pass from the personal to the communal level through the process of ‘identification’. Individuals in the same group as a person undergoing a crisis may react as if they were experiencing it themselves. This can happen by ‘contagion’ (as when the friends of a girl who has lost her lover react hysterically as if they had all had the same experience) or by ‘suggestion’ (when all members of a group identify with the struggles of a representative leader). Both types of ‘identification’ can be recognised in Old Norse mythology: for ‘contagion’, see Brother Peter’s story of the dancing women and the demon Bovi (Chapter 10); for ‘suggestion’, see the Pórr–Geirrøðr pattern (Chapter 9).

But if Freud’s divide between ‘spontaneous’ savage society and repressed civilisation were true, we should expect to encounter some remnants of ‘primitive’ myth which antedate any idea of right and wrong. There may once have been a myth of Ouranos and Zeus without Kronos, in which an amoral Zeus acted out the Oedipal desire of the male child to castrate his father Ouranos and impregnate his mother Gaea – but that is not the myth we have. Kronos could have been introduced as a ‘useful outsider’, a focus for disapproval both of the aggressive youth who emasculates his father and of the oppressive father who destroys his sons to prevent them from replacing him. This would be useful in preserving sympathy for both Ouranos and Zeus, but even if it happened (and we have no evidence for it), it implies a stage when self-repression had already become essential to a heroic figure.

Applied to Old Norse mythology, Freud’s view would suggest that eddic poets were servants of a heathen religious tradition whose effect was to maintain the hegemony of an oppressing social class. But it is doubtful whether Old Norse mythological poetry is ‘religious’ in any recognisable modern sense. The first century of Christian skaldic poetry includes no overtly religious poetry in its extensive corpus. There are frequent references to God, Christ, St Michael, St Óláfr, going on pilgrimage and so on, but no devotional hymns to Christ, narratives of the Passion, hymns to the Virgin or penitential prayers. A brief fragment survives from what may have been a devotional Kristsdrápa ‘Poem in Praise of Christ’ by Markús.

---

66 See respectively Arnórr jarlaskáld, Porfinnsdrápa 25 (c. 1065, Kock I, 163); Sigvatr Þórðarson, Ólafsdrápa 25 (1030s, Kock I, 130); Arnórr jarlaskáld, fragment 1 (c. 1073, Kock I, 163); Sigvatr Þórðarson, Óláfsdrápa 25 and 27 (c. 1031, Kock I, 127).
Skeggjason, composed before 1108, but the earliest complete devotional poem in Old Norse is probably Einarr Skúlason’s *Geisli ‘Sunbeam’* (c. 1154), composed a century and a half after the Conversion. It is as if the whole concept of poetry designed to support religious practice was alien to Norse culture and had to be learned from the rest of Christendom. This suggests that whatever the social role of mythological poetry may have been in the late heathen period, it was not the maintenance of a religious system.

But is it actually true that in ‘primal’ societies, the renunciation involved in civilisation benefits only the oppressors? Freud argues that the large-scale units of modern society are achieved by the aggression of ruling minorities and policed by the unreasonable demands of the ‘cultural super-ego’. This imposes order through a sense of guilt that is fostered by organised religions, especially Christianity, through the myth of ‘killing the father’, in which we are all implicated. Much of this analysis looks like generalisation from Freud’s own experience. He was the son of a rather oppressive father, and was brought up within an underprivileged ethnic Jewish minority in an undemocratic Austrian ancien régime supported by the Roman Catholic Church. In this context it is hardly surprising that he regarded the moral structures of Judaism and Christianity as an agency of oppression.

The origins of an idea have no necessary bearing on whether it is valid or not, but when the perceiver fails to realise that others do not share his experience, he is liable to assert as universal what is actually true only in particular circumstances. And although privileged social groups must by definition benefit most from civilisation, early societies are not necessarily more oppressive than later ones, nor does civilisation necessarily exclude the general population. In the particular case of early Icelandic society, the well-being of people of all ranks depended on the success of their extended family, and in particular that of its leading figures. This applied equally to a woman’s marriage prospects and to the legal security of a peasant farmer. Even a slave might hope for significant advancement if he had a successful patron; and after the Conversion, the church was as likely to restrain repressive behaviour as to support it. In a society like this it is easy to see why people created myths about kings, heroes or gods, but the idea of Þórr, the defender of middle-earth, as the representative of an oppressing class would have seemed absurd.

*67 Kock I, 208.
68 Kock I, 211–19.
69 Freud XII, ch. 5, pp. 302–5.
70 Freud XII, chs. 6–8 (esp. 313–14, 319–20, 329, 337).
71 Jón Jóhannesson 35–63 (on legal structures and the powers of chieftains), 212–14 (on defence of the poor by Bishop Guðmundr Arason), 344–58 (on class divisions and the rights of slaves).
A more useful psychological explicator of myth is Carl Jung (1875–1961), whose theories were based partly on the analysis of mentally ill patients, partly on his own self-analysis, and partly on the ‘archetypes’ found in various mythologies.72

As regards the analysis of myth, Jung’s most important ideas are:

1. In addition to the individual’s unconscious mind, we all share a ‘collective unconscious’. One effect of this is the creation of ‘archetypes’, similar symbolic figures and motifs that are independently created over and over again. This is true of both dreams and myths, and of the latter both within single cultures and between one culture and another.

2. The unconscious mind in each individual ‘consists of an indefinite, because unknown, number of complexes or fragmentary personalities’. Dreams and myths personify our internal personalities as archetypal characters (the Anima/Animus, the Shadow, the Persona, the Wise Old Man, and so forth) and work out the dynamics between them in narrative or dramatic form. In traditional societies these narratives can function as a means of self-therapy. Unlike Freud, Jung does not interpret all of them in terms of infant sexuality, though he still associates most interior dramas with the preoccupations of childhood, and especially with the influence of parents.

3. Far from being instruments of oppression, myth and religion in ‘archaic’ societies serve to convey psychic ‘truths’ and confer dignity on the individual, even when he or she knows that the myth cannot be literally ‘true’. For example, a group of Pueblo Indians told Jung that the sun was their father, and that if they ceased to perform the necessary rites, he would slowly lose his powers and within ten years would be unable to rise at all. The belief that their ritual was necessary to the world’s well-being gave the Pueblo dignity, and the fact that the myth is not literally true was irrelevant to the benefit they derived from it.

4. We might now add that the Pueblo myth also conveyed the symbolic truth that their traditional mode of life was necessary to maintain the ecological balance of the natural world in which they lived. And Jung also realised that symbolic interpretations do not apply only to archaic societies. He pointed out that thousands of sane Christians believe ‘symbolically’ in the Virgin Birth, which cannot be a literal historical fact,73 but which also marks out the divine saviour-hero in a number of other mythologies. Jung saw what he called ‘archaic man’ as in many ways psychically healthier than his modern descendants. What is wrong with neurotics, he argued, is not primarily that their sexual lives or personal relationships are inadequate, but that they have lost any sense of their own human dignity. It

---

72 See esp. Jung (1933 and 1968); for a survey of his life and ideas, see Storr.
73 See Storr 32–3 for a summary of this argument.
is hard to resist the suggestion that even as he wrote, the existential angst of Sartre, Camus and Beckett was proving him right.\textsuperscript{74}

Jung was too unfashionably religious and prophetic for much contemporary taste. One materialist objector to his ideas is the Russian Old Norse scholar Mikhail Steblin-Kamenskij (1903–81). He regards the dreams reported to Jung with scepticism:

In fact, such reports are no more like a dream than, for instance, reports about a musical performance are like the sound itself. One cannot reproduce a dream in telling it; for one cannot help introducing elements into the report that were not in the dream, according to one’s notion of what a dream should be like.\textsuperscript{75}

One must admit that narratives of dreams do often show a tendency to rationalise inconsistencies. The same tendency also appears in some myth-narratives (for example, Snorri’s uneasy excuses when the Æsir break their oaths to the Giant Builder; see Chapter 3). But it does not follow, as Steblin-Kamenskij asserts, that accounts of dreams resemble myths only because both are narratives. Their common characteristics (for example, simple and absolute characters, the imposition of imperative tasks, the attribution of absolute value to commonplace objects) are, to say the least, not found with equal frequency in other narrative genres.

But Steblin-Kamenskij’s main objections to Jung’s ideas are:
1. Jung’s ‘archetypes’ are too varied in form and content (and therefore too vague) to be of any use.
2. Jung ‘does not so much prove his positions as he endeavors to create belief in them, appealing in part to the reader’s subconscious, not the conscious, mind’.\textsuperscript{76}

The variety of content in Jung’s archetypes must be admitted, but is what one would expect of archetypes created independently in different cultures. The variety of form is probably illusory, if we define form functionally and are strict about what is admitted into the roles of the ritual object, the Shadow, the Persona and so on.

Steblin-Kamenskij’s objection to Jung’s attempts to persuade the reader to ‘believe’ seems curious, since he himself inveighs against those (including Jung) who insist on interpreting myth rather than accepting that ‘primitive’ man believed in it as literal fact.\textsuperscript{77} But this can be explained by Steblin-Kamenskij’s belief in a basic divide between logical and ‘prelogical’ thought, the latter being defined by belief in supernatural forces and the ‘law of contiguity’, or mystic connections. He derives this idea from

\textsuperscript{74} Cf. also Bettelheim 3–4.
\textsuperscript{75} Steblin-Kamenskij 33–4.
\textsuperscript{76} Steblin-Kamenskij 32.
\textsuperscript{77} Steblin-Kamenskij 21–2, 40–1.
the French ethnographer Lévy-Bruhl, but criticises him for not realising that ‘primitive man’ was quite capable of thinking logically in non-ritual contexts, while ‘pre-logical’ thought remains common today, ‘since it is the basis of all religion’. It was quite proper for ‘primitive man’ to think in this way, but the modern scholar should never do so. Here Steblin-Kamenskij dons the white coat of the scientist in order to impose his personal view that all religion belongs to the ‘primitive’ past and can be dismissed without further discussion. His attitude of detached superiority towards ‘pre-logical’ thought also cuts him off from imaginative sympathy with the myths that he is investigating and the people who told them.

I shall use some of Jung’s concepts, but it is time to discard the label ‘primitive man’, at least in describing recorded Indo-European mythologies. Apart from the distancing effect of calling any culture ‘primitive’, it would be accurate to use the term (or the less harmful ‘simple societies’) only of peoples who have not yet discovered metals, seafaring, the wheel, weaving or agriculture. This does not apply to any of the Indo-European peoples who have left a record of their mythology. A second caveat is that Jung was inclined to regard the interior dramas he described as largely or solely the products of childhood. Childhood must be important to some of them, but the psyche does not cease to need mythic patterns at later stages of life. Most of those with which I shall be concerned can be connected with problems such as those of adolescence (Chapter 9), bereavement of parents (Chapter 13), or growing old and facing the fact that one must be replaced by one’s children (Chapter 5).

Many of Jung’s theories are based on his ‘conversations’ with his own internal ‘fragmentary personalities’, notably the Anima and the Wise Old Man (whom he called Philemon). His autobiography reveals not only his belief that mythology can be used as a guide to the unconscious, but that his own psychological experience included many elements that can be paralleled in Old Norse myth (though he does not draw these parallels himself). From an early age he was preoccupied with contradictions: his father was an authority figure and yet lacked actual power, rather like Óðinn, who is Alþðr ‘Father of All’, but is helpless to prevent his own inevitable downfall. Jung perceived his mother as having a powerful but divided personality, and this gave him a wary and ambivalent attitude to women which resembles the patterns I shall investigate in Chapters 5 and 12. His conversations with his Anima recall Gíslí’s messages from his two dream-women in Gísla saga ch. 22, and those with Philemon might remind

---

78 Steblin-Kamenskij 40.
79 Cf. Kaberry 49, who points out that the scientist who assumes that his methods are the only valid means of establishing truth is creating his own mythological model of the universe.
80 Ed. 70–2; tr. Johnston 33–4; tr. Regal 27–8.
us of Óðinn’s wisdom contests (for example, *Vafþrúðnismál*), though both Norse sources contain an element of threat which Jung did not see in these figures. Most strikingly, after his break with Freud in 1913 Jung suffered a series of traumatic visions of the destruction of the world. He could not decide whether these were a psychotic symptom or a premonition of the First World War; but their parallel with Ragnarök is obvious.

It would probably be possible to find similar parallels between Jung’s psychic experience and any other mythological tradition which one knew well. But the most important difference between Jung and most of the other scholars I have considered in this chapter is that (at least sporadically) he accepted that his own approach was subjective and therefore allowed for the possibility of other truths. In my view, that is a major advance: students of mythology can hardly avoid becoming myth-makers, and those who fail to investigate their own subjective input risk deceiving their readers and themselves. It is all too easy for ‘scientific objectivity’ to become a mask for the unperceived worship of other gods, such as nationalism, fascism, communism or simple personal greed, which remain undetected, unquestioned and therefore dangerous.

This book’s title presupposes a concept of ‘the Other’, and this requires a few words about the theories of Jacques Lacan, who situates ‘the Other’ largely within the unconscious. 81 In his view, the unconscious sense of selfhood is formed in relation to what one lacks and consequently desires. This Self (which he calls the Subject) is in constant quest for stasis (pleasure, or the absence of the torment of desire) through possession of the desired Other. This idea was developed from Hegel’s paradigm of the master–slave relationship: the master (Lacan’s Subject) conquers the slave (Lacan’s Other) and forces him to accept a view which defines the master’s concerns as central and those of the slave as peripheral. But his exploitation of the slave also makes the master dependent on the slave for his well-being.

For Lacan the analogy of the master–slave relationship ultimately breaks down because of two conflicts within the Subject:

1. To maintain its own identity the Subject must reject the Other, and yet it continues to desire or need the Other.
2. The Subject longs to control the responses of the Other, but knows that to do so would render them worthless. ‘Desire is for the desire of the Other’; in other words the Subject seeks validation by the voluntary response of the Other, which can be given only if the Other remains uncontrolled, unpredictable and to an extent unknowable.

81 See esp. Lacan’s ‘The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason since Freud’ (146–78), and ‘The Direction of Treatment and the Principles of its Power’ (226–80); see also Butler, Meltzer.
This rather oversimplifies Lacan’s ideas, which are often expressed enigmatically. For example, his maxim that ‘the unconscious is the discourse of the Other’ may be useful if he means that the unconscious is the medium in which narratives concerning the Other take place. But if he means that the unconscious is merely the voice of the Other’s viewpoint, there is a danger that the territory of the ‘Subject’ will become limited to the conscious mind and that the ‘Other’ will be deprived of any true otherness.

One could analyse most of the myth patterns considered in this book in Lacanian terms. Among the ‘patterns of the Vanir’, the Summer King could depict the Subject setting out to conquer an Other who is necessary to him in terms of the harvest and the continuation of his dynasty, but who also, because she must remain unpredictable, threatens him with possible winter, famine and death (Chapter 5). The lover of the goddess confronts a divided Other who is both the divine mistress, who promises him sexual fulfilment and material prosperity, and also her dark sister, whose gifts are seasoned with hints of destruction (Chapter 6). The völva might reflect the Subject’s need for a prophetic wisdom which only the Other can give him; but she must either be compelled to yield it up, or else she compels an unwilling Subject to receive it. In either case, the wisdom includes the Subject’s certainty of his own mortality (Chapter 7).

Turning to patterns of the Æsir, the Subject in Þórr’s giantess fights seems to reject the Other, and yet often needs her help in the form of the unacknowledged mother (Chapters 9 and 12). Óðinn’s seductions devise a compromise between domination of a hostile Other and achievement of ‘the desire of the Other’, since his giantess mistresses remain in love with him (Chapter 10). The Friendly Giantess (Chapter 12) may be a fantasy of an ideal Other who can either give maternal nurture or become the perfect sexual partner, and who can offer either a temporary or a permanent relationship according to the needs of the fantasy. The wisdom derived from the dead (Chapter 14) might be a more benign version of that offered by the völva; here, the Other is a close relative of the Subject, who will protect rather than threaten. The female Subject discussed in Chapter 14 is validated by the Other (her dead husband or lover), who provides the desire she craves from him; but he is also ultimately uncontrollable, because of a death in which the female protagonist must not share.

I shall often refer to Lacan’s ideas, but not all of his assumptions seem helpful. My use of the term ‘the Other’ will not imply acceptance of Freud’s ideas about the overwhelming influence of infant sexuality, as it often does in Lacan (for example, when he refers to the Father as ‘the real Other’). Again, Lacan extends the maxim ‘desire is for the desire of the Other’ to mean also that the Subject wishes ‘to become’ the Other, and thus to be de-centred, possessed or masochistically dissolved. I can recognise a psychological truth in this, and it may be useful in the analysis of such genres as medieval mystical writing; but it does not seem relevant to this study. Nor
Meeting the Other in Norse Myth and Legend

does the Subject necessarily desire to dominate the Other sexually, although this is basic to Lacan’s view; in several myth patterns, the Subject does not desire the Other at all, but regards her with suspicion, fear or revulsion. Finally, the use of Lacan’s analysis, or of any other psychological theory, does not preclude the possibility that the Other may have an objective representative in the external world of the family or of nature.

4. A few guidelines

Although the scholars discussed in this chapter have put forward such a wide range of ideas that they sometimes seem to be considering quite different subjects, some general guidelines do emerge.

1. Some major deities were known to all the pre-Christian Germanic peoples, but without written scriptures or a centralised authority to regulate belief, their mythology was probably subject to continual change. Some aspects of Old Norse myth may be ancient, but the attempt to reconstruct a common Indo-European religion (if such a thing ever existed) is a hopeless task, because the surviving evidence is much too recent. Structural similarities between one Indo-European mythology and another are at least as likely to result from independent re-creations of the same archetypes as from common ancestry.

2. Any elucidation of a particular myth pattern must consider primarily what it may have meant to the poets in whose work it first appears, and to their immediate audiences. We should also be concerned with the (possibly different) meaning(s) that it may have had for medieval Christians like Snorri, Saxo, the writers of legendary sagas and the scribes who copied the manuscripts.

3. Most early Christian Norse speakers probably did not associate heathen mythology very strongly with the maintenance of heathen religious practice, since if they had, they would not have continued to tolerate it after the Conversion. It is therefore difficult to maintain the view that mythological patterns used heathen religious belief as a means of enforcing oppressive social patterns.

4. A disproportionate number of these patterns identify the Subject with aristocratic males. This may be due to ‘identification’: men and women of all levels of society identified with the struggles of gods and heroes who represented or were claimed as ancestors by the leaders on whose success their own fortunes depended.

5. Since most of the patterns I shall discuss are in some way morally problematic (see Chapter 1), they probably did not have an exemplary or normative function in the late heathen period. After the Conversion, such a function is even less probable for them, since it was then taken over by Christian texts which enjoyed much higher authority. It seems more likely that the myth patterns served to dramatise and resolve problems and
contradictions. They could do this precisely because they had no religious authority, and could therefore provide a non-prescriptive, open-ended way in which social and psychological problems could be worked out. Wherever possible, I shall try to make suggestions as to what these problems may have been, but none of these suggestions is intended to exclude the possibility of other meanings, and it remains likely that different listeners to the myths may always have seen different meanings in them.\textsuperscript{82}

6. Social and psychological interpretations of myth are not mutually exclusive. In a period before the existence of the unconscious was perceived, there was no reason to separate the external problems of the protagonist from their psychological implications, and I shall mingle the two as seems appropriate in any particular case. But any interpretation of a myth pattern which is in fundamental conflict with the ideas that were available to the conscious mind in the medieval period must be regarded as improbable, or else as forming another problem in itself. In the latter case, some resolution must be sought between the historically ‘impossible’ idea and the contemporary orthodoxy which it seems to contradict.

7. Many of the myth patterns investigated in this book include the idea of a universal principle of balance. This may be expressed in terms of nature (summer and winter must alternate and neither can finally vanquish the other), social power (neither the gods nor the giants can overcome the other without exterminating themselves), human wisdom (which must be paid for with something of equivalent value to the purchaser) or the begetting of heirs (whose price is one’s own eventual death). The difference between myth and mere fantasy may be that the author of a fantasy tries to suggest that the success of the Subject can be cost-free.

8. Almost all the theories I have discussed have been influenced by the subjective beliefs of their originators. We must take into account Grimm’s romantic nationalism, Dumézil’s idea of class-struggle, Lang and Frazer’s evolutionist view of human progress, Clunies Ross’s implied agenda of the democrat and moderate feminist, Jung’s mysticism and Steblin-Kamenskij’s atheist materialism. If one investigated the lives and opinions of the other scholars considered here, their agendas would no doubt also become evident. Quite simply, anyone who claims to be completely objective is not telling the whole truth.

This book will not be wholly objective either, and I must briefly outline my own subjective viewpoint. I am male and heterosexual, and have been intrigued and to some extent mystified by the feminine Other throughout my adult life; in this, I resemble many of the protagonists in the myths I shall consider. I see inherited culture as valuable and tend to prefer

\textsuperscript{82} Cf. Bettelheim 12; Narayan.
evolution to revolution and pragmatic experience to theoretical systems. I am attracted by Jung’s ‘sacred’ view of myth, and convinced that religious belief is psychologically beneficial, and that in Darwinian terms it is advantageous to a society to have a religion. I have adult children of both genders with whom I am on good terms, and the patterns in which I see adolescent revolt do not present me with a personal problem. I note, a little wryly as I grow older, that the patterns of the ᚪ.ua and of Þórr’s fights (Chapters 7 and 9) generally sympathise with the offspring against the parent. This could be because the adolescent is in more need of advice, but the likeliest reason for it may be that the community has more of its future invested in the child than in the father. I may, because of my own experience, be more inclined than most people to see bereavement strategy in the myth patterns I discuss (see Chapters 8, 9, 13, 14). Otherwise, I am not aware of any respect in which my interpretations are likely to be influenced by unusual experiences. But it is time to pass on from the subjectivity of the observer to the objective evidence of the sources.
CHAPTER THREE

Sources

Óðinn’s question to Vafþrúðnir is extremely pertinent: how do we know the myths that (we think) we know? This chapter will consider the sources for Other World encounters in Old Norse myth and legend and the rationale for using them. Unlike religious practice, for which the best sources are often archaeological, mythology is essentially narrative and depends chiefly on written sources. Although there are important sources in both prose and verse, most of the prose works derive their material from older poetry, so it is the poetic tradition whose evidence is usually primary. It can be divided into two poetic genres: eddic and skaldic.

1. Eddic poetry

Most eddic poems are anonymous; their metres and diction are relatively simple, and they present whole myths or segments of myths in narrative, monologue or dialogue form. They are difficult to date, but linguistic evidence suggests that none can be earlier than c. 800; most were probably composed between the mid-ninth century and the mid-thirteenth. They were apparently not written down until the early thirteenth century. Eddic poetry has traditionally been regarded as having a limited ‘canon’ and containing two distinct sets of subject matter: mythological (poems about gods and other supernatural beings) and heroic (poems about legendary human beings). The main body of this ‘canon’ is found in the Codex Regius of the Poetic Edda, where the first eleven poems form what looks like a separate mythological section, although the headings in the manuscript do not make this division explicit.

A few poems found in other manuscripts are traditionally called Eddica Minora, and some editors also categorise these as either mythological or
heroic. Usually accepted as mythological are Baldrs draumar, Rígsþula, Hyndluljóð, Grottasongr and Svipdagsmál, though the last survives only in post-medieval manuscripts.1 There are also some quotations in Snorra Edda (see section 4 below) from poems which are otherwise lost.

It is time to question the nature of this ‘canon’. The early editors who established it assumed that most Old Norse mythological eddic poetry was the work of heathen poets who genuinely believed in a single heathen mythology, and few scholars take this view today (see Chapter 2). The Codex Regius editor does group the ‘mythological’ poems together, but this may be simply because, once he had linked the Helgi-lays to the cycle of the Völsungar, nearly all his ‘non-mythological’ material belonged to one long sequence of legend, which had to be presented in chronological order. The only exception is Völundarkviða, which places near the end of the ‘mythological section’ as one of two poems featuring semi-divine protagonists (Völundr is called an elf, while the central figure of Alvíssmál is a dwarf). But the poems themselves do not show any strict division between gods and human beings, and all the other characters in Völundarkviða are human. Similarly, two of the three characters in Grímnismál are a human king and his son. Conversely, gods and other supernatural beings appear in some ‘legendary’ poems (for example, Helgakviða Hundingsbana II, Reginnsmál, Sigdrífrismál, Helreið Brynhildar). In the Eddica Minora we find a similarly mingled cast of characters in Rígsþula, Hyndluljóð and Grottasongr. To debate whether these poems are ‘mythological’ or ‘legendary’ is a waste of time.

The accepted ‘canon’ of Eddica Minora also includes two heroic poems extracted from legendary sagas: Hlóðskviða (or The Battle of Goths and Huns) from Heiðreks saga, and a poem about the death of Hildibrandr from Ásmundar saga kappabana. Hlóðskviða must be one of the oldest eddic poems, but the Hildibrandr poem may have been included mainly because it can be compared with the Old High German Hildebrandslied, and was therefore likely to interest modern German readers. But Heiðreks saga also contains three other eddic poems, one of which, The Riddles of Gestumblini, shows similarities to Vafþrúðnismál, while another, Hervararkviða, can be linked to Hávamál D, Sigdrífrismál and Svipdagsmál (see Chapter 13). But it would be equally inconsistent to add all the poems in Heiðreks saga to the ‘canon’ while ignoring those in other legendary sagas. For example, the völva’s verses in Hrólfs saga kraka and Óldr’s poetic autobiography at the end of Órvar-Odds saga are also based on ancient story material, whatever the date of the verses themselves (see Chapter 6). These have usually been excluded as ‘late pastiche’,2 but since some poems in the Codex Regius itself are now

1 Sijmons and Gering regard Grottasongr as ‘heroic’; Neckel and Kuhn ignore Svipdagsmál.
2 For example, by de Vries (1934), 30–3; Holtsmark.
thought to date from a time not long before the date of the manuscript (c. 1270), this argument melts away. The survival of traditional story patterns does not depend on a poem having been composed in heathen times.

We might extend this argument to include the Latin translations of lost Norse poems that appear in Saxo’s *Gesta Danorum*. Book I alone includes at least six examples, of which only one also survives in Old Norse (the dialogue between Hadingus and his wife, which resembles two stanzas quoted in Snorri’s *Gylfaginning* ch. 23; see Chapter 5). This parallel suggests that Saxo sometimes elaborated on his material or transferred it from one mythical or legendary figure to another. All his poems probably include some raw material derived from eddic verse, but this cannot be reliably distinguished from what he has added himself.

2. *Skaldic poetry*

Unlike eddic verse, skaldic poetry is usually attributed to named poets who served specific kings and chieftains. The earliest skaldic poem, Bragi’s *Ragnarsdrápa*, is attributed to the mid-ninth century, and the tradition flourished until the thirteenth. A few court poems are in eddic metres, but most are in variants of the *drottkvætt* ‘court metre’ stanza of eight lines, with six syllables and three stresses in each line. There is alliteration between three stressed syllables within each couplet (two in its first line, one in its second), half-rhyme (usually agreement of consonants with a different vowel, called *skothending*) between two of the stressed syllables in each odd-numbered line, and full rhyme (*aðalhending*) between two of the stressed syllables in each even-numbered line. Prose word-order may be radically varied within each half-stanza, and there is an elaborate tradition of poetic diction. This employs *heiti* ‘poetic words’, *fornôfn* ‘nicknames’, which refer to an aspect of what something or someone literally is; and *kenningar* ‘metaphors’, when the comparison is metaphorical. *Fornôfn* and *kenningar* can be telescoped into each other, and they often refer to myths. Thus Arnórr jarlaskáld calls poetry *hrostabrim* Alfðöurr ‘All-father’s malt-surf’. ‘All-father’ is a *fornafn* for Óðinn, while ‘malt-surf’ is a kenning for ‘alcoholic drink’, referring to Óðinn’s theft of the mead of poetry (see Chapter 10).

Once composed, skaldic verses are difficult to alter without destroying their metre or making them meaningless. Snorri argues that deeds related

---

3 For example, *drasill* ‘steed’ for ‘horse’, *Ynglingatal* 21.6 (*Skj* I B, 11).
4 For example, *Dórr* is *Jarðar burre* ‘Earth’s son’, *Lókasenna* 58.
5 For example, a ship is called a sea-king’s ‘horse’, *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 51 (ed. I, 75; tr. 125).
6 See *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 2 (ed. I, 6; tr. 66).
7 The Old Norse terminology is derived from *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 1 (ed. I, 5; tr. 64), but some of it may have been in use before Snorri’s time.
in poems that were recited in the presence of patrons or their sons must be true, since no poet would dare to make claims which everyone present knew to be false. But some verses were certainly composed later and attributed to poets long dead, and many modern scholars are reluctant to claim that any individual stanza or poem genuinely dates from the lifetime of its supposed poet. But some general observations can be made about the corpus of skaldic verse from particular periods (for example, the frequency of the expletive particle of/um declines in later verse; most poets of the immediate post-Conversion period avoid kennings based on heathen myth). It seems likely that a large proportion of skaldic verses actually do date from the periods to which they are attributed, and I shall assume this kind of ‘authenticity’ except where there are specific reasons for doubting it.

Few skaldic poems contain actual mythological narrative, and most of these describe scenes painted on ceremonial shields (Bragi’s Ragnarsdrápa, Pjödólfr of Hvin’s Haustlõng, c. 900) or on the internal partitions of a house (Ulfr Úggason’s Húsdrápa, c. 985). Eilífr Geðrúnarson’s bördrápa (c. 985) does directly narrate a myth about Þórr (see Chapter 8), and may have been intended to bolster Þórr’s reputation in order to counter the increasing influence of Christianity. Pjödólfr of Hvin’s Ynglingsdrápa (c. 890; see Chapter 5) and Eyvindr skáldaspillir’s Háleygjatal (c. 985; see Chapter 10) trace the divine ancestry of noble families. But most mythological references in skaldic verse appear in fornõfn and kenningar, each of which can substantiate only a single point. The compiling of many such references into a coherent myth would be a laborious business if much of it had not been done in Snorra Edda (see section 4 below). But the fact that skaldic verse does not usually narrate the myths to which it alludes shows that a cultured contemporary audience could be expected to know them.

3. Legendary sagas

Fornaldarsögur, literally ‘stories of ancient times’, were extremely popular in late-medieval Iceland; in their present forms, most probably date from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. They are often spurned as late and degenerate compared with the austere ‘realism’ of the family sagas, but some fornaldarsögur clearly existed before there were any family sagas. Two are said to have been recited at a wedding in Iceland in 1119, and one of these, about the hero Hrómundr Grippsson, survives in a later version. Similarly, in 1263 the historian Sturla Pórðarson told the king and queen of

---

8 Heimskringla, Prologus (ÍF 26, 5; tr. 3–6).
9 For skaldic poetry, see Skj, Kock; both will be superseded by the forthcoming corpus of skaldic verse co-ordinated by Margaret Clunies Ross, Kari Gade, Guðrún Nordal, Edith Marold and Diana Whaley. For dating criteria, see Fidjestøl (1999).
10 þorgil saga ok Hafliða ch. 10 (Sturlunga saga, ed. I, 27; tr. II, 43–4).
Norway a story about the troll-woman Huld (cf. Ynglinga saga chs. 13–14, discussed in Chapter 5). It is clear that these stories were often regarded as entertaining rather than truthful.

Many fornaldaðsögur preserve sequences of eddic verse. Brief sequences from what were probably longer poems are often cited to support prose narratives, and many salient details which now appear only in prose may be derived from lost verse. Myth-influenced story patterns in fornaldaðsögur may therefore supply valuable evidence even where little or no verse survives, as in the story of Boðvarr bjarki (see Chapter 9). Among the fornaldaðsögur which contain ancient verse and/or story-material are Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka (see Chapter 10), Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks (see Chapter 13), Hrólfs saga kraka (see Chapters 6, 7, 9), Hrómundar saga and Hversu Noregr Byggðist (see Chapter 10), and Órvar-Ádds saga (see Chapters 7, 11).

In some cases the embedded verse is old (for example, Hlóðskviða) or impossible to date, as in Orms þáttur Stórollofssonar (see Chapters 7, 9, 12). In others, ancient material is imitated in later texts, as where the hero’s relationship with a giantess in Órvar-Ádds saga is mirrored in the later sagas of his father and grandfather (Gríms saga lodinkinna and Ketils saga hængs; see Chapter 11). Some other late legendary sagas include deliberate parody of traditional story patterns (for example, Egils saga ok Asmundar and probably Bósa saga; see Chapters 11, 9). Others mingle myth-derived patterns with motifs borrowed from Breton lai or Arthurian romance (for example, Samsons saga fagra, Valdimars saga, Vilmundar saga viðutan and Pátrr Helga bórissonar; see Chapters 9, 12, 11).

A few texts that resemble fornaldaðsögur (for example, Orms þáttur and Bardar saga Snæfellsáss) have traditionally been categorised as Íslendinga-sögur ‘sagas of Icelanders’, simply because their heroes are Icelandic. This has tended to blur the differences between the two genres, and to delay the recognition of myth-derived patterns in some actual family sagas. The relationship between Beowulf and parts of Grettis saga has long been recognised, but similar mythological motifs in Kjalnesinga saga (see Chapter 11) and Vatnsdæla saga (see Chapter 7) have attracted less attention.

Fornaldarsögur remain difficult to evaluate. Some certainly include ancient material, whether the sagas we now have are early or not. Others are probably late-medieval adaptations of old story patterns, and the latest ones shade off into folktale like those of Gullbrá and Skeggi (see Chapter 9) and Asmundur flagðargaði (see Chapter 12). If fornaldaðsögur are used as evidence for pre-Christian patterns of belief, we must insist on the presence of probably ancient verse or on close comparison with other early sources before taking them seriously. But in this book I shall consider them mainly as examples of how the old patterns continued to be used in medieval

11 Sturlu þáttur ch. 2 (Sturlunga saga, ed. II, 232–4; tr. II, 495–6).
Iceland, and for that purpose they are valuable whether their specific content is ancient or not.

4. The first scholars

In a brief appendix to his *Islendingabók*, the Icelandic historian Ari Þorgilsson (died 1148) gives a line of male descent from the legendary kings of the Ynglingar down to himself, which begins: I. Yngvi Tyrkjakonungr. II. Njôrðr Sviakonungr. III. Freyr ’1. Yngvi King of the Turks. 2. Njôrðr King of the Swedes. 3. Freyr’. Some time later (perhaps c. 1150), a similar genealogy appears in the Norwegian-Latin *Historia Norwegiae*, together with brief details of how each king died. Except for the three Vanir at the beginning, all this material is probably derived from *Ynglingatal*. There was thus a learned twelfth-century legendary tradition of the Swedish and Norwegian kings, and Ari, at least, had adopted the fashionable idea of an origin in Asia Minor. But he includes nothing else, and the *Historia Norwegiae* adds no comment except to dismiss the story that Svegðir chased a dwarf into a rock (cf. *Ynglingatal* 2).

This tradition is built upon in the early chapters of *Heimskringla*, Snorri Sturluson’s history of the kings of Norway (c. 1220–36). The Prologue evaluates the sources, notably *Ynglingatal*, *Háleygjatal* and Ari’s writings, and concludes that the skaldic poems are historically the most reliable, provided they are metrically correct and carefully understood. Chapters 1–10 of *Ynglinga saga*, which follows, contain a brief world geography (ch. 1); the origin of the Æsir in Asia Minor (ch. 2); their emigration to Russia, Saxony and Scandinavia (ch. 5); and rationalised versions of the myths of Óðinn’s brothers Vili and Vé (ch. 3), the war between the Æsir and the Vanir (ch. 4), Gefjon and Gylfi (ch. 5), Óðinn’s magical skills (chs. 6–7), the divine ancestry of the Háleygjar (ch. 8) and Fróði’s peace (ch. 10). The origins of cremation funerals (ch. 8) and of marking a dying man with a spear to dedicate him to Óðinn (ch. 9) are also explained. Although Óðinn has many sons, he is succeeded as king by Njôrðr (ch. 9), who is followed by his son Freyr (ch. 10). Óðinn is thus inserted into the place previously held by Yngvi (which, as Snorri knew, is actually a title for Freyr). Chapters 11–19 are based mainly on the early stanzas of *Ynglingatal* (see Chapter 5).

There are a few episodes of mythological interest elsewhere in Snorri’s *Heimskringla* (for example, the Snjôfrîðr story in *Haralds saga hárfagra*; see Chapter 5), and others in *Flateyjarbók* (compiled 1387–94), whose attitude to sources is less historically rigorous (see Þorgerðr Hölgabrúðr, *Völsa þáttr*, Chapters 6, 10).

Slightly earlier than *Heimskringla* is the *Gesta Danorum* of Saxo grammaticus (completed c. 1208–22). Saxo is inspired by Danish patriotism and
devotion to the Christian life. He admires military energy and glorifies the Danes, but despises anything resembling self-indulgence and deprecates anything of German origin (including the Æsir: like Snorri, he says that they came into Scandinavia from Saxony). Saxo preserves a large number of myths, but regards the so-called gods as disgraceful human beings, the worst of whom is Othinus, a man who is falsely believed to be a god. When the northern kings send Othinus a golden statue of himself, his wife Frigga persuades one of her servants, in return for being allowed to sleep with her, to demolish it and bring her the gold. Saxo comments (I.vii.1):

Hoc loci quid adiecerim quam tale numen hac coniuge dignum exstitisse? Tanto quondam errore mortalium ludificabanturingenia

'Need I add anything but to say that such a god deserved such a wife? Men’s intelligence was once made ridiculous by gullibility of this kind'.

Balderus (Baldr) also becomes a villain, but Hotherus (= Hōðr), Thor and Starcatherus are more kindly treated, perhaps because of Saxo’s admiration for military valour. Because he regards the gods as historical people, Saxo mingles their stories with those of legendary figures, and scatters them through various supposedly historical periods.

Saxo’s Preface is vague about his sources, but he claims to use Old Norse poetry faithfully translated into Latin verse, and implies that some of it was Icelandic. One possible channel for this is a certain Arnoldus Tylensis ‘Arnald the Icelander’, who Saxo (XIV.xxxvi.2) says was a storyteller in the household of his patron Archbishop Absolon of Lund (died 1201). Saxo does sometimes give Latin versions of poems whose substance is known from other sources (see, for example, Bjarkamál, discussed in Chapter 9), but most of his source-poems are lost and it is impossible to tell how much he has changed them. In general, Saxo is rather a poor witness for the details of any single myth, but his value for the study of myth-patterns may be greater, because of the large number of examples he provides.

But the most valuable learned source for Old Norse mythology is a guidebook for poets, the Prose Edda (= Snorra Edda, c. 1222). Its four parts were probably composed in reverse order. Last in the manuscripts but probably first to be composed was Háttatal ‘The List of Metres’, whose 102 stanzas in praise of King Hákon Hákonarson and Skúli jarl are in 101 variants of the skaldic and eddic metres. Next came Skáldskaparmál ‘The Language of Poetry’, where the traditional heiti, fornøfn and kenningar of skaldic verse are explained. This includes some narratives of individual

14 Ed. I, 459-60, not in tr.
MEETING THE OTHER IN NORSE MYTH AND LEGEND

Legends and myths, but this was obviously insufficient. The author therefore added *Gylfaginning* 'The Tricking of Gyfi', where the tale of the naive King Gyfi becomes the frame for a general account of Old Norse mythology. Much of *Gylfaginning* relies on *Völuspá*, but many other poems are also quoted in it. Finally, a Prologue was added; its argument runs:

1. After Noah’s Flood people lost their knowledge of God. Lacking this knowledge, they reasoned that the earth was alive, worshipped it and traced their ancestry to it, although they still realised that there must be a supreme being, to whom they gave different names in their various languages.

2. Þórr was a son of King Priam; his descendants (whose names show that Snorri was using an Anglo-Saxon royal genealogy) culminate in *Vōden, þann kollum vér Ūðin* ‘Woden, whom we call Óðinn’. He and his wife Frigg discover by divination that they will be honoured in the northern part of the world, and set off with their followers to go there. Wherever they go, they are regarded as gods.

3. Óðinn gains control of Saxon, Westphalia, France and Jutland, and makes one of his sons the founding king of each before establishing his capital at Sigtuna in Sweden. His son *Yngvi* (!) becomes king in Sweden, and the language of Asia is then adopted in the northern lands.

The Prologue thus argues that pre-Christian myth originated either because people worshipped natural forces or because human rulers arrogated to themselves the status of gods. But these humans are not condemned, as they are, for example, in Ælfric’s *De Falsis Diis* and by Saxo. After all, their supposed descendants were still in power in the thirteenth century. These Christian explanations were essential defences in case the author was accused of having heathen sympathies himself. But his main aim was to popularise skaldic poetry in the face of the new genres of romance, Breton *lai*, courtly love verse and popular ballad that were flooding into Norway and Iceland under the patronage of King Hákon. If skaldic poets were to understand the work of their predecessors, the myths had to be told without deliberate distortion, and this makes *Gylfaginning* a much more reliable source than Saxo.

Even so, we meet occasional Christian attitudes: each man has an immortal soul (*Gylfaginning* ch. 3), which will eventually go to Gimlé or to Nástrond, which resemble heaven and hell (*Gylfaginning* ch. 52). The myth of Óðinn’s self-sacrifice by hanging on Yggdrasill (see *Hávamál* 138–41 and Chapter 13) is significantly omitted, perhaps because Christians might have considered it blasphemous. Occasionally, the writer makes excuses for the gods, as when they break their oaths of safe-conduct to the Giant

15 Chambers and Wrenn 202–3, 311–22 argue that this genealogy is related to manuscript London, BL Cotton Tiberius B V and derived from a West-Saxon royal genealogy copied at Ripon, Northumbria c. 970.
Builder (compare Völuspá 25–6 with Gylfaginning ch. 42). But the largest distortion of pre-Christian mythology in Snorra Edda is that it gives the impression of describing a single, coherent religious system. This may have been an inevitable result of trying to make the whole of Old Norse mythology available in a single handbook, but it has given rise to a powerful impulse among later mythologists to try to ‘make everything fit’. If we are to understand the shifting currents of Old Norse mythology, this temptation must be resisted.

Nonetheless, the importance of Snorra Edda as a source can hardly be overstated. It gives a clearer picture of the sources than Saxo does. Without it, many eddic and skaldic poems would not have survived, and few of those that did would have been comprehensible. Above all, without its example the late-thirteenth century anthologies of eddic verse would probably never have been compiled. Without them we would not have had the Poetic Edda, and the writing of this book would have been impossible.

5. Minor sources in Old Norse

A number of other types of source material in Old Norse can provide information of limited but distinctive use.

1. Runic inscriptions. These are usually brief and often enigmatic, but they cover a wide time-span and convey types of information that rarely surface elsewhere. The older futhark of twenty-four signs was in use from the first or second century after Christ until it was replaced c. 800 by the younger futhark, originally of sixteen signs, which remained popular throughout the Norse-speaking area until the late Middle Ages. I shall cite what may be an appeal for supernatural help from a dead sister (Chapter 13); invocations to Þórr (Chapter 8); and charms or curses designed to seduce (Chapter 5), to exorcise a disease-demon or impose one’s will on a tyrant (Chapter 7), or to provide protection of various kinds (Chapters 10, 13).

2. Codes of law. There are few references to heathen practice in thirteenth-century Icelandic codes of law (the republican Grágás and the royal codes Járnsíða, Jónsbók and Hákonarbók). But some Norwegian codes of the same era include measures against volur and female magic (see Chapter 7) and also illustrate the extent to which troll-women were equated with Saami (Lappish) women.

3. Ballads and folktales. The earliest Scandinavian reference to ballads is often said to be in Jóns saga helga ch. 24, where Bishop Jón of Hólar (died 1121) tries to suppress the traditional amusement of men and women reciting sexually explicit verses to each other.16 But this resembles the

---

16 Biskups sogur I (ÍF 15), 211. For comparable examples in Latin, German, French and Provençal, see Peter Dronke 190-4.
common European ‘wooing game’ lyrics rather than any sort of narrative, and the other early ballad refrains cited by Jónas Kristjánsson are all lyrics, whether satirical or amorous. However, at some time in the Middle Ages a genre of narrative dance-ballad developed throughout Scandinavia and the north Atlantic islands (including Scotland, Orkney and Shetland). A solo leader sang the narrative lines, which alternated with lines of refrain sung by all the dancers together. This tradition survives in the Faroes, but examples of it have been collected from all the northern countries. Such ballads are usually impossible to date, though the earliest Danish collections appear in the sixteenth century. Ballads are rarely taken seriously as mythological sources, but in Chapter 14 I shall explore their possible value in elucidating the pattern of the dead lover’s return.

Most folktale collections are even more recent (Iceland is fortunate to have some from the seventeenth century), but they, too, can provide helpful survivals. I shall use three Icelandic folktales (see Chapters 9, 12, 14), and one in Scottish Gaelic which is probably derived from a Scandinavian source (Chapter 9).

6. Other Germanic literary sources

The sparse evidence for pre-Christian myth in other Germanic languages often differs from the corresponding Old Norse material (see Chapter 2), but all the Germanic peoples honoured Óðinn, Þórr and Frigg, and non-Norse sources can sometimes provide valuable evidence about early stages of Germanic mythology. It may be helpful to distinguish between ‘direct’ expressions or accounts of myth (usually in a Germanic language) and ‘indirect’ sources (usually in Latin), which provide educated Christian comment.

German ‘direct’ sources include the Latin matronae inscriptions (see Chapter 13), and the Old High German First and Second Merseburg Charms, found in a tenth-century manuscript but undoubtedly older (Chapters 13, 2). My most important Old English ‘direct’ source will be Beowulf (see Chapter 9), but I shall also cite The Rune Poem and The Nine Herbs Charm (both preserved in tenth-century manuscripts; see Chapters 4, 2).

Learned Christian comment on pre-Christian myth or religious practice by Germanic-speaking writers is relatively rare, and the heathenism it reflects is sometimes that of the classical world (see, for example, the eighth-century Scarapsus of St Pirmius). Works which include some genuinely Germanic material include Bede’s De Temporum Ratione (Anglo-Latin, early eighth century; see Chapter 13); the Historia Langobardorum of Paulus diaconus (Langobardic Latin, later eighth century; see Chapter 2);
Ælfric’s *De Falsis Diis* (Old English, c. 1000; see Chapter 2); Adam of Bremen’s *Descripicio Insularum Aquilonis* (German Latin, later eleventh century; see Chapter 4); Symeon of Durham’s *Historia Ecclesiae Dunelmensis* (Anglo-Latin, c. 1100; see Chapter 5); a story in the anonymous *Liber Exemplorum* (Anglo-Irish Latin, later thirteenth century; see Chapter 10); and a reference in the *Flores Historiarum* (Anglo-Latin, c. 1308; see Chapter 5).

7. **Non-Germanic literary sources**

Two non-Germanic works include important information about Germanic mythological and religious beliefs. One is the *Germania* of Tacitus (AD 98). Tacitus had never been to Germania, but many of his informants had,\(^{19}\) and he uses them intelligently. He occasionally reveals misunderstandings: for example, because they often display their precious possessions, he wrongly concludes that the Germanic peoples do not value gold or silver (ch. 5). He is best informed about tribes near the Roman frontier, and some of the more remote peoples he mentions were not Germanic at all.\(^{20}\) He tends to ignore differences between Germanic peoples – for example, they are all similar in physical build (ch. 4); they have only one kind of public show (ch. 24). He also gives them a common ethnic character: they are all brave, warlike, chaste and obsessed with honour, but impetuous, undisciplined, quarrelsome, lazy, drunken and greedy. Some aspects of later Germanic heroic societies are recognisable in this stereotype, but it remains the view of an outsider whose assumption of superiority prevents real understanding.

Nonetheless, Tacitus provides the earliest real evidence for Germanic religion. He includes an otherwise unknown creation myth of *Tuisto*, a god born from the earth, and his son *Mannus*, the ancestor of the three branches of the Germanic peoples: *Ingvaeones*, *Herminones* and *Istaevones* (ch. 2), which are probably cult-names referring to divine ancestors. He identifies the chief Germanic gods as Mercury, Hercules and Mars (by whom he probably means Germanic deities related to Óðinn, Pórr and Týr), though he also claims, less reliably, that some of the Suebi worship Isis (ch. 9). He gives details of the seeking of auguries (ch. 10) and of belief in the prophetic powers of women (ch. 8). Later (ch. 40), he attributes to some of the northern tribes a distinct cult of *Nerthus* ‘Mother Earth’ (see Chapter 4).

The other valuable ‘outsider’ is the Arab traveller ibn Fadlan. His *Risala*, an account of his journey among the Scandinavian-ruled *Rus* on the Volga in 922, includes an eyewitness account of a chieftain’s funeral, much of

---

\(^{19}\) See lr. 35–41.

\(^{20}\) The *Lugii* (ch. 43) may have been Celtic, the *Aestii* (ch. 45) were probably Baltic, the *Veneti* (ch. 46) probably Slavonic, the *Sitones* and *Fenni* (chs. 45–6) were Finno-Ugric.
which looks recognisably Norse (see Chapter 8). Ibn Fadlan regards the Rus as cultural inferiors (quite apart from their non-Islamic religion), but he clearly made a serious attempt to understand what he saw, and must have had a competent interpreter to explain it to him.

8. Non-literary sources

Some recent books on Old Norse mythology have made extensive use of picture-stones and archaeological finds, which appeal to modern taste for two main reasons. Firstly, our society has a thirst for the new, and it is relatively easy to make new discoveries in archaeology. Secondly, these sources direct attention towards physical objects, and chime well with the common modern belief that physical ‘reality’ is the only reliable truth. But mythology subsists in the imaginative mind, and requires narratives about a mythic reality distinct from that of the physical world. Iconography can convey myth only together with narrative that can explain its symbols, while archaeological finds reflect the physical actions that result from religion rather than the myths that inspire it.

It follows that for an investigation of myth, non-narrative sources must always be secondary, and for periods with no texts they must remain speculative. For example, many Swedish Bronze Age rock carvings show a sexually emphasised male figure holding a huge axe, and these have been confidently interpreted as a sky-god wielding his thunderbolt, a direct ancestor of Þórr’s hammer. But the only evidence for this interpretation is in literary descriptions of Þórr, which are at least two and a half millennia later than the axe-bearing figures. We may feel fairly confident that the axe-bearer had a name and a myth, but we shall never know what they were. By contrast, the preserved corpse of a sacrificially hanged man from Tollund, Jutland (from about the time of Christ), can reasonably be linked to Tacitus’s near-contemporary description of human sacrifices to ‘Mercury’ (= a Germanic god corresponding to Óðinn). Later sources such as Hávamál 138–41 and Gautreks saga ch. 7 can then be cited for comparison, but the contemporary reference is the crucial link that makes association with the later ones reasonable. In general, iconographic and archaeological evidence can only be trusted when they relate to a period no earlier than the earliest texts.

---

21 Davidson (1967), 52–3.
22 Glob 21–32.
23 Similarly, Layton (2001) argues that we can interpret Australian aboriginal art by using the interpretations of living native informants, but where we lack such informants, as with ancient rock art, we must not ‘fill the empty signs with meaning’, or we tend to impose modern values, inversions of modern values, or meanings imported from other cultures. He concludes (34): ‘This is where writing once more becomes oppression and we should stop.’
The iconography of Viking Age picture-stones can also be valuable if cautiously interpreted. Many of the finest ones are on the island of Gotland, but they can be found all over Scandinavia, the Norse-colonised areas of England and the Isle of Man. But to identify a particular mythological scene, we need either an accompanying inscription or a distinctive iconographic feature. Thus a wolf biting a man’s foot is probably Fenrir swallowing Óðinn; a man blowing a horn may be Heimdallr (but the horn must be prominent); a man fishing and sticking his foot through the bottom of a boat is probably Þórr fishing for the Miðgarðsormr. In this book I shall use the evidence of sun-disc images on Gotlandic picture stones (Chapters 2, 4); a ship accompanying a runic dedication to Þórr on the Sønder Kirkeby stone (Chapter 8); and another, again accompanying runes, at Sakshaug, Norway (Chapter 13).

Useful archaeological finds include the tiny die-stamped gold plates known as *guldgubber* ‘gold grandpas’, which may have been important in the worship of the Vanir (see Chapters 4, 6). The myth pattern of the Summer King (Chapter 5) may explain the large funeral mounds in Uppland, Sweden, and Vestfold, Norway. Similarly, the existence of literal or metaphorical ship-burials (see Chapter 8) gives support to the eyewitness account of ibn Fadlan and the carving at Sønder Kirkeby.

9. Conclusion

It now appears that the quasi-Biblical corpus of ‘canonical texts’ of Old Norse mythological poetry is a relatively recent construct. Many poems may be more recent than was once thought, but this survey has also suggested that other sources, notably episodes in *fornaldarsögur*, have received less attention than they deserve. The only rational course must be to note the mythological story patterns wherever they appear in Old Norse and related literature, while not assuming that any of them is necessarily much older than the earliest example of it that we can find.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Vanir Patterns: Ritual Origins

Four of the patterns outlined in Chapter 1 are associated with the Vanir. They are those in which:
1. A god or hero has a troubled marriage with a giantess.
2. A goddess helps her lover to gain vital information from a giantess.
3. A prophetess makes hostile predictions or works magic against a god or a human aristocrat.
4. A prophetess predicts the glorious career and eventual death of a young man who is unwilling to listen to her.

In this Chapter I shall consider the evidence for the pre-Christian origins of these patterns.

The earliest literary source for the worship of the Vanir is ch. 40 of Tacitus’s Germania (AD 98), where he is describing seven northern Germanic tribes (including the Anglii – the first literary reference to the Angles, who were to give their name to the English). These peoples, he says, share a common worship of Nerthus, id est Terram matrem ‘Nerthus, that is, Mother Earth’, whose shrine is in a grove on an island. At a particular season, the goddess and her one male priest go on procession in a sacred waggon drawn by heifers. The period of the processions is a time of peace, when all iron objects are locked away. When she returns to her shrine, the idol of Nerthus and everything else associated with the processions is washed by slaves in a secluded lake, in which the slaves are then drowned.1

The name Nerthus corresponds to Njörð, the oldest of the Vanir,2 but some critics have questioned the value of this account, partly because Nerthus looks grammatically masculine and partly because the manuscripts (which all date from the fifteenth century or later) have many different readings of the name: Nerthum, Nertum, Neithum, Nehertum, Necthum, Herthum, Verthum.3 The usually accepted stemma has three families, and readings shared by the best manuscripts of any two of them

1 Tr. (1999), 93.
2 The development would be Nerthus > *Njarduz (breaking) > *Njorduz (u-mutation) > Njordr (syncope).
3 See ed. Robinson for all the variants.
are thought likely to be correct. The best X group manuscripts (Vatican, Cod. Vat. 1862, Leiden UL XVIII Periz Q.21) read Neithum; the best Y manuscripts (Cod. Vat. 1518, Codex Neapolitanus) have Nerthum, and the best Z manuscript (Iesi, Æsinas Lat. 8) reads Nertum. The sound /th/ did not exist in classical Latin, though the spelling is found in words derived from Greek or the Germanic languages (such as thesaurus ‘treasure’, or the name Theodoricus). Tacitus would therefore be unlikely to introduce the spelling th gratuitously. In the fifteenth century, the Italian scribes who produced most of the earliest surviving manuscripts (including the Iesi manuscript) would have a natural tendency to replace th with t, as was consistently done in their native language (see Italian tesoro, Teodorico), but would be very unlikely to do the reverse. Nerthum is therefore more probably correct than Nertum. If both Y and Z should read Nerthum, that reading must be preferred. A different stemma, proposed by Robinson, has only two groups, and the best manuscripts in both read Nerthum. Whichever stemma is correct, Nerthum therefore seems the likeliest reading, although it could represent either a grammatically masculine Nerthus or a grammatically neuter Nerthum. The meaning of the name has usually been connected with Old Irish nert ‘strength’ (so ‘the powerful one’), but it might be related to Old English geneord ‘contented’ and neorxnawang ‘paradise’ (literally ‘field of contentment’), or to the word ‘north’ (i.e. ‘deity of the northern people’, cf. Greek νέρτερος ‘belonging to the underworld’).

Klaus von See has argued that Tacitus had no genuine information about Nerthus except the name, and that his account is based on the cult of Magna Mater (‘Great Mother’) at Rome (in which he was himself entitled to wash the goddess in a tributary of the River Tiber). Some details which are paralleled in the Magna Mater ceremony but not supported by contemporary archaeology or later literary sources may indeed be borrowed from the Magna Mater ritual; this applies particularly to the statement that the waggon was drawn by cows and to the washing of the idol. But others differ from the Magna Mater ceremony but are supported by later Germanic literary or archaeological sources:

1. The shrine of the goddess is in a wood on an island (cf. Þorgeirr Hölgabrúðr; see Chapter 6).
2. The goddess is in the form of an idol (cf. Gunnars þáttr helmings and surviving idols; Magna Mater was represented by a black stone).
3. The goddess has one attendant priest, of the opposite gender to herself, who controls when the cult takes place (cf. Gunnars þáttr helmings).
4. The period of the processions is a unique time of peace and feasting (cf. Gunnars þáttr helmings).

For other less probable derivations, see AEW 410–11.

Von See (1981b).
The cult ends with a sacrifice in a lake (cf. the waggons and idols deposited in peat bogs; see below).

Von See and North also suggest that the deity was in fact male, and that Tacitus made Nerthus female because of the analogy of Magna Mater. But if there had been no goddess in the Germanic cult it is difficult to see why he should link it to the Magna Mater ritual at all. It seems more likely that the deity had both a male and a female form (cf. Freyr/Freyja and the other sources cited below), and that Tacitus’s error was simply to use the name of the male deity for the female one.

Archaeological finds consistent with his description can be traced back as far as the Bronze Age model wagon from Trundholm, Zealand, Denmark, where a horse pulls a cart which carries a large sun-like disc, plated with gold on one side. This may illustrate something like the progress of Nerthus and/or her male twin (seen as the sun), though it is so early that we must confess ignorance of the myth implied by it. Two small ceremonial wagons (each c. 1 x 1.75 m) from Dejbjerg, Jutland, Denmark (probably first century BC), and others from two further Danish sites may have been used for a progress like that of Nerthus; all of them have been deliberately sacrificed. Again, such lightly built wagons were probably pulled by horses rather than cattle (and cf. Gunnars þáttr helmings, discussed below), so the speed of the goddess’s progress may have been fairly quick. There were probably many local cult centres rather than a single central one, and thus the period of sacred peace need not have been as long as the several months suggested by North.

Tacitus does not explain why Nerthus travelled among human beings, but the identification with Terra Mater may imply that it was to bless the crops (and cf. the same function in Gunnars þáttr helmings). In the runic inscription on the Stentoftten Stone (Blekinge, Sweden, c. 650), this function of patron of the harvest is transferred to a family ancestor, who may have been seen as a descendant of the fertility god (see Chapter 5): haþuwolaf gafjara, ‘Haþuwolafr gave harvest’. The ancient sun-disc symbol continues to appear on early picture-stones from Gotland (for example, Martebo), and could be linked to the name of Freyr’s emissary Skírnir ‘the Shining One’ in Skírnismál. However, since there is no inscription on any of the sun-disc picture-stones, this connection with the Vanir cannot be proved.

*
Tacitus also says that the Germanic tribes nearest the northern ocean are called *Ingaevones* or *Ingaevones* ‘descendants of Yngvi’ or ‘followers of the law of Ing’, though Tacitus cannot have known the meaning.\(^{10}\) This name is clearly associated with the Vanir, and this supports Tacitus’s suggestion that in his time they were the most important deities in southern Scandinavia. Two early runic inscriptions also include *Ing-* as a personal name-element.\(^ {11}\)

In the Old English *Beowulf* 1319, 1044, *frea Ingwina* and *eodor Ingwina* ‘lord/prince of the friends of Ing’ are titles for the king of the Danes. *Ing* is also linked to the Nerthus description, and to the Danes, by the Old English *Rune Poem*, 67–70 (MS tenth century, poem of uncertain date):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ing was ærest mid Eastdenum} \\
\text{geseven secgun, } \text{of he siððaneft} \\
\text{ofær waeg gewat, } \text{wan æfter ran;} \\
\text{ðus heardingas } \text{ðone hæle nemdun.}
\end{align*}
\]

‘Ing was first seen by men among the East-Danes, until later he went away again over the sea, and his waggon rolled after him; that is what the man was called among those warriors.’\(^{12}\)

The departure of Ing over the sea has been compared with the funeral of the ancestor of the Danish kings, Scyld Seefing (‘Scyld with the Sheaf’, or ‘Scyld son of Sceaf’) in *Beowulf*.\(^ {13}\) If the waggon and the ship are equivalent symbols, the waggon may have had connotations of death and funeral as well as of blessing the crops. *Ingui* appears in the legendary genealogy of the kings of Bernicia, whose origins were probably in Schleswig, but not in those of any other Anglo-Saxon kingdom.\(^ {14}\) Otherwise, *Ing-* names are rare in Old English, except for the legendary hero *Ingeld* (again connected with legends of the Danes), who appears in *Beowulf* 2064 and in Alcuin’s letter of c. 794 reproving the monks of Lindisfame for their love of heroic legend, where he asks *Qui Hinielius cum Christo?* ‘What has Ingeld to do with Christ?’\(^ {15}\) Two other Ingelds, perhaps named after the legendary hero, were a brother of King Ine of Wessex (died 728) and an abbot of the same period; Ingwald (possibly a variant of the same name) was bishop of London in 731.\(^ {16}\)

---

\(^{10}\) *Germania* ch. 2 (tr. 76–7, 113). The name *Ing* has not been convincingly explained; for suggestions, see *AEW* 678–9.


\(^ {12}\) *ASPR* VI, 29–30; Shippey 82–3. Bauer 84, 87, 107 and cf. the *Heardingas* with the *Haddingjar* (see Chapter 5).

\(^ {13}\) Ed. Klaeber, 121–4.

\(^ {14}\) For the cult of *Ingui* among the heathen Angles, see North 44–77, 133–43.

\(^ {15}\) See Chambers and Wrenn 22; *Beowulf and Its Analogues* 242.

\(^ {16}\) *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* 855 (Version A), ed. II. 38; *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* 731 (Version E) and Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica* V, 23, ed. and tr. 558–9.
There is some evidence for the worship of a god corresponding to *Ingui* among the Goths (who probably originated from southern Scandinavia).¹⁷ *Enguz* is the name of the Gothic letter equivalent to the rune *Ing* (MS Vienna, Nationalbibliothek, lat. 795, early ninth century; but since most of this manuscript is of northern English origin, its Gothic credentials are doubtful).¹⁸ Marstrander and North are probably mistaken in seeing the name of the Gothic god *Inggwes* in the inscription on the early-fifth-century Pietroassa ring (from Walachia, Romania); a more probable interpretation is ‘a good season for the Goths; sacred to the shrine’.¹⁹ But this still suggests that a gold ring was used in Gothic rituals designed to ensure the harvest (cf. Chapter 5 below), and it may have been part of a Vanir-derived cult.

In Þjóðólfr of Hvín’s *Ynglingatal* (c. 900), the legendary kings of Sweden are defined as descendants of *Yng(vi)*, and in Ari and the *Historia Norvegiae* (both twelfth-century; see Chapter 3), the first three generations of this line are *Yngvi, Njôrðr* and *Freyr*. *Lokasenna* 43 (probably also twelfth century) makes Freyr’s servant Byggvir (‘the Barley Maker’) refer to him as *Inguna-Freyr*.

Two other Scandinavian sources tell of a ceremonial progress in a waggon. According to Saxo (V.xvi.3),²⁰ King Frotho III was conveyed in a waggon both before and after his death (see Chapter 5). *Gunnars þáttr helnings* is in some ways closer to Tacitus, though the *Germania* can hardly have been known to its author. It appears as the second half of *Ógmundar þáttr dytt* in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta* (late thirteenth or fourteenth century).²¹ Gunnarr flees to Sweden in the first year of Óláfr’s reign (995) and takes refuge with the priestess-‘wife’ of Freyr, although the god dislikes him. He accompanies them when Freyr goes to give people árbót ‘help with the crops’; Freyr and his wife sit in a waggon. As they negotiate a mountain pass during a blizzard, Freyr’s attendants all drift away, except for Gunnarr, who is leading the horse. When he gets tired and sits in the waggon, Freyr attacks him. As they wrestle, Gunnarr resolves that if he survives, he will return to King Óláfr and the true faith. The devil which has inhabited the idol then flees, leaving only an empty block of wood, which Gunnarr breaks in pieces. He spends some time impersonating Freyr, and makes the priestess pregnant before escaping to Norway with her and making good his resolve to return to Christianity.²²

In this mocking parody, a lapsed Christian proves more effective than the fertility god at all the god’s major functions, including sex with the

---

¹⁸ Derolez 58; North 139.
¹⁹ Marstrander (1929), 39–65; North 140; RÄF no. 41, 91–5; Reichert 235–47; RMR C1, 52–3.
²¹ See McKinnell (2001d).
²² ÍF 9, 112–15; Wyatt and Cook 6–9, x–xx.
The Vanir Patterns: Ritual Origins

god’s ‘wife’. Freyr himself is forced into the role usually filled by his adversary, the ‘Winter King’ (see Chapter 5); this is presumably the point of the blizzard. However, the deity in the wagon is explicitly one of the Vanir; the cult is run by one priestess, who is now the marital partner of the deity; a horse-drawn wagon is used during a tour to guarantee the crops; there is much feasting; and offerings are made to the god wherever he goes. But the later sources share two features in contrast with Tacitus: all three stories involve the destruction or death of the fertility figure (assuming the meaning of Ing’s departure to be like that of Scyld’s funeral), and the deity is male.

Because Ing, Frotho and Freyr are all male, it is sometimes assumed either that the god always had been male (von See, North), or that the deity had changed gender during the centuries between Tacitus and the coming of Christianity — a change which is thought to reflect a diminution in the mythic status of women during this period. However, Njörð/Nerthus and Freyr/Freyja clearly had both male and female forms. A number of wooden idols of naked human figures found in the peat mosses of Denmark and Schleswig/Holstein also suggest that the deity could be of either sex. Those from Foerlev Nymølle and Rebild Skovhuse are female, those from Broddenbjerg, Spangefholm and Rude Eskildstrup male, while the site at Aurbekver Mose, Braak, Holstein produced one figure of each sex. This may suggest a cult in which the two genders of the god were worshipped as simultaneously siblings and marital partners. Similarly, in Lokasenna 36 Loki claims that Freyr is the product of an incestuous union between Njörð and his sister, and in Ynglinga saga ch. 4 the same is stated of both Freyr and Freyja. There may have been a sense in which the consort priest(ess) represented the divine partner who was not present in statue form. This would explain why there can be only one priest(ess), who is privy to the presence and intentions of the deity. If the sexual portrayal of an idol depended mainly on the gender of the priest(ess) who controlled the local observance of the cult, it would actually be in the hands of a member of the opposite gender to that of the idol at the time when it was made. In any case, the archaeological material suggests that the sex of the deity depended more on local circumstances than on date, and therefore that no conclusions can be drawn about changes in the relative power of the two genders of worshipper.

Another ancient type of image which has been linked to the Vanir appears on the sandstone lid of a Bronze Age funeral urn from Denmark. This

23 Jochens 35–7; Glob 130–2.
24 See Davidson (1973), 78–9 and plates 32, 34; Glob 126–8 and plates.
25 ÍF 26, 13.
26 See Magnús Magnússon 76–7.
depicts a couple, apparently naked and coming together for sex, with what looks like an ear of corn (or possibly a plant or tree-branch) behind the back of the woman. But even if the branched object really is an ear of corn, this image is too ancient for us to be able to interpret its mythic content with any confidence.

Pictures of a formal embrace between a male and a female figure (both now fully clothed, but occasionally including the presumed ear of corn) reappear on one type of *guldgubber*. These are tiny plates of gold (usually measuring 7–20 x 3–12 mm), usually stamped but occasionally in cut-out shapes, found in various parts of Scandinavia and dating from between the late sixth century AD and c. 900.27 The majority of *gubber* depict a single male or (less often) female figure; *gubber* depicting an embracing couple are less common, while a few are in the form of an animal, usually a boar.

The purity of the gold used in *gubber* is usually high, though there are some instances of ‘cheating’, in the use of gold-silver and gold-copper alloys, and a very few figures of silver or bronze. The plates are so thin and the weights so small that it was clearly the symbolic fact that the offering was of gold that mattered, rather than its monetary value. Until the 1980s the largest number of *gubber* found on any one site was 26 at Ekketorp, Öland, Sweden, but 122 and 5 die-stamps have since been found at Uppåkra, Skåne, Sweden,28 102 at Lundeborg (= Gudme) on Fyn, and over 2300 at Sorte Muld on Bornholm (both Denmark). They are very difficult to find during excavation, and as these large numbers result from modern excavation techniques such as the washing of discarded spoil, actual numbers present on sites excavated earlier were probably much larger than the numbers discovered. These large numbers make it unlikely that *gubber* were personal amulets that were lost by accident. They are rarely found in association with graves, more usually with high-status buildings (although that at Sorte Muld was already disused by the time the *gubber* were deposited). In at least two places (Mære, Norway, and Eskilstuna, near Stockholm, Sweden), they were on sites later occupied by early Christian churches, which may have replaced heathen cult-places. The discovery at Uppåkra of a bronze die-stamp for making ‘female’ *gubber* suggests that they may typically have been produced at the sites where they are found.

This pattern suggests deposit as an offering. One kind of offering is where the object deposited takes the form of what the gods are being asked or thanked for: the part of the body to be healed, a child, or an identifiable piece of property. But it does not matter what such offerings are made of – usually they are of lead – and the range of subjects depicted on *gubber* is too narrow for such an explanation of them to be convincing. This suggests that the figure(s) on *gubber* are probably either those making or sponsoring

---

27 Watt (1999a).
the offering or the deity or deities to whom the offering is being made. In either case, we need to explain why the offering has to be made of gold, and why it was evidently acceptable (at least at Sorte Muld) to use the image of an animal instead of one or two human figures.

Most single-figure gubber depict a man dressed in an elaborately trimmed long coat, with a staff in his right hand (see Figure 1a).29 His left hand sometimes holds a cup, out of which a tongue-like shape projects, probably to indicate that the cup is full of liquid. Sometimes he wears a necklace, or a circlet round his head (Watt 1999a, 3b), and a ring may be used as a decorative filler.30 His salient attributes seem to be the cup, the staff and the necklace or ring.

When gubber depict a female figure (Figure 1c, d),31 she is richly clothed in a long dress surmounted by a large cutaway cloak. Her long hair is usually twisted into a knot behind her head; sometimes she wears a heavy necklace and/or carries a cup like that of the male figure.

Relatively few gubber depict both a man and a woman (Figure 1e, f).32 The man is without his staff, cup or necklace; the woman’s dress and hairstyle are like those on the ‘female’ single gubber. In some cases the two figures may be kissing,33 in others they are not. His arms and/or hands may be on her waist, or about to touch her face. In Watt (1999a) 6a–b he seems about to grasp her shoulder, while her hand is round his wrist. Her arm may be round his waist,34 or she may be holding a leafy branch.

A few ‘cut-out’ figures of gubber type from Sorte Muld depict either a man with a necklace made of a separate piece of gold, or a single animal, usually a boar (Figure 1b, g). The apparently naked male gubber with a separate gold necklace may perhaps be linked to Migration Age naked figurines like the one from Kymbo, Västergötland.35

Gubber might be explained as offerings made to and depicting the Vanir, who are often associated with gold;36 similarly, although Zachrisson interprets the Kymbo figurine as Óðinn, its prominent gold necklace may suggest that it represents one of the Vanir or a sacred king descended from them. The cup could be connected with the chalice of foaming mead offered to Skírnir by Gerðr in Skírnismál 37 as a symbol of her submission to Freyr, and the necklace is widely associated with Freyja, and with kings descended from the Vanir (see Chapter 5). The staff is harder to explain—though awkwardly, this is the commonest attribute of the male figure. The

29 Cf. Watt (1999a), groups 1–3 and some features of groups 7, 9.
30 Watt (1999a), 2b–d.
31 Watt (1999a), groups 4–5.
32 Watt (1999a), group 6.
33 Watt (1999a), 6c–f. Cf. the gubber from Uppland, Sweden, in Magnus Magnusson 76.
34 Watt (1999a), 6e.
35 See Zachrisson.
36 Watt (1999b).
meeting the other in Norse myth and legend
Figure 1. Guldgubber.

A selection of guldgubber from Sorte Muld, Bornholm, Denmark, with (d) a die-stamp for making female gubber, from Uppåkra, Skåne, Sweden. Each illustration is about three times actual size.

Sorte Muld drawings by Eva Koch; Uppåkra drawing by Margrethe Watt.
animals might be symbolic of a Vanic deity, for Freyr’s sacred animal was
the boar and Freyja’s the sow.

However, there are difficulties about this interpretation. The iconography of gubber must have evolved when they were first used, in the late sixth century. Although we can be confident that the Vanir were worshiped at that time, we cannot be sure that their mythology did not change between then and the composition of Skírnismál and Gylfaginning (both probably from the beginning of the thirteenth century). Since gubber fell out of use by c. 900, a century before the arrival of Christianity, even a tenth-century source would have to be slightly archaic to explain these old-fashioned objects. If the male figure represents Njörðr or Freyr, the double gubber would presumably depict either the brother–sister marriage or the union of the god with Skáddi or Gerðr, but the absence of any of the male figure’s attributes in the double gubber would then be surprising. If the representation is of the marriage with the giantess, it is also hard to see why a votive offering should seek to placate the god by depicting his disastrous misalliance (see Chapter 5). The simplification of the attributes of the male figure also raises problems if the double gubber are taken to represent the partners in a human marriage, while it is hard to see how the single gubber would fit into this interpretation at all.

I would suggest that the male figure may be a human ruler and the female one his patron goddess, one of whose main characteristics is that she demands offerings in gold (see Chapter 6). His staff may then be a symbol of temporal rule, his necklace a sacred royal possession (see Chapter 5), and his cup symbolic of the wisdom which he gains and remembers as a result of the influence of the goddess (and which she hands to him; see Hyndluljóð 45, 49–50 and Chapter 6). The sale of gubber for offerings may have been both a source of income for the nobleman who controlled the cult-site and a reminder of his special status as lover of the goddess. But as with most iconographic sources, this is only a persuasive theory—it cannot be proved.

This chapter has considered the ‘prehistory’ of the patterns associated with the Vanir. Because the sources for this early period are necessarily either archaeological/iconographic or the observations of outsiders, they tend to reveal ritual rather than the myths behind it. The patterns of belief behind these rituals are difficult to reconstruct, but might credibly be summarised as follows:

During the first millennium after Christ, each of the Vanir had both a male and a female form, who were simultaneously siblings and marital partners; traces of this belief survive in Lokasenna, Gylfaginning and elsewhere. By Tacitus’s time, local expressions of this deity were usually represented by a male or female idol attended by a priest(ess) of the opposite gender, who was probably the spouse or lover of the deity. The
priest(ess) was of high social status and controlled the cult-place. One major function of the deity was to guarantee the crops by means of an annual progress by waggon, but (s)he may also have had a role in royal funerals.

When the god was male, the hallowing of the crops was seen in terms of a sexual relationship between him and a personification of the earth, imagined as a beautiful giantess. Human rulers could claim power by virtue of descent from the god through the male line, but they also assumed the divine responsibility for crop fertility. This pattern was established by c. 900 (see Ynglingatal), but it may be centuries older than this (cf. the Sten-toften rune-stone); it will be examined further in Chapter 5.

When the goddess was female, she represented the fecundity of the earth, and was the patroness and lover of her consort-priest. He might be a hereditary ruler whose óðal ‘inheritance’ right she ensured by her relationship with successive heads of his family, and she could be worshipped with offerings of gold at her cult-site as well as when she was ‘on tour’. This practice may have developed during the sixth century AD. As we shall see, she also had a ‘dark sister’, a giantess who was her sinister alter-ego (see Chapter 6).
CHAPTER FIVE

Misalliance and the Summer King

1. Misalliance

Wed in haste, repent at leisure.

*English proverb*

One might have expected myths about the ‘sacred marriage’ between the fertility god and the earth-giantess to be celebrations of a joyful union, but in fact the fundamental hostility between gods and giants was so strong that they are usually misalliances. The myths of Njörðr and his son Freyr have many features in common:

1. The protagonist is one of a dynasty that descends through the male line.
2. He is (wholly or partly) responsible for the death or threatened death of the giantess’s father or brother.
3. He or his representative goes on an expedition to win the giantess (but in the myth of Njörðr and Skaði this motif is reversed).
4. The protagonist and the giantess marry.
5. The marriage is unsuccessful, and the wife becomes hostile to the protagonist.
6. This hostility may lead to the death of the protagonist.

**Njörðr and Skaði**

Njörðr often appears in eddic and skaldic verse, but rarely with Skaði. He may be referred to as her husband and as god of ships in the damaged text of Ævind skaldaspillir’s Hálegjatal 3–4 (c. 970), but the actual statement

---

1. He is referred to as distinct from the Æsir (Vafþrúðnismál 38, Grímnismál 16); as hostage (Lokasenna 34); as father of Freyr (Grímnismál 43, Skírnismál 38, 39, 41) or Freyja (Brýnjukvöðla 22, Einarr Skáladason, Óxarflokkr 4, mid-twelfth century, Kock I, 221); as religious patron (Egill, Arinbjarnarkviða 17 and lausavísa 19, mid-tenth century, Skj I B, 40, 47); as sea god (Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld, lausavísa 9, late tenth century, Skj I B, 159); and mysteriously, as father of nine daughters (Sólarljóð 79, ?twelfth century, Kock I, 316).

2. Skj I B, 60, but this may refer to Ullr, who could travel over the sea on a bone (Saxo III iv. 12, ed. I, 73; tr. I, 79, II, 57–8), and could be called Óndurás ‘snowshoe god’ (Skáldskaparmál ch. 14, ed. I, 19; tr. 76); cf. Skaði’s title Óndurðis (Gyfugjönnin ch. 23, ed. 24; tr.
here is that Skaði lived for a long time with Óðinn and bore him many children. If Eyvindr mentions Njóðr at all, therefore, it is in the embarrassing role of cuckold. However, he later contradicts the family’s descent from Óðinn, referring to Hákon Grjótgarðsson as Freys ëttungr ‘Freyr’s descendant’.3 This family, like the Ynglingar, seem originally to have claimed descent from the Vanir, and the Óðinn–Skaði union was perhaps invented in the later tenth century, when the aristocratic cult of Óðinn was popular. But the myth of an unhappy marriage between Njóðr and Skaði probably already existed, for Þórðr Sjáreksson (lausavísa 3, eleventh century) also notes that she did not love him.4

The name Skaði (and Sca(n)dinavia and Skáney ‘Skåne’) may be related to Gothic skadus, Old English sceadu, Old Saxon scado, Old High German scato ‘shadow’.5 She may thus have originated as either a personification of the land-mass of Scandinavia or an underworld figure. In Grímnmál 11,6 she is the daughter of the hideous giant Þjazi,7 a scír brúðr goða ‘bright bride of gods’ who now lives in her father’s old home (i.e. not with her husband). This implies her marriage to Njóðr, her separation from him, and her beauty. Skaði’s infidelity to Njóðr (this time with Loki) is also alleged in Lokasenna 52.

Two stanzas from a lost eddic poem about Njóðr and Skaði are quoted in Gylfaginning ch. 23.8 Here Njóðr expresses his dislike of the mountains and longs to hear the ‘song of the swan’ again, while Skaði complains of being kept awake by a sea-bird. Saxo (I.viii.18–19)9 presents a Latin version of these stanzas as a dialogue between Hadingus and his wife Regnilda (see below). Hadingus cannot bear to be among the mountains and longs to put to sea; Regnilda objects that on the shore she is kept awake by sea-birds, and longs to sport in the woods. Both versions present the marriage as a failure because of a basic incompatibility between the couple, but Snorri’s account is more meaningful: Njóðr’s environment (the sea) produces food, while Skaði’s mountain home is essentially barren. In Saxo’s account, this contrast has been forgotten.

---

3 Háleygjatal 9.7 (Skj I B, 61); Haralds saga ins härfagna ch. 12 (ÍF 26, 108).
4 Kock I, 154, Skáldskaparmál ch. 6 (ed. 18; tr. 75).
5 AEW 480.
6 She is also the daughter of Þjazi (Lokasenna 50–1, Hyndluljóð 30), who is faðir ëndurðisar (Bragi, Ragnarsdrapa 20, Skj I B, 4, mid-ninth century) and fóstri ëndurgoðs (Þjóðólfr of Hvín, Haustlõng 7, Skj I B, 15, c. 900).
7 Cf. Modern Icelandic þjassi ‘giant, fat man’, possibly related to Old High German tado ‘king’, or more likely to Greek ταταῖος ‘titan, giant’ (originally ‘father deity’), Sanskrit tatas ‘father’ (AEW 612). If the latter etymology is right, the role of the giantess’s father must be an ancient part of the myth.
8 Ed. 24; tr. 23–4.
The fullest accounts of Njörðr’s marriage are in Gylfaginning ch. 23 and Skáldskaparmál ch. G56. The second relates how, after the gods had killed Þjazi, Skaði set out in pursuit of revenge, but was diverted by Loki’s crude entertainment and by the offer of a husband from among the gods, whom she was to choose after seeing only their legs. She chose the most beautiful legs, expecting them to be those of Baldr, but they were in fact Njörðr’s legs. Gylfaginning ch. 23 adds that the couple could not agree where to live. They spent nine nights in the home of each of them, but this proved intolerable to both, and Skaði went back to Þrymheimr without Njörðr.

The version in Skáldskaparmál depends on a reversal of normal social patterns. Instead of the armed male god or his representative going on a quest for a giantess-bride, it is Skaði who takes up weapons, comes to the gods and is allowed to choose a husband. Although there is no evidence for this reversal before the time of Saxo and Snorri, Snorra Edda cannot have invented it: the alien female’s journey to this world is shared with the tale of Haraldr and Snjófríðr, and the choice of a husband by his legs with Saxo’s story of Hadingus (see below). This inversion implies some disgrace for both parties (for Njörðr in allowing himself to be chosen like a woman, for Skaði in her diversion from honourable vengeance into marriage with one of her father’s slayers). But these judgemental elements could be recent additions.

Freyr and Gerðr

This myth is most fully told in Skírnismál. Skímir, sent to find out why his master Freyr is unhappy, discovers that he is infatuated with Gerðr, daughter of Gymir. In order to convey Freyr’s suit to her, Skímir demands a horse which can bear him through the darkness and the flickering flame, and the sword which fights by itself against giants, and Freyr gives them to him. Skímir tells the horse that they will both return safely or else fall victim to that hideous giant (presumably Gymir). In the giant world, Skímir is greeted by a herdsman who tries to prevent him from seeing Gerðr, but she sends an invitation to him to drink mead in the hall, though she fears he is the slayer of her brother (usually assumed to be Beli; see below). Skímir tries to bribe Gerðr into giving her love to Freyr, offering her ‘the apples for curing old age’ and the ring which was burned with Óðinn’s young son (i.e. Draupnir, burned at the funeral of Baldr); both are refused. He then threatens her and Gymir with the sword, but in vain. At

10 Ed. I, 2; tr. 61.
11 Ynglinga saga ch. 8 (ÍF 26, 21), adds that Skaði abandoned Njörðr for Óðinn, with whom she had many sons; this is derived from Hálegjatal (see above).
12 Ms epli ellifo ’eleven apples’, is probably a mistake for epli ellifys ’apples to cure old age’, the apples of Iðunn which preserve the gods’ youth, c.f. Skáldskaparmál ch. G56 (ed. I, 1–2; tr. 60).
last he threatens her with a curse by which she will be barren and frustrated, and either have no husband or be forced to live with a hideous giant. She gives him a chalice of mead and promises to grant Njörðr’s son joy after nine nights at a grove called Barri. Skírnir reports this outcome to Freyr, who laments the length of time that must pass before his desire is satisfied.

Until fairly recently, it was thought that Skírnismál dates from the heathen period and preserves an allegory about fertility. Skírnir (‘the Shining One’), another emanation of Freyr himself, represented the sun, and Gerðr the enclosed field (cf. garðr ‘fence’) whose crop is brought forth by it.13 But Bibire has shown that part of the threatened curse relies on rune-names which cannot have arisen much before 1200,14 and a fourteenth-century runic charm including a similar curse has been discovered in Bergen.15 This material could have been interpolated into an older poem, but Skírnismál as it now stands probably dates from the later twelfth century.16

The marriage of Freyr and Gerðr is also mentioned in Hyndluljóð 30 (probably twelfth century), which calls her parents Gymir and Aurboða, relatives of Þjazi (a ‘giant eager to sail’) and his daughter Skaði. In Lokasenna 42 (late twelfth century?), Loki says that Freyr claimed to have bought Gymir’s daughter (i.e. Gerðr) with gold, and gave away his sword for her. At Ragnarök he will see how he will fight without it. In Völuspá 52–3 (late tenth century?), where the fire-demon Surtr fights against Freyr (‘Beli’s slayer’), he apparently wields a sword that belongs to the gods, and this may allude to the same story. Völuspá, Lokasenna and Gylfaginning ch. 37 agree that the sword was given away, and was thus the last of Skírnir’s bribes rather than the first of his threats, as in Skírnismál.

Gylfaginning ch. 37 uses Skírnismál as its main source. It concentrates on the early part of the story, up to the point at which Skírnir sets out on his quest, summarises the rest in a single sentence, quotes the last stanza of Skírnismál, and adds that the reason why Freyr had to kill Beli with a stag’s antler was that his sword had been given away.17 Snorri makes no reference to Skírnir’s bribes or his threatened curse on Gerðr.

Early skaldic poetry also calls Freyr the slayer of Beli,18 who is clearly a giant,19 but does not refer to Beli as Gerðr’s brother (though this seems a
natural interpretation of *Skírnismál* 16), to his having been killed with a stag’s horn, or to the relationship between Freyr and Gerðr.

In *Pula IV* h 1, Gerðr appears among the goddesses (presumably because of her marriage, since Skáði and Jóðr also appear here). Five proper names in verse (four of them giantess-names) have the second element -gerðr, but all the poems concerned are late. Gerðr is common in woman-kennings, usually compounded with items of female dress (for example, língerðr ‘linen-Gerðr’, Gerðr gullhrings ‘Gerðr of the gold ring’). Such kennings are usually based on goddess names, and this should probably be assumed here also; the earliest examples probably date from the late tenth century. This would imply that Gerðr was known as the consort of Freyr by this date, whether or not she was already a giantess. Her name has been linked to garðr ‘fence’, but has also been interpreted as ‘protectress’, ‘the girdled one’, or (as a reduced stress variant of Geirríðr) ‘spear rider’ (a valkyrie-name?). The name Freyr seems simply to mean ‘lord’.

The evidence for early knowledge of this myth is thus rather weak, and the usage of the name Gymir confirms this. In poetry, he appears as Gerðr’s father only in *Skírnismál, Hynnduljóð* and *Lokasenna*, and as a giant in *Pula IV* b 1. In older skaldic poems he is a personification of the sea. The name may be related to guð ‘man (born of the earth)’, guði ‘earth’, góm ‘jaws’ (i.e. perhaps ‘the devouring earth’), Latin homo ‘man’ and humus ‘earth’; gymir ‘the (devouring) sea’ may also be connected with these. The name may once have meant ‘the devourer’, but early skaldic verse relates Gymir firmly to the sea, and does not yet call him a giant or the father of Gerðr.

As the Vanir themselves are strongly associated with the sea, this raises the possibility that Gymir may in the ninth and tenth centuries have been
the negative aspect of the sea god Njörðr. In that case, Gerðr may once have been a mate of the sister-bride rather than the giantess type, and her father a ‘dark’ alter-ego of the fertility god himself, or of the father whom he succeeds.29 The skaldic evidence suggests that some aspects of this myth may have changed as late as the mid-eleventh century. By the late tenth century there probably was a myth in which Freyr acquired Gerðr as his wife by giving his sword in exchange for her, but the negative moral judgement on this could be another recent development.

HADINGUS AND REGNILDA

Some parts of Saxo’s account of Hadingus suggest an Odinic hero (see Chapter 11 for his relationship with Harthgrepa) but others undoubtedly derive from myths of the Vanir.30 Early in his career, he institutes the sacrifice to Freyr which the Swedes call Fmoblot (Saxo I.viii.11–12),31 and from then on is able to sail his ship faster than anyone else, presumably because of the patronage of the Vanir. He sets out to save Regnilda, daughter of the king of the Nitheri (probably the people of Nidaros, western Norway), from marriage to a giant. He kills the giant, but is himself badly wounded; Regnilda nurses him, and leaves her ring inside a wound in his leg. Later her father allows her to choose her husband, and she inspects the legs of her suitors until she finds the concealed ring in the leg of Hadingus, whom she then marries. After some years of peace, Hadingus wants to return to life at sea, while Regnilda wishes him to remain with her; this is the context of Saxo’s version of the two stanzas that Gylfaginning ch. 23 attributes to Njörðr and Skád (see above).

In this story it has been forgotten that the wife is herself a giantess, but rescuing her from marriage to a giant resembles the lifting of the curse in Skírnismál. The choice of a husband by inspecting the suitors’ legs echoes Skád’s choice in Skáldskaparmál. Saxo motivates the inspection of legs (which in Snorri is arbitrary, but necessary in order to produce the misalliance), but does not explain why the girl is allowed to choose her husband herself (which Snorri accounts for as part of the compensation for the killing of Þjazi).

Saxo implies that Hadingus later abandoned Regnilda to go on a seafaring campaign. Later, his wife (now dead)32 appears to him in a dream to make a cryptic prophecy about his loyal son Frotho and his treacherous

29 Cf. Pórgsr Hólgabruðr and her sister Irpa, Chapter 6.
30 MR N 213–20. For a comparison of Hadingus with Njörðr, see Dumézil xxxix.
32 Kroesen 421 suggests that the dead wife may not be Regnilda, but the ‘death-goddess’ who has previously taken Hadingus to the underworld. But since the Vanic goddess who was partner to the sacred king probably had two aspects (see Chapter 6), the wife and the death-goddess may have been opposite aspects of the same entity.
daughter Ulvilda (Saxo I.viii.24–6). Ulvilda resents having been married to the low-born Guthormus, and urges him to murder Hadingus while he is grooming his hair. Hadingus thus has a loyal son whose name has Vanic connections, and a treacherous pseudo-son (son-in-law) whose bad faith is provoked by a woman. As we shall see, this pattern also appears among kings descended from Njórr and Freyr, although the treacherous woman there is normally the king’s wife rather than his daughter.

The plot to attack Hadingus is unsuccessful, probably because he was also associated with another type of death. Hundingus, king of the Swedes, mistakenly believes that it has succeeded, and holds a memorial feast for Hadingus, during which he falls into a huge jar of beer and is drowned. Hearing about this, Hadingus returns the courtesy by publicly hanging himself (Saxo I.viii.27). The death of Hundingus recalls the drowning of Fjõlnir in a vat of mead during a feast held in his honour by Fróði, king of Denmark (Ynglinga saga ch. 11; see below), but self-sacrifice by hanging is Odinic (cf. Hávamál 138–41), and this demonstrates the mixed nature of the traditions associated with Hadingus.

The name Hadingus (Old Norse Haddingr) is probably related to haddr ‘(a woman’s) long hair’, so ‘the long-haired’. It probably originated as a royal title, and Saxo himself later mentions two Haddingi (Old Norse Haddingjar), who are also brothers in a verse in Órvar-Odds saga and in the prose of Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks. In Guðrúnarkviða II 22, Haddingja land ‘land of the Haddingjar’ is probably a sea-kenning, and in the prose at the end of Helgakviða Hundingsbana II, Helgi is said to have been reincarnated as Helgi Haddingjaskati (MS -scaði), ‘prince of the Haddingjar’. In a legendary genealogy in Flateyjarbók (1387–94), no fewer than six Haddingjar are said to have ruled over Haddingjadalr, which also appears as Vallis Haddingorum in the Historia Norwegiae. More remotely, it is possible that the Heardingas who gave Ing his name in the Old English Rune Poem (see Chapter 4) and a
MISALLIANCE AND THE SUMMER KING

Vandalic tribe known as Hasdingi or Asdingi may contain memories of the same sacred dynastic name (see Turville-Petre 1964, 218).

It is thus impossible to separate the marriage-myths of the Vanir from the legends of their royal descendants. As we shall see, an investigation of the stories of Vanir-descended kings suggests that the myths of Njörðr and Freyr preserve segments of a common pattern, but not all of it.

2. The Summer King

‘Æstimo quod rex aestivalis sis; forsitan hiemalis non eris.’

‘I reckon that you are a summer king; perhaps you won’t be a winter one.’

Flores Historiarum

According to the Flores Historiarum, these were the words of Lady Elisabeth Bruce to her husband Robert after he had had himself crowned king of Scots in the spring of 1306, as part of his campaign to wrest control of Scotland from the occupying English forces. When she went on to accuse him of breach of faith, he tried to kill her, but was restrained by the bystanders and sent her back to her father in Ireland. He sent her to England, where she was treated honourably.

Most of this story is lying propaganda, and no other account of Bruce’s coronation mentions it. The Flores Historiarum, written at Westminster, is fiercely hostile to Scottish independence, but its propagandist stance makes it easy to analyse what may be the earliest reference to the ‘game’ of the Summer King. The propagandist clearly means to suggest (wrongly, as it turned out) that Bruce is a king only in jest, and that his reign will be brief. The implication is of a battle between the ‘kings’ of Summer and Winter in which the ‘Summer King’ is killed, and also that his consort is

39 Ed. III, 130; for other ‘summer kings’, see E. K. Chambers I, 173.
30 Elisabeth Bruce was actually abducted from sanctuary and imprisoned in England (Dunbar 130). In a letter to the English king she complains that she is not allowed adequate clothing or bedclothes (Gibson-Craig and James vii, and no. XVI, p. 11). Since this letter omits to address Edward as king of Scots (while giving him his other titles), she probably supported her husband’s cause.
41 It is not mentioned in the confession of Bishop Lamberton of St Andrews, who was present (Stones 135–9).
40 In 1240 ludi de Rege et Regina were prohibited by Bishop Walter de Chanteloup of Worcester (E. K. Chambers I, 91, 172), but this could refer either to the Summer/May/ Harvest King and Queen or to the Winter/Christmas ones.
42 Gunnell 128–30 suggests that the battle between Summer and Winter may be a medieval import into Scandinavia, but that Winter and Summer marriages are probably ancient. He does not link the two traditions or suggest that the bridal pair are hostile to each other, but there are suggestions of both in the ‘wooing and combat’ folk plays from the English East Midlands, which come exclusively from an area of dense
hostile to him. We have already seen both features in the myths of the Vanir, and they are confirmed in the stories of the sacred kings who are their descendants.

The Ynglingar

In Ynglingatal 1–10 (late ninth century),44 the Historia Norwegiae (c. 1150)45 and Ynglinga saga chs. 11–19 (c. 1230)46 there are brief accounts of the first nine kings of the Swedes after the Vanir, and particularly of their deaths. They are Fjôlnir ‘Manifold’ or ‘Multiplier’ (ch. 11), Sveigðir ‘Waving One’ (ch. 12),47 Vanlandi ‘Man from the Land of the Vanir’ (ch. 13), Vísburr ‘Certain/Undoubted Son’ (chs. 13–14), Dömaldi ?‘Power to Judge’ (ch. 15), Dömarr ‘Judge’ (ch. 16), Dyggvi ‘Useful, Effect’ (ch. 17), Dagr ‘Day’ (ch. 18) and Agni (cf. agn ‘fishing bait’, ch. 19); each is the son of his predecessor.48 Their stories present what looks like a single, repeated myth, though detailed realisations of its symbols vary from one generation to the next, and some miss out most features, probably because the number nine is significant but no story needs to be repeated nine times. The central examples are those of Vanlandi and Agni, but most of the others also show some features of the following pattern:

1. The King’s name is connected with his function, either as patron of fertility or as guarantor of the law.

2. He makes a military expedition to a land of winter or death in the north or east. (In Ys, Sveigðir goes to Svitjóð in mikla, roughly northern Russia; Vanlandi, Visburr (by implication) and Agni go to Finnland; Dagr goes to Reiðgotaland or Gotland (possibly a misunderstanding of áuðstrvega ‘on the ways east’, Yt 2,11 refers to the stone into which Sveigðir runs as jõtunbyggðr’ the giant’s dwelling’. More figuratively, death is expressed in terms of travel in Yt 3 and especially 8, where Dagr ‘had to travel in accordance with death’s bidding’.

3. There he encounters a ‘Winter King’ (Snjár inn gamli ‘Snow the Old’, Ys ch. 13; Frosti ‘Frost’, Ys ch. 19; more enigmatically Auði inn auðgi, Ys ch. 14), and his daughter (Drifa ‘Snowstorm’, Ys ch. 13, Skjôlf, probably the Norse settlement (Helm 11–19).

44 Skj 1 B, 7–9.
45 Ed. 97–9; tr. 12–13; the names (but no further details) also appear in a genealogy at the end of Ari’s Blendingabók (1148 or earlier, IF 1, 27).
46 IF 26, 25–39, including Ynglingatal 1–10.
47 AEW 566 takes this as an Ódinic name referring to a waving spear, but in this context it probably refers to a waving ear of grain.
48 All three sources show the same sequence, except that Historia Norwegiae corrupts Agni to Hõgni and transposes him with Alrekr and Eiríkr, the first kings of the ‘murderous brothers’ type (see note 36 above).
49 Possibly from auðr ‘rich’, but probably from auðr, adj. ‘desolate’, auðr, noun ‘desolation’ or ‘death, fate’; Gylfaginning ch. 10 makes Auðr the son of night (ed. 13; tr. 14), and in Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld, Hákonardrápa 4 his sister is the earth (Skj 1 B, 147).
MISALLIANCE AND THE SUMMER KING

Clashing One’ Ys ch. 19, Yt 10). Sveigðir shows an alternative pattern, with a wife of the ‘sister-bride’ type (Vanlandi from Vanahemir, Ys ch. 12).

4. Either by agreement or by conquest, the king marries the Winter King’s daughter.

5. They have sons, whose names and loyalties are either ‘hers’ (G(e)isl ‘Ski-stick’ and Óndurr ‘Snowshoe’, Ys ch. 14), or ‘his’ (Visburr).

6. The king abandons his wife (Vanlandi, Visburr in Ys), or removes her from the land of winter (Agni, stated in Ys, implied in HN).

7. His wife wants him to return (Vanlandi, Ys), or covets a necklace that represents him or his sacred status (Visburr, Ys; Agni, Yt 10, Ys, HN).

8. She gets a víðfaða called Hulð (‘the Hidden Woman’) to put a curse on the king or his son (Vanlandi; Yt 3, Ys; Visburr, Ys).

9. The king dies because of the curse (Vanlandi, Yt 3, Ys; Dómaldi, Ys), or is murdered by his wife or ‘her’ sons (Agni, Yt 10, Ys, HN; Visburr, Yt 4, Ys, HN).

10. The king’s death is connected either with a symbol of barrenness (Sveigðir rushes into a stone, Yt 2, Ys, HN; Vanlandi dies in a fit because he cannot return to the land of winter, Ys; Dómaldi is sacrificed to end a famine, Yt 5, Ys, HN) or with its opposite (Fjólnir is drowned in a vat of mead, Yt 1, Ys, HN; Visburr is killed for his gold necklace, Ys; Dagr is killed with a pitchfork, Yt 9, Ys; Agni is hanged using the same necklace, Yt 10, Ys, HN).

11. The death and/or funeral of the king are associated with fire and water.

Fire: Visburr is burned in his hall, Yt 4, Ys, HN; Agni’s brother-in-law is called Logi ‘Flame’, Ys, possibly Yt 10 (but see below); Vanlandi (Yt 3, Ys) Dómarr (Yt 6, Ys) and Agni (Ys) are cremated.

Water: Fjólnir is drowned (Yt 1, Ys, HN); Dagr is killed on the shore (Yt 8; see below), on the bank of a river (Ys), or at a ford (HN); the ashes of Vanlandi, Dómarr and Agni are buried beside specified stretches of water (Ys, Yt 5, 6).

12. The king is succeeded by ‘his’ son (whose rule may have been legitimated by his control over the burial places of his predecessors. This would explain the specification of places of cremation and burial in Yt, which are all in the heartland of the Swedes).

*  

AEW 494–5 relates Skjölf to Old High German sceliva ‘plate’, and interprets her as a goddess of fruitfulness; cf. Skjölf as a Freyja-name (Pula IV h 3.5, Kock I, 326). Wessén (66) argued for Skjölf as eponymous ancestress of the Skyllungar (Swedes), but this case of a Nordic tribal name derived from a female eponymous ancestor would be unique, and seems unlikely. Gade concludes that Skjölf must be a giantess-name, meaning ‘Shaker’ or ‘Clasher’ – cf. river-names like Skjelver – and this is in keeping with Skjölf’s behaviour.
It might be objected that the fullest evidence is provided by the latest source (Ynglinga saga), so that we cannot vouch for the existence of all features of this pattern before the early thirteenth century. But when one examines the detail in each source, Ynglingatal includes all twelve points except no. 6; Historia Norwegiae includes or implies all except nos. 2–4. But most of these elements (the king’s journey to the land of winter, meeting with the Winter King, marriage with the Winter Princess and abandonment of her) are well attested in the myths of the Vanir (see above), and may have been omitted from Ynglingatal and Historia Norwegiae precisely because they were universally known.

Ynglingatal repeatedly suggests that the king is under the control of a woman who has taken him away and gained sexual power over him. The enchantress brings Vanlandi á vít Vilja bróðar ‘to meet Vili’s brother (i.e. Óðinn)’ (Ynglingatal 3,1–2); Hel has Dyggvi’s dead body at gamni ‘for her pleasure’ (Ynglingatal 7,4), and as Loka már ‘daughter of Loki’ she has of leikinn (both ‘destroyed’ and ‘sported with’) allvald Yngva hjóðar ‘the sole ruler of Yngvi’s nation’ (Ynglingatal 7, 9-12). Dyggvi is here seen both as descendant of Yngvi and as the sexual partner or plaything of Hel, the patroness of death. Agni’s queen is called Loga dís (Ynglingatal 10,7), which Ynglinga saga takes as ‘sister of Logi’ but may actually mean ‘guardian spirit of the flame (i.e. of the funeral pyre)’. These expressions suggest that the wife’s desire to take the king back to her realm is equivalent to a desire for his death.

Ynglingatal also emphasises the symbolism of water and fire in the deaths or funerals of some kings. Fjólnir is drowned in svigðis geira vágr vindlauss ‘the windless bay of the ox’s spears (i.e. liquid that is usually in a drinking horn)’ (Ynglingatal 1,6–7). Dagr is killed when he comes til Vörva (understood in Ynglinga saga as a place-name, but possibly ‘to the shore’, cf. Old English wearoþ ‘seashore’, Ynglingatal 8,6). Agni’s murderous wife is loga dis (Ynglingatal 10,7; see above); and Vis Burr is swallowed by sævar niðr ‘sea’s kinsman (i.e. fire)’ í arinkjóli ‘in the hearth-keel (i.e. house)’ (Ynglingatal 4,3, 4,10) – two kennings which contrive to combine the opposed symbols of fire and water.

Frothio

Saxo’s story of the two marriages of Frotho III also includes parts of the ‘Summer King’ pattern, this time as part of the legendary history of the Danes. As in Skírnismál, both wooings are by proxy and are backed up

51 ÍF 26, 36–7.
52 In Ynglingatal 1, Íslendingabók and Ynglinga saga, Froði is the contemporary and friend of Fjólnir, the first of the ‘Summer Kings’ of the Ynglingar. Saxo attributes the peace and good harvests of Froði’s reign to the birth of Christ having taken place at that time (V.xv.3, ed. I, 141–2; tr. I, 157).
with the threat of military force. In the first, Frotho’s counsellor Westmarus is sent to seek the hand of Hanunda, daughter of the king of the Huns; he threatens the king with his sword, and with the help of his sister-in-law Gotvara overcomes Hanunda’s reluctance to accept Frotho. But the marriage is not a success: in Frotho’s debauched court, Hanunda soon commits adultery with Westmarus’s son Grep. When this is revealed by the Norwegian hero Ericus, Frotho divorces Hanunda and proposes to send her back to her father lest she may plot against his life, but is persuaded instead to marry her to Ericus’s half-brother Rollerus (Saxo V.i.5–12, V.iii.4–5, 11–13, 23–4).53

Frotho’s second marriage is to Alvilda, daughter of Gøtarus, king of Norway. Ericus is sent to woo her for him (and to rescue his own wife, Frotho’s sister, from the king’s clutches). Gøtarus tries to have Ericus and his party killed, but himself suffers heavy losses before fleeing to the mountains, while Ericus successfully completes his mission (Saxo V.iii.23–35).54 Later, another of Frotho’s champions, Arngrimus, wins Frotho’s daughter Ofura as his wife by leading an expedition to conquer the Finns; the two Haddingi (see above) are among the twelve sons of Arngrimus and Ofura (Saxo V.xiii).55 However, neither Frotho’s marriage to Alvilda nor that of Arngrimus to Ofura is a failure, and they preserve only faint echoes of the pattern.

At the end of his reign, Frotho demonstrates the rule of law that he guarantees by setting up a gold arm-ring (armillam) on a post. A sorceress incites her son to steal it, and Frotho sets out to avenge this; because of his great age, he arrives for the encounter in a waggon. The woman, now transformed into a sea-cow, gores Frotho to death before being killed herself. Frotho’s nobles conceal his death for three years and continue to convey his body about in his waggon. When they can no longer prevent its decay, they bury him beside the river at Være, near Roskilde in Zealand (again, this is in the Danish heartland) (Saxo V.xy–xvi).56

Frotho’s story preserves some features of the Vanir cult that are not in the Ynglinga legends: the wooing by proxy, the waggon, and the concealment of the king’s death for three years (cf. Ynglinga saga ch. 10,57 where the death of Freyr is concealed for the same period). His burial place is beside a river, but there is no association with fire, probably because the Danes were thought, unlike the Swedes and Norwegians, to have buried their kings in mounds without burning them. The Prologue to Heimskringla58 makes the same distinction between them.

55 Ed. I, 137–9; tr. I, 152–3.
56 Ed. I, 141–2; tr. I, 156–8.
57 ÍF 26, 24.
58 ÍF 26, 4–5.
Otherwise, the Frotho legend includes all the major features of the Summer King pattern. The king’s name probably means ‘the Potent’. His emissaries make two expeditions, the first to the east, the second to the north (and the expedition of Arngrimus is also north to Finnmark). In each case, the king’s daughter is won by the use or threat of force. Frotho abandons Hanunda, and in the received story he probably sent her back home (cf. the Skaði myth); this has been disturbed by the intrusion of Ericus and Rollerus, but is still present as a discarded intention. In the legend of Frotho’s death, it has been forgotten that the sorceress and her sons are also the king’s wife and sons, but her desire for a gold ring remains, and it is still the symbol of his rule. The sorceress transforms herself twice. The first transformation, into a mare, seems pointless unless it echoes the magic that kills Vanlandi (Ynglinga saga ch. 13); perhaps Saxo confused the supernatural mara ‘demonic spirit’ (cf. English ‘nightmare’) with mera ‘a female horse’. The second transformation enables her and her sons to kill Frotho. He is buried beside a river in the heart of his family’s territory and succeeded by ‘his’ son Fridlevus ‘remnant of peace’, whose name suggests a continuation of Fróði’s peace (cf. the sacred peace associated with Nerthus, Chapter 4 above).

Helgi, Ólóf and Yrsa

A curious variation on this Danish tradition appears in Fróða þáttur and Helga þáttur (chs. 1–17 of Hrólfs saga kraka). In its present form, this saga is probably very late, but the traditions behind it must be ancient. Healfdene and Halga (= Hálfdan, Helgi) are mentioned in Beowulf (possibly later eighth or early ninth century). In the saga, Fróði becomes a villainous usurper who gains the Danish throne by murdering his brother Hálfdan and is later killed and succeeded by Hálfdan’s son Helgi. (Further on the þóla in this legend, see Chapter 7.)

Helgi’s legend adapts the Summer King pattern in a number of ways. His name (‘the Sacred One’), like Haddingr, probably originated as a title rather than an individual’s name. His military expedition, however, is south to Saxony, probably because of the traditional enmity between Danes and Saxons. He has three unsuccessful marriages. The first is with Ólóf, who hates him; this produces his daughter Yrsa, but hence also his treacherous son-in-law Aðils, who is procured by Ólóf and is in a way ‘her’ proxy son; as we would expect, he eventually betrays and kills Helgi. Helgi’s second marriage, with Yrsa, looks like a survival of the ‘sacred
incest' between the Vanir, though here it is between father and daughter; this produces 'his' son, Hrólfr. His third, with an unnamed elf-woman, produces the vicious daughter Skuld, who will persuade another son-in-law to attack and kill Helgi's son.

Helgi's brother Hróarr dies rather as Helgi himself does, murdered by his nephew at the instigation of his sister Signý for the sake of a precious ring (cf. the deaths of Vísburr and Agni in *Ynglingatal* and *Ynglinga saga*). This repetition of the pattern introduces an inconsistency, for Signý's instigation of Hróarr's murder emphatically contradicts her earlier behaviour. The sheer weight of the traditional pattern has evidently forced her into the part of the Winter Princess, despite its conflict with her earlier role as the loyal sister.

In this saga the pattern has been adapted in three ways:

1. Most symbolic and supernatural elements have been removed. The deaths of Hróarr, Helgi and Hrólfr are contrived by treachery, but not by magic. The ring is given a naturalistic motivation, and no other symbols of fertility or barrenness are involved; nor do fire, water or funerals play any particular role.

2. The father of the Winter Princess has disappeared.

3. The contrast between the king's sons and those of the Winter Princess is replaced by that between the king's loyal son (Agnarr, Hrólfr) and his treacherous son-in-law or nephew (Aðils, Hrókr, Hjörvarðr), who is less significant than the mother, mother-in-law or wife who provokes his treachery.

The Winter Princess therefore becomes part of the king's own family, and he himself replaces her absent father. In part, this makes *Hrólfs saga* look like a misogynistic reinterpretation of the pattern (loyal son or brother versus treacherous daughter or sister), but more importantly, it locates both the Summer King and his opponent within the protagonist himself. In keeping with this, Helgi is in some way culpable in each of his failed marriages. He refuses honourable marriage to Ólóf (ch. 8); although he does not know it, his union with Yrsa is incestuous (chs. 10, 13); and he ignores the instructions of the elf-woman by neglecting his daughter Skuld (ch. 15).

In another section of the same saga, *Bǫðvars þáttar* (ch. 24), the widowed King Hringr ('Ring') goes to Finnmark, where he encounters and marries Hvit ('White'), the daughter of the king of the *Finnar*. She practises enchantment against Hringr's son Björn and his wife Bera ('He-bear' and 'She-bear'), and contrives the killing of Björn, which is later avenged by Björn's son, the hero Bǫðvarr. The 'Bear's Son' motif belongs elsewhere (see Chapter 8), but the early part of this story is clearly derived from a legend of the Summer King type.

---

63 *FSN II*, 39-41.
THE OTHER IN NORSE MYTH AND LEGEND

HARALDR AND SNJÓFRÍDR

The legend of King Haraldr ‘fine-hair’ and his Saami wife Snjófríðr adapts the pattern to a new meaning. All versions of it are in prose, but Flateyjarbók (Flt) attributes to Haraldr a verse expressing grief at being unable to wake a dead woman and appears to associate her with a dwarf; the date of this verse is uncertain. A further half-stanza of rhymed verse, also in Flt, looks obviously recent.

During Haraldr’s midwinter feast, Svási, who is king of the Saami (Ágrip), a finnr (Heimskringla (Hkr), or a dwarf (Flt), sends in a message asking him to come out. Haraldr is angry, but Svási says the king has given him permission to place his gammi (Lappish hut) there (Ágrip, Hkr). The king enters the gammi, and Svási’s daughter Snjófríðr ‘Snow-lovely’ pours him a tankard of mead (Ágrip, Hkr). As he takes her hand, he is filled with desire and wants to possess her that very night, but Svási insists that they become betrothed first (Ágrip, Hkr). Haraldr marries Snjófríðr and loves her deeply; because of Svási’s magic, she seems more beautiful to him than any other woman (Flt). He abandons the management of his kingdom and his honour (Ágrip, Hkr), and has four sons with her (Hkr, Flt). She dies, but her appearance does not change and Haraldr believes she will recover (Hkr); Svási spreads a magic coverlet over her body, and the king refuses to allow her to be buried (Flt). He laments over the body for three years, while the people lament his madness (Ágrip, Hkr). A wise man (variously named) persuades the king to have her bedclothes changed. The body is then seen to be rotten and stinking (Flt). It is buried according to the old faith (Flt); a pyre is made and the body is burned, becomes black, and snakes, frogs and toads come out of it (Ágrip, Hkr). Snjófríðr sinks into the flames, but the king mounts from foolishness to wisdom (Ágrip, Hkr). After this, Haraldr will not tolerate seiðmenn ‘magicians’ in his kingdom (Flt). Later (ch. 34), Hkr tells how Haraldr’s eldest son, Eiríkr blóðøx, attacks his half-brother, Snjófríðr’s son Rõgnvaldr rettilbeini, because of his practice of seiðr, and burns him in his hall with eighty seiðmenn; this action is much praised.

Here Haraldr assumes the role of his ancestors, the Summer Kings, while Svási and Snjófríðr are clearly the Winter King and his daughter. The king’s sudden lust echoes that of Freyr in Skírnismál. Snjófríðr pours him a tankard of mead (cf. Skírnismál 37 and the cup held by many male and female figures on guldgubber, Chapter 4). The couple marry, and one of their sons is marked as ‘hers’ by the witchcraft which he derives from her family.

64 See Haralds saga ins hárfagra ch. 25 (ÍF 26, 125–7); Ágrip chs. 2–4 (ÍF 29, 5–6); a þáttr about Haraldr in Flateyjarbók: Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar ch. 469 (ed. II, 69–70). Historia Norvegiae and two other þættir in Flateyjarbók also show knowledge of the story (Historia Norvegiae ed. 104–5; tr. 14) mentions Rõgnvaldr rettilbeini as son of Haraldr and Snjófríðr, and cf. also Flateyjarbók, ed., I, 41, 44. II, 53).
65 ÍF 26, 139.
A magic spell makes the king desire to remain figuratively in the realm of death (cf. the curse on Vanlandi in Ynglingatal 3, Ynglinga saga, and the death goddess’s power over Dyggi in Ynglingatal 7). Her corpse is preserved for three years after death before a funeral is held (cf. Freyr in Ynglinga saga ch. 10, Frotho in Saxo).

In other respects the pattern has been reversed. The Winter King and his daughter visit Haraldr rather than vice versa (but see also the Skaði myth). It is the wife rather than the husband who dies. The attack by burning in a hall is carried out, not by ‘her’ son against the Summer King, but by ‘his’ son against ‘her’ son. Despite the shame usually attached to burning someone in their hall, Eiríkr is praised for this action. This suggests that this legend may be using the pattern in a political justification of violent action against a prince who was seen as dangerously alien.66 Eiríkr’s meeting with his own wife Gunnhildr also somewhat resembles his father’s relationship with Snjófríðr: although not a Saami herself, Gunnhildr is brought up and taught magic by two Lapps, whom Eiríkr kills in order to win her.67 However, the more macabre details of the Snjófríðr legend probably derive from the later medieval memento mori tradition.

Conclusions

1. The legends of the Ynglingar, Frotho, Hadingus and (to some extent) Helgi reflect a common narrative pattern (‘The Summer King’) concerning royal families that claimed descent from the Vanir.68 The pattern certainly existed by the late ninth century, and its independent occurrence in connection with Ynglingar, Danes and Haddingjar suggests that it may be centuries older than that.

2. Parts of this pattern can be seen in the myths of the marriages of the Vanir themselves. Sources from the late tenth century onwards tell of the marriage and separation of Njörðr and Skaði, but the motif reversal whereby Skaði comes to claim a husband is not found before Saxo and Snorra Edda. The gift of Freyr’s sword to Gerðr was probably known to the poet of Völuspá, but this need not imply the presence of the surrogate wooer, who does not appear explicitly before Skírnismál, Saxo’s Frotho story, and the Helgi lays in the Poetic Edda (see Chapter 6). Some aspects of the Vanir’s misalliance myths may therefore be recent developments.

3. The marriages of Njörðr and Freyr include only parts of the Summer King pattern. Neither couple is said to have produced sons. The wife’s curse on the protagonist is absent, and there is no fire-and-water funeral

67 Heimskringla, Haraldr’s saga ins hárflaga ch. 32 (ÍF 26, 135–6).
68 For this claim among the Danes, see Seof ‘Sheaf’, Beowa ‘Barley’ (cf. Old Norse Byggvir), Chambers and Wrenn 68–89, 203; among the Haddingjar, see the establishment of the Froblot, Saxo I.viii.12 (ed. I, 29; tr. I, 30); cf. MRN 216–19.
meeting the other in norse myth and legend

(although Freyr will later perish in battle against the fire-demon Surtr, shortly before the earth sinks into the sea), or succession from father to son. The coveting of a necklace or arm ring survives in Skírnismál only in the form of Skímir’s unsuccessful attempt to bribe Gerðr with the ring Draupnir.

4. The pattern of the sacred kings descended from the Vanir may be older than the related myths of the Vanir themselves. In that case, the presence of the gods in these myths may represent universalised versions of kings. Any potential ‘meanings’ of the pattern are therefore most likely to emerge from its most complete form, that of the Summer King.

This pattern is obviously in some sense ‘about’ the resolution of contradictions, and it could easily be expressed in terms of Lévi-Strauss’s formulae (see Chapter 2):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial pair</th>
<th>First triad</th>
<th>Second triad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summer</td>
<td>king/god</td>
<td>unjust king is killed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter</td>
<td>king/giant</td>
<td>‘his’ son justly succeeds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>marriage to princess/giantess</td>
<td>‘her’ sons attack their father</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The initial pair would be the Summer King (or fertility god) and the Winter King (or giant); when the latter is coerced into allowing his daughter’s marriage, she replaces him (the ‘first modifier’). Because this is a marriage of opposites, the Summer King leaves his wife. This is unjust, especially when he denies her the necklace which is her mundr ‘bridal gift’ – and yet the necklace is the essential symbol of his function, and he cannot afford to give it away to his symbolic opposite.69 His injustice provokes her or her sons to destroy him. But this death unites him sexually with Hel, who is equivalent to the Winter Princess, and this is symbolised by the balanced symbols of fire or decay (representing death) and water (the source of new life) that are attached to his death or funeral. This is the final resolution that allows ‘his’ son to inherit his kingdom and responsibilities, perhaps through controlling his father’s burial site and the water next to it. However, the son’s inheritance includes the responsibility to repeat the cycle.

The pattern can be read in terms of crop fertility, or of a ‘political’ justification of patriarchal rule by a restricted dynastic group,70 but it may

69 For a gold ring as an essential symbol of kingship at the period when Ynglingatal was composed, cf. Symeon of Durham’s account of the accession of Guthred, second Norse king of York, c. 883: posit in brachio ejus dextro armilla in regnum constituatur ‘let him be installed as king with the ring placed on his right arm’ (Historia Ecclesiae Dunelmensis II, 1:3, ed. I., 68–9; tr. 48).

70 For ‘sacral kingship’ and crop fertility, see MRN 1:90–5 and (with suitable caution) McTurk (1975–6) and Lönnroth. For the marriages of the Vanir as reflections of a social
also have held a psychological significance. The head of a Norse family group was likely to see his wife to some extent as an outsider, since she had grown up as a member of a different social group and remained traditionally and legally more closely committed to her father and brothers than to her husband. In their sexuality together, he was likely to define himself in terms of his function as the Summer King, and therefore she would automatically become the Winter Princess or nature-related giantess. The climax of their sexuality together involved an exit of life-force from his body into hers. He desired this physically, and in Lacanian terms it validated him through her desire for him. Biologically, too, it furthered his ambition to beget a son like himself. But what if that son turned out to be ‘hers’, an alien threat, born to destroy him and take away his inheritance? This is the nightmare imagined when Visburn’s ‘wintry’ sons burn him in his hall, or the daughters of Hadingus and Helgi devote themselves to alien husbands and conspire with them to destroy their fathers. And even if the king’s son was ‘his’, the birth of his successor proved the inevitability of his own death. He might therefore identify his mate as the agent of his death, particularly if she desired him sexually (i.e. was eager to produce the children who would destroy or succeed him). This may explain why the Winter Princess sometimes causes the protagonist’s death through desiring him (see, for example, Ynglinga saga ch. 13), and why Ynglingatal describes the deaths of kings in terms of the sexual satisfaction which Hel gains from them.

That this kind of thinking was possible can be seen from the evident suspicion of daughters in Helga þáttur, and from other medieval sources that show a Kronos-like fear of being supplanted by one’s sons. One function of this pattern may have been to reconcile aristocratic young men to the balance between dynastic success and personal mortality. An older man might ask himself whether his sons would be, like Visburn, ‘true sons’, heirs...
to his own being, or his wife’s ‘wintry’ sons, eager to see him dead and to replace him with their own alien natures. Of course, the father’s resentment against his wife for bearing the son who will replace him was morally unacceptable, both to society and to the conscious ethics of the father himself. This may be why the Summer King is usually seen as morally ambivalent. This is rationalised in various ways (Njörðr’s lack of sexual dignity, Freyr’s foolish lust, the injustice to their wives of Visburr and Agni, Dagr’s excessive vengeance for a sparrow, Frotho’s encouragement of his licentious court, Helgi’s sexual revenge and disregard for a tabu). Such variety suggests an underlying rationale that cannot be consciously acknowledged.

And what of his daughters? Might an older man sometimes have seen himself (or his Jungian ‘Shadow’) as the Winter King, antagonist rather than protagonist? This would be an uncomfortable perception, and we see it only rarely, but it is undeniably present in Hrólfs saga kraka, and some of the other hints of it must be ancient. These include Gerðr’s father Gymir, who was evidently once a sea-deity like the Vanir themselves, and the name of Snjófríðr’s father, Svási: sváss usually means ‘beloved’, ‘benevolent’, ‘delicious’, but it derives from the same root as Latin suus ‘one’s own’ and Old English swæs ‘one’s own’, ‘delightful’. If it retained a trace of the meaning ‘himself’, protagonist and antagonist would become, in a sense, one and the same.

It seems that these stories may be primarily about human aristocrats and only secondarily about gods. The same is true of the myth pattern associated with the female fertility deity, which I shall consider next.

73 LP 550.
74 Bosworth and Toller (1898), 942.
CHAPTER SIX

The Goddess and Her Lover

Æ trúði Óttarr á ásynior.
‘Óttarr always trusted in goddesses.’

Hyndluljóð 10,7–8

When we turn to myths associated with goddesses of the Vanir type, the male protagonist is almost unavoidably a human ruler. Simple inversion of the god’s marriage with a giantess would have been intolerable, since it would have implied the subjection of a divine wife to a giant husband and her removal to a frozen, infertile giant world. This would have been to give away the principle of fertility to the forces of chaos; it is a constant desire of the giants, but one which the gods must at all costs resist (see Chapter 1, and as Clunies Ross’s idea of ‘negative reciprocity’, Chapter 2).

1. Þorgerðr Hõlgabrúðr

The role of priest to the goddess was probably the hereditary right of successive rulers, and this may provide an explanation for the use of gubber (see Chapter 4). One goddess whose cult flourished in western Norway and southern Iceland in the tenth century is Þorgerðr Hõlgabrúðr, who is mentioned in a variety of prose sources.1

According to Skáldskaparmál, she was the daughter of Hõlgi, after whom Hálogaland was named; they both received sacrifice, and Hõlgi’s mound was made of alternate layers of gold and silver (which were sacrificial offerings) and of earth and stone. A verse is then cited in which Skúli Þorsteinsson (c. 1000) calls gold and silver Hõlga haugþõk ‘thatch of Hõlgi’s mound’.2 This sounds like a mythicised account of the use of gubber as

2 Kock I, 145, describing the plunder taken after a battle. The gold-kenning in the
offerings. There may be another allusion to Þorgerðr in Tindr Hallkelsson’s Hákonardrápa, where Hákon’s battle with the Jómsvíkingar (c. 986) is said to be ‘not as if the beautiful gims Gerðr (“jewel’s Gerðr”) made a bed for the jarl in her arms’; however, this may be no more than a peculiarly apt woman-kenning.

In Njáls saga Víga-Hrappr enters the temple owned by Hákon jarl while the earl is away, strips the idols of Þórr, Þorgerðr and her sister Irpa, plunders their gold rings and Þorgerðr’s headdress, and sets the temple on fire. When the jarl returns, he says that the man who has done this will never get to Valhöll; he goes off by himself, falls on his knees and covers his eyes. When he returns he can show them Hrappr’s hiding place, but Hrappr is so fleet of foot that he escapes.

In Harðar saga, Grímkell (a relative of Hákon jarl) goes to the temple of Þorgerðr hórgabrúðr to pray for the success of his daughter Þorbjõrg’s forthcoming marriage, but finds the gods preparing to leave. When he asks where they intend to take their good luck, Þorgerðr replies that it will certainly not be to Grímkell’s son Hórr, who has plundered a gold ring from the grave-mound of her brother Sóti (cf. ch. 15 of the saga). She would rather transfer her good luck to Þorbjõrg, but there is such a great light over her that Þorgerðr fears it may separate them; Grímkell himself will not live long. Grímkell burns the temple and its idols, saying they will not make any more predictions of disaster about him. At dinner that evening he suddenly falls dead.

In Ketils saga hángs, Ketill encounters a troll-woman, who tells him that she is going to an assembly of trolls at which one of the major figures will be Þorgerðr hórgatröll. The troll-woman will have nothing to do with Ketill since he killed the giant Kaldraði (cf. ch. 2 of the saga), and she wades out into the sea. This may be thematically related to the preceding episode (based largely on verse), in which Ketill confronted a giantess called Forað ‘Danger’ and thwarted her intention of marrying an unnamed jarl. Its portrayal of the goddess as a troll may suggest a viewpoint influenced by Christianity.

Þorgerðr appears in four episodes in Flateyjarbók as the patroness of the devotedly heathen Hákon jarl (killed in 995):

1. Hákon’s friend Sigmundr wants to go to the Faroes to avenge his father (ch. 114, and Fareynga saga ch. 23). He trusts only in his own power following stanza is Freyju tyr ‘Freyja’s tears’.

3 Skafla B. 136; ÍF 26, 281–2.
4 Grímkell’s mother was Hákon’s first cousin (ÍF 13, 51, note 1); the supposed date of this episode is c. 970 (ÍF 13, Ínngangur xliv).
5 Although this looks like an omen that Þorbjorg will convert to Christianity, this does not happen; on the contrary, her great success is to instigate a successful vengeance for her brother Hórr.
and strength, but Hákon persuades him to seek help from Þorgerðr Hǫrðabráuðr. They go to a magnificent house in a forest clearing; its carvings are inlaid with gold and silver, and it has many glass windows and idols, but chiefly a splendidly adorned female figure. The jarl prostrates himself, and they make an offering of silver to her. Hákon says that if their gift has been accepted, he will be able to take the ring from her hand — but when he tries to do so, it is as if the idol clenches her fist. The jarl tearfully prostrates himself again. This time Þorgerðr releases the ring, and Hákon gives it to Sigmundr.

2. Hákon faces an attack from the Jómsvíkingar (chs. 154–5,8 and chs. 32–4 of Jómsvíkinga saga).10 During a lull in the battle, which is going badly for him, Hákon goes to a clearing on a wooded island and prays to Þorgerðr Hǫrðabráuðr for help. He offers various sacrifices, including the life of anyone except himself or his two adult sons; she finally demands his seven-year-old son Erlingr, and the jarl has the boy killed. When the battle resumes, a sudden blizzard from the north drives into the faces of the Jómsvíkingar, and Þorgerðr appears in the jarl’s army as a flagdr ‘ogress’ shooting arrows from each finger. When the snowstorm abates, Hákon renews his prayers; it resumes, and Irpa is now seen alongside her sister. At last Hákon’s enemy Sigvaldi flees. Jómsvíkinga saga adds that after the battle, Hákon’s men weighed some of the hailstones (haglkornin) to determine the greatness of Þorgerðr and Irpa, and one of them weighed an ounce.

3. Þorleifr Ásgeirsson jarlskáld has recited a magically damaging poem against Hákon in his own hall (ch. 173,11 and þorleifs þáttr jarlskálds ch.712). Hákon consults Þorgerðr Hǫrðabráuðr and Irpa, and then makes a wooden figure out of driftwood. He kills a man, puts his heart into the wooden man, clothes it and calls it þorgarðr. He and the sisters then bring þorgarðr to life by magic, equip him with Hǫrgi’s halberd, and send him off to Iceland to kill Þorleifr. Mortally wounded, Þorleifr strikes at þorgarðr with his sword, and the magically created man sinks head-first into the earth.

4. After Hákon’s death, King Óláfr Tryggvason finds þorgerðr Hǫrðabráuðr in her house in the forest, removes her gold, silver and fine clothing, and drags the idol behind his horse (ch. 326). Þ He then asks whether any of his men wants to buy a wife. One of them asks the idol why she is here, deprived of the fine array she had when Hákon jarl loved her. The king asks
Whether he has any love for this woman himself, and the man prudently replies that he was speaking to the idol in scorn. King Óláfr then has Þorgerðr dressed and placed in a high seat, but is pleased to see that none of them offers her reverence or respect. Then he has the idol stripped again, breaks it to pieces with his club, and has it burnt, along with an image of Freyr which he has removed from another temple.

Most of these sources are late, the two late-tenth-century verses are both enigmatic in content, and the purpose-built ‘temples’ described in some of these stories are historically improbable. However, other features look convincing. Þorgerðr has aspects of both goddess and troll-woman (for the association of -gerðr names with giantesses, see Chapter 5). The name of her father is probably a later invention, made up to explain the origin of the name Hálogaland. Holgabrúðr probably means ‘bride of the (rulers of) Hálogaland’, and Hórdabrúðr similarly ‘bride of the (rulers of) Hórdaland’. Hórgabrúðr may mean ‘bride of the heathen shrines’, and holdabrúðr either ‘bride of the people of Holde’ or ‘bride of noblemen’. This variation of stories and names suggests that traditions about Þorgerðr were widespread, and that she was venerated in more than one area. Hákon jarl, who belonged to the family of the Háleygjar, probably called her Holgabrúðr.

These stories lie on the border between description of ritual and myth-narrative, but they present a consistent picture:

1. A ruler’s power depends on the favour of a goddess who is his ‘bride’.
2. She has a ‘house’ in a forest clearing, which may be on an island.
3. She must be placated (and perhaps sexually ‘bought’) with offerings of gold and silver.
4. She may intervene in battle or private revenge on behalf of her protégé.
5. Her sister Irpa ‘the Swarthy’ may fight alongside her. Þorgerðr may be seen as either goddess or troll-woman, but Irpa only as the latter.
6. Þorgerðr is capricious. If she withdraws her favour, her protégé will die unless she accepts a human sacrifice as substitute for him.
7. She may have been regarded as the mistress of successive rulers. This would explain why she demands the life of Hákon’s son (Jómsvíkinga saga, Flateyjarbók), and specifically rejects Grimkell’s son (Harðar saga). It also seems possible that Ketill hœngr’s troll-woman ‘foster-mother’ was assumed to be Irpa.

15 Storm, Jómsvikinga saga, ed. 51–2.
16 Cf. jarpr ‘swarthy’, Old English eorp (used of dark-skinned peoples), and the personal name Erpr, applied to sons of foreign fathers, for example, in Atlakviða 38, Hamðismál 14, 28 (Dronke (1969), 11, 164, 167 and note on p. 71).
17 Motz (1993a), 76–8 assumes that Þorgerðr was worshipped as a giantess. This seems unlikely, but it was probably not only Christian prejudice that caused her to be called a troll, since the name-element -gerðr is usually associated with giantesses (see Chapter 5).
8. In several cases Þorgerðr or her temple is attacked with fire. This may reflect Christian disapproval of her cult, but in most cases the attackers are also heathen.

In some ways, Þorgerðr resembles Nerthus: she has no waggon, but her shrine is in a clearing in the woods (perhaps on an island), and she receives human sacrifice. Like the Vanir in general, she may be associated with the sea (Ketils saga hœngs). She is greedy for gold, and prepared to prostitute herself for it (cf. Freyja in Sørla þáttr ch. 1). She and Irpa employ battle-magic (cf. the Vanir in Völuspá 24,7–8). Her blizzard in the Jómsvíkingar battle resembles the snowstorm in Gunnars þáttr helmings, and there may be an ironic parallel with the function of the Vanir as gods of the corn in the weighing of her haglkorn (literally 'hail-corn'). It may even be relevant that her favourite, Hákon jarl, dies in a pig-sty, for Freyja is also called Sýr ‘Sow’ and has a boar as her sacred animal (see Hyndluljóð, discussed below).

Þorgerðr is never actually called a goddess. To her devotees she is the brúðr ‘bride’ of a succession of rulers, while her heathen opponents call her a flagð ‘hag’. To the Christian King Óláfr Tryggvason she is mocked as a konan ‘woman’ but is in fact only a likneskja ‘image’. She is not explicitly said to be beautiful, but she is tall (Njáls saga) and splendidly dressed (Flateyjarbók chs. 114, 326), and she and Irpa were probably of contrasting appearance. Irpa looks like a circumlocution for a figure whom it was unlucky to name, perhaps a ‘dark’ aspect of the goddess herself, or an image of Hel. The two may even have seemed synonymous, just as the predatory Winter Princess who destroys the Vanir-derived king in Ynglinga saga tends, in the corresponding stanzas of Ynglingatal, to merge with the image of Hel deriving sexual pleasure from him.

2. Freyja in Hyndluljóð

The eddic poem Hyndluljóð, preserved only in Flateyjarbók, consists of a narrative framework (1–10 and 45–50) surrounding two internal sections, each with its own sporadic refrain. The first of these (11–28) links the protagonist, Óttarr, to the great families of heroic legend; the second (29–44, sometimes called ‘the shorter Völuspá’), concentrates mainly on the descent of gods from giants. The three parts are usually thought to have

18 FSN II, 97–8.
19 For the sources on Hákon’s death, see Hamer. He analyses it as a Christian allegory of Hákon’s unrepented lechery and apostasy, but Hákon’s lecherous behaviour may also have been associated with his devotion to Þorgerðr; further see Chadwick (1950), 407–12.
21 The name comes from Gylfaginning ch. 5 (ed. 10; tr. 10), where st. 33 is quoted; it is usually assumed to apply only to st. 29–44, but see below.
separate origins, but there is no real evidence for this, and I shall consider it as a single poem.  

_Hyndluljóð_ may be a very late poem. Some critics maintain that its purpose was to glorify a noble family and assert their óðal-right (ancestral land-patrimony); that a fanciful mythical framework was later placed round its genealogical material; and that this in turn attracted the interpolation of ‘the Shorter _Völuspá_.’ Gurevich points out that the statement of Óttarr’s paternal descent through five male ancestors in st. 12 satisfies the requirement for the demonstration of óðal right in the West Norwegian law code _Gulatingslov_. Óttarr’s more remote ancestry consists of legendary connections with the best families in this world; as a giantess, Hyndla wishes to see the disruption of Míögarðr and is therefore hostile to Óttarr’s claim. Otherwise, Gurevich ignores the mythological sections.

The poem was clearly composed by someone who knew the law of óðal-right, but it hardly seems to glorify Óttarr’s family. Hyndla’s repeated address to Óttarr as _inn heimosci_ ‘the foolish’ and her well-founded accusations of deceit and lustfulness against Freyja relate the poem to the genre of _senna_’ abuse contest’, whose conventions allow unfair abuse but not actual lies. These accusations make it difficult to see how it would enhance the honour of Óttarr’s family to derive their óðal right from Freyja’s help. If the poem is a later medieval construct with no genuine basis in traditional myth, Óttarr must be regarded as a foolish idolator and his goddess as morally disgraceful.

However, if the mythological framework of _Hyndluljóð_ has some genuine basis in ancient tradition, its three characters become analogous to Þorgerðr Holgabrúðr, Irpa and Hákon jarl. The corresponding points are as follows:

1. Óttarr relies on his relationship with Freyja to assert his óðal right, but also needs the help of Hyndla.
2. He has made a shrine (hôrgr) for Freyja, who might therefore, like Þorgerðr, be called a _hôrgarbrúðr_ ‘shrine-bride’.
3. He is not said to have offered gold to Freyja, but she calls him _scati inn ungi_ ‘the generous young prince’ (9,6) and says that he has made a shrine for her, whose stones have now become glass (10). In Old Norse verse glass is always associated with precious things: a crystal cup (_Hymiskviða_ 29,4); gold ( _Sigdrífumál_ 17,1); a gold-hoarding dragon and the bright sun in the

---


23 Similarly, Fleck sees Óttarr as the younger of two brothers who are disputing the election to sacral kingship. Gering suggests that _Hyndluljóð_ was composed to honour Óttarr byrtingr, a noble supporter of King Sigurðr Jorsalafari (reigned 1103–30). All these approaches concentrate on the genealogical content, and none of them considers whether the framework would contribute to the poem’s supposed laudatory purpose.

sky (Málshátakvæði 27,1–3);\textsuperscript{25} in Lilja 33,3 and \textsuperscript{5} it is used as a comparison for the birth of Christ from a pure maiden.\textsuperscript{27} The conceit of stones transformed to jewel-like glass by sacrificial fire hints at the love of precious things that is characteristic of both Freyja and Þorgerðr, and the implication is that Freyja’s patronage and sexual favours can be bought.

4. Freyja intervenes on Óttarr’s behalf just as Þorgerðr does for Hákon, although her magic seems to be defensive, protecting herself and him from an attack by fire and negating Hyndla’s attempt to poison him.

5. Freyja begins by addressing the giantess as ‘sister Hyndla’ (1,3), and this may be more than figurative. Hyndla means ‘Bitch’, which may remind us of Hjalti Skeggjason’s couplet in Íslendingabók ch. 7:\textsuperscript{28} 

\begin{quote}
Vil ek eigi goð geyja, 
grey þykkim mér Freyja.
\end{quote}

‘I don’t want to bark at the gods (but) Freyja would seem a bitch to me.’

Freyja is also associated with other lustful female animals (sow, nanny goat, cat), so this insult probably carried a specific mythological reference. In that case, Hyndla may be the ‘dark sister’ or alter ego of Freyja just as Irpa is of Þorgerðr.

6. There are hints that Freyja may in future bring about Óttarr’s death. Hyndla says that Freyja has ver þinn i valsinni ‘your lover on the way of the slain’ (6,5–6; in Grimnismál 14 Freyja is said to take half the slain each day). Freyja protests that Óttarr is actually her gold-bristled boar Hildisvíni ‘battle swine’ or Gullinbursti ‘Golden Bristle’, and this probably claims a sacred function for him, for she herself has the by-name Sýr ‘Sow’,\textsuperscript{29} and Freyr also has a sacred boar called Gullinbursti.\textsuperscript{30} But Freyja claims that her boar has been ‘made’ by the dwarfs Dáinn ‘the Dead’ and Nabbi ‘Mound’ (7,5–10), and this may admit the partial truth of Hyndla’s warning: perhaps Freyja will claim Óttarr when he is slain.

7. Freyja is not explicitly a dynastic mistress to Óttarr’s family, but her concern to enable him to establish his óðal right by getting her ‘dark sister’ to list his paternal ancestors may point indirectly to this function.

\textsuperscript{25} Kock II, 77.
\textsuperscript{26} Kock II, 217.
\textsuperscript{27} Other interpretations lack conviction, for example, LP 188: ‘by being reddened with blood the stones have become shining red in appearance, like glass beakers’; SG III, 373, Lafarge and Tucker 87 and Larrington (1996), 296: ‘Óttarr made such frequent sacrifices that the stones became glazed’. But frequent sacrificial fires would not necessarily vitrify the stones; that would require an extremely high temperature on one occasion.
\textsuperscript{28} ÍF 1, 15.
\textsuperscript{29} IF 1, 15.
\textsuperscript{30} LP 557.

\begin{quote}
Gylfaginning ch. 49 (ed. 47; tr. 50); Skáldsópur mál ch. 7 (ed. I, 18; tr. 75).
\end{quote}
8. Most editors assume that Freyja extorts the ale of memory from Hyndla by the threat of fire, but according to the manuscript, it is Hyndla who menaces Freyja with fire (48–9). Then she sneers: verða flestir fjörlausn þola ‘most people manage to put up with the price of saving their lives’ (49,3–4). Her price for sparing the goddess from the fire seems to be that Freyja must give the beer to Óttarr knowing it has been poisoned. To save her own life, she must collude in the murder of her lover, and thereby prove the truth of Hyndla’s sneer that she feels only lust for him. This raises suspense just before the final stanza of the poem: will Freyja reveal her worthless nature by betraying Óttarr? She takes the beer – but then practises protective magic on it and announces that the curse of the ‘giant’s bride’ will have no effect: Óttarr will drink the ale of memory and derive only good from it. But as in most competing magical charms, it remains likely that both good and bad predictions will eventually come to pass; in good traditional storytelling, knowledge and success have a price.

Two other questions also arise from this poem: since Hyndla is not fooled by Freyja’s flattery, why does she give Óttarr the information he needs? And why does Freyja need Hyndla, after the prophecy, to supply the ‘ale of memory’ to Óttarr?

The first question can be answered if we assume that Hyndla and Freyja are rivals for Óttarr’s favour. This would explain Hyndla’s instant hostility to Freyja, and her readiness to tell Óttarr his ancestry (ignoring Freyja while she does so). She calls him Óttarr heimsci ‘Óttarr the foolish’ because he prefers the sexually attractive but ignorant Freyja to the giantess who possesses the information he needs. The idea that Óttarr is desired by the ‘dark sister’ as well as by Freyja is reminiscent of the sexual pleasure Hel derives from some of the Ynglingar in Ynglingatal. Hyndla is not explicitly dead or a death goddess, but she lies sleeping in a cave (1,1–4), wishes to go back to sleep (46,2) and tries to contrive Óttarr’s death with poisoned beer (49,5–8).

This assumption of rivalry also dramatises the relationship between the two female characters. There is an entertaining contrast between Hyndla’s crude but forthright speech and Freyja’s duplicity, genteelly concealed lust and preoccupation with precious offerings. But Freyja is not herself the keeper either of the information Óttarr needs or of the minnisól, the ale of memory that will enable him to remember it. The closing framework must therefore begin with her demand for the ale on his behalf (45). This recalls the minnisveig which Sigrdrífa gives to Sigurðr (Sigrdrífumál, prose after st. 2; see Chapter 13). On one level it is a magic potion; on another it may be a

31 Cf. also the traditional ‘Wooing Ceremony’ play from the English Danelaw, where the protagonist (known as ‘the Fool’), is desired both by the Lady (the literal meaning of Freyja) and by the hag, and is accused of always wanting a drink; see Helm 10–19.
minni, a toast drunk to one or more deities, to Hyndla, or to Óttarr himself?

This last suggestion may forge a subliminal link with 46,1–2, where Hyndla says that she wants to sleep, like a völva raised from the dead and forced to reveal hidden information (cf. *Völsóp* 66,8; *Balds draumar* 5). But the usual sombre courtesy on such occasions (see, for example, *Balds draumar* 13,1–4) is here replaced with a scathing attack by Hyndla on the sexual behaviour of her eðlvina ‘noble friend’ (sarcastically echoing Freyja’s mín vina ‘my friend’, 1,2). She repeats that Freyja leaps about at night like Heiðrún going among the billygoats. She then recalls Freyja’s passionate pursuit of Óðr, during which she wept for his absence and went among unknown peoples searching for him). Hyndla doubtless intends to apply to Freyja’s conduct the ordinary prose sense of the adjective óðr – ‘mad’, but óðr is also a noun meaning ‘intellect’, and this suggestion of a love that is not pure lust may begin to turn our sympathies in Freyja’s favour.

Hyndla’s attack with fire and her attempt to force Freyja to collude in the murder of Óttarr finally unmask her as the attempted death-bringer. Her motive may be to gain Óttarr for herself by contriving that he dies (but not in battle), or at least to deny him to Freyja if she cannot have him herself. In either case, she is thwarted by the power of the goddess to protect her worshipper.

3. *Gullveig in Völsóp*

*Hyndluljóð* is obviously indebted to *Völsóp*, but perhaps its poet understood *Völsóp* better than has usually been realised, and correctly saw in its frame situation a modified version of the myth pattern which he himself used in a more conventional form in the encounter between Freyja and Hyndla.

*Gullveig* is mentioned only in *Völsóp* 21, where she is attacked with spears, repeatedly burned in Óðinn’s hall, and yet still lives. She seems to be one of the Vanir, since this sequence of events is collectively referred to as the first war in the world (i.e. that between the Æsir and the Vanir). *Völsóp* 22 has usually been taken as stating that Gullveig is reborn as a

---

32 See CV 429.
33 Cf. *Gylfaginning* ch. 35 (ed. 29, tr. 19–30).
34 Some of their common features seem too specific to be explained except as borrowings. Both use the name Heiðr for a prophetess of giant origins (*Hyndluljóð* 12,5–33,2, *Völsóp* 2,22). The nine mothers of Heimdallr are mentioned in *Völsóp* (1,3–4, 2,6) and listed in *Hyndluljóð* (35, 37). Fenrir is the offspring of Loki and Angrboða (*Hyndluljóð* 40,1–2, *Völsóp* 40). Loki is brother of Æialeipti/Æileistr (*Hyndluljóð* 40,7–8, *Völsóp* 51,7–8). There will be fierce weather before Ragnarök, and the sea will overwhelm the land (*Hyndluljóð* 42,1–6, *Völsóp* 45,9–10, 57,2). An unnamed mighty one will appear after Ragnarök (*Hyndluljóð* 44, *Völsóp* 65).
volva called Heiðr, who practises seiðr and was always the joy of an evil brúðr (here meaning primarily ‘woman’). Gullveig is then interpreted as ‘the intoxicating greed for gold’ and Heiðr as derived from the adjective heiðr ‘bright’ or more probably the neuter noun heið ‘brightness (of the sky)’. But this interpretation cannot be correct. Veig sometimes means ‘strong drink’, but never the intoxication produced by it; it is more often used as a second element in female names and woman-kennings, where it may mean simply ‘lady’. Gull- is a fairly common first element in names, but is only used literally, either of beings associated with the gods and supposedly made of or adorned with gold, or of human beings who are very rich. It never refers to any moral or psychological effect of gold, or to anything which is merely golden in colour, nor (except in translations of foreign Christian texts) is it used metaphorically. The most likely interpretation of Gullveig is therefore ‘the lady made of/adorned with gold’ – a description which would fit Freyja well, especially if she is the female figure on the gubber (see Chapter 4).

Heiðr is a common name for a volva, but probably does not mean ‘Brightness’. It is identical in form with the feminine noun heiðr ‘heath’, and is one of a group of single-element volva-names which refer either to wild nature or to concealment. No other volva with this name is ever transformed or reborn, nor is it necessary to suppose that Gullveig and Heiðr are the same character. The lines (22,1–4)

\begin{verbatim}
Heiði hana hétó, hvars til húsa kom,
volo velspá, vitti hon ganda
\end{verbatim}

‘They called her Heiðr wherever she came to dwellings, a prophetess foretelling good fortune, she laid spells on spirits’

may easily refer to her Heiðr wherever she came to dwellings, a prophetess foretelling good fortune, she laid spells on spirits.

If Heiðr is the narrator, there is no need for the awkward assumption of two or more volur in Völuspá, but it is necessary to explain why she brings herself into the account of the origins of the war between the Æsir and the Vanir. If she were a counterpart to Hyndla, the ‘dark sister’ who possesses the esoteric information that the protagonist needs but Freyja lacks, this

\[\text{For the evidence on Gullveig, see McKinnell (2001b), 404–7; for that on Heiðr, see 395–402. Hermann Fálsisson (ed. 1994, 60–4) also identifies Heiðr with the narrator of the poem.}\]
would be explained. The wicked brúðr to whom she brings joy (by revealing her magic) would be Gullveig/Freyja, and the word brúðr also recalls Þorgerðr.36

It is even possible that the Völsespá poet intended a political allusion to Hákon jarl’s sexual behaviour. Later in the poem, the human beings punished in the grievous currents at Náströnd (‘Corpse-shores’) are oath-breakers, murderers and seducers of other men’s wives (Völsespá 39.1–6), and the gods seem here to be punishing men for the sins of which they themselves are guilty. Their oathbreaking and murder are clear in the story of the Giant Builder (25–6), but there is nothing to associate them with the seduction of married women unless it is their acceptance of Freyja after the war with the Vanir. Hákon jarl, however, was notorious for abducting the wives and daughters of his most important followers and having sex with them for a week or two before sending them home again.37 It seems likely, as Richard North has suggested,38 that this promiscuity was ‘sacred’, linked to Hákon’s worship of Þorgerðr, and that in it he saw himself passing on her gift of fertility, both to the land itself and to human women. If Gullveig/Freyja was a goddess of the same type as Þorgerðr, the acceptance of Freyja by the Æsir may implicate them in the seductions of married women that were part of the cult of the promiscuous goddess.

Like Þorgerðr and Freyja, Gullveig is unsuccessfully attacked with fire, and like Þorgerðr and Irpa, she and the other Vanir gain victory by battle-magic (Völsespá 24.7–8). However, at this point the conventional pattern is transcended, for the protagonist who confronts Heiðr is not the human worshipper of Freyja/Gullveig, but the god in whose hall her burning took place and against whom her battle-magic was directed. This suggests that, as in many other respects, the Völsespá poet is being original here, creating a new kind of confrontation between völva and protagonist in which the latter tries to resist the morally debilitating influence of the goddess and faces the giantess without her help. (The same sub-pattern can also be seen in Baldrs draumar, which may have been influenced by Völsespá.) The conventional shape of the myth was probably more like that of Hyndluljóð.

4. Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar

Another echo of the pattern of the Goddess and her Lover can be seen in the three ‘Helgi’-lays in the Poetic Edda: Helgakviða Hundingsbana I and II, and Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar, which in the Codex Regius comes between them. The two Helgi’s have similar stories, and the prose links at the ends of Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar and Helgakviða Hundingsbana II complicate this

36 On poetic uses of brúðr, see McKinnell (2001b), 402–4.
37 On Hákon’s promiscuity and its links to fertility, see McKinnell (2001b), 412.
further by suggesting that both were reincarnated, along with their wives Sváva and Sigrún. The prose editor also adds after Helgakviða Hundingsbana II 4 that Sváva was reincarnated as Sigrún. In the prose at the end of Helgakviða Hundingsbana II, which is based on a lost poem called Károlióð, it is said that in his reincarnated form, Helgi was called Helgi Haddingiascati ‘Helgi, prince of the Haddingjar’. Apart from these two stories and the ‘rebirth’ of Gullveig in Völuspá 21, the idea of reincarnation seems to have been alien to Old Norse mythic thought, and this suggests that, like Hadingus (see Chapter 5), Helgi was originally a dynastic title rather than a personal name.

The Helgi-lays are probably all rather late, and Helgakviða Hundingsbana II may be composite (see Chapter 14), but they probably derive from the same ancient traditions that produced the story of King Helgi in Hrólfs saga kraka (see Chapter 5). If so, the tradition that Helgi Hundingsbani is a son of Sigmundr and thus one of the Völsungar is probably a recent development. All three lays are dominated by a love-relationship, and each protagonist needs the magical protection of his (partly supernatural) mistress. It seems likely that this story-type is derived from the myth of the goddess and her human lover rather than from the ‘divine incest’ of King Helgi and Yrsa.

The older version of this pattern is probably the one preserved in Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar. Its opening episode, the wooing of Helgi’s mother Sigrlinn, is largely made up of motifs that are also found in the patterns of the Summer King or the Goddess and her Lover (Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar 1–5). Helgi’s father, Hjörvarðr, has four beautiful wives (cf. the promiscuity of Hákon jarl and of Frotho’s court). He gains the fourth, Sigrlinn, after his emissary, Atli (cf. Skírnismál and Frotho’s emissary Westmarus) has his attention drawn to her pre-eminent beauty by a bird, which demands a sacrifice from him. Atli stipulates that the sacrifice must not include the lives of the king, his sons, or his wives (cf. Hákon jarl’s reservation of the lives of himself and his two adult sons when a sacrifice is required by Þorgerðr Hólgabrúðr). The bird agrees, and demands temples, shrines and gold-horned cattle, but agrees in return to make sure that Sigrlinn will willingly sleep in the king’s arms (cf. Þorgerðr’s temple and Freyja’s satisfaction at the shrine Óttarr has made for her). It is hard not to conclude that the bird is a disguised form of a goddess like Þorgerðr or Freyja (who is said in Brymskviða 3 to have a fjáðrhamr ‘a feather-skin’, which presumably makes her resemble a bird).

39 The manuscript reads -scaði ‘damager of the Haddingjar’, but the form with -skati appears in Flateyjarbók and elsewhere and makes better sense (SG III.2, 134; MRN 217–18).

40 See Fidjestøl (1999), 224, where the frequency of the expletive particle un/of is shown to be very low in all three poems.
Both Helgis are given their name (or title) by someone else: Helgi Hjörvarðsson remains nameless and speechless until a valkyrie (later revealed as Sváva) grants him both, together with a sword and herself as his mistress (*Helgakvida Hjörvarðssonar* 6–9). Hjörvarðr has won Sigrlinn despite an aggressive rival called Hróðmárr, who is later killed by Helgi and Atli in revenge for his killing of Sigrlinn’s father (*Helgakvida Hjörvarðssonar* 10–11 and following prose). This may correspond to Óttarr’s rivalry with Angantýr in *Hyndluljóð*, which similarly saves both the hero’s ðóð-ríght and the goddess whose shrine is attached to it from the unwanted attentions of his ambitious rival. Both Sváva and Helgi Hundingsbani’s Sigrún are said to protect their lovers in battle (*Helgakvida Hundingsbana I* 30, *Helgakvida Hjörvarðssonar* 26, 28), and are clearly supernatural in some way.

Helgi Hjörvarðsson now moors his ships in a fjord, where first Atli and then Helgi himself have an abuse contest with the giantess Hrímgerðr. Atli says that Hrímgerðr ought to be nine leagues underground with a fir tree growing out of her lap (i.e. she should be dead, *Helgakvida Hjörvarðssonar* 16, cf. Hel, Irpa and Hyndla in her cave), while she calls him a gelded horse (*Helgakvida Hjörvarðssonar* 20, like Óttarr, an animal which is ridden). She then addresses Helgi, demanding that as compensation for killing her father he should sleep with her for one night (*Helgakvida Hjörvarðssonar* 24, cf. Skáli’s demand for a husband from among the Æsir). When he refuses and says that her mate will be an ogre called Loðinn (‘Shaggy’, cf. the three-headed ogre imagined as Gerðr’s mate in *Skírnismál* 31), she resentfully remarks that he would rather have the girl who has been preventing her from destroying him and his men, and then describes her (*Helgakvida Hjörvarðssonar* 26, 28, cf. Hyndla’s jealousy of Freyja). Eventually, Helgi tells her that the sun has risen, and she is turned to stone (*Helgakvida Hjörvarðssonar* 29–30).

The hints of Óttarr’s future death in *Hyndluljóð* are explicitly played out in the stories of both Helgi’s; Helgi Hjörvarðsson is killed by Hróðmárr’s son Alfr. As he is dying, he tries to persuade his brúðr Sváva to become the wife or mistress of his brother Heðinn (*Helgakvida Hjörvarðssonar* 41). She protests that she will not willingly hold an unknown (= ‘strange’ or ‘not famous’?) man in her arms, but the closing implication seems to be that she may accept Heðinn after he has avenged his brother. The king is dead — long live the king!

Helgi Hundingsbani is more conventionally named and given a sword by his father Sigmundr (*Helgakvida Hundingsbana I* 7–8) — perhaps because of the common Norse feeling that it is demeaning to be indebted to a woman — but both naming and sword are still explicitly mentioned. Like Helgi Hjörvarðsson, he moors his ships in a bay (*Helgakvida Hundingsbana I* 31), where his emissary (in this case his brother Sinfjótli) has an abuse contest. Although this is an all-male contest against Höðbrodr’s brother Guðmundr, its contents still resemble those of the hero–giantess
confrontation. Sínfrøtti accuses Guðmundr of having been a *völtva* who desired sex with Sínfrøtti himself and gave birth to nine wolves as a consequence (Helgaskvida Hundingsbana I 37–9), while Guðmundr, like Hrímgerðr, alleges that Sínfrøtti has been castrated by giantesses (Helgaskvida Hundingsbana I 40). Again, the poet of *Helgaskvida Hundingsbana I* seems to have felt that it would have been demeaning to Sínfrøtti to bandy words with a woman, and in fact Helgi reproves him for exchanging useless words when he could be fighting (Helgaskvida Hundingsbana I 45). Guðmundr’s part in the *senna* looks more appropriate to a giantess than to a warrior.

Like his namesake’s father, Helgi Hundingsbani wins his mate despite his rival King Höðbroddr, whom he kills (Helgaskvida Hundingsbana II 25), and Helgi, too, is killed when Sigrún’s brother Dagr reluctantly avenges the death of his father. The name Dagr also appears among the Ynglingar (see Chapter 5).

In these legends, which are obviously related, the hero is provided with an emissary, as in *Skírnismál* and Saxo’s story of Frotho, but he is allowed to confront the giantess himself, rather than needing his divine mistress to speak for him, as in *Hyndluljóð*. All the same, he remains dependent on her protection, and in the end he will be killed and succeeded by a ‘reincarnated Helgi’, i.e. a successor to his title. That his mistress is also reincarnated (but with a different name each time), is probably a piece of naturalisation that took place when she was no longer regarded as a goddess. The problem of what she ought to do after the hero’s death was to become the focus of another, later pattern (see Chapter 14), but here it is enough to conclude that her origins are probably related to the goddesses I have considered earlier in this chapter.
CHAPTER SEVEN

The Völsa

1. The nature of the völsa

Ækki vældr hon þui siolf at hon er troll
‘She can’t help being a troll.’
Ældre Borgarthings-Christenret I, 16

The patterns considered in Chapters 5 and 6 often include a prophetess or magic-working woman. She may be the ally or sister of the Winter Princess (Hulð in Ynglinga saga, Irpa, Heiðr in Voluspá), or herself the princess (Hvit in Hrólf's saga kraka), or the opponent of the goddess (Hyndla, Hrímgerðr in Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar). Her role may seem secondary, but it is essential to the narrative. In this chapter I shall consider the typical features of the völsa figure, whether she is of naturalistic or mythic origin, and whether she can be associated with particular patterns of narrative.

Terms used for the völsa

The usual terms applied to the prophetess are völsa 'prophetess' (from völ 'staff') and seiðkona 'enchantress', but spákona 'prophesying woman' and visindakona 'wise woman' also appear; any of them may refer to the same woman.2

One might have expected a völsa to predict the future and a seiðkona to perform effective magic, but this distinction hardly emerges. Some women who are called völur also use effective magic,3 others make predictions but are not called völur.4 Family sagas often avoid the word, employing euphemisms such as kona ... frøð ok framsýn 'a wise woman who could see

---

1. NGLI, 351.
2. For example, Ólafs saga helga ch. 25 in Flatjardbók (ed. II, 98–9); Eiriks saga rauða ch. 4 (ÍF 4, 266–9); Ynglinga saga chs. 13–14 (ÍF 26, 28–31); Hrólf's saga kraka ch. 3 (FSN II, 9–11); Övor-Odds saga ch. 2 (FSN I, 286–9).
3. For example, Ynglinga saga ch. 14 (ÍF 26, 30–1); Kormáks saga ch. 22 (ÍF 8, 282–5; in a verse where the surrounding prose calls her a spákona); Gull-Bóris saga chs. 18–19 (ÍF 13, 220–2).
4. For example, Hyndhuljóð; Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar ch. 50 in Flatjardbók (ed. I, 81–2).
the future’; or nökkut fornfrøð ‘rather skilled in ancient things’. Alternatively, narrators may disavow responsibility for the information: þat töludu menn, at hon væri fjölkunnig ‘people reckoned that she was skilled in magic’.

The activities of the völla were evidently seen as disgraceful or dangerous, at least in the thirteenth century, and there is also a general tendency in family sagas to play down supernatural elements.

In legendary sources, by contrast, the völla is sometimes referred to in terms that imply non-human origins. Thus Hulð in Ynglingatal 3 is viða véttr ‘creature of spells’ and trollkund lýs grim-Hildr ‘the people’s troll-born woman of night’; Busla in Bósa saga ch. 5 is vánd vattna ‘evil creature’; and Heiðr in Hauks þáttir hábrókar is hin mikla troll ‘the great troll woman’.

The word völla in Old Norse verse usually has archaic and mythological connotations. It appears nine times in ‘mythological’ eddic poems, but only three times in ‘heroic’ verse, of which two are in fornaldarsögur. It also appears in three skaldic verses attributed to the tenth or early eleventh centuries, all associated with troll-women or giantesses.

Other words for magic-working women are even rarer. Seiðkona ‘enchantress’ does not appear in verse at all, and spákona and spánmar ‘prophetic woman/girl’ occur once each, both in allegedly tenth-century stanzas; the latter has legendary associations. The noun seidr ‘magic’ and the verb sída ‘to practise magic’ are also unusual. Seiðr appears six times: twice in its literal sense, and four times in kennings for ‘battle’. Two of these date from the twelfth century, but both look archaic: one echoes a stanza by Egill Skallagrímsson and the other is by the antiquarian Sturla Þórðarson.

5 Viga-Gláms saga ch. 12 (ÍF 9, 41).
6 Fóstbrœðra saga ch. 23 (ÍF 6, 242).
7 Fóstbrœðra saga ch. 9 (ÍF 6, 161).
8 ÍF 26, 29 and Skj I B 7.
9 FSN II, 473.
10 Flateyjarbók, ed. II, 69.
11 Baldrs draumar 4, 8, 10, 12, 13; Völuspá 22; Hávamál 87; Lokasenna 24; Hnúttljóð 33.
12 Helgakviða Hundingsbana I 37 (which belongs to the tradition of mythological saga, cf. Lokasenna 24); Orvar-Ódds saga ch. 32, st. 4 (FSN I, 391); Orms þáttir Störflissonar ch. 6, st. 2 (ÍF 13, 408).
13 In Kormák, lausavísa 48 an enchantment-working völla is associated with trolls (Skj I B 81 and ÍF 8, 284–5); anon. lausavísa 112 6 concerns a giantess (Skj I B 172); Holgarða-Refr’s travel verse 2 uses Gynnis völla as a kenning for the sea-god’s dress (or giantess) Rán (Kock I, 151).
14 Kormák, lausavísa 53 (Skj I B 82 and ÍF 8, 289–90); Þorarin’s málhöfingr, lausavísa 7 (Skj I B 107 and ÍF 4, 43), in a kenning for spears or arrows, which are said to ‘sing’; as Fróði is also named in this verse, there may be an implied reference to the völla’s prophetic verses against him (see Hröfs saga kraka ch. 3, FSNII, 7–11 and below).
15 Völuspá 22; Orms þáttir st. 2 (ÍF 13, 408).
16 Fjónis seiðr, Eiríkr víðjá, lausavísa 6 (Kock I, 105); sverða seiðr, Sturla Þórðarson, Hákonarþvötsla 12 (Kock II, 64); vigur seiðr, Egill Skallagrímsson, lausavísa 6 (Skj I B, 43) and Guthormr Helgason þókr, lausavísa (Kock II, 59).
The verb *síða* or *seiða* appears six times: twice in mythological eddic poems (*Völuspá* 22, *Lokasenna* 24), three times in supposedly tenth-century skaldic verses, and once in a verse attributed to a giantess in *Gríms saga loðinkinna* ch. 18. The last is a late archaism rather than genuinely ancient, but in general the vocabulary connected with *völur* seems to be associated with antiquity and with myth and legend.

**The *völva* and her magic**

There were two traditional methods by which a prophetess could establish control over spirits: to carry out a partially communal but exclusively female ritual called *seiðr*, or to ‘sit out’ (*sitja úti*) at night in order to raise and control the spirits of the dead. Fictive descriptions of *seiðr* are remarkably consistent. The *seiðkona* or *völva* is an itinerant who is invited to visit a householder and prophesy for his household. She must be lavishly entertained and paid with gifts. She may arrive accompanied by a group of helpers, or the women of the household may help her to achieve a trance through singing and/or drumming. The magic is performed on a high platform or mound. The aim of the *völva* is to gain control over spirits, who may be called *gandar*. In a chapter headed *De Finnis* ‘On the Lapps’, the *Historia Norvegiae* says that these were raised up by Saami magicians for the purpose of making predictions. However, this probably represents Norse beliefs about Saami magic rather than the reality of it, for the word *gandr* does not exist in the Saami language.

The trance involves a seizure in which the *völva* opens her mouth wide and gasps for breath (*Hrólfs saga kraka*, *Hauks þáttr hábrókar*). She may deliver her prophecies within the trance, in which case it is sometimes said that ‘a song came into her mouth’ from elsewhere. This is always in fornyrðislag metre; in it, she may refer to herself either in the first person (*Hrólfs saga kraka*, *Baldrs draumar*) or in both first and third persons (*Völuspá*, *Órvar-Odds saga*, *Bósa saga*). In other cases, the *völva* prophesies in response...
to questions when she has returned to her normal state (Eiriks saga rauda, Vatnsdeila saga).

Alternatively, the *völv* might raise the spirits of the dead by ‘sitting out’ at night at a crossroads, on a mound or in a cave.25 *Völuspá* reverses this: here it is the probably dead *völv* who ‘sits out’ in order to contact the living Óðinn. ‘Sitting out’ may also be implied in stories where the *völv* gains her prophetic knowledge at night (as in Orvar-Odds saga).

When *völur* are consulted in mythological and legendary sources, it is assumed that they are truthfully predicting an inevitable future. *Hrólfss saga kraka* does present a *völv* who tries to deny the truth of her own statements, but when King Fróði forces her to continue, she admits that the two rightful heirs will kill the king, adding: ‘unless they are quickly destroyed, and that won’t happen’. This raises momentary doubts about the reliability of the prophecy, only to dismiss them. Similarly, Orvar-Odds saga, Orms þáttr and Vatnsdeila saga use the protagonist’s determination to defeat the predictions as a way of emphasising their inevitability; and the *völv* often asserts that they will come true whether the subject likes it or not. Despite this, those who receive unwelcome prophecies often react as if the *völv* were responsible for what she predicts; perhaps the destined future was thought to become unalterable only when it was stated aloud.

The unanimity of the literary sources has often led critics to assume that *völur* were a familiar feature of early Icelandic society, but in contemporary sagas and lives of bishops we find no *völur* at all. Similarly, Sturlunga saga makes no reference to them (or to spákonur, seiðkonur or vísindakonur), and has only two episodes which might be argued to involve them. In Islendinga saga ch. 190 the dead Guðrún Gjúkadóttir (who is explicitly said to be heathen) appears in the dreams of the sixteen-year-old Jóreiðr to give information about the fates of important political figures; this is said to have happened in 1255.26 But Jóreiðr is not a prophetess, and the whole account is contained within a dream. In Sturlu saga ch. 7 the twelfth-century farmer Þóroðr Grettisson is said to have fathered a son on a gongukona ‘female vagrant’ called Þórdís ina lygna ‘Þórdís the Liar’—but she is not called a *völv*, and if she was one, her prophecy clearly commanded no respect.27

This impression of lack of familiarity is reinforced by several fornaldar-sogur which begin stories about *völur* by explaining what a *völv* was. In Norna-Gests þáttr ch. 11 they are said to have been invited to feasts and given gifts when they left in return for prophesying people’s lives. Orms
þáttir Stórólfssonar ch. 5\textsuperscript{29} says that they were itinerant women who prophesied people’s fates, the nature of the crops, and other things that people wanted to know.\textsuperscript{30} No two such passages share any detailed phrasing, and they are probably all textually independent of each other. Some writers may have found it advisable to distance themselves from such un-Christian practices by pretending that their audiences were more ignorant about völur than was in fact likely to be the case, but that would not explain the absence from contemporary sagas of völur or accusations that a woman is a völva. In Icelandic prose texts, völur seem to be a feature of the legendary or mythic past, not a social phenomenon in the present.

Norway presents more evidence for völur as a social reality. Most early Norwegian law-codes forbid seiðr, which they define as at segja spár ‘to speak prophecies’,\textsuperscript{31} or at fara med spásogum ‘to go about with prophetic stories’.\textsuperscript{32} People who seek prophecies are said to gera Finfarar ‘make a journey to the Saami’, fara at spyrja spa ‘go and ask for prophecies’, fara a Finmarkr at spyrja spadom ‘go to Finnmark to ask for prophecies’,\textsuperscript{33} or trua a Finna ‘to believe in the Saami’.\textsuperscript{34} Making and seeking prophecies are, like murder, suicide and malicious enchantment, crimes that cannot be compensated for financially. Those who heed such prophecies or provide the houses in which they are made are as culpable as those who make or initiate them. There are provisions for valid defences, including oaths and ordeals, which suggest that the practice actually existed in Norway; but apart from a reference to spáfarar in Hákonarbók 19,\textsuperscript{35} whose wording is derived from Norwegian sources, there are no similar prohibitions in Icelandic law.

Norwegian legal codes also prohibit ‘sitting out’ at vecia troll upp oc fremia heiðni með þri ‘to wake up trolls and perform heathen practices by that means’.\textsuperscript{36} This might include divination, but the few known cases all involve raising up ‘trolls’ to perform effective magic.\textsuperscript{37} Nor is it clear what is meant by ‘trolls’, for the same codes sometimes refer to magic-working women as themselves trolls or trylsk ‘trollish’.\textsuperscript{38} ‘Sitting out’ is another crime that cannot be financially compensated for. Apart from Hákonarbók,

\textsuperscript{29} ÍF 13,405.
\textsuperscript{30} Cf. Órvar-Odds saga ch. 2 (FSN I, 286); Vilmundar saga víðatan ch. 1 (ed. 140); McKinnell (2003), 110–12.
\textsuperscript{31} Ældre Gulathings-lov 28 (NGL I, 17).
\textsuperscript{32} Ældre Frostathingss-lov III.15 (NGL I, 152); Ældre Bjárkó-Ref 69 (NGL I, 318).
\textsuperscript{33} Ældre Borgarthings-Christenret II.25, III.22 (NGL I, 362, 372).
\textsuperscript{34} Ældre Elidsvatnings-Christenret 45 (NGL I, 389).
\textsuperscript{35} NGL I, 265.
\textsuperscript{36} Ældre Frostathingss-Lov V.16 (NGL I, 182); Ældre Borgarthings-Christenret II.25, III.22 (NGL I, 362, 372); Hákonarbók 19 (NGL I, 265).
\textsuperscript{37} Mitchell (2000); Mitchell (2003), 132–40.
\textsuperscript{38} Ældre Borgarthings-Christenret I.16 (NGL I, 351); Ældre Gulathings-Lov 13 (NGL I, 18).

Further, see Raudvere 31–41.
there are no references to it in Icelandic laws. In Hákonar saga herdubreids ch. 16, during Hákon’s conflict with King Ingi in 1161, his foster-mother is said to have procured a woman called Pórdís skeggja (‘the bearded’) to ‘sit out’ in order to discover how Hákon might be victorious. Snorri carefully adds that he does not know the truth of this matter, but the rumour shows that the practice was believed to be possible.

Seiðr is often associated with the Lapps or their territory (Vatnsdalasaga, Ynglingasaga ch. 13, Hauks þáttr), and it is sometimes suggested that most historical seiðkonur and þólfur were Saami women. Some traditional details of seiðr, notably the use of rhythmic drumming to induce a trance (cf. Lokasenna 24), are also found among the Saami; but other stories make the magic-worker Hebridean, Russian or Greenlandic. In Norway, individual Saami women probably took financial advantage of Norse beliefs about them, and may even have shared those beliefs. But the terms frinn ‘Lapp’ and jötunn ‘giant’ were sometimes almost interchangeable, and this suggests that the Saami, a mysterious people inhabiting the frozen north, were being used by the dominant Norse population as the physically present representatives of imaginary giants. In Iceland, it seems likely that the þólfur in family sagas are quasi-realistic versions of their mythological counterparts, rather than that the mythological and legendary þólfur are derived from real-life fortune-tellers.

2. The patterns of the þólf

The easiest way of categorising the many accounts of þólfur is according to the nature of those affected by their prophecies or magic; these are:

a. The unjust patriarch.
b. The angry young man.
c. The young protegé of the þólf.
d. The female opponent.
e. New-born infants.

The last two groups fall outside the scope of this book, but by comparing the stories that fall under each of the first three headings, it may be possible to decide whether they amount to coherent story patterns or not.

39 ÍF 28, 366.
41 See Laxdæla saga ch. 35 (ÍF 5, 95–100); Oddr Snorrason’s Saga Óláfs Tryggvasonar ch. 6 (ed. 20–1); Eiríks saga rauda ch. 4 (ÍF 4, 206, 410).
43 Stories of the þólf and her female opponent include Hyndluljóð (see Chapter 6); Helreið Brynhildar 1–4; Víga-Glúms saga ch. 12 (ÍF 9, 40–1); Laxdæla saga ch. 76 (ÍF 5, 223–4). Prophecies over new-born infants sometimes involve three normir ‘fates’ rather than a single þólfur; they include Norma-Gests þáttir ch. 11 (FSNI 1, 186–7); the story of Fridlevus and Ólavus, Saxo VI.iv.12 (ed. I, 150; tr. I, 169); Helgakeviða Hundingsbana I, 2–4 and the
The unjust patriarch

This group includes:
1. Ynglinga saga ch. 13 (and Ynglingatal 3, fornyrðislag narrative); 44
2. Ynglinga saga ch. 14 (and Ynglingatal 4, fornyrðislag narrative, though this does not mention the voxla); 45
3. Hrolfs saga kraka ch. 3 (including four short stanzas of fornyrðislag monologue); 46
4. Saxo, Gesta Danorum V. vii.1–2; 47
5. Bósa saga ch. 5 (including nine stanzas of fornyrðislag monologue). 48

Related to this group are the framework stories of:
6. Võluspå (stt. 2, 21–2, 28–30 and possibly 66);

This story type can be defined as follows (with major features in bold face):

The voxla (if named) has a single-element name connected with concealment, chaos or wild nature (Hulđ ‘Hidden’ in Ys; Heiðr ‘Heath’ in Vsp, Hrs – see Chapter 6; Busla, perhaps ‘the disordered’, 49 in Bs).

She may come from the far north (Ys), or from the worlds of the giants or the dead (Bdr, probably Vsp); she is hostile to the protagonist.

He is a patriarch, usually a king (a god in Vsp, Bdr) descended from the Vanir (Yt, Ys) or having a name associated with them (Frotho in Saxo, Fróði in Hrs, Hringr ‘Ring’ in Bs).

He commits an injustice. He breaks his promise to return to his wife (Ys ch. 13); denies her the gold necklace which is her bridal gift (Ys ch. 14); kills his brother, usurps the kingdom and seeks to kill his brother’s sons (Hrs); tries to exile his son and kill his son’s foster-brother (Bs); raises the dead (Bdr, Vsp). 50

This brings him into conflict with his two sons (Ys ch. 14), his nephews (Hrs), a son and his foster-brother (Bs), and the voxla takes their side against him. 51 She may be provoked by the patriarch’s injustice (Ys ch. 14, same story in Võlsunga saga ch. 8 (FSN I, 19; tr. Byock 47); Vilmundar saga víðutau ch. 1 (ed. 141)).

44 ÍF 26, 28–9; Ski I B 7.
45 ÍF 26, 30–1; Ski I B 7.
46 FSN II, 9–11.
48 FSN II, 472–5.
49 AEW 66 compares Modern Icelandic busl ‘disorder’, and translates ‘slut’; alternatively, it could derive from bysja ‘to gush’ (of water).
50 Saxo reacts against this, making frotho a conspicuous upholder of justice, probably because of the peace and prosperity associated with his reign. But Fróða þáttr and the debauchery of the young Frotho’s court in Saxo’s own account suggest that he distorted his sources, possibly for patriotic reasons.
51 In Saxo there is only one son, who becomes that of the matrona. In Võluspå and Baldrs draumar the protagonist is Óðinn; this rules out the conflict with his sons, which is
from lost verse). She may refer to herself in the fornyðislag other; in Hrs, rst and third persons (fi Ynglingatal from (Chapter and the corresponding demonisation of the enchantress. has changed herself into a sea-cow; this continues the idealisation of Frotho matrona him (Saxo). she does it in a hostile manner, Bs Vsp, or inspired by greed to act against him (Saxo).

A gold ring or necklace is involved in the quarrel with the sons (Ys ch. 14, Saxo), or it is the payment for the prophecy (Vsp), or for breaking off the prophecy (Hrs). In Bs the patriarch is called Hringr, and the quarrel involves two chests of gold. The ring probably originated as an attribute of the Vanir-descended king (see Chapter 4).

The volva directs a prophecy (Hrs, Vsp, Bdr) or curse (Ys chs. 13, 14, Bs) against the patriarch (and his family, Ys ch. 14). In Ys ch. 13 and Bs the curse is conditional — this will happen if the patriarch does not act as the volva wishes him to; in Hrs it will take effect unless the king seizes his nephews, but it is predicted that he will fail to do so. The curse or prophecy includes the patriarch’s death (Ys chs. 13, 14, Hrs, Bs, Vsp); Ys ch. 14 adds that members of the family will always kill each other; in Vsp, Bdr the patriarch’s son will also die. She may refer in verse to the reliability of what she says, always in fornyðislag (Bs, Vsp, Bdr; in Hrs this survives only in prose, but may come from lost verse). She may refer to herself in the first person (Hrs, Bdr) or in first and third persons (Bs, Vsp). Prophetic verse may seem to come to her from elsewhere (ok varð henni þá ljóð á munni), and she may refer to ‘seeing’ in a vatic way (Hrs, Vsp).

The patriarch dies, often by fire (killed by the curse and then cremated, Ys ch. 13; burned in his hall by his sons or nephews, Ys ch. 14, Hrs; in Bs ch. 10 he is threatened with having his hall burned, but is eventually killed in battle). In Vsp he will be killed by the wolf before the world is engulfed in fire; in Bdr there is a final reference to Ragnarök, which probably implies the engulfing fire).

Summary. The volva is typically a giantess (possibly dead), and the protagonist a god or a king descended from the Vanir. He commits an injustice against his two sons, and the volva takes their side against him; the

replaced with the pre-existing myth of conflict between his sons Höðr and Baldr (Volsung 31–3, Balds draumar 1, 7–11); cf. the same motif in Ynglinga saga chs. 20, 21 and Ynglingatal 11–13 (ÍF 26, 39–42; tr. 21–2).

52 In Saxo’s story the hostile prophecy is replaced with a physical attack after the matrona has changed herself into a sea-cow; this continues the idealisation of Frotho and the corresponding demonisation of the enchantress.

53 In Ynglinga saga ch. 15, the sacrifice of Dómaldi may be part of the curse on his father Visbjörn; cf. the curse on Björn by his stepmother Hvít in Hröðs saga kraka chs. 25–6 (see Chapter 6).

54 FSN II, 484.

55 Again, Saxo reacts against this: Frotho is gored to death, his courtiers try to conceal his death by parading his body in his waggon, but eventually bury him when the body rots. On the omission of the fire motif from Danish versions, see Chapter 5.
injustice and/or the magic involves a gold ring. The *völsa* prophesies against the ‘patriarch’, and her words, in fornyrðislag metre, come to her from elsewhere. The sons kill their father, possibly by burning.

This is clearly the myth of the Summer King told in another way, and one cannot summarise the two myths without using some of the same texts for both. The difference is that taking the *völsa*’s viewpoint tends to emphasise the injustice committed by the Summer King, and hence makes his character more problematic. In one sense, he must behave as he does, since the prosperity of his people depends on him and his ring; in another, his symbolic disavowal of his wife and ‘her’ sons brings down their just revenge on him. There can be no such thing as a completely just ruler. The essential features of this pattern – the confrontation between the king and the troll-like *völsa*, his death and destruction by fire – are already present in *Ynglingatal* 3–4. It is not explicitly stated there that Visburr’s sons kill him, but there is no evidence that the story known to Þjóðólfr differed from that told in *Ynglinga saga*. The main elements of this pattern therefore existed by c. 900.

*Völsapl* follows some features of this pattern, but contradicts others. Whether or not its narrator is called Heiðr (see Chapter 6), she was brought up (or brought forth) by giants and remembers the nine worlds of the dead (2). She is paid for her prophecy with *hringa ok men* ‘rings and necklace’ (29). She performs her magic in a trance (*leikin*, 22) and delivers her prophecy in fornyrðislag verse to a patriarchal figure. She ‘sees’ her predictions, as the *völar* called Heiðr do in *Hrólf’s saga* and *Órvar Odd’s saga*, and one of her refrains – *vituð er enn, eða hvat?* ‘do you know (enough) yet, or what?’ – is echoed in *Hyndluljóð* 17, 18, 34, 36, 39 (*viltu enn lengra?* ‘do you want still more?’) and in *Bósa saga* (*eða viltu þulu lengri?* ‘or do you want a longer list?’); the latter suggests that this feature is traditional, not just another borrowing from *Völsapl* into *Hyndluljóð*. The patriarch has three sons (by different mothers, so that they are half-brothers) who figure in the killing of Baldr and the revenge for it. The *völsa*’s prophecy includes the patriarch’s death (though not at his sons’ hands), and fire is involved, although it is not the actual cause of his death.

However, *Völsapl* does not include any hostility between the patriarch and his sons, and they do not kill him (though they do kill each other). The deity associated with the unjust patriarch is usually Freyr (Hringr in *Bósa saga* is an exception, since he is said to be the grandson of Óðinn, but his name belongs to the Freyr tradition). Most importantly, the patriarch’s death is not the main point of the prophecy or of the poem as a whole – the
Voluspá poet has a larger vision than that. The unjust patriarch pattern may have been used to construct the narrative framework of this poem, but the ends for which this has been done are strikingly new.

**The angry young man**

These narratives resemble those of the unjust patriarch, but are distinct from them. They include:

1. *Órvar-Odds saga* (*OOs*) ch. 2 (including three stanzas of fornyrðislag monologue).\(^{58}\) Later (ch. 32), the dying Öldr recites a separate poem of seventy-one stanzas, st. 4 of which acknowledges the truthfulness of the *volva’s* prophecy.\(^{59}\)

2. *Orns þáttir Stórólfssonar* (*Ob*) ch. 5 (including a stanza of fornyrðislag monologue).\(^{60}\) In chs. 6–7, in the second of eleven stanzas recited by Åsbjorn, he refers to the *volva* and his attempt to defy her prophecy.

3. *Vatnsdœla saga* (*Vs*) ch. 10,\(^ {61}\) and the same story in *Landnámabók* (*Lb*, Sturlubók ch. 179, Hauksbók ch. 145).\(^ {62}\)

Two other narratives look like Christian adaptations of the same pattern:

4. *Oddr Snorrason*, *Saga Óláfs Tryggvasonar* ch. 6,\(^ {63}\) and the same story in *Flateyjarbók*, *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* (*ÓsT*) ch. 50.\(^ {64}\)

5. *Flateyjarbók*, *Óláfs saga helga* (*ÓsH*) ch. 25.\(^ {65}\)

This story-type can be described as follows:

The *volva* is nameless, or is called Heiðr (*OOs*, *Vs*, and *Lb*), or is decrepit with age, has to be carried on a bed and is the patriarch’s mother (*Oddr*, *ÓsT*).\(^ {66}\)

The patriarch is the head of a household but not the protagonist, and the *volva* is not hostile to him (*OOs*, *Vs* and *Lb*, *Ob*); in Öldr and ÓsT he is King Valdimarr of Garðaríki (Russia); in ÓsH there is no patriarch figure.

He does nothing unjust except invite the *volva* to prophesy.

The protagonist is the foster-brother of the patriarch’s son(s) (*OOs*, *Ob*, *Vs*, *Lb*), or he becomes the patriarch’s foster-son (*Oddr*, *ÓsT*).

\(^ {58}\) FSN I, 286–9.

\(^ {59}\) FSN I, 391.

\(^ {60}\) IF 13, 404–6.

\(^ {61}\) IF 8, 28–30.

\(^ {62}\) IF 1, 217.

\(^ {63}\) Ed. 20–1.

\(^ {64}\) Ed. I, 81–2.

\(^ {65}\) Ed. II, 98–9.

\(^ {66}\) Similarly, the *volva* in *Eiríks saga rauða* is the last survivor of nine sisters; perhaps her effectiveness was thought to be increased by her proximity to the dead. This would also explain prophecies made by the dead (for example, Angantýr in *Hervararkviða* 32ff.), or by dying characters who have not been prophets previously (for example, Fáfnir in *Fifnismál* 11–22, Brynhildr in *Sigurdarkviða* in skamma 53–64).
The patriarch and the protagonist are on good terms, but the protagonist disapproves of the patriarch’s invitation to the völva (ÓOs, Oół, Vs, Lb; in Ódðr and ÓsT it is the patriarch’s wife who disapproves).

The völva is sometimes paid for her prophecies (ÓOs, Oół).

She prophesies that the patriarch will live successfully til eilif’s until old age’ (ÓOs, Oół) or that nothing will threaten his kingdom (Ódðr and ÓsT); she may also make a favourable prophecy for the hero’s foster-brother(s) (ÓOs, Vs).

She then insists on making her main prophecy about the protagonist, despite his reluctance to hear it (ÓOs, Vs, Lb. In Oół the whole episode concerns the foster-brother Æsbjorn, who temporarily becomes the protagonist. In ÓsH the prophecy is made with the permission but disapproval of St Óláfr, who is not present).

She announces that the prophecy will come true whether he likes it or not (ÓOs, Oół, Vs, Lb).

She predicts glory for him, but also his death. (He will die on this farm after three hundred years – ÓOs; he will die of old age provided he does not go to Nord-Mœrr, or further north in Norway – Oół; he will rule Norway gloriously, but briefly – Ódðr, ÓsT; he will make one slip of the tongue in his whole life, and will die that same day – ÓsH). 67

The völva speaks in fornyrðislag (ÓOs, Oół), asserts her own reliability, and uses both the first and the third person (ÓOs only). The verse comes to her from elsewhere; in ÓOs she claims to know all the fates of men in advance.

The protagonist is furious, and may threaten to attack the völva (ÓOs, Vs, Oół); in ÓOs he attacks her with a sproti ‘stick, sapling’. 68 In Vs Ingimundr would attack the völva were it not for his obligation to his foster-father. The protagonist takes measures to thwart the prediction (ÓOs, Vs; in Oół he tempts its fulfilment in an attempt to prove the völva wrong).

All the prophecies are fulfilled. After three hundred years, Ódðr is killed by the bite of a snake that crawls out of the skull of a horse which he has killed in an attempt to forestall the prophecy. Æsbjorn goes to Nord-Mœrr and is tortured to death by the giant Brüsi. Ingimundr and his foster-brothers settle in Iceland. 70 Óláfr Tryggvason converts King Valdimarr and

67 In Vatnsdæla saga the end of the prediction is that Ingimundr will settle in Iceland, but he still reacts as if the völva had predicted his death.

68 The formula þa er varð henni/hennum/Ódði/Hjálmarri ljós á munni also introduces a number of non-prophetic verses in Orsvar-Ódds saga (FSNI, 314, 316, 317, 324, 326, 330, 370, 382), but these may be copied from its use before the völva’s verses; further see Quinn (1998) With the claim to know Fate in advance cf. Volsáspí4,5–8.

69 This may be a symbolic spear; cf. the attack on Gullveig with spears (Volsáspí21), and Gantiokku saga ch. 7 (FSN III, 25–8, tr. 39–41), where Starkaðr uses a sproti which magically becomes a spear.

70 Vatnsdæla saga ch. 15 (ÍF 8, 42); Landnámabók Ír 79, H1 45 (ÍF 1, 217–19).
his queen, but his reign in Norway is short. St Óláfr makes a slip of the tongue just before the Battle of Stiklastaðir, in which he is killed.

**Summary.** The *völva* is a mortal woman, but retains some associations with giants or with death. The patriarch is more sympathetically treated, both by the *völva* and by the narrative, than in the ‘unjust patriarch’ stories. His two sons become a son and a foster-son (who is usually the protagonist). The antipathy between patriarch and foster-son is muted; that between patriarch and *völva* is replaced by the protagonist’s resentment against the *völva*, whom he may attack physically. The *völva* prophesies glory for the hero, but also his death. She is sometimes mysteriously inspired to speak in verse (always in *fornyrðislag*). The prophecy is absolute (except in *Orms þáttr*), and always comes true.

This pattern may be derived from the previous one. Its age is difficult to determine, but the oldest source for it is probably Oddr Snorrason’s *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* (c. 1190). These tales set up a situation like that of the unjust patriarch stories, but it is seen from the viewpoint of the son or foster-son. But they do not romanticise adolescent rebellion, since they mute the protagonist’s hostility towards the patriarch. Instead, his anger is turned against the *völva*, his ally in the unjust patriarch legends, even though her prediction for him is more glorious than for anyone else. This is emphasised by the fact that no one else shares his anger against her.

One might argue that the protagonist is motivated by a quasi-Christian abhorrence for heathen magic, but none of these stories contain the sort of ‘religious’ language that might support this view. It seems more likely that his anger is fuelled by the belief that making a prediction explicit also makes it certain, and therefore that the *völva* is pronouncing an eventual death-sentence on him. Psychologically, this may correspond to the point during late adolescence or early adulthood when we reach the emotional realisation that we ourselves will eventually cease to be, and that this is absolutely certain, however long it may be delayed. Thus the *völva* often adds that her prediction will come to pass whether the hero likes it or not. His rage against her is misdirected: it is actually against his loss of the childish sense of an unchanging present, which was his illusion of immortality.

---

71 *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, Flateyjarbók ch. 90 (ed. I, 126–9).
72 *Óláfs saga helga*, Flateyjarbók ch. 277 (ed. II, 458).
73 See Turville-Petre (1953), 83–4.
74 Similarly, Saldís in *Víga-Glúms saga* ch. 12 is angry with the *völva* for not making a favourable prophecy about her grandsons, and holds her responsible for her predictions.
THE VÖLVA

The völva and her protégé

Several narratives share the pattern of a young hero who is helped and protected by a völva, but they are otherwise rather various. They are:

1. Svipdagsmál (Svip) 1–16
2. Gull-Þóris saga (Gs) chs. 18–19 (also called Þorskfirðinga saga);
3. Fóstbrœðra saga (Fs) chs. 9–10;
4. Fóstbrœðra saga ch. 23;
5. Hauks þáttr hábrókar (H), in Flateyjarbók, Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar chs. 467–8;
6. Saxo’s story of Hadingus and Harthgrepa (Saxo I.vi.4–6).

Two other stories may be related to but adapted from this group:

1. Kormáks saga chs. 9, 22;
2. Eiríks saga rauða ch. 4.

It is difficult to see a common pattern in these narratives; they often show common features, but most of these are derived from the pattern of the unjust patriarch:

The völva usually has a single-element name linked to concealment or wild nature (Gróa ‘Grow’ in Svip; two women called Gríma ‘Mask’ in the Fs episodes; Heiðr ‘Heath’ in Hþ). Only Gs actually calls her a völva, but Gróa is raised from the dead to give magic spells to protect her son Svipdagr; the two Grímur are respectively kona ... fjólkunnig ‘a woman skilled in magic’ and kona ... nokkut fornfróð ‘a woman rather wise about ancient matters’. Harthgrepa and Heiðr are both giantesses.

The patriarch is the protégé’s opponent (Gs, Fs chs. 9–10, Fs ch. 23, a giant in Svip). In Hþ the unjust king is King Eiríkr of the Swedes, who worships a god called Lýtir, who resembles Freyr.

The protection given by the völva varies: she gives her son the magical spells he needs (Svip); tells her protégé about his enemy’s movements and raises a storm to make his enemy vulnerable to him (Gs); makes him

---

75 Ed. SG I, 196–200 and see Chapter I 3.
76 If I, 2.20–2.
77 If 6, 161–9.
78 If 6, 242–8.
79 Ed. II, 66–9.
81 If 4, 233, 282–5. The spákonanvölva Þordis warns Kormákr against a foolish marriage and tries to remove an enchantment from him, but is thwarted by his excessive curiosity. The motif of the hero helped by a völva is here adapted to a protagonist who is so self-destructive that even a devoted and skilful völva cannot save him.
82 If 4, 206–9, 412–13. Þorðiðjórg litílvölva prophesies the end of a famine in Greenland, helped by Guðrøðr, for whom she foretells a splendid marriage and famous descendants. Here the protégé has become female and the völva is motivated by gratitude to her.
83 Saxo gives her the troll-woman-name Harthgrepa (cf. Harðgreip in Þula IV c 2,6, Kock I, 324); in Gull-Þóris saga she has the more ordinary name Heimlaug.
invulnerable to weapons (Fs chs 9–10) or invisible to pursuers (Fs chs 9–10, Fs ch. 23); chants a poem to give him a fair wind (Fs ch. 10); heals his wounds (Fs ch. 23, Hp); travels with gandr in her sleep to discover a danger that threatens him (Fs ch. 23); supplies him with a magic weapon (Hp); raises a dead man to discover the future for him (Saxo).

The motif of the foster-brothers survives in Hp.

The payment of the Þórra with a gold ring survives in Gs and Hp.

These narratives may be derived from the pattern of the unjust patriarch, but they see the story from the viewpoint of his young opponent. The oldest of them is Saxo’s story of Harthgrepa (c. 1200). However, they preserve only individual motifs, not the pattern as a whole. They also look ‘degenerate’ in another sense. At the end of Chapter 2 I suggested that the essential difference between myth and fantasy is that the latter tries to convince us that success can be cost-free. Some of these stories at least preserve the need to pay the Þórra, but others simply assume her devotion to the hero’s interests, as if she were a fairy godmother (further see Chapter 12).

3. Conclusions

In Iceland, most stories about Þórra probably reflect a literary type rather than a social fact. In Norway there is better evidence for historical Þórra, but their most likely origin is in mythological tales about prophetesses connected with giants and/or the dead.

The pattern of the ‘unjust patriarch’ is clearly related to that of the ‘Summer King’ descended from the Vanir, and it must have existed by c. 900. That of the ‘angry young man’ may be a development of this which arose through viewing the same pattern from the point of view of the patriarch’s young opponent(s); but it mutes the hostility between the two figures, and is more interested in the limiting of the young man’s own future than in his confrontation with the patriarch. The stories of the Þórra’s protegé are too disparate to be clearly defined, but may also develop from the hostile patriarch pattern, again seen from the young man’s viewpoint but with a more escapist slant.

This also confirms the view that the patterns of myth and legend connected with the Vanir were liable to constant change. In the early Christian period, one way in which this could happen was by changing the protagonist rather than the pattern, and the ambivalent sympathies evident in many narratives probably assisted in this process.
CHAPTER EIGHT

Fighting the Giantess: Þórr

1. Þórr’s destruction of Giantesses

‘Ec var austr oc iðtna barðag,
brúðr bælisar, er til biargs gengo;
mikil myndi ast iðtna, ef allir lifði,
vætr myndi manna undir miðgarði.’

‘I was in the east and fighting giants, those girls skilled in evil,
as they went towards the rock; the tribe of giants would be large if all of them lived – there would not be a single human being throughout the world.’

Hárbarðsljóð 23,1–8

The myths in which the Æsir encounter Other-World females can be divided into what I shall call myths of exploitation and of confrontation. In the first group, the protagonist is usually Óðinn, and the giantesses he seduces seem to represent a natural power which gods and men need in order to defend themselves, generate ruling families or gain poetic inspiration. These are myths about exploitation of and co-operation with the Other World (see Chapters 10–11). But this chapter and the next will consider myths of confrontation, which reject the Other World, assert the defence of mankind against it, and often regard any negotiation with it as dishonourable.1 The god who typifies this attitude is Þórr, who is an exultant destroyer of giants and giantesses. Brymskviða 32 is typical: Þórr, finally recovering his lost hammer, immediately uses it to strike down Þrymr’s grasping giant sister, and we are clearly expected to regard her destruction as right and proper.

Hárbarðsljóð

In the quotation above, Þórr destroys giantesses to prevent the giants from multiplying to the point where they would oust human beings from the

world. Similarly, in Þrymskviða 18,5–8 Loki tells Þórr that unless he dresses up as Freyja in order to get his hammer back, the giants will soon be living in Ásgarðr. In these texts, the natural fertility of giantesses will lead to disaster unless they are vigorously ‘culled’. In Hárðarþjóð there is also a more general fear of the natural-magical powers of brúðir bolvisar, ‘brides/women skilled in evil’. The only other use of the adjective bolvis in verse (Sigdrifumál 27,4) warns against women skilled in evil who sit near the path and blunt the swords and minds of warriors. These texts suggest that involvement with women can deprive men of their brains and manhood, and in particular that the seduction of giant ‘brides’ makes a man vulnerable to their magic powers. All the same, this is only Þórr’s view, and in the larger context of Hárðarþjóð as a whole he is made to look a fool.

The other encounter between Þórr and Other-World females in Hárðarþjóð is in stt. 37–9, where Þórr boasts of his fight with some ‘brides of berserks’ (37) and the disguised Óðinn comments that it was a cowardly deed to fight against women (38). Þórr retorts that they were ‘hardly women’ but more like she-wolves, and had broken up his beached ship with their iron clubs and deceived whole peoples (39). It is not certain that these brúðir berserka are giantesses, but it seems probable. This fight is located on Hlésey (37,2), the Danish island of Læsø, which is a setting for heroic legend in Helgakviða Hundingsbana II 6,4, Oddrínaragratr 30,2 and Orvar-Odds saga ch. 27. Hlésey also appears in two sea-kennings, and Skáldskaparmál claims that Hlér is another name for the sea-god or giant Ægir, who ‘lived on the island which is now called Hlésey’. In Orkneyinga saga ch. 1, Hlésey is one of a family of giants; his brothers are Logi ‘Flame’ and Kári ‘Wind’, and his relatives include Frosti ‘Frost’ and Snaer inn gamli ‘Snow the Old’. Similarly, a verse riddle in Heiðreks saga ch. 10 (ed. 46) asks ‘Who are the girls who travel lamenting because of their father’s curiosity? To many people they have brought harm, and thus they spend their lives’; the answer is ‘It is Hlésey’s brides who are so called’. The obvious prosaic answer to this riddle is ‘waves’, and that is what Hlésey’s brides must mean, so the reference in Hárðarþjóð to brúðir berserka on Hlésey probably also means ‘stormy waves’.

3 See, for example, Hávamál 113–14; Óðinn disagrees, and in Hárðarþjóð 30 boasts of just such a seduction.
4 SG III,i, 249.
5 FSNI, 373.
6 Hléseyjar þorm `Hlésey’s edge’ (Einarr Skúlason, Haraldsdrápa I 24, twelfth century, Kock I, 210); hryngarh Hléseyjar `the resounding fence of Hlésey’ (Bjóðólfur Arnarsson, lausavísa 23,1, mid-eleventh century, Kock I, 177).
7 ÍF 34; cf. DNM 88.
Fighting the Goddess: Þórr

Hárbarðsljóð generally portrays Þórr as comically ineffective, and here we see him as a warrior absurdly trying to fight the waves on the beach. A similar myth may lie behind Henry of Huntingdon’s famous story of King Cnut commanding the rising tide not to make him wet. This ends with the king leaping backwards to escape the tide and telling his courtiers that the power of kings is vain and frivolous, and that no one but God is worthy of the name of king.9 Here, the absurdity of trying to assert command over the waves is the whole point of the tale.

On another level, these women look like giantesses. Their iron cudgels recall giantess-names like Járnglumra, Járnsaxa, Járniðiði,10 and the ancient giantess in Völuspá 40,2 who gives birth to her monstrous brood i Járniðiði ‘in Ironwood’. The comparison with she-wolves also suggests giantesses, who often ride on wolves.11 The breaking up of the ship by giant girls also appears in Gríms saga lóðrincinna ch. 12 and Hjálmpé’s saga ok Ólvis ch. 12.12

Óðinn’s objection that it was cowardly to fight against women provokes us to explore the diversity of levels in this poem. If the brúðir berserkja are waves, Þórr is not so much cowardly as ridiculous, and his defence that they were ‘hardly women’ merely underlines this absurdity. If they are women, it was indeed cowardly to attack them. If they personify the destructive powers of nature, his indignant excuse is justified. Within Hárbarðsljóð all three levels function at once. But since women were often believed to personify the natural as opposed to the rational order represented by men,14 the dangerous power of giantesses may reside in the very fact that they are female. Þórr’s excuse then points to an insoluble problem: it is disgraceful to attack a woman, but the defence of civilisation may depend on doing so. This may help to explain why giantesses are sometimes more dangerous than their male counterparts, and why the myths about Þórr often seem to regard with suspicion any female who is not a blood-relative.15

Late Heathen Skaldic Verse

Two skaldic stanzas attributed to the late tenth century celebrate Þórr’s triumphs over named giantesses. Vetrliði Sumarliðason claims:

---

9 Henry of Huntingdon Book VI (ed. 189, c. 1130, see Intro. x-xi); Knútr was king of Denmark 1014–35 and of England 1016–35.
10 Póla IV c (Kock I, 324 and Skáldskaparmál, ed. I, 112; tr. 156).
11 Cf. Hyndla in Hyndluljóð, Hyrrokkin in Gylfaginning ch. 49 (ed. 46; tr. 49).
12 FSN I, 270–2; see Chapter 9.
14 See, for example, Clunies-Ross (1994–8), I, 82–4 and refs.
15 Even Þórr’s wife Sif is not entirely exempt from this – see the allegations of her extra-marital affairs (Hárbarðsljóð 48, Lokasenna 54).
Leggi bráuzt Leíknar, 
lamðör Prívalda, 
steyþðör Starkeð, 
stétt of Gjálp dauða. 

You broke the leg of Leikn, 
pounded Prívald, 
threw down Starkeðr, 
stood over the dead Gjálp. 16

This apparently refers to four different fights, of which two are against giantesses. Gjálp is well known (see below), but Leikn is remembered only here, in two wolf-kennings (Leiknar hestr and Leiknar sóti, both 'Leikn’s horse'),17 one probable valkyrie-kennin (oddra Leikn 'Leikn of spears'),18 and in a list of troll-women.19 The name probably means 'the witch'.20

Þorbjörn dísarskáld praises Þórr for defending the Æsir with strength, and lists two giants and six giantesses whom he has overcome:

Ball í Keila kolli, 
Kjallandi bráuzt alla, 
áðr drapt Lútr ok Leiða, 
lézt dreyra Búseyru, 
heptuð Hengjankjapta, 
Hyrrokkin dó fyrri, 
þó vas snemr en sáma 
Svívor numin lífi.

There was a clang on Keila's crown, 
you completely broke Kjallandi, 
you killed Lútr and Leiði before that, 
you made Búseyra bleed, 
you bound Hengjankjapta, 
Hyrrokkin died earlier, 
yet soon the swarthy 
Svívor was deprived of life. 21

Lútr and Leiði are masculine names, but all the others are female, though only Hyrrokkin figures in a known myth (see below). Kjallandi and Hyrrokkin and the slightly varied forms Hengjankjapta and Sívör also appear in a list of troll-women;22 Keila occurs, mysteriously, in a þula of names of fish and another of hens;23 Búseyra is not found elsewhere.

Most of these names can be interpreted:

Keila: cf. Nynorsk keila, Shetland kelek 'a narrow strait of water';24 the idea may be of a flow of water issuing from the private parts of the giantess (cf. Gjálp, discussed below). Búseyra: probably 'Farm-starver'.25

---

16 Skj I B, 127 and Skáldskaparmál ch. 4 (ed. I, 17; tr. 74).
17 Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld, Óláfsdrápa 6, 3 (c. 996, Skj I B, 149); Rognvaldr kali, Hattalukill 32b, 1–2 (mid-twelfth century, Kock I, 247).
18 Hallvarðr háreksblesi 6, 5 (before 1035, Kock I, 150).
19 Pula IV c. 4, 7 (Kock I, 324 and Skáldskaparmál, ed. I, 112; tr. 156).
20 AEW 351, cf. leikni ‘enchantment’, harðleikni and illleikni (both ‘hostility’), Old English scinleax ‘witch’. For magical powers of giantesses see below.
21 Skj I B 135; Skáldskaparmál ch. 4, ed. I, 17; tr. 74.
22 Pula IV c. 5, 4, 21, 2, 3, 7 (Kock I, 324 and Skáldskaparmál, ed. I, 112–13; tr. 156).
23 For the fish-name, see Pula IV x. 4, 4 (Kock I, 332 and Skáldskaparmál, ed. I, 127; tr. 162); cf. Orkney keelim, Scots Gaelic cilean, cilig. Manx kella ‘a large cod’ (AEW 304). For the hen-name, see Pula IV x. 6a (Kock I, 341).
24 AEW 100; DNM 18a.
25 ba ‘farm’ + seyra ‘famine’; AEW 66; DNM 50; LP 71 suggests ‘who devours, destroys farms (by plundering cattle from them)’. 
Fighting the Goddess: Þórr

Hengjankjapta or Hengikepta: ‘Hanging Jaw’, referring to the ugliness of giantesses.26

Hyrrokkin: ‘Shrivelled by Fire’.27

Svívõr: either ‘Shame-lips’ (referring to her ugliness) or ‘Shame Goddess’ (perhaps referring to her sexual appetite).28

Kjallandi is obscure; a connection with kellir ‘helmet’ (strictly ‘something hollowed out’) seems possible.29

Most of the myths that must once have accompanied these names are lost, but by the late tenth century Þórr was clearly thought to have destroyed a number of giantesses who were associated with ugliness, disgusting sexual appetite, enchantment and dangerous natural phenomena – stormy waves, rivers in flood, famine or fire. The evidence of eddic poetry suggests that admiration of Þórr was not universal, and it sometimes went hand in hand with male attitudes that were hostile to wild nature and suspicious of women as infected with it. But is there any evidence that these beliefs were derived from or expressed in the rituals of late heathen religion?

2. Connections with pre-Christian ritual

Of the six giantesses named by Þorbjõrn disarskáld, only Hyrrokkin appears in a surviving myth, which is told in Gylfaginning ch. 49.30 The Æsir cannot launch Baldr’s funeral ship and have to send for Hyrrokkin to help them. She arrives riding a wolf and using snakes for reins; four berserks are unable to hold her ‘steed’ still without knocking it down. She launches the ship with her first touch, so that flame flies from the rollers, and this enrages Þórr, who has to be dissuaded from smashing her head with his hammer. When Baldr’s body is laid in the ship, his wife Nanna dies of grief and is placed beside him. The ship is set alight; Þórr consecrates the pyre with his hammer, and kicks a dwarf called Litr into the fire. The property sacrificed with Baldr includes his horse and the ring Draupnir.

As literal narrative, this is full of inconsistencies. What use is a ship which the gods cannot launch? Why do they need to launch a ship which they intend to burn? Do the four berserks merely knock the wolf-horse over, or do they kill it? Why should Hyrrokkin’s launching of the ship

26 DNM 139; but the masculine Hengikeptr is an Óðinn-name (Púla IV j j 4.6, Kock I, 337 and Skáldskaparmál ch. 43, ed. I, 52; tr. 107).

27 AEW 276; DNM 170; see below.

28 DNM 308. With the first element cf. svívirða ‘disgrace’; with the second either vorr ‘lip’, or Vár (a goddess of marriage or sexuality), who is also ‘parodied’ in the giantess names Fjólovör ‘Sorcery-Vöru’ and Leirvörr ‘Mud-Vörr’ (Púla IV c 3.4, 5.1, Kock I, 324 and Skáldskaparmál, ed. I, 112–13; tr. 156).

29 AEW 311, 306; DNM i 183–4.

30 Ed. 46–7; tr. 49–50.
make Þórr angry? What is the point of kicking the dwarf into the fire? And how is it done, given that the pyre is burning on a ship which is now some distance from the shore?

Such questions merely show that this is the wrong way to read the story. The ship must be ‘launched’ so that Baldr can undertake his journey to the realm of Hel, and because his body must be burned, the only being who can launch it is the hag whose name means ‘withered by fire’. The fire that flies from the rollers is also the literal fire kindled under the funeral ship. Þórr’s fury could be because the hag has achieved a feat of strength that was beyond him, but its deeper motivation must be impotent rage in the face of death. Litr ‘Appearance, Good Looks’ is destroyed in the fire; he is also a dwarf in Völuspá 12.4 and Póla IV ii 6.2, but a giant in the much older Ragnarsdrápa 18.1, c. 850. Perhaps making him a dwarf (an inhabitant of the earth) or a giant (a representative of chaos) brings the consolation of some ‘revenge’ against the agents of death. In the version of the myth known to Þorbjörn disarskáld, Þórr must also have killed Hyrrokkin. Whether he kills her or not, she is probably the snake-tongued, snake-holding figure who rides a wolf-like animal with snakes for reins on Hunnestad Stone 3, Skåne (see Figure 2a). The rune stone from Tullstorp, Skåne (see Figure 2b) shows a similar wolf and a ship.

Six points about this myth seem particularly noteworthy:

1. The dead god’s body is not placed on the ship until just before it is to be burned.
2. His wife also dies, and her body is placed beside his in the ship.
3. A ‘horse’ is knocked down (and possibly killed) by four strong men.
4. The ship is launched by a hag who is the main agent of the burning of the dead.
5. Þórr consecrates the pyre with his characteristic weapon.
6. There is a ‘revenge’ killing of one or both of the agents of burning the dead, who are of opposite sexes.

*
Figure 2. Þórr, the hag and the funeral ship.

a. Hunnestad Stone 3, Skåne, Sweden, c. 1000: the hag rides her wolf, using snakes for reins (stone, c. 180 x 100 cm).

b. Tullstorp Stone, Skåne, Sweden, c. 1000: the wolf and the funeral ship (stone, c. 200 x 135 cm). The inscription reads: **knibin auk ása riþðu kuml þusi uftin ulf** ‘Knippir and Ása erected this monument in memory of Úlf.’

c. Sønder Kirkeby Stone, Falster, Denmark, probably later tenth century: the ship above a dedication to Þórr in concealed same-stave runes. (Part of the stone has been cut away; it now measures c. 50 x 70 cm.) The inscription reads: **s(a)sur sati stin þiþsi haft ðsk(u). bruþur sin ian (han) uarp tuþr a ku(tlant)i þur uiki (r)unar** ‘Sassur placed this stone in memory of Æsgautr (?) his brother, but he died in (Gotland?). May Þórr consecrate the runes.’
The Hyrrokkin story can be compared with an eyewitness account in the Arabic Risala of ibn Fadlan, a diplomat from Baghdad. He witnessed the funeral of a Rus chieftain on the Volga in 921 or 922, probably at Bulghar. Although the Rus ruled an ethnically mixed population, their chiefs were still recognisably Scandinavian. Some Slavonic influences are possible, and ibn Fadlan, as a non-Norse-speaking outsider, may not have understood all that he saw (though he shows little religious prejudice). But some of his details can be supported from Scandinavian archaeological finds, and in general his account is probably fairly reliable.

The ritual he describes agrees quite closely with the crucial features of the myth in Gylfaginning:

1. The dead man’s body is placed on the ship only just before it is burned.

2. Nanna’s death in Gylfaginning is artistically convenient, since it makes it unnecessary for her to be murdered. In ibn Fadlan’s account, a slave-girl volunteers to ‘die with’ her lord, and is killed. Her stabbing is carried out by the ogress figure.

3. In ibn Fadlan’s account two horses and some other animals are killed, and six men (parallel to the four berserks in Gylfaginning?) exert their strength by strangling the slave-girl as the ogress figure stabs her.

4. In Gylfaginning the ship is launched by a hag whose name means ‘shrivelled by fire’. In ibn Fadlan, the hag is in charge of the ship during the preparations, but is not needed to represent the literal fire.

5. In Gylfaginning Þórr consecrates the pyre with his hammer. In ibn Fadlan, it is ritually lit by the dead man’s closest relative (who may have been acting on behalf of a god). He approaches the pyre naked, covering his anus with his free hand. The sexual vulnerability of this figure is interesting (further, see below).

6. In the Hyrrokkin myth Litr (and perhaps also Hyrrokkin herself) is killed by Þórr in ‘revenge’. In ibn Fadlan there is no male ogre figure, and of course no revenge could be taken on the woman who corresponds to Hyrrokkin, but she seems to have been feared rather than liked.

The dead chief was probably of Swedish origin, and comparable ship burials have been excavated in Sweden and Norway. Some (for example, Birka and Valsgärde in Sweden and Oseberg in Norway) also include a murdered companion, and this is confirmed in Sigurdarkvida in skamma, where Brynhild stabs herself with a sword in order to share Sigurðr’s funeral pyre. She declares that Sigurðr’s wife Guðrún should have follow-
ed her husband in death (61), and implies that her own suicide makes her his real wife (40–1). Burials of horses, oxen, and dogs also occur in the Swedish and Norwegian mounds, as do beds, textiles, cooking equipment, food (including apples), spices, weapons, tools, and jewellery.38

Some other details may have been misunderstood by ibn Fadlan or translated into terms that were more familiar to his Arab audience. He came from a culture in which princes had large numbers of slave-concubines, and we do not know whether the girl who died with the chief was actually a slave, or whether she came from a noble family and enjoyed some marital rights. She certainly shows enough confidence in the status of her own family to include them in her vision of the Other World. Ibn Fadlan’s idea of Paradise also comes from Islam, and we must assume that the dead chief was actually thought to be bound either for Hel or for the hall of Óðinn. Since his divine ‘lord’ is referred to as having sent a strong wind to fetch him quickly, the latter seems more likely. Similarly, the title ‘Angel of Death’ must be misleading to some extent. Islam was familiar with the idea of angels, but Old Norse religion, so far as we know, was not. It seems more likely from her role and physical appearance that this woman was acting the part of a giantess or troll-woman.

Nevertheless, we must conclude that the Hyrrokkin myth had its ritual counterpart in some heathen funerals. Similar rituals may be implied by the iconography of some tenth-century runic memorial stones which display a prominent Pórr’s hammer or call on Pórr to ‘dedicate the runes’.39 At Sønder Kirkeby, Falster, Denmark, this dedication is even hidden in the line drawing of a ship (see Figure 2, bottom).40 The only major divergence between the Hyrrokkin myth and ibn Fadlan’s account is the presence in myth but absence from ritual of an actual or threatened physical conflict between Pórr and the giantess. But myth can enact a fantasy-release of the impulse for revenge which is not possible in ritual, where the corpse and the fire are inescapable facts, the hag’s practical cooperation is needed, and there is no physical enemy to fight. A similar fantasy may lie behind Pórr’s destruction of ogresses who represent threats

38 For example, at Oseberg and Gokstad (Sjøvold 42–56; Jesch 32–5).
39 For Pórr’s hammer, see Laeborg (Jutland, Denmark, DR 26), Spentrup 2 (Skåne, Sweden, DR 120), Gårdstånga 3 (Skåne, Sweden, DR 331), Äby (Södermanland, Sweden, SR 86), Stenkvista (Södermanland, Sweden, SR 111), Bjärby (Västergötland, Sweden, Västergötlands Runinskrifter, ed. 1958–70, 113). For Pórr dedications see Glavendrup (Fyn, Denmark, DR 209), Sønder Kirkeby (Falster, Denmark, DR 220), Virring (northern Jutland, Denmark, DR 11), Velanda (Västergötland, Sweden, Västergötlands Runinskrifter, ed. 1958–70, 150). Further see Moltke 220–33, 248–7, 272; Perkins (2001), 109, 122–4 and figs. 19–21; RMR O3–15, 118–26.
40 See note 34 above; but what remains of the ship on the Sønder Kirkeby stone does not look archaic.
to life, the brúðir of Hárbarðsljóð and Búseyra (Famine), Elli (Old Age) and Forað (Danger).41

3. Allegory or symbol? Elli, Gjálp and Greip

Þórr’s role as Miðgarðs véurr ‘defender of the shrine of the world’ (Vóluspá 56,6) naturally involves him in fights against giantesses who represent threats to life. But these may be expressed either as allegory – i.e. narrative whose sole purpose is to convey this underlying meaning – or as open-ended symbol.

An example of the first is Þórr’s unsuccessful wrestling match with the crone Elli ‘Age’ in Gylfaginning chs. 46–7,42 while he, Þjálfi and Loki are visiting Útgarðalok. This sequence cannot be entirely Snorri’s invention: the story of how Þórr hid in Skrýmir’s glove and was unable to untie the giant’s meal-bag is mentioned in Lokasenna 60, 62, and Utgarthilocus also appears in Saxo VIII, xv.43 But the two accounts of Útgarðalok are very unlike each other, and there is no real counterpart to Elli in Saxo, or anywhere else.

The meaning of Elli is simply too transparent: Gylfaginning may be reading a personification into some verse instances of the common noun, such as the statement in Hávamál 16 that old age (elli) will give a man no quarter, even if spears do, or Holmgöngu-Bersi’s lausavísa 12, where the poet complains that elli controls him.44 In these cases the listener might imagine Elli as a tyrannical old giantess even if the poets intended no such personification. Her story also has two other suspicious features: it is a mere sporting contest, whereas Þórr’s other encounters with giantesses are usually mortal combats; and uniquely, Þórr loses. This fits the parodic nature of the expedition to visit Útgarðalok, but it also changes Þórr from a superhuman hero to an Everyman figure, who must bow the knee to old age however strong he is. That is Elli’s only meaning; she is a limited and exact sign, and her story is therefore allegory rather than myth. For my purposes here, the most interesting thing about it is that it reuses the pre-existing pattern of the hag who struggles with Þórr.

The whole Útgarðalok episode may be a parody of Þórr’s visit to Geirrôðr, in which he has two confrontations with giantesses. In the first, he is nearly washed away by the urine (or possibly the menstrual fluid) of Geirrôðr’s daughter Gjálp while crossing the River Vimur.45 In the second, he breaks

41 For Búseyra, see above; for Elli, see below; for Forað, see Völu IV c 2,6 (Kock I, 324 and Skáldskaparmál, ed. I, 112; tr. 156).
42 Ed. 42–3; tr. 44–5.
43 Ed. I, 24–7; tr. I, 267–70.
44 Skj I B88, c. 98c; cf. ÍF 8, 261 and Inngangur civ.
Fighting the Goddess: Þórr

the backs of Gjálp and her sister Greip when they try to crush him against the roof of the giant’s cave. The surviving sources are:
1. Eilífr Goðrúnarson’s bòrsdrápa (bd, c. 990); 46
2. Two stanzas from a lost eddic poem (’Vimrarkviða’, early thirteenth century or earlier); 47
3. Skáldskaparmál (Skm) ch. 18, which also quotes 1 and 2 (c. 1222); 48
4. A brief summary in Saxo VIII.xiv.15 (’Saxo A’); 49
5. Saxo VIII.xiv, where Þórr becomes Thorkillus and is baptised before the end of his life (’Saxo B’); 50 this incorporates Saxo A. 51

bòrsdrápa tells the story in detail and has influenced Skáldskaparmál (although Snorri also had other sources); by contrast, Vimrarkviða is too fragmentary and Saxo A too brief to provide much detail, while Saxo B has undergone deliberate adaptation. Eilífr has therefore been very influential, and may have distorted our view of the myth by what he chose to emphasise or to omit.

Nonetheless, Gjálp, Greip and Vimur are familiar in skaldic verse: Gjálp appears in a list of troll-women, 52 in two kennings where wolves are the ‘horse’ of Gjálp, 53 and in two axe-kennings. 54 She and Greip are the first two of Heimdallr’s nine giantess-mothers (Hyndluljóð 37), but if this reflects ancient tradition it must relate to a different myth. Gjálp probably means ‘Roarer’ (cf. Modern Icelandic gjálp ‘roaring’, ‘ferment’), 55 referring to the sound of a river in spate, and she may have been equated with the river which she swelled with her urine; Eilífr calls Vimur ‘the giantesses’ water’ (Þórsdrápa 4, 2–4).

46 Skj I B, 139–44; Skáldskaparmál ch. 18 (ed. I, 25–30; tr. 83–6).
47 For the first stanza, see Skáldskaparmál, ed. I, 25; the second (ed. I, 171) is only in manuscript U (Codex Uppsalensis, early fourteenth century), where it appears a paragraph later. Faulkes omits it because of U’s general carelessness (Intro. I, xl–xliv). Snorri may have intended to include it, or his source may also have been known to the reviser of U, but its metre is poor, and it may be a later composition.
51 Clunies Ross points out a parody of part of this myth in Þjóðólfr Arnórsson’s lausavísa, composed at the command of King Haraldr harðráði, about a quarrel between a smith and a tanner (Clunies-Ross (1981), 371; Sneglu-Halla þáttr, ÍF 9, 267–8 and cf. lausavísa 14 in Kock I, 176). That verse concentrates solely on the confrontation between Pórr (= the smith) and Geirrøðr (= the tanner), but it shows that the myth was widely known.
52 Buá IV c2.1 (Kock I, 324 and Skáldskaparmál, ed. I, 112; tr. 156).
54 Snerru Gjálp ‘Gjálp of battle’ (Grettis saga, lausavísa 3.5–6, ÍF 7, 12–13); vandgjálpur naufla ‘namesake of the wand-Gjálp’ (i.e. wood-axe, whose ‘namesake’ is a battle-axe, Njáls saga, lausavísa 27.4, ÍF 12, 479); Kock II, 234, 114.
55 See DNM 111, AEW 170 (under gjálp).
Apart from *Hymnuljóð* 37 (see above), Greip appears in the giant-kenning *Greipar bólill ‘wooer of Greip’* (*Hautlótr* 13.3–4, c. 900), in *Vimrarvikvída* 2,4 and *Pula IV* c. 2.37 she is called *Gneip*, which could derive from *gripa ‘a projecting mountain peak’* but is probably an error. The element -*greip* also appears in the giantess-name *Harðgreip* (*Pula IV* c. 2.6), *Harthgrepa* (the giantess-mistress of Hadingus).* Greip ‘Grip’ and *Hardgreip ‘Firm Grip’; both probably arise from giantesses who wrestle with the hero, although Greip does not wrestle in the myth we now have.

*Vimur* appears in a list of rivers61 and in Ulfr Uggason’s *Þórr-kenning* *Vimrar vaðs* (*c. 1000, Húsdrápa* 6.5),62 to which Skáldskaparmál ch. 46 adds: *Hér er hann kallaðr jofunn Vimrar vaðs* ‘Here he is called the “giant” of the ford of Vimur’. *LP* 622 explains *vigðymnir* as ‘‘the one who wades through’ or something similar’, but Faulkes takes it that Þórr is simply the ‘enemy’ of the river (or of the giantess represented by the river?). Either way, this kenning shows knowledge of Þórr’s struggle to cross the River Vimur. One gold-kenning and two ship-kennings use *Vimur* to refer generally to expanses of water.64 *Vimur* has been translated ‘Bubbling’,65 but cf. Modern Icelandic *vimi ‘giddiness, stupefaction’, Old High German *wimi ‘the springs or source of a river’, runic Old Norse *vim ‘current’* (*Eggja* stone, c. 700).66 and the mythical river-name *Geirvimul* ‘the One Eddying with Spears’.67 It probably means ‘the one that causes dizziness, the eddying one’, and refers to the violent swirling of the river.

The usage of these names shows that the myth of Þórr’s visit to Geirrøðr, including the crossing of the River Vimur and the parts played by Gjálp and Greip, was widely known by c. 900. It probably ran as follows:68

1. **Þórr (Thorkillus in Saxo B) is tricked into visiting Geirrøðr without his hammer Mjöllnir or his belt of strength** (in *bd 1, Skm* because of the lies of Loki). In Saxo B, King Gormo is enticed to visit Geruthus by information from Thorkillus himself about a huge treasure.

2. **Þórr has one or more companions** (his servant Þjálfi and the treacherous Loki in *bd 3,1–4*; only Loki in *Skrn; King Gormo and three

---

61 Skj I B 17.
62 Kock I, 324 and Skáldskaparmál, ed. I, 112; tr. 156.
63 AEW 76–9.
64 Saxo I vi.2–6 (ed. I, 21–3; tr. I, 22–4).
65 DNM 116 and 131; AEW 186–7.
66 Pula IV v.1,3 (Kock I, 331 and Skáldskaparmál, ed. I, 124; tr. 161).
67 Skj I B 129.
68 Ed. I, 17; tr. 74.
69 Gold is *Vimrar eldr ‘Bire of Vimur’* (*Ægislátta Orvar-Odds* 59.6; Kock II, 180 and *FSN* I, 397); a ship is *Vimrar valr ‘Falcon of Vimur’* (Einarr Skúlason, *Sigurðardrápa* 1.7, twelfth century, Kock I, 209) or *marr Vimrar* ‘steed of Vimur’ (*Pula III* d.4, Kock I, 322).
70 DNM 362; AEW 664.
71 RÅF no. 101, p. 231; RMR Y4, 163–5.
72 *Grimnismál* 27.7 and *Pula IV* v.6.6 (Kock I, 331).
73 Further, see McKinnell and Ruggerini 59–68; McKinnell (1995), esp. 147–61.
hundred men in Saxo B), **whom he has to protect** (from being washed away in *Þd* 9.1–4, *Skm*; from repeated temptations to gluttony, lust and greed in Saxo B, where some companions are lost each time).

3. **The companion(s) may fight valiantly** (*Þd* 10.1–4, 11.1–4, Saxo B), but **make(s) no important contribution to the outcome** (though in Saxo B Broderus and Buchi do defend their comrades by their archery during the final retreat).

4. **Þórr receives hospitality and help from a friendly giantess or giant** (Gríðr has given him her pole, *Þd* 9.7–8; in *Skm* Gríðr gives advice and lends him a belt of strength, iron gloves and her pole. In Saxo B the giant Guthmundus gives advice and directions).

5. **To reach the giant’s abode, they must cross the River Vimur** (*Þd* 5–9, *Skm, Vimrarkviða 1, Húsdrápa*). In Saxo B they must cross the sea which girdles the earth, pass through the realm of Chaos, and later cross a river between the human and monstrous worlds.

6. **While Þórr is crossing the river, it begins to rise**; he threatens that his divine strength will swell up to heaven (*Þd* 7.5–8, *Skm, Vimrarkviða 1*) and **he resists the current by sticking Gríðr’s pole into the river-bed** (*Þd* 9.7–8, *Skm*). The flood is caused by Gjálp and Greip (*Þd* 9.5–6; by Gjálp in *Skm*). Þórr stops it by throwing a stone at Gjálp’s private parts, with the words ‘At ósi skal á stemma’ ‘A river must be dammed at its source’ (*Skm* only). Þórr pulls himself out of the river after grasping a rowan bush on the bank (*Skm* only).

7. **They are badly received at the giant’s cave** (*Þd* 13.1–4, 14.1–4, Saxo A) or goat-shed (*Skm*). In Saxo B Guthmundus and his daughters try to seduce them away from their expedition with temptations of food and sex, and they then visit Geruthus in a filthy, stinking stone vault.

8. **Þórr feels his seat being lifted towards the ceiling**: Gjálp and Greip are trying to crush him against the roof. He wedges Gríðr’s pole against the ceiling and pushes downward, breaking the giantesses’ backs (*Þd* 13.5–8, 14, *Skm, Vimrarkviða 2*; in Saxo A the chair is omitted: Thor has broken their backs with his thunderbolts).

Most of the rest of the story concerns Þórr’s conflict with Geirrœðr, whom he destroys during a ‘game’ of ball-throwing with a red-hot iron ingot. The fight with the male giant follows that with his daughters, which may imply that the male opponent is here seen as more formidable than the female one; this view is not always shared in other stories (see Chapter 9).

In *Þorsdrápa* and Saxo B it is possible to some extent to see what has been emphasised or suppressed. Eilífr seems reluctant to admit that Þórr receives any help, especially from female figures. Even when he wields Gríðr’s pole, there is no direct statement that she gave it to him or offered him hospitality and advice. This may also explain why he makes no
reference to the rowan-bush, which seems to imply that Þórr’s wife Sif ‘saved him’ in some sense.69

Þórsdrápa 17 does refer to Þórr’s relationships with female characters, but only after the threat posed by Gjálp and Greip has been destroyed. Here he is langvinr þrõngvar ‘the old friend of þrõng (Freyja)’ (17,4) and þrámóðnis þrúðar ‘the one who yearns in his heart for þrúðr’ (17,7). By contrast, Geirrøðr is orþrasis Hrímnis drósar ‘the passionate lover of Hrímrnir’s lady’ (i.e. of a giantess who is not his wife, 17,5–6). He throws the ingot af greipar brjósti ‘from grip’s breast’, i.e. from his hand, 17,8 (and perhaps also ‘from Greip’s breast’, reflecting her hostility to Þórr). This imagery therefore names two females associated with each fighter. Þórr’s honourable friendship with Freyja is contrasted with a suggestion of illicit passion between Geirrøðr and another giant’s wife. Þórr’s affection for his daughter, whom he protects from the dangers he undergoes, is contrasted with Geirrøðr’s involvement of his daughters in the attack on Þórr. The implications are that male–female friendships should be restrained and asexual, and that daughters should be kept away from danger.

However, the Freyja-name þrõng ‘Narrowness’, ‘a Crowded Space’70 also recalls giantess-names like keila ‘Strait’ (see above). The roaring river produced by Gjálp’s urination probably conjured up the comparison between a narrow gorge and a woman’s sexual parts,71 and Freyja is also a goddess of sexuality. The suggestion may be that Þórr is quite capable of a friendly association with that narrow space (i.e. of consensual sex), but only after the dangerous female sexuality of the giantesses has been crushed – i.e. when the male is in clear command.

Eilífr was clearly inclined to see the River Vimur episode and the raising of Þórr’s chair in aggressively sexual terms. As Clunies Ross points out,72 urination is in many societies a means by which one male asserts dominance over another. When a female urinates on a male, humiliation of the male is certainly intended and the victim must reassert his virility if he is to be accepted as a man. But while Eilífr may have emphasised this view of the episode, he is not unique in taking it. Þórr’s riposte in Skáldskaparmál, of throwing a stone at Gjálp’s sexual parts, reflects a similar outlook, and part of the significance of Gríðr’s pole must also be phallic.

69 The Saami thunder-god Hora Galles may be derived from Old Norse Þórr karl ‘old man Þórr’; his wife is Ræva (cf. Old Norse reginr, Norwegian raun, Swedish rönn, Scots rowan). The idea that Þórr was saved by the rowan also appears in Grettir’s Ævikuða 5.7 and 7,1–3, where the name Þórbjõrg (literally ‘Saving Þórr’) is replaced by reginr ðrun ‘rowan tree’ and hjõlp handa beggja Sifjar vers ‘help of both hands of Sif’s husband’ (supposedly early eleventh century, Kock I, 147); cf. MRN 98, Clunies Ross (1981), 379.
70 AEW625.
The story of the giantesses raising Þórr in his chair might be seen as analogous to raising a woman in a birthing chair, and thus as suggesting that Þórr is ‘a woman and has borne children’. But the two giantesses are more probably raising Þórr up to make him available as a passive victim of homosexual rape by their father – a humiliation which would have rendered him ágr, unworthy to compete in the trials of strength which follow. Again, Eilífr may not have invented this; the chair is also raised in Vímararkviða 2. A bronze statuette from Eyrarland, north Iceland, also depicts what may be Þórr sitting in a chair. As this is the only known myth about Þórr in which a chair is significant, it may refer specifically to this episode; in that case, it may also be important that apart from a large pointed helmet this figure is naked.

Saxo shows even more concern for male sensitivities, but also associates manhood with celibacy and contempt for worldly wealth. Here there is not only a reluctance to acknowledge female help, but a refusal even to contemplate the possibility of sexual humiliation. Saxo A (VIII.xiv.15) summarises the myth very briefly, omits the Gríðr and River Vimur episodes, and adds without further explanation that they ‘had paid the penalty for attacking his divinity by having their bodies broken’. It would indeed be possible to describe the attempt by Gjálp and Greip to humiliate Þórr sexually as an attack on his divinity, but Saxo delicately avoids specifying the nature of the attack.

In Saxo B the hero’s contact with females is further reduced: even the helpful giantess is replaced by the giant Guthmundus. The function of the sea or river as a dangerous boundary between worlds is emphasised, and its mythic significance becomes explicit when Guthmundus tells them that it is a boundary between the worlds of humans and monsters (VIII.xiv.7).

The motif of the dangerous river is used again when Buchi, who has been ‘swept away’ by his passion for one of the daughters of Guthmundus, is
literally swept away while crossing a ford (VIII.xiv.19). Saxo clearly understood the significance of the river as a boundary between worlds and knew a story in which it was associated with sexuality. However, he replaces the gender humiliation by the giantess’s urine with a moral humiliation of Buchi, who surrenders to his own sexual passion. This reflects Saxo’s usual ethic, in which surrender to one’s appetites is unmanly and disgraceful.

Saxo ball but removes the episode of the chair. Here it is Geruthus and his daughters who lie on couches, incapacitated by Thor’s attack on them. When Thorkillus loses his restraint and plunders a cloak and sword-belt (which may reflect Þórr’s megingjarðar ‘belt of power’ in the inherited myth), the women cry out, causing the intruders to be attacked by a company of wraiths who rise out of their seats to attack them. These traces of the chair motif suggest that sitting or reclining is a signal of passivity or defeat, but the unmanly associations are transferred to the enemy. Again, Thorkillus and his companions are defended from any hint of humiliation except when they indulge a worldly passion (in this case, greed for precious possessions).

Although Eilífr and Saxo both contribute elements of their own personal outlooks, the myth clearly had some shared common meaning. Þórr has to fight off a humiliating attack on his gender status, and this recalls two puzzling details in the Baldr and ibn Fadlan funerals: Þórr’s anger when Baldr’s funeral ship is launched by Hyrrokkin, and the nakedness of the relative who lights the funeral pyre in ibn Fadlan’s account.

Þórr’s rage against Hyrrokkin may be because death is associated with defeat, and thus insults male self-respect. In Baldr’s funeral this is compounded by the fact that Þórr needs her help in consecrating the funeral fire, and yet she causes and represents the destruction of his kinsman’s body. It is not surprising that in an earlier version of the myth, he vindicated his manhood by killing her.

Similarly, the naked relative in the Volga funeral needs the help of fire to consecrate the pyre. His nakedness displays his sexual vulnerability, and he must symbolically counter this by covering his anus with his hand. If the naked statuettes represent Þórr, the naked kinsman may also have done so as he consecrated the pyre. But nakedness also recalls the laying out of the dead man’s body, and also the only act which can counter death – the assertion of a man’s potency in the begetting of children.

In this chapter I have argued that many of the giantesses whom Þórr destroys symbolise threats to human life. One such myth, that of Hyr-
rokkinn, can be associated with pre-Christian funeral ritual, and another, that of Gjálp and Greip, suggests a pattern in which Þórr confronts and avenges the fact of death itself. But unlike the Summer King in the Vanir patterns (cf. Chapter 5), he is not himself the figure who dies, but the representative of a bereaved kinsman. This may explain the male associate, whom he must rescue (Þjálf, King Gormo), or who is dead but will in some sense return or live on (Baldr, the dead chief at Bulghar). The custom of women dying with their husbands or lovers may explain why the associate has a sexual partner (Nanna, the concubine in the Volga funeral). There is a dangerous river, which was probably originally a boundary between the living and the dead. Þórr fights and destroys a hag (Hyrrokkin, Gjálp and Greip) and a giant (Litr, Geirrøðr), who are related to each other, in a cave which may represent the funeral mound.80 His weapon is a fire or fiery object, or a piece of wood (Gríðr’s pole) – which are also the ingredients of the literal funeral pyre.

It seems likely that this myth pattern is related to bereavement and male strategies for dealing with it. In a society where men were expected to show extreme stoicism, grief could not be expressed openly, and this is the kind of situation in which the symbolism and contradictions inherent in myth are most needed.

80 Skáldskaparmál ch. 18 turns it into a goat-shed (possibly as an insult to Þórr as hafra dröttinn ‘lord of goats’ (cf. Hymiskviða 20, 2, 31, 2); this is probably a witty adaptation.
CHAPTER NINE

Þórr and the Bear’s Son

Se wæs monocynnes mægenes strengest
on þæm dæge þysses lifes,
aæpele ond eacen.

‘He was the mightiest in strength of living men at that time, noble and huge.’

Beowulf 196-8a

In Chapter 8 I outlined a pattern in which Þórr encounters one or more giantesses who represent a threat to human life, in particular that of the protagonist’s close kinsman. These are examples of a story pattern whose common features are:

1. A supremely strong hero makes an expedition to fight a giant.
2. He has one or more companions, but they usually make no important contribution.
3. He and his companion(s) are badly received at their destination.
4. He is attacked by at least one giantess and at least one giant, who are related to each other, and destroys both; both fights include some wrestling.

Two other common features which do not emerge in the Geirröðr myth are:

5. The ogress often tries to pierce the hero’s flesh with her claws.
6. Later, the hero will perish, heroically facing overwhelming odds.¹

Turning to stories of this kind in which the hero is a human being rather than a god, one can distinguish two sub-types, which I shall call the ‘Þórr pattern’ and the ‘Bear’s Son pattern’. The main features of the Þórr pattern are:

P1. The hero or his associate is tricked into making the visit.
P2. The hero is usually helped by a friendly giantess (occasionally a giant).
P3. The associate (or occasionally the hero) often has a sexual partner.

¹ Orchard 119–23 also compares Þórr with Beowulf, but concentrates only on this last point.
1. Bórr as human hero

Saxo’s story of Thorkillus shows the beginning of a tendency to transform Bórr into a human being, and three episodes in fornaldarsögur develop this further:

1. Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss chs. 13–16 (probably c. 1350–80);[2]
2. Orms þáttar Stórolfssonar chs. 8–9 (probably mid-fourteenth century);[3]
3. Gríms saga loðinkinna' chs. 1–2.[4]

The first two are usually classified as sagas of Icelanders, but are full of motifs typical of fornaldarsögur; it seems unhelpful to distinguish between the two genres in this case.

These episodes reflect the pattern as follows:

P1. In Bárðar saga, the ogre Kolbjörn abducts the future sexual partner of Bórr, one of the hero Gestr’s two half-brothers, then tricks the three brothers into visiting his cave by promising her hand in marriage. In Orms þáttur, the associate Ásbjörn is lured into a fatal visit to the ogre Brúsi because he wants to defy the prophecy of a völva; the hero must then visit the giant to gain revenge. In Gríms saga, the hero visits the giant Hrímnir (‘Frost covered’) following a famine in Hálogaland; this is not literally caused by the giants, but immediately follows the abduction of his fiancée Lopthæna (which resembles that of Sólrún in Bárðar saga).

P2. In Bárðar saga, Gestr and his father have already visited the giantess Hit, who gave Gestr a fighting dog called Snati. In Orms þáttur, the giantess Menglǫð appears to Ormr in a dream and gives him advice and a pair of gloves of strength.[5] In Gríms saga, the helpful giantess is merged with the sexual partner and separated from the ogre combat, appearing after it rather than before.

---

[3] ÍF 13, 415–18; CSI III, 464–6; Two Icelandic Stories, 40–1. Ormr is already mentioned in Haukr Valdísarson’s Islendingadrápa 15, 1–4 (twelfth or thirteenth century, Kock I, 263), though this episode is not. Orms þáttur has been compared with Beowulf (Boer 1898, 66–71, Chambers and Wrenn 53–4, 65–7), but Chambers bases this partly on a misreading of the place-name Sauðey as Sandey, which he links to Sandhaugar in Grettis saga; see Two Icelandic Stories 35–6.
[5] Cf. Skáldskaparmál ch. 18 (ed. I, 25, II, 330; tr. 82). Járngreipr might refer to iron gloves, gloves that enable Bórr to handle red-hot iron, or gloves that give him a ‘grip of iron’, i.e. great strength; the author of Orms þáttur seems to assume the last.
128

¶3. In Bárðar saga, Sólrún is found tied to a chair by her hair. This is reminiscent of the chieftain’s ‘wife’ being strangled on a couch with a cord in the Volga funeral (see Chapter 8), and it also appears in Bósa saga ok Herrauðs and Hálfdanar saga Brynufóstra (see below). In Orms þáttr the sexual partner is reduced to a wistful hint: Menglöð wishes she could have a sexual relationship with Ormr, but this cannot happen because of their different faiths. In Gríms saga, the sexual partner is attached to the hero rather than to either of the associates, who are absent from the combat and are later killed. This episode has been influenced by a different motif – that of the enchanted princess-hag who can only be restored to her proper shape by a man who is prepared to kiss and/or have sex with her.

¶4. In Bárðar saga, the dangerous river crossing is replaced with a land journey north-east through the mist. In Orms þáttr it becomes a sea passage east and north from Iceland to Sauðey, the ogre’s island. In Gríms saga, there is a dangerous sea journey north and east to Gandvík (‘Magic Wand Bay’, the White Sea), a common home of giants.

¶5. In Bárðar saga, the first giant-slaying happens in the cave, but the main conflicts take place when the hero’s party are making their escape (cf. Þórsdrápa 19–20,6 Hymiskviða 35–6). The major ogres are mother and son (rather than father and daughter, as in the Geirrøðr myth); the fights are simultaneous, but the male ogre is killed last. In Orms þáttr both fights are in the cave; the ogres are mother (in the form of a monstrous cat) and son, and Ormr kills the male ogre last. In Gríms saga there is a family of giants: Grímr kills one daughter and mortally wounds the other, then fights both parents in the cave, killing the mother last.

¶6. In Bárðar saga, the fights are all without weapons. The ogress is killed when the dog rolls a large rock down on her, breaking her back. The other contestants all wrestle: Gestr kills Gljúfra-Geirr (a secondary giant) by smashing his skull, and Kolbjørn, the major ogre, by breaking his neck. In Orms þáttr, Ormr wrestles against both ogres after failing to use his arrows, and kills the ogress by breaking her back. He tears the skin off Brúsi’s face, breaks his back when he becomes weak through loss of blood, but actually kills him by carving the ‘blood-eagle’ on his back. He then burns both bodies. In Gríms saga the hero kills one giant girl with an arrow and wounds the other with an axe; he decapitates Hrímnir with an axe-blown, then wrestles with Hrímnir’s wife and cuts her head off after she has fallen. This use of weapons is untypical, but the axe was another common attribute of Þórr.

Further details suggest other influences from myths about Þórr. Bárðar saga includes two throwing contests against giants, like the one in the Geirrøðr

6 Skj I B, 143–4 and Skáldskaparmál ch. 18 (ed. I, 29–30; tr. 85–6).
7 MRN 84.
myth (they are *skinnleikr*, throwing a rolled-up animal hide (ch. 13) and *knutukast*, throwing knuckle bones (ch. 15). In *Orms þáttir*, the iron pillar in Brusi’s cave recalls the pillar behind which Geirrøðr tries to hide when Þórr throws the iron at him. In *Gríms saga*, the two giant-girls try to shake Grímr’s beached ship to pieces, recalling the attack on Þórr’s beached ship in *Hárbarðsljóð* 37–9 (see Chapter 8).

Faulkes suggests that in *Orms þáttir* the monstrous cat-mother and the tearing of beard and skin from the face of the male ogre may be derived from *Õrvar-Odds saga*. But the pattern is better preserved in *Orms þáttir* than in *Orvar-Odds saga*, where Óddr fights the two ogres on unrelated occasions (the male one several times), none of the fights is in a cave, and his arrows succeed in killing the ogress mother. *Orvar-Odds saga* also makes explicit reference to the Geirrøðr myth, when Ógmundr is said to be Geirrøðr’s son-in-law (chs. 20, 23).9 *Orms þáttir* may have been influenced by a lost version of *Orvar-Odds saga*, but it is perhaps more likely that echoes of Þórr-derived motifs were commonplace in this kind of story.

Deliberate echoing of myths about Þórr might also explain the ‘infantilised’ version of Gjálp and Greip in the killing of the ‘little girl’ giants in *Gríms saga* (and also in *Hálfdanar saga Bronufóstra* and *Sörla saga sterka*, and of ‘little boy’ giants in *Porsteins þátttr uxafóts*, all discussed below). In each case the effect, since the hero does not realise that they are ‘children’, is to emphasise how huge and dangerous all giants are.

In another common development, the hero overhears a conversation between the giant and his wife (cf. *Porsteins þátttr uxafóts*, *Hálfdanar saga Bronufóstra* and *Sörla saga sterka*, all discussed below). This functions as a plot-device for telling us things that the hero cannot know already, such as the names and family relationships of the giants and the details of their plotting. It also allows him to eavesdrop on their disgusting sexuality (reduced in *Gríms saga* to immodest dress which exposes their sexual organs).

Some other features of these stories are probably ‘floating motifs’ which might be attached to tales of very diverse origins. These include Ómr’s resolve to adopt a Christian duty if he survives the fight with the ogress,10 and the frequent presence of treasure in the cave.

2. The Bear’s Son pattern

Major features

The distinctive features of the ‘Bear’s Son’ stories are:

8 Two Icelandic Stories 32–4.
10 Cf. Ógmundar þátttr dýtt (ÍF 9, 113–14; CSI II, 321); Hávarðar saga Ísþiðnings ch. 11 (ÍF 6, 326–7; CSI V, 330–1).
BS1. The hero belongs to the royal family of Gautland; he comes to Denmark to fight a male and a female monster.

BS2. He has associates (who are ineffective except in tales derived from *Bjarkamál), but there is no helpful giantess and usually no sexual partner.

BS3. The first combat takes place when one of the ogres attacks the hall; (s)he may try to throw or drag the hero into a ravine; this fight typically ends with the ogre’s right arm being torn off.

BS4. To undertake the second combat, the hero must negotiate a dangerous lake or waterfall.

BS5. During the second combat, the associates may abandon the hero, assuming that he has perished.

BS6. The second combat takes place in a cave; it involves a giant- and/or magic sword, which is sometimes a replacement for one that has failed. The failed weapon may be of a kind whose name includes the element Old Norse hepti- / Old English hæft- ‘haft’.

BS7. There may be a bright light in the cave just before or just after the hero kills the ogre.

BS8. The hero sometimes decapitates the ogre(s), either as a way of killing them or to prevent them from ‘walking’ as draugar (the walking dead).

BS9. The hero usually takes some treasure, and sometimes also a proof of his deed. By his own efforts, he swims to the surface/climbs back up the ravine.11

11 Further on the Bear’s Son tales see Orchard 123–9 and references on p. 123, Jorgensen (1975).

Analysis of such typical features has two limitations. One is that relationships between texts cannot be argued solely on the basis that a motif is absent from two or more versions. Thus it does seem significant that the helpful giantess and the sexual partner are absent from nearly all versions of the Bear’s Son pattern, but their absence from any one version does not in itself provide evidence that it belongs to the Bear’s Son type. The other problem is that of ‘floating motifs’ (see above), to which these two sub-patterns seem particularly vulnerable at the following points:

P3. Giving the hero a sexual partner is commonplace; but giving the associate a sexual partner when the hero is without one seems distinctive.

P4, BS4. The dangerous river/sea (Þórr pattern) or lake/waterfall (Bear’s Son pattern) is a common archetypal boundary.12 Occasionally, these equivalent motifs may be confused (for example, the Sandhaugar episode in Grettis saga includes both a waterfall and a river-crossing). This feature cannot therefore be used to distinguish between the two sub-types except where it is perfectly preserved.

P6, BS6. The fact that Þórr fights with primitive weapons or none may be merely a consequence of the deception motif, and in some later tales of

12 McKinnell and Ruggerini 64–5.
the Þórr type the hero uses a weapon associated with Þórr (an axe, a magic pair of gloves). But the Bear’s Son may also fight without weapons (for example, Beowulf against Grendel), though he usually uses a short sword of giant origin.

BS8. The decapitation of the ogre is not significant by itself, since this is a common way of dealing with draugrar in stories of other kinds.13

BS9. The association of treasure with caves or mounds is commonplace,14 but it may be significant when the treasure has a function in the plot (see Gullbrá og Skegg). In borsteins þáttr uxfóts it is explicitly pointed out that there was no treasure (implying that treasure might have been expected in this kind of story).

The Bear’s Son texts

The Bear’s Son pattern is so called because the hero’s name and parentage often relate him to the animal. Beowulf is probably a kenning for ‘bear’,15 and Bóðvarr’s parents are Björn ‘He-bear’ and Bera ‘She-bear’; both Björn and Bóðvarr are sometimes transformed into bears.16 The major examples of the type are:

1. The first half of Beowulf;17
2. Part of the lost *Bjarkamál, as represented by four texts derived from it:
   a. Saxo’s account (II.vi.9–viii.2) of Biarco, including a partial translation of Bjarkamál into Latin; c. 1200;18
   b. Bóðvars þáttr in Hrólfs saga kraka chs. 24–36; fifteenth or sixteenth century;19
   c. Bjarkarímur (possibly c. 1400).20

13 Cf. Flóamanna saga ch. 13 (ÍF 13, 255–6; CSI III, 281); Hrómundar saga Gripsonar ch. 4 (FSN II, 277–8); Boberg 98.
14 Cf. the discussion among the runic graffiti at Maeshowe (Orkney, 1152–3) about the possible presence of treasure in the mound there (Barnes nos. 4, 8, 25, 26, 27, 28).
16 Hrólfs saga kraka chs. 25–6 (FSN II, 41–5).
17 Whatever the date of Beowulf (for various suggested dates, see Newton, Chase, Björk and Obermeier), it must be older than the earliest evidence for *Bjarkamál; its manuscript, London, BL Cotton Vitellius A.xv, dates from c. 1000.
19 Ed., 51–82 (chs. 17–24); Hrólfs saga kraka og Bjarkarimur (1904), 47–74 (chs. 17–24); FSN II, 39–62 (chs. 24–36); tr. 262–88. Bóðvars þáttr ends with the cleansing of the hall by Bóðvarr and Hjalti; their final defence of Hröðr is postponed to the climax of the saga (ed. chs. 33–4, 116–25; Hrólfs saga kraka og Bjarkarimur (1904), chs. 33–4, 99–107; FSN chs. 50–2, II, 86–93; tr. 307–18). Hrólfs saga kraka og Bjarkarimur (1904) argues that the saga cannot be older than the early fifteenth century (Indledning xxvi), and Slay shows that the lost common source of the surviving manuscripts probably dated from the later sixteenth century (ed., Intro. xi–xii). The saga may therefore be later than the rímur.
20 Hrólfs saga kraka og Bjarkarimur (1904), 109–63; partial tr. in Chambers and Wrenn 182–6. Finnur (Indledning xxx) dates the rímur to about 1400.
d. isolated stanzas from Bjarkamál quoted in Snorri’s Óláfs saga helga ch. 208, where it is said to have been recited to St Óláfr before the Battle of Stiklastaðir in 1030; cf. also Skáldskaparmál ch. 45 (ed. I, 60–1, tr. 112–13);
3. Grettis saga chs. 32–5 (the Glámr episode) and 64–6 (the Sandhuagrar episode); these probably adapted a version of the Bõðvarr story to the setting of eleventh-century Iceland;22
4. The Icelandic folktales Gullbrá og Skeggi (first mentioned 1690).23
5. Possibly the Scottish Gaelic folktales Am Primh Sgeul1 ‘The Chief’s Story’24 (nineteenth century or earlier), and other Gaelic folktales of the type known as ‘The Hand and the Child’.25

The first half of Beowulf shows many epic expansions. When these are removed, the core of the tale consists of Hroðgar’s building of his hall Heorot (64–85) and the coming of Grendel to slaughter his men there (86–9, 99–105, 115–74, 189–93); Beowulf’s journey to Denmark after twelve years (194–228), his reception by Hroðgar (301–406), and his threefold vow to fight Grendel without weapons (407–55, 632–8, 677–87); Grendel’s nocturnal arrival at Heorot and his murder of one of Beowulf’s men (710–45); the wrestling match between him and Beowulf, which ends with Grendel fleeing after his right arm has been torn off (745–836); the revenge attack on Heorot by Grendel’s mother, in which Hroðgar’s counsellor Æschere is killed (1251–1344); the expedition to Grendel’s mere (1383–1424) and Beowulf’s descent into it (1492–1517); his killing of Grendel’s mother (1518–69) and beheading of the dead Grendel (1570–90); his return to find that only his own retainers have waited for him (1591–1628); and his presentation to Hroðgar of the hilt of a giant sword as evidence of his deed (1651–1709).

The hero of *Bjarkamál was, like Beowulf, a relative of the king of Gautland; his parents had bear-names, and he himself was sometimes transformed into a bear (Hrólf saga). The Danish royal hall had been attacked at Yuletide on two previous years, and the first fight took place at the same season in the third year (Hrólf saga). The story included a male and a female monster (Bjarkarimur). The conflict with the female monster preceded that with the male one (Bjarkarimur), and the female may have been in the form of a she-wolf (Bjarkarimur; and cf. Beowulf 1506a, where

21 Íf 27, 361–2.
23 Jón Árnason I, 140–4, II, xxix; partial tr. in Beowulf and Its Analogues 328–31. The manuscript collector Ærn Magnússon, who grew up at Hvammur, mentions it in a letter to Torfaeus.
24 See Puhvel; McKay I, 3ff. For possible Irish influences on Beowulf, see Andersson (1998), 134–8.
25 I omit two Bear’s Son stories which lack the giantess fight: Gull-bóris saga chs. 3–4 (Íf 13, 183–9; CSI III, 338–41); borsteins saga Vikingssonar ch. 23 (FSN II, 238–41); see Smithers 8 and footnote 12.
Grendel’s mother is called *seo brimmwylf* ‘the she-wolf of the water’. The first monster was killed with a sword of magical origin (which in *Hrólfs saga* is inherited from the hero’s cave-dwelling father; the corresponding weapons inherited by his two brothers both have a *hepti*), the second with a sword given by King Hrólfr, possibly with a blow on the right shoulder (*Bjarkarímur*). *Bjarkamál* gave unusual prominence to the hero’s associate Hjalti, who gains courage when Bõðvarr makes him drink the first monster’s blood, and it may even have transferred the second killing to him (*Bjarkarímur*). The first fight took place out of doors (Saxo, *Hrólfs saga*, *Bjarkarímur*), the second in the royal courtyard (*Bjarkarímur*). In the first fight, the hero was momentarily unable to draw his sword (*Hrólfs saga*).

The two *Grettis saga* episodes are probably deliberate adaptations of a narrative similar to *Bjarkamál*. Grettir is a historical Icelander of the early eleventh century, but the two legendary episodes are inserted at defining moments of his career. Glámr’s curse before Grettir kills him (ch. 35) marks the turning point between Grettir’s youthful success and his future misfortune: he will become an outlaw, will always see Glámr’s eyes before him, and will find his constant solitude hard to bear. The Sandhaugar episode (chs. 64–6) is almost his last attempt to escape total isolation before his final retreat to Drangey, an island girded round with almost impregnable cliffs, which nonetheless fail to protect his life.

In some ways, the *Grettis saga* conflicts reflect *Bjarkamál*. Both take place at Yule in the third year of attacks on the hall. In the Glámr episode there is only one fight (cf. Saxo, *Hrólfs saga*); at Sandhaugar there are conflicts with a female monster and then a male one (cf. *Bjarkarímur*). In the Glámr episode, Grettir is momentarily paralysed before he cuts Glámr’s head off (cf. *Hrólfs saga*). In other respects, the *Grettis saga* source must have been closer to *Beowulf* than to *Bjarkamál*. Grettir’s first two fights involve wrestling; the fight with Glámr and the first fight at Sandhaugar are in the hall, the second at Sandhaugar is behind a waterfall.26 At the end of the first Sandhaugar fight the ogress, like Grendel, has her right arm torn off, whereas in *Bjarkarímur* the male ogre’s arm is cut off at the end of the second fight. In the second fight at Sandhaugar it is the giant who reaches for a replacement weapon when his first one fails, like the hero’s first weapon in *Beowulf*. The failed weapon is called a *heptisax* ‘hafted knife’, cf. the unique Old English *haftmece* in *Beowulf* 1457 (but cf. also the *hepti* of *Hrólfs saga*).27 The associate has no role in the Glámr story and only the

---

26 Guðni Jónsson points out (ÍF 7, 213) that there is no gorge or waterfall at Sandhaugar, but that the topography of Goðafoss, thirteen kilometres downstream, resembles that described in the saga. But waterfalls that plunge into gorges are common in Iceland, and this could simply reflect a type of landscape familiar to the author.

27 The weapon intended for Elg-Fróði in *Hrólfs saga kraka* (ch. 20, in ed. 62; ch. 28 in *FSN II*, 46–7) is a *skálm* with a *hepti*. That meant for Pórir hundsfótr is an axe with a *hepti* (ch. 21 in ed. 63; ch. 29 in *FSN II*, 47); Bõðvarr’s own weapon is a *sverð* with a *hjalt* (ch. 23 in
minor one of watching the water at Sandhaugar (cf. Beowulf's men watching by Grendel's Mere, Beowulf 1591–1605).

The Sandhaugar episode may have borrowed two features from the þórr pattern. The hero has a sexual partner (the housewife); she cannot be attached to the associate, who is a priest and an unsympathetic figure, and her farmer husband, the troll-woman's first victim, is not an associate, since Grettir never meets him. Grettir also carries the housewife across the river to church with her daughter on her knee. This could be derived from þórr saving the associate during the dangerous river-crossing, but seems closer to the legend of St Christopher, the giant-sized man who carries the child Christ over a water which is deeper than it has ever been before.28

Gullbrá og Skeggi is also attached to a historical Icelander; it may have been influenced by Grettis saga, whose hero comes from the same part of Iceland. As at Sandhaugar, Skeggi's associates, who have responsibility for the rope, fail in their task. The ravine, the waterfall and the cave behind the waterfall all resemble those in Grettis saga. Like Grettir at Sandhaugar, Skeggi takes to his bed to recover from the first fight; I have not found this feature in any other version of either pattern. But Gullbrá og Skeggi cannot be based only on the surviving version of Grettis saga. The bright light which ends the second fight by turning Gullbrá to stone resembles Beowulf 1570–2 and borsteins þátr uxafóts rather than the Glámr story (where the moon comes out from behind a cloud) or the Sandhaugar episode (where Grettir has to kindle a light for himself after killing the giant). The treasure, usually a stereotypical feature, becomes important in Gullbrá og Skeggi, since gaining it is a prominent part of Skeggi’s motivation.

Some features of the Bear’s Son pattern are adapted in Gullbrá og Skeggi. Both fights are with the same ogress, and both take place behind the waterfall, so there can be no attack on the hall, although the killings of Skeggi’s livestock and shepherds resembles the Glámr episode. Because Gullbrá is the only ogre-figure, the first fight cannot end with her arm being torn off. This may also explain why there is no giant sword: since women were not expected to carry weapons and Gullbrá has no relatives, there is no reason to expect a sword in her cave. The sudden light becomes a divine means of killing Gullbrá rather than a result of her death. Gullbrá og Skeggi shows no features of the þórr pattern, but þórr fails to support Skeggi when he calls on him for help during the first fight. This underlines the fact that it

ed. 68; ch. 31 in FSN II, 52). As Elg-Fróði is the most troll-like and Æoðvarr the most human of the brothers, skalm and hepti may have seemed more applicable to giant weapons than sværð and hjalt. The heptisax in Grettis saga is also a giant's weapon, and although the heftmece in Beowulf is given to the hero by Unferð, it may have originated as a giant-weapon. For other stories featuring the failed weapon, see Jorgensen (1979).

28 Christophoris saga ch. 5, ed. 283–7. This sixteenth-century translation from German is later than Grettis saga and not particularly close to it, but the Christopher legend was probably known in Iceland in some form.
is God rather than Skeggi who really overcomes Gullbrá, and it may also imply knowledge of other stories in which Þórr does help an associate to overcome a giantess.

*Am Priomh Sgeul* is of more doubtful relevance, though it shares some features with *Beowulf* and *Bjarkamál*. The first fight happens in a royal hall, the second (and third) at the home of the giant. The first ogre’s right arm is bitten off at the shoulder (cf. *Beowulf*, *Bjarkarimur*, *Sandhaugar*). Both ogres are beheaded (cf. *Beowulf*, Glámr) with a magical ‘sword of light’ (cf. the magical swords of *Beowulf*, Hrölf’s saga, *Bjarkarimur*), though it is not a replacement for a failed weapon. The ‘sword of light’ also recalls the supernatural light at or after the climax of the fight in the cave (*Beowulf*, Gullbrá og Skeggi and *Pórlens þátttr uxafóts*; see below), as well as the moon in the Glámr episode and Grettir’s light-kindling in the Sandhaugar story. It has even been suggested that *Beowulf* may be derived from Celtic rather than Scandinavian sources, despite its setting and its links with Swedish and Danish legendary history.29

But *Am Priomh Sgeul* also shows some resemblances to the *Bjarkamál* tradition which are not shared by *Beowulf*. The first protagonist has been transformed into a fierce animal by his wicked stepmother (cf. Hrölf’s saga kraka, *Bjarkarimur*). The first combat happens on a specific occasion which is the third of its kind (the birth of the third child in Gaelic, the third Yule in Hrölf’s saga, Glámr, Sandhaugar). The first two fights are undertaken by different but allied heroes, as in *Bjarkarimur*.

One might argue that the ogre-fights in both *Beowulf* and *Bjarkamál* could be independently derived from a Celtic source similar to *Am Priomh Sgeul*. But *Beowulf* and *Bjarkamál* should not then share any major features which are not also in *Am Priomh Sgeul* – but they do, notably the hero’s origins in Gautland, the setting in the Danish royal hall, and most importantly, the fact that there is one male and one female ogre (*Beowulf*, *Bjarkarimur*, *Sandhaugar*).

There are also some illogicalities in *Am Priomh Sgeul* which could arise from corruption of a story like that of *Bjarkamál*. The old man looks like a device to link the two otherwise unrelated parts of the story. Because the shape-changer is an animal all the time, he cannot wield a sword, so another hero is also needed (and *Am Priomh Sgeul* actually exacerbates this problem by having two heroes in addition to the shape-changer). We would expect the *tuairisgeal* (cave-dwelling troll) to live in a cave like the ones in *Beowulf* and Grettis saga, not in a castle or hillock. The awkward change from one male and one female ogre to two male ones (father and son) underlies many of the other complications in this story. The simplest explanation of the origins of *Am Priomh Sgeul* is via a single borrowing from Old Norse into Gaelic, but it remains possible that the ‘Hand and Child’

29 Carney; Puhvel.
MEETING THE OTHER IN NORDIC MYTH AND LEGEND

stories (which are all quite recent) are a distinct Celtic story-type which happens to use some of the same archetypal images as the Bear’s Son stories without either group having borrowed from the other.

3. Mixed and hybrid versions

The following texts are ‘mixed’, showing some features of both the Þórr pattern and that of the Bear’s Son:

1. Þorsteins þáttr uxafóts chs. 10–12 (probably fourteenth century),30
2. Bósa saga ok Herrauds ch. 8 (fifteenth century or earlier);31
3. Hálfdanar saga Bróufóstra chs. 4–6 (probably fourteenth or early fifteenth century);32
4. Sórla saga sterka chs. 2–4 (seventeenth century or earlier).33

**Þorsteins þáttr uxafóts**

This is chiefly a story of the Bear’s Son type. All the giants Þorsteinn slays (except the revivified mother ogress Skjáldvörr) are killed with a giant-derived sword. He cuts off the arm of the father ogre (Járnskjöldr) at the shoulder, and then decapitates him. A bright light shines when the ogress is overcome, though here it is a Christian means of defeating her (cf. Gullbrá og Skeggi), rather than as a result of her defeat (cf. Beowulf). As in *Bjarkamál*, Þorsteinn’s associate Styrkarr (‘Strengthener’) gives him essential support.

Other features of the Bear’s Son pattern are adapted or missing. All the conflicts take place in a hall, but it combines the two locations of the Bear’s Son pattern, since it belongs to the giants. Because Þorsteinn has already attacked the wife in her sleep, she is temporarily ‘dead’ when he overhears the conventional conversation between giant and giantess, so the ogress must be split into mother and daughter. Missing features include the attack on a human hall, the waterfall (though there is a sea journey) and the ravine. The absence of treasure is interesting, because the hero and his associate actually look for it, as if they know that they are in the kind of story where treasure is to be expected.

Features derived from the Þórr pattern include the names Þorsteinn and Styrkarr (cf. Þórr’s son Magni, ‘Strength’). Þorsteinn is the only man the giant fears; this is echoed in Orms þáttr (see above), and may reflect giant fears of Þórr. Styrkarr kills the two giant boys with a seat-post (cf. Gríðr’s pole in the Geirrøðr story and the seat-pillars taken to Iceland by Þórólfr Mosatrskögg, which have images of Þórr carved on them).34 Skjáldvörr is

---

30 ÍF 13, 359–65, Formáli dxxv; CSI IV, 349–52.
31 FSN II, 478–82; tr. 71–4. The two earliest manuscripts date from the fifteenth century.
34 Landnuamábók S85, H73 (ÍF 1, 124).
finally killed by having her neck broken; and the giants’ bodies are burned rather than beheaded.

Other features come from the general body of popular belief about giants. The ogres live in the mountains (cf. the encounters among the glaciers in Hálfdanar saga Brønufóstra). Skjálđvor’s shift looks as if it has been washed in blood (a reminder that giants are cannibals). The hero’s resolve to convert to Christianity if he survives the fight is also common (cf. Orms þáttr). The two giant boys killed by Styrkarr are probably a variant of the giant-girls motif (cf. Gríms saga loðinkinna, Hálfdanar saga Brønufóstra).

Bósa saga ok Herrauðs

In most respects this episode resembles the Þórr pattern, but some features are adapted. The hero is not tricked, but treacherously given a deadly task. The friendly giantess is naturalised into a sexually obliging farmer’s daughter (Bósi meets such compliant and informative girls wherever he goes), and the cave becomes a heathen temple. The dangerous river is changed into a sea voyage to the east. However, the most radical adaptation is the replacement of the male ogre with the idol of a heathen god, perhaps because ogres were associated with devils, who were often thought to inhabit idols. But this idol is not brought to life, so his fighting role has to be taken over by a series of peripheral opponents (a thrall, a vulture and a sexually poisonous and possibly demonically possessed bull) before the main fight with the priestess/troll-woman.

The associate’s sexual partner is again tied to a chair by her hair. Natural justice requires that the associate (Herrauðr) should fight the main opponent, because he has caused the trouble by his desire for the sexual partner, but this is obscured, because he does not meet her until after the fight is over. As in Bárðar saga, Herrauðr needs the hero’s help in gaining his victory. Two of Bósi’s three weapons are reminiscent of Þórr—he kills the thrall with a club and attacks the priestess with the head of the bull (cf. Hymiskviða 18–19). However, the burning of the temple is simply the usual Christian way of dealing with heathen shrines.

35 Cf. chs. 11, 13 (FSN II, 485–6, 491–3; tr. 77–9, 82–4).
36 Cf. Ógmundar þáttr dyfts (II 9, 112–14; CSI II, 320–1); Ælfric, De Falsis Diis 572–623 (ed. II, 707–10); cf. the Bovi story, discussed in Chapter 11.
37 With the bull cf. Eyþryggja saga ch. 63 (II 4, 169–76; CSI V, 211–15).
38 Cf. Bárðar saga ch. 16: börð skal i mót Kolbjórns, míg sínum; er þat máldi, at hann lafi mesta raun, þó at hann hefð oss öllum í þessa þraut komit. ‘Þórðr must face Kolbjorn, his kinsman; it’s right that he should face the greatest test, because he got us all into this difficulty’ (ÍF 13, 156; CSI II, 259).
39 Cf. Óláfr Tryggvason’s burning of the temple at Hlaðir (Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar ch. 59, II 26, 308); it is also occasionally attributed to pre-Christian heroes, as in Hrafnskílds saga ch. 6 (II 11, 124; CSI ch. 12, V, 275).
There are also echoes of the Bear’s Son pattern. Herrauðr tears off the priestess’s arm at the shoulder. The important fighting role of the associate is reminiscent of *Bjarkamál. The treasure is significant to the plot, since it includes what the hero has been sent to find.

_Hálfdanar saga Bronufôstra_ ¹

This is predominantly a Þórr-type story. Its hero is driven ashore in Helluland by a storm which the giant has raised by magic in order to replenish his larder with human flesh (cf. also _Sörla saga_). This looks like a combination of the tricking of the hero with the dangerous sea journey, both features of the Þórr pattern. The direction in which Hálfdan’s ships are driven should literally be west (Helluland was the Norse name for northern Labrador), ⁴⁰ but it is probably a country of the mind, whose name, ‘Stone Slab-land’, suggested a terrain suitable for giants. A friendly giantess supplies the _sax_ ‘short sword’ with which Hálfdan beheads the ogress Sleggja, and later gives him and his two associates clubs with which to slay other giants. The friendly giantess and the club are ‘Þórr’ features, though the _sax_ comes from the Bear’s Son pattern. The fights against Járnefr and Sleggja both take place in the cave. There is a sexual partner, who as usual is tied to a chair by her hair—but since the associates here are her brothers, another husband is found for her later in the saga, and the instant love between her and the associate is replaced by friendship between her and the hero’s sister. Two other ‘Þórr’ features are the beached ship (though since nothing happens to it, this becomes a blind motif), and the fact that Hálfdan kills the giant with an axe.

A smaller group of features come from the Bear’s Son pattern. Both giants are decapitated, Sleggja with a weapon of giant origin. Sleggja tries to throw Hálfdan into a chasm in the floor of the cave, into which her own headless body falls at the end of the fight (cf. the fall of the one-armed ogress into the ravine in the Sandhaugar story, and see also _Sörla saga sterka_, discussed below). The treasure also appears in some Bear’s Son stories, but has no further function here and is probably not significant. It is noticeable that the ‘Bear’s Son’ features here are not the same ones as in _Bósa saga_. This suggests that any aspect of the Bear’s Son pattern might continue to be borrowed, and therefore that the pattern was probably still known as a whole in late medieval Iceland (cf. also the late date of _Gullbrá og Skegg_).

Other elements come from the general stock of giant-motifs. These include the hero eavesdropping on the giants (cf. _Grims saga lodinkinna, Porsteins fátru uxafóts_); the grotesque sexuality of the giant couple (cf. _Grims saga_); their cannibalism (cf. _Beowulf, Grettis saga, Sörla saga_), from which

⁴⁰ Cf. *Eiriks saga rauða* ch. 8 (ÍF 4, 222 and note; CSI I, 12).
Bran carefully disassociates herself; and the killing of the ‘little’ giant girls (cf. Gríms saga).

**Sörla saga sterka¹**

This episode resembles the one in Hálfdanar saga Bronufóstra and may be borrowed from it. It takes place in an imaginary country (this time in the east): Bláland is named after the blámenn ‘black men’ who live there. Again, the hero’s ships are driven ashore by a storm magically raised by the giant, who wants to replenish his supplies of human flesh. Again the fight with the male giant comes first, and there is a chasm in the cave-floor during the fight with the female giant. Again, the hero helps a friendly giantess in a later encounter with another giantess; and again the hero is loaded with treasure, which has no further function in the plot. The major giantess here even has the same name (Mána) as one of the ‘little girl’ giantesses in Hálfdanar saga Bronufóstra, and both sagas feature caves with the absurd feature of a window through which the hero can eavesdrop on the giants.

There are some differences between the two tales, but they do not affect their relationship to the inherited patterns. In Sörla saga the associates are less important: in each of the two encounters, eleven men are quickly killed off before the narrative concentrates on the hero’s prowess. But the major innovation is that the ogress and the helpful giantess are merged into a single character, so that the ogress cannot be killed. The fall into the ravine belongs to the Bear’s Son tradition, but the presence of a helpful giantess is a feature of the Pórr pattern. Mána is not human, and is certainly a cannibal, but as soon as the hero has spared her in return for the promise of a magic corselet and sword, he places absolute trust in her, and she changes into the helpful giantess. Together they push the giant’s body into the chasm; then she makes up a bed for him and brings him a drink, and he goes off to sleep without a flicker of mistrust and is loaded with treasures the next day.

Besides these mixed stories, there are two ‘hybrid’ tales, based partly on Norse tradition and partly on material imported from European romance:

5. *Þiðreks saga* chs. 17–18 (probably c. 1250). ¹¹
6. *Samsons saga fagra* chs. 7–8, 12, 15 (probably fourteenth or fifteenth century). ¹²

We cannot simply assume that anything in these stories that resembles the Pórr or Bear’s Son patterns must come from native tradition; coincidence based on cross-language borrowing or on the independent occurrence of common archetypes is always possible.

¹¹ ed. I, 34–8 and Indledning iv; tr. 17–19.
¹² Ed. 12–16, 23–5, 28–30.
Þiðreks saga

Þiðreks saga is mainly based on various Low German heroic romances, but it probably also contains some native material; the source of this particular episode is unknown. It lacks the most distinctive details of either sub-type, but has some minor features of each of them. It agrees with the Bear’s Son pattern in four features: the associate is important (cf. *Bjarkamál*); the giant can only be defeated with his own sword (made by a dwarf); the giant is decapitated; and the treasure is emphasised, becoming the motive for the attack on the giant. Two features suggest influence from the Þórr pattern: both fights take place in the cave; and when the giant finds that his sword has gone, he fights with a flaming log. This looks like a transfer to him of one of Þórr’s characteristic weapons, though the author may simply have thought that a log would be the obvious weapon to use in such a situation. This rather generalised giant-slaying has too few distinctive features to be confidently classified.

Samsons saga fagra

This presents itself as Arthurian romance, but is mostly made up of motifs drawn from fornaldrasögur, though the author clearly knew Mottuls saga and some Breton lais, including the Guigemar of Marie de France and the anonymous Graënt (probably through the Norse prose versions in Strengleikar). On the other hand, the saga’s later chapters (18–23) include some figures derived from Old Norse myth, notably Goðmundr of Glæsisvellir, Skrýmir and Gerðr (who becomes Skrýmir’s daughter).

This episode combines the Bear’s Son pattern with various romance motifs. The attack on the hall is largely replaced by Kvintelín’s enchantment and abduction of Valentína, but one feature of it remains: the hero is pulled down into a waterfall by the ogress. The motif of the river stained with the blood of the giant(ess) remains (cf. Beowulf; the Sandhaugar episode), but its original point – to explain why the associates abandon the hero – has been lost, since no one is present to observe it. Two traces remain from the motif of the giant-derived sword: Samson stabs the troll-woman with a knife which Valentína has given him, and later regains his own sword in the fight against Galinn and Kvintelín. The treasure appears twice – first when Samson is exploring the cave after killing the troll-woman, and again after he has captured Kvintelín. There may be an echo of the tearing off of the ogress’s arm when Samson cuts off two of Kvintelín’s toes (though Kvintelín cannot be killed, since he will be needed again later in the saga).

---

43 The Old Norse version of the Old French Cort Mantel; see ed.
44 For Guigemar see Marie de France, ed. 7–25; tr. 43–55; for Graënt, Tobin 83–125; cf. also Donovan 25–6, 69–71; cf. Strengleikar, ed., 11–41, 278–90.
There are no traces of the Þórr pattern, or of conventional giant-motifs. Kvintelín is sexually promiscuous, but not physically repulsive or obscenely dressed. His mother is a troll-woman, but her appearance is not described, and there is no suggestion of cannibalism or grotesque sexuality in her. The story seems to be based on a combination of the Bear’s Son pattern with a romance-derived tale of magical abduction.

This survey has shown that both sub-patterns remained familiar in Iceland throughout the Middle Ages. Medieval audiences could clearly be expected to recognise them and appreciate deviations from them, such as the absence of a treasure which the hero and his associate expect to find (Þorsteins þáttr uxafóts) or Þórr’s failure to provide help (Gullbrá og Skeggi). But it remains to ask why these patterns continued to be popular. One approach to this question may be through the implied audience response to the hero’s male and female opponents, and the relationship between them.

4. Family relationships

One view of popular attitudes towards legendary Other World beings makes a distinction between noble giants whom one might be proud to claim as ancestors and hideous trolls who must be destroyed. It is undoubtedly true that some noble families claim descent from the union of a god and a giantess (see Chapters 5 and 10), but in the Þórr and Bear’s Son patterns, the terminology used for giants does not suggest any distinction between different kinds of Other-World being. The same male figure may be a jötunn (cf. eta ‘to eat’, so ‘cannibalistic giant’), risi (perhaps ‘mountain giant’), þurs ‘ogre’, or simply karl ‘peasant’ or mikinn maðr ‘big man’. The same female may be a flágðkona ‘witch-woman’, gýgr ‘hag’, skessa ‘giantess’, tróllkona ‘troll-woman’ or merely kerling ‘old woman’. These stories do not support the idea of a popular distinction except when giantesses choose to be helpful to the hero; all other giants are hostile beings whom it is right to exterminate.

The family relationship between the male and female ogre and the sequence of their fights with the hero vary within both sub-patterns. The surviving sequences are as follows:

doughter(s)—daughters—father: Þórr and Geirrőðr (c. 990 and later);

— Ármann Jakobsson 62; Bárðr’s unusual combination of good looks with descent from giants may be explained by his supposedly divine nature, but as Ármann points out (p. 58), none of his ten children has any further descendants.
— AEW 447.
Meeting the Other in Norse Myth and Legend

daughters–father–mother: Gríms saga lodíkinna (fifteenth century or earlier);

son–mother. Beowulf (?c. 800); Bósa saga ok Herrauðs (fifteenth century or earlier—with substitutes for the male ogre);

mother–son. Orms þátr Stórólfssonar (c. 1325–75); Samsons saga fagra (fifteenth century or earlier); Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss (c. 1350–90—plus other male giants before each);47

father–father–son: Am Priomh Sgeul (early nineteenth century or earlier);

husband–wife: Þiðreks saga (c. 1250); Hálfdanar saga Bronufóstra (fifteenth century or earlier—plus two daughters in a later episode); Sórla saga sterka (seventeenth century or earlier—preceded by twelve sons);


The husband and wife relationships usually emphasise the sexual turpitude of giants. In Hálfdanar saga Bronufóstra the couple are discovered rolling about in an obviously sexual game; in Gríms saga lodíkinna they are lying by the fire exposing their sexual organs; in Porsteins þátr uxafóts and Sórla saga sterka one of them is in bed. In Porsteins þátr uxafóts, Gríms saga lodíkinna and Sórla saga sterka the couple also have children, and this probably reflects an older pattern in which there were two ogres: parent and child. Similarly, in Bósa saga the priestess-hag is the mother of a king who does not otherwise figure in the episode.

If we discard the husband–wife sequence as a late development, there are three remaining basic patterns: daughter(s)–father; son(s)–mother; mother–son. The last could be ancient, but is more probably a reversal: since men are usually stronger than women, some writers may have felt that the climactic contest, which must come last, should be that against the son. If the mother–son sequence were the ancient one, it would be hard to see why the son–mother order ever arose at all. This suggests that in early forms of both patterns the second ogre was probably the parent of the first. The surviving examples suggest that the daughter–father sequence appears only in stories of the Þórr type and in mixed versions, whereas the son–mother pattern has examples from both types, as well as from mixed and hybrid versions.

This suggests three considerations to bear in mind in the search for possible traditional meanings for the Þórr and Bear’s Son patterns:

1. It is assumed to be ‘right’ to destroy the giant and giantess.
2. The basic form of both patterns probably made the giant and giantess parent and child.

47 The last four fights are simultaneous, but it is in this order that the giants are killed.

48 Two sons are killed by the associate in a parallel narrative; the wife is killed last.
3. In both patterns, the fight with the child probably preceded that with the parent.

5. Some possible meanings and uses

When suggesting possible ‘meanings’ for a story pattern the use of one’s own intuition is inevitable, but one must make the reasoning behind that intuition as clear as possible, avoid suggesting that one’s proposed meanings are the only ‘true’ ones, and accept the possibility that the values attached to a traditional pattern may have changed over time.

The Bear’s Son pattern

While Þórr is a central representative of the Æsir and the acknowledged defender of gods and men, the Bear’s Son is usually a foreigner and often shows some resemblance to the male monster against whom he fights. Beowulf and Bôðvarr are aliens in Denmark; Grettir arrives at Sandhaugar as an outlaw, and although he comes to fight trolls, Steinvölr tells the priest that she does not know whether the being who carried her across the river was a man or a troll.

In his first fight, the Bear’s Son typically tears or cuts off the ogre’s right arm (Beowulf, Sandhaugar, Porsteins þáttr uxafóts, and compare modifications of this in Bjarkarímur, Bôsa saga). Since the daughter–father sequence of fights is not found in the Bear’s Son pattern and the son–mother sequence is probably older than its obverse (see above), the being whose arm is torn off ‘should’ be the male monster. In that case, the hero mutilates the ogre who resembles himself.

The female monster is more physically invasive than the male. She tries to hook her claws into the hero’s flesh (Beowulf, Bôsa saga, Sôrla saga sterka, Orms þatr; in Porsteins þatr uxafóts she tries to bite through his windpipe). Then she tries to crush or suffocate him (Beowulf, the ogress fight at Sandhaugar, and cf. Bôsa saga and Þiðreks saga). But unlike Þórr, the Bear’s Son is never threatened with sexual humiliation. He often triumphs over the second ogre by decapitating her (or him) with a sword of giant origin (Beowulf, Sandhaugar, Porsteins þatr uxafóts, Am Priomh Sgeul). His victory is sometimes accompanied by a bright light of supernatural origin (Beowulf, Porsteins þatr uxafóts, Gullbrá og Skeggi, Am Priomh Sgeul). After the fight, he usually gains some treasure.

All these features could be related to a young man’s need to free himself from the control of a mother who is ‘suffocating’ him or has ‘got her claws into him’ — idioms that we still use today. Whatever our conscious attitudes, the ancient assumption that a man should be emotionally independent lives on in such figures of speech. When the hero suddenly finds a giant-sword available to him (which in Porsteins þatr uxafóts is even suspended over the bed of the mother ogress), this is no mere plot-device to
get him out of trouble, but a symbol of his sudden acquisition of adult masculinity. His removal of the head of the ogress (i.e. his mother's authority) is essential to becoming a man, and its reward is light and treasure (perhaps personal success and the inheritance of property).

But an honourable young man usually loves his mother, and the need to ‘behead’ her in this way is bound to make him feel guilty. To assure himself that he is not himself a monster, he must therefore first fight the male monster who is a perverted version of himself. Thus Beowulf comes from the open sea, and courteously requests permission to enter Hroðgar’s hall; his ‘alter-ego’ Grendel comes from the monster-infested mere, and crashes through the hall-doors in a frenzied attack. Inside the hall, Beowulf eats, drinks and strengthens social relationships; Grendel devours anyone he meets, drinks their blood and has no social relationships. The monster’s right arm is torn off to disable the ‘evil’ self and provide assurance that he who will defeat the demon mother is not himself a demon. There is, according to this interpretation, no father-figure; this may be because the commonest context in which such self-assertion was necessary to a young man was immediately after his father’s death.

The Þórr pattern

As we have seen in Chapter 8, the Þórr pattern has counterparts in the ritual of pre-Christian and mythological funerals. Funeral rituals are often rationalised as actions that ‘must’ be done to bring the dead person successfully to the Other World, but their underlying motivations must be sought in the psychological needs of those who survive. The naked man, carefully guarding his sexual integrity, who lit the funeral pyre observed by ibn Fadlan was the closest relative of the dead chief, typically his son or brother. He stands in the position of Þórr, Baldr’s brother in the Hyrrokkin story, and Þórr may have been thought of as embarking naked for his confrontation with Geirrøðr and his daughters (see Chapter 8).

A young man was unlikely to think of his parents as ogres while he presided over his father’s funeral. On the contrary, his father would become the counterpart of Baldr the Good. If his mother were still alive, she might be seen as the helpful giantess who provided him with the support he needed to prove himself as his father’s successor. If she were dead (and especially, in pre-Christian times, if she chose to die with her husband), she would become a Nanna figure, tied to the funeral couch just as the

49 For the sword as a symbol of masculinity and the psychic damage of losing it, cf. Völundarkviða 18 and McKinnell (1990), 23.
50 Nanna may actually mean ‘Mother’ (DNM 227; AEW 405; cf. also Scots and northern English nanna ‘grandmother’ and the corresponding German masculine nanne ‘father’). The alternative derivation, from Proto-Germanic *nanþ- ‘powerful’, may not be distinct from the ‘mother’ sense; nanna could once have implied ‘she who empowers’.
POÍR AND THE BEAR’S SON

associate’s sexual partner is tied to the chair by her hair. This may explain why most stories of the Poír type include the helpful giantess, the sexual partner, or both.

Poír does not embark on his expedition out of choice: he has been tricked, and he sets out unarmed. The River Vimur signifies a boundary between worlds, perhaps those of the living and the dead, but possibly also between stages of the hero’s life.51 The bereaved young man must confront the separation of death, and also his new responsibility to match his father’s social and sexual achievements.

When the giantesses try to crush Poír in the cave, they may represent the most extreme threat of wild nature – death; the cave must convey suggestions of the funeral mound. But they could also symbolise a more personal dread that the young man cannot express consciously: his father’s death leaves him with the dynastic responsibility to beget children, and an ‘alien’ woman, drawn from outside his own family, may soon be testing his virility.

The significance of the male ogre is less clear, but he could be a receptacle for the guilt-haunted resentment that young people often feel when their parents leave them by dying. What Geirrøðr flings at Poír is a blazing ball which sheds sparks and light as it flies towards him, like a sun lighting up the cave. That, indeed, may be what it is. But here the sun-symbol is a threat to the hero: his ‘day’ has come, but does he have the courage and strength to ‘handle it’, the ‘magic gloves’ that will enable him to grasp the blazing ball and make use of it?

POSTSCRIPT

Some readers may object that these stories were probably regarded primarily as historical events52 rather than psychological symbols (although fornaldarsögur were not always taken seriously as history).53 But ‘history’ itself served an exemplary function, reminding later generations of ancestral deeds that they ought to emulate,54 and that leads us back to a psychological function for these stereotypes.

The very fact that stereotypical patterns can be recognised, varied or contradicted shows that they had traditional meanings. Both these sub-patterns may have encouraged young men of high rank to assume adult

51 On journeys as a symbol of transition from one social status to another, see van Gennep 18; on the perception in early societies that transitional states are dangerous, see Douglas 96.

52 Ármann Jakobsson 53–60.

53 Borgils saga ok Hafliða ch. 10 (ed. I, 27) says that the fornaldarsaga of Hrómundr Gripsson (see FSN II, 271–86) was a favourite of King Sverrir, who thought ‘such lying sagas were the most amusing’; cf. also Hrolfs saga Gautrekssonar ch. 37 (FSN III, 151; tr. 148).

54 Cf. Guðrúnarhöfundar 3, Sigurðarkviða in skamma 40–1.
responsibilities. However, while the Bear’s Son pattern may relate to a voluntary self-liberation from maternal control, that of Þórr seems to arise from an involuntary shouldering of responsibility. But the young man’s inheritance from his father was not merely a personal matter; he was also a new leader, with whom his whole family or social group needed to be able to identify by Freudian ‘suggestion’ (see Chapter 2). At their simplest, both patterns assert the heroism of organised human society in defiance of death, with which no compromise is possible; in the end, that may be why they are ‘myths of confrontation’.
Seducing the Giantess: Óðinn

The protagonist in myths of exploitation is usually Óðinn. In the quotation above, he boasts that he knows spells which enable him to win and keep a woman’s love; but his own motivation is usually calculating rather than passionate. In the Gunnlög myth he wants to obtain the mead of poetry, but his usual aim is to beget a son who will be a defender of the gods, a just avenger, or the founder of a human dynasty.

1. Óðinn’s names

Óðinn as progenitor

Óðinn’s role as progenitor or seducer is reflected in a few of his many names, most obviously in Alfðr ‘All-father’. This name probably was used during the heathen period (see, for example, Grímnismál 48,5), but doubtless arose as a borrowing from Christianity. Gylfaginning ch. 92 calls Óðinn the father of all gods and men – an exaggeration even in Snorra Edda, where he is not, for example, the father of the Vanir – and ch. 33 claims that Alfðr is immortal and has created human beings with immortal souls. Late sources show a tendency to inflate the number of Óðinn’s divine sons, but

1 Ed. 13; tr. 13.
2 Ed. 8–9; tr. 9.
3 Þula IV e lists seventeen of them (Kock I, 325 and Skáldskaparmál ed. I, 113; tr. 156).
other Óðinn names ending in -fðr\textsuperscript{a} suggest that pre-Christian poets took Alfðr to mean simply ‘patron of everyone’.

Þrór (cf. ðróask ‘to thrive, be fruitful’)\textsuperscript{9} probably originated as a name for Freyr. In Íðindhóllr’s Ynglingatal 35.1–3 (c. 900),\textsuperscript{8} niðkvísl Þrós ‘the branch of Þrór’s descent’ refers to the Norwegian branch of the Ynglingar, who are descended from the Vanir (see Chapter 5). Similarly, in Þula IV 7, Þrór is a boar. Freyr’s sacred animal.\textsuperscript{8} But by the later tenth century, when Kormákr uses the spear-kenning Prós fél ‘Þrór’s file’ (lausavísa 46.6–8),\textsuperscript{9} Þrór is Óðinn. In Grímnismál 49.6, Óðinn claims that he is called Þrór at þingum ‘Þrór at assemblies’; Finnur Jónsson interprets this as ‘he who allows legal cases to proceed successfully’,\textsuperscript{10} but Prós þing is a battle-kenning,\textsuperscript{11} so the ‘assemblies’ in question are probably battles. In Haukr Valdísarson, Íslendingadrápa 17.7\textsuperscript{12} (probably twelfth century), Prós drós ‘Þrór’s lady’ means þóðr, the earth, and this refers to one of Óðinn’s seductions (see section 2 below). Used as an Óðinn-name, Þrór probably meant ‘the (sexually) prolific’.\textsuperscript{13}

Jalkr ‘Gelding’\textsuperscript{14} appears in Grímnismál 49.3; 54.6, Pula IV jf 7.6,\textsuperscript{15} and three times in battle contexts: two shield-kennings,\textsuperscript{16} and one meaning ‘ship’.\textsuperscript{17} In Grímnismál 54 Jalkr is paired with the tribal name Gautr ‘the Goth’, so it may have denoted Óðinn as ancestor of a line of human rulers.

The idea of the gelding as virility symbol is paralleled in Võlsa þáttr\textsuperscript{18}, which features a household who worship the preserved phallus of a slaughtered horse, which they call Võlsi. Either it or the verses composed

\begin{itemize}
  \item [4] For example, Herjaðr ‘Father of Armies’, Vafþrúnnsnismál 2.2; Sigðr ‘Father of Victory’, Grímnismál 48.2; Valþrún ‘Father of the Slain’, Võluspá 1.5.
  \item [5] AEW 623; DNM 329.
  \item [6] Skj I B, 13: IF 26, 82.
  \item [7] Kock I, 335.
  \item [8] Finnur Jónsson (1919), 311–12. It has been argued that Þrór always was an Óðinn-name and that the boar-name refers to the wedge-shaped battle formation called svinfylking ‘the pig’s formation’ (see DNM 329), but this ignores the instance of the name in Ynglingatal.
  \item [9] Skj I B, 80.
  \item [10] LP 647.
  \item [11] Placitusdrápa 49.3–4 (Kock I, 301).
  \item [12] Kock I, 263.
  \item [13] Cf. also Sigþr Þrór’s ‘Fruitful in Victory’ (Pula IV jf 8.7, Kock I, 338). For Þrór as a dwarf-name see Võluspá 12.4 (probably a twelfth-century interpolation).
  \item [14] AEW 289–90; LP 327; DNM 177–8.
  \item [16] Jalk frþk ‘Jalkr’s partition’ (Sigvatr Pórðarson on Erlingr Skjálgrsson, before 1027–8 – Kock I, 118 and Ólafs saga helga ch. 112, IF 27, 183–4); jalks ský ‘Jalkr’s cloud’ (Holmgungu-Bersí, lausavísa 3.6, reputedly tenth century, Skj I B, 87 and Kormáks saga ch. 12, IF 8, 250–1).
\end{itemize}
about it are offered as ‘sacrifices’ to Maurnir. This may mean ‘giantesses’;\(^\text{19}\) in this case the ritual described in the \textit{játtr} may reflect the physical seduction of the giantess, with the \textit{völsi} representing the phallus of Öðinn.\(^\text{20}\) But in \textit{Völsunga saga} ch. 2, \textit{Völsungr} is the great-grandson of Öðinn and founder of the \textit{Völsungar}.\(^\text{21}\) He marries Öðinn’s \textit{óskmey} (probably ‘mistress’) Hljóð,\(^\text{22}\) the daughter of the giant Hrímnir, and their son is Sigmundr, which is also an Öðinn-name.\(^\text{23}\) Similarly, in \textit{Beowulf} Sigemund’s father is \textit{Wæls} (\textit{Beowulf} 877, 897).\(^\text{24}\) The royal ‘horse-ancestor’ can be seen earlier still, in the brothers Hengist and Horsa (‘Stallion’ – cf. Danish \textit{hingst} – and ‘Horse’), the legendary founders of the kingdom of Kent.\(^\text{25}\)

Like the horse-phallus itself, the name \textit{Völsi} clearly signified Odinic virility in his royal descendants, and \textit{jalkr} may reflect similar beliefs. Perhaps it was thought that the gifts necessary to human beings are in such short supply that the gods have to give them away, wholly or in part,\(^\text{26}\) and this may explain the strange idea of the totemic gelding as virile progenitor.

\textbf{Óðinn as seducer}

Three Öðinn-names probably refer to his role as seducer. The most obvious is \textit{Glapsviðr} ‘Wise in Seduction’.\(^\text{27}\) Finnur Jónsson translated this as ‘he who

---

\(^19\) The giant Þjazi is called \textit{faðir Mõrnar} (\textit{Haustlõng} 6.4 and 12.8, c. 900, Skj I A 17, 19, I B 15, 16); but the plural of \textit{Mõrn} should have been \textit{Marnar} or \textit{Marnir}, so this interpretation is problematic; cf. Steinsland and Vogt.

\(^20\) In \textit{Þula} IV l.8, \textit{völsi} is a \textit{heiti} for ‘sword’; cf. \textit{DNM} 365–6. Düwel (followed by Simek (2003), 285) argues that the story is a late fabrication, but despite its mockery of heathenism, the ancient proper names and the correspondence with a genuinely heathen horse-cult suggest that the \textit{Völsi} game may be derived from folk survivals.

\(^21\) \textit{FSN} I, 6.

\(^22\) Cf. Óski below. This may be another tale of the retainer marrying his lord’s discarded mistress, cf. Saxo’s story of Júritha, discussed below.

\(^23\) \textit{Þula} IV iii 6,5 (Kock I, 337).

\(^24\) \textit{Beowulf}, ed. 33–4. Since Wæls was less famous than Sigemund, his name often appeared in the patronymic \textit{Waelsing/Völsungr} ‘Son of Wæls/Völsi’, as in both cases in \textit{Beowulf}. This allowed \textit{Völsungr} to replace \textit{Völs(i)} as the father’s name in the Old Norse legend.

\(^25\) Bede, \textit{Historia Ecclesiastica} I, 15 (ed. 50–1); The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for 449 (ed. I, 12–13, tr. 142–3). Wallace-Hadrill (23–4) argues that they were historical kings, but for their mythic status see Joan Turville-Petre, \textit{DNM} 139. The tradition used by Bede must antedate the conversion of Kent, c. 601. According to version E of \textit{The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle}, Hengist and Horsa were great-grandsons of Woden.

\(^26\) Öðinn sacrifices one eye and Heimdallr part of his hearing to gain wisdom (\textit{Völuspá} 27–8); Hömir gives away his intelligence to human beings (\textit{Völuspá} 18,6: \textit{Ynglinga saga} ch. 4, ll 26, 12–13).

\(^27\) \textit{DNM} 112; \textit{ÆW} 172; SG III, i, 212; it appears in \textit{Grínmismál} 47,8 and \textit{Þula} IV iij 3,3 (Kock I, 337).
knows how to drive someone mad\textsuperscript{28} (cf. Hávamál 155, Hárðarþljóð 20), and it is true that Óðinn’s deceptions do not always have a sexual motive.\textsuperscript{29} But in verse, glepja nearly always has sexual connotations; it is only in prose that it refers to people confusing others in legal matters.\textsuperscript{30} In Völsunga 39,5 and Lokasenna 20,3 it refers to extra-martial seductions. In Hárðarþljóð 52,3 Hárbarðr ‘deceives’ Þórr by refusing him passage across a fjord, but this is linked to the immediately preceding allegation that Þórr’s wife Sif has had an affair during his absence from home (Hárðarþljóð 48, 50). In Hallfreðr’s Óláfdrápa 19,3, 25,7 (c. 1000), Norway is seen as a grieving widow ‘deceived’ (i.e. sexually disappointed) by the fall of her ‘husband’ King Óláfr Tryggvason.\textsuperscript{31} Two similar Óðinn-names, Ginnarr ‘Deceiver’ and Skollvaldr ‘He who Controls Betrayal’\textsuperscript{32} might also refer to seduction, but ginn ‘trick’ and skollr ‘treachery’ can refer to any kind of deception,\textsuperscript{33} so these names may refer to Óðinn’s trickery in general.

Óski\textsuperscript{34} has usually been translated ‘wish fuller’\textsuperscript{35} or ‘the one whose wishes are fulfilled’.\textsuperscript{36} But in verse-compounds, ósk- consistently refers to people or things that are desired, not to the wisher or the agent who grants the wish.\textsuperscript{37} About half the surviving examples are in contexts involving sexual desire,\textsuperscript{38} and two others apply a Christian allegorisation of desire to Christ or the Virgin.\textsuperscript{39} Óðinn could well be described as ‘he who is desired’ (see Hávamál 161–2 and Hárðarþljóð 30, where he boasts of a sexual conquest in the east, among giantesses, in which he gave and received pleasure). The only instance of Óski in a mythological context (Óttarr

\textsuperscript{28} LP 187.

\textsuperscript{29} He deceives a giant or king in Völsungsímál and in Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks ch. 10, and tries to deceive a dead prophetess in Baldr’s draumar.

\textsuperscript{30} CV 203.

\textsuperscript{31} Skj I B, 154, 156.

\textsuperscript{32} Þula IV jj 1, 8 and 6, 1 (Kock I, 337).

\textsuperscript{33} The verb skollr sometimes occurs in contexts of sexual betrayal, for example, in Haraldr harðráði 3, 8, 6, 8, 7, 8, 6, 8 (Kock I, 166), but this is not its usual use.

\textsuperscript{34} Grímnismál 49, 8; Óttarr svarti, Óláfsdrápa sönska 2, 4 (probably before 1022, Kock I, 137; see note 40 below); Þula IV jj 8, 3 (Kock I, 337).

\textsuperscript{35} SG III. 1, 214.

\textsuperscript{36} See óskahyr ‘a desired wind’, óskafandr ‘a longed-for meeting’, óskalíf ‘the life one would desire’, óskafol ‘praise desired (by God)’, óskamey dróttins ‘desired virgin of the Lord’, óskkván ‘desired or beloved wife’, óskney ‘desired maiden, mistress’, ósknóg refugees desired son’. Ósk-Rán, used of Hildr Hoyadóttir in Ragnar’s draupa 8, 2 (Skj I B 2 and Skáldskaparmál ch. 50, ed. I, 72; tr. 123) is taken in LP 448 to mean ‘the goddess (i.e. woman) who desires death’, but probably means ‘the woman who is desired’ (by her lover and her father, who fight until Ragnar’s over who shall possess her).

\textsuperscript{37} Óskalíf in Arni Jónsson’s Guðmundartráða 19,6–8 (Kock II, 243); óskkván in Guðhormr sindri 8, 8 (Skj I B, 56); óskney in Oldnærgjárn 16, 3; ósk-Rán, see above.

\textsuperscript{38} Óskamey dróttins (the Virgin), in Mariuvísur I 23, 6 (Kock II, 293); óskmegi dróttins (Christ), in Heilags anda visur 17, 2 (Kock II, 94).
svarti’s Öska víf’ Öski’s lady’) uses the myth of Óðinn and Jóðr to suggest a sexual relationship between the king and the land. It is also difficult to see non-sexual contexts in which Óðinn might be desired. Kings and warriors might wish to be with him after their deaths, but while one was alive, victory was preferable to being given to Óðinn on the battlefield. Öski can be contrasted with another Óðinn-name, Pekkr ‘the Popular’, which seems to have had no sexual connotations.41

Gondir (Grimnismál 49, 10; Pula IV jí 3,34) is obviously related to the valkyrie-name Gondul.43 Gandr has traditionally been translated ‘magic staff’,44 but probably means ‘magic spirit’ and/or ‘wolf’. The description of Lappish magic in the Historia Norwegiae includes a definition of gandus as an unclean spirit used in predictive magic.45 Related words include (spá)ganda ‘prophetic spirits’ (Völsuspá 22,4, 29,4); gandreíbr ‘ride of spirits’;46 gandrek ‘spirit-drive’, a poeticism for ‘wind’;47 Gandvik ‘the White Sea’, where the Lapps live, hence associated with the spirits raised by them;48 and jormungandr ‘the enormous spirit’, a heiti for the World Serpent.49 Elsewhere, gandr is a heiti for ‘wulf’,50 perhaps because wolves were regarded as the embodiment of spirits. In Fóstbrœðra saga ch. 23 the wise woman Bórdís claims to have run far and wide during the night on gandar (probably ‘spirits in the form of wolves’) in order to gain information.51 Similarly, a Norwegian charm from 1325 uses gondul to mean ‘magical animal, wolf’.52

Gondir probably means either ‘the One Who Uses Magic Spirits’ or ‘the One with (Spirit) Wolves’, and both could suggest dealings with

40 See Skíldskaparmál ch. 64 (ed. I, 100; tr. 145). Kock accepts the manuscript reading öskvíf ‘desired lady’, which would remove the Óðinn-name, but see Faulkes, ed. I, 219; the verse predicts that Oláf scóski will invade Norway, portrayed as ‘Jóðr’ with no mate. As in Hallfreðr’s use of glepja, Norway is presented as a joyless widow.
41 Grimnismál 46,4; Pula IV jí 7,3 (Kock I, 337); cf. Ynglings saga ch. 6 (IF 26, 17) and DNM 313.
42 Kock I, 337.
43 Hákonarmál 1,1 (Skj I B, 57), Völsuspá 30,7 and about twenty other examples (see LP 213–14).
44 LP 179. DNM 115; Völsuspá, ed. Nordal 61 (under spáganda), but AEW 155–6 shows that the derivation from Primitive Old Norse *ga-wandar = Old Norse wandr ‘wand’ is unsatisfactory.
45 Ed. 85–6; tr. 6; cf. Dronke (1997), 132–3; Tolley.
46 Sturla Bóðarson, Hákonarkviða 23,5–6 (1263, Kock II, 66), Anon. XII E 1,2 (Kock I, 293).
47 Pula IV oo 2,7 (Kock I, 339).
48 Eilífr Goðrúnarson, Pórsdrípa 26 (c. 990, Skj I B, 139); Eyjólf Valgerðarson 1,6 (later tenth century, Skj I B, 95).
49 Ragnarsdrípa 16,4 (c. 850, Skj I B, 4), Völsuspá 50,3.
50 Egill Skallagrímsson, lausavísa 23,8 (mid-tenth century, Skj I B, 47); Sturla Bóðarson, Hrynhenda 10,4, 13,8 (before 1284, Kock II, 61, 62). In Hildr Hrólfsdóttir nefja 1,2 (mid-tenth century), gandr means ‘criminal’ (Skj I B, 27); and cf. the fire-kenning hrögtandr ‘roof-wolf’ (Pula IV pp 1,7, Kock I, 339).
51 IF 6, 243.
52 DNM 115.
giantesses. Hynluljóð in Hyndluljóð 5.1–4 and Hyrrokkin in Gylfaginning ch. 49 both ride on wolves, and females who ride gandr in the night are probably the same as the wolf-riding troll-women called myrkriður ‘riders in the dark’ or kveldriður ‘evening riders’. In Hávamál 155 Ódinn describes a spell by which he drives túnriðor ‘fence-riders’ mad and prevents them from returning to their own bodies; in Hájarðsljóð 20,1–3 this is expressed in terms of seducing myrkriður away from their husbands. Of course Ódinn might have dealings with giantesses that were not seductions, or Gõndlir might mean simply ‘the One with Wolves’ (a reference to Ódinn’s wolves Geri and Freki; see Gaimnismál 19.1–3). But it is at least possible that it refers to his use of magic spirits in overcoming and seducing giant-sorceresses.

Old Norse poets were clearly aware of Ódinn as a clever seducer (Głapsviðr) who inspired desire in his mistresses (Óski), and perhaps as one who used magic spirits in achieving his seductions (Gõndlir). Two of his ‘progenitor’-names are probably borrowed from elsewhere (Alfõðr and the related Aldafõðr ‘father of men’ from Christianity, Pror from the cult of the Vanir), while jalkr relates to the ancestry of human families rather than that of the gods. Overall, the evidence of Ódinn-names suggests that skaldic poets found Ódinn’s seductions of giantesses more poetically interesting than his role as progenitor.

2. Jõrð

Hvernig skal jõrð kennu? Kalla Ymis hold ok móður Þórs, döttur Ónars, brúði Óðins, elju Friggjar ok Rindar ok Gunnlaðar, sværu Sifjar, gólf ok botn veðra hallar, sjá dýranna, döttur Nátta, syster Auðs ok Dags.

‘How should earth be referred to? By calling it Ymir’s flesh and mother of Þórr, daughter of Ónarr, bride of Óðinn, rival of Frigg and Rindr and Gunnløð, mother-in-law of Sif, floor and base of the hall of winds, sea of the animals, daughter of Night, sister of Auðr and of Day.’

Skáldskaparmál ch. 24

53 Ed. 46; tr. 49.
54 See Pála IV c. 4.8 (Kock I, 324), and a verse in Ketils saga hengs ch. 5 (FSN I, 260; Kock II, 161), where Ketill (who is an Odinic hero, see Chapter 11) boasts to a troll-woman that he has often encountered a myrkriða but never been frightened by one.
55 In Helgaþuði Hjørvarðssonar 15.6 Atli boasts to the troll-woman Hrímgardr that he has often killed kveldriðor. Cf. the wolf-kennings kveldriðu hesta ‘evening-rider’s horses’ (Dovvaldr Hjaltason 1.4, late tenth century, Skj I B, 111), kveldriðu stóði ‘evening-rider’s stud-horse’ (Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld, Óláfsdrápa 6.8, c. 1000, Skj I B, 149).
56 On this stanza’s relation to Norwegian law-codes, see Hávamál, ed. Evans 139–41.
57 Ed. I, 35; cf. tr. 90.
This quotation shows that skaldic poets could refer to the earth (jôrð) in three different ways. Treating it in naturalistic terms produces images like ‘floor and base of the hall of winds (i.e. of the sky), sea of the animals’. Terms like Ymis hold use the myth that Óðinn and his brothers created the earth out of the body-parts of the primeval giant Ymir (see Gylfaginning ch. 8).58 The third approach was to refer to the myth of the giantess Jôrð, daughter of Night, concubine of Óðinn and mother of Þórr, which might occasionally be mingled with learned euhemeristic speculation on the origins of heathen belief, as in the Prologue to Snorra Edda.59

No explicit narrative of the seduction of Jôrð survives, but there is probably a blurred memory of one in Saxo’s story of Iuritha (VI.iv.10–11).60 King Fridlevus stays with a man called Grubbi, seduces his daughter Iuritha and has a son by her, whom he names Olavus; later he abandons her, but she is consoled by marriage to his man-at-arms Ani. The name Iuritha obviously resembles Jôrð. That of her father looks like a giant-name (cf. Old Norse grybba ‘an ugly hag’). Ani, her eventual husband, is probably a weak form of An(n), cf. her father’s name Anarr or Ønarr in Skáldskaparmál. This story replaces the progenitor god and his heroic son (Óðinn and Þórr) with a progenitor king and his heroic son (Fridlevus and Olavus).61 Otherwise, it probably reflects the main features of the Jôrð myth: a visitor receives hospitality from a giant, seduces the giant’s daughter and later abandons her; she bears a heroic son; and she feels a continuing attachment to or sexual need for her seducer.

Skaldic poets often refer to Þórr as son of Jôrð. Her name also appears in six woman-kennings, and in haddr Jarðar ‘Jôrð’s tresses’, a kenning for grass in Bjarkamál 3.1.62 Jôrð is also called Fjõrgyn and Hlôðyn or Hlõðyn.63 In Hárbarðsljóð 56.5–10 Þórr is told to meet his mother Fjõrgyn in Verland (probably ‘the Land of Men’), where she will teach him the way to Óðinn’s lands.64 In Vôluspá 56.10 Þórr is called Fjõrgynjar bœrr ‘Fjõrgyn’s son’ as he defends the Earth against the Miðgarðsormr. Al fjõrgynjar ‘Fjõrgyn’s eel’ is a snake-kenning,65 and á fjõrgynju (Oddrúnargrátr 11,6) means simply ‘on earth’, but in these two cases fjõrgyn is probably a common noun. Hlôðyn or Hlõðyn first appears in Võlu-Steinn 2.466 (c. 950), where the poet recalls the funeral of his son, vividly contrasting the literal dark earth (with images of

58 Ed. 11–12; tr. 12.
59 Ed. 3; tr. 1–2.
60 Ed. I, 150; tr. I, 168–9; II, 97.
61 Olavus also appears in Ynglinga saga ch. 25 as Áli inn frœkni Friðleïsson, one of the victims of Starkaðr (LF 26, 48–9).
62 Skj I B, 170.
63 Ælfric. IV a 1, 2–3 (Kock I, 333 and Skáldskaparmál, ed. I, 130; tr. 163).
64 See SG III.1, 254; Hárbarðr (= Óðinn) may be suggesting that Jôrð is infatuated with him and often travels the roads to seek him out.
65 Anon. III B 5.2 (Skj I B, 174 and Skáldskaparmál, ed. I, 87; tr. 135).
66 Skj I B, 93.
the dark giantess Jörð swallowing the corpse, and the rocks as (Ymir’s?) bones), with the green ‘dress’ of the nourishing Hlöðyn, which is vegetation.

Several poets implicitly compare a king’s control over the land (jörð) with Óðinn’s physical and emotional hold over Jörð. Guthormr sindri’s Hákonardrápa 5,1–4 (mid-tenth century), says that Hákon Ádalsteinsföstri has placed his nephew Tryggvi in charge of the province of Viken: at því fjóði / Ónars, eiki gróna / austr ‘of that lady of Ónarr (= Jörð, land), grown with oak in the east’.70 Ónarr is the father of Jörð, and ‘grown with oak’ implies that the forest is Jörð’s hair; this may allude to a myth in which Óðinn passed on his discarded mistress to one of his followers, as in Saxo’s story and Völsunga saga ch. 2 (see above). Einarr skálaglamm’s Vellekla 27,36 (c. 986) concentrates on the seduction. The context is Hákon jarl’s desire to freista ‘tempt’ Denmark (i.e. conquer it), and the phrase myrk-Hlöðynjar markar ‘the dark woods of Hlöðyn’ or ‘dark Hlöðyn’s woods’ again likens the forest to the dark hair of a woman or giantess.

A more elaborate exploration of the same idea appears in stt. 3–6 of Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld’s Hákonardrápa 490, composed for Hákon jarl c. 990. Hákon apparently placed great importance on his ‘sexual’ relationship with the land (see Þorgerðr Hólgabrúðr in Chapter 6 above). These quatrains refer to Jörð as ‘bride’ of Óðinn, sister of Auðr and daughter of Ónarr, and attention is again drawn to trees as her hair (she is barrhadduð ‘firm-tressed’ and viði gróna ‘grown with woodland’). Some details may refer to Hákon’s control over Norway rather than to Óðinn’s conquest of Jörð: Hallfreðr’s statement that the ‘marriage’ took place síðan ‘afterwards’ may suggest that Hákon had ‘seduced’ the loyalty of Norway before he actually gained power. The reference to Jörð as a deserted wife may refer either to Óðinn’s abandonment of her or to the flight from Norway of Hákon’s predecessors (see Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar ch. 16). But two expressions seem incompatible with Hákon’s situation — spenr ‘tures’ and tegja ‘to entice’ are strange words to use about a military conquest—and these must surely refer to Óðinn’s seduction of Jörð.

Later, Hallfreðr used the myth of Jörð again, but more subtly. In lamenting the fall of the Christian King Óláfr Tryggvason in his Óláfsdrápa 19,3 and 25,7 (c. 1000), he personifies Norway as a grieving widow whose love has been frustrated by Óláfr’s fall.71 Here the reference to the Jörð myth is submerged in deference to the new religion, but it reinforces the

67 Skj I B, 55; Hákonar saga góða ch. 9 (ÍF 26, 161).
68 Skj I B, 122.
69 Skj I B 147–8 and Skáldskaparmál (ed. I, 8, 36, 35–6, notes on pp. 136, 158, 181–2; tr. 67, 91, 96). In the first quatrain most manuscripts read bifkván ‘trembling wife’ for biðkván ‘abandoned wife’; but this destroys the metrically required internal rhyme with brídja.
70 ÍF 26, 241.
71 Skj I B, 154, 156.
suggestion that Jǫrð was emotionally as well as physically ‘conquered’ by Óðinn. Twenty years later, Óttarr svarti’s Óláfdrápa 2 (c. 1020) encourages the heathen Swedish king Óláfðr sœnski to invade Norway: *Visi tekr ... munlaust ... Óska víf* ‘the ruler will without doubt take Óski’s lady’. The name Óski suggests Jǫrð’s desire for Óðinn (see above), and hence the supposed desire of Norway for the coming of Óláfr. This verse might originally have read *mundlaust* ‘without a bride-price’ for the rather colourless *munlaust* ‘without doubt’. This would suggest that seizing Norway will be like the sexual possession of Jǫrð without formal marriage; it is a tempting idea, but the unanimity of the manuscripts tells against it.

However, this image is certainly present in st. 3 of Þjóðólfr Árnorsson’s *Sexstefja* ‘Six Refrains’ (c. 1065, composed for King Haraldr harðráði). Describing a campaign in ‘Africa’ when the young Haraldr was in the service of the Byzantine emperor, Þjóðólfr claims that Haraldr took *elju Rindar* ‘Rindr’s rival’ (Jǫrð, the land), *ómynda ‘without a bride-price’. He adds that the African ruler could not keep Ánarr’s daughter (Jǫrð) from Haraldr with her fine headdress. This varies the usual image of forests as Jǫrð’s hair by comparing the snow on mountain tops to the white linen of a woman’s headdress, and here Jǫrð is unambiguously *ómynda ‘without a bride-price’. *Elju Rindar* ‘Rindr’s rival’ suggests that Þjóðólfr saw Jǫrð as emotionally attached to Óðinn, but the same poem may also contain the idea that he raped her. In st. 28 he says that Haraldr often causes battles áðr hann of þryngvi ... und sik jǫrðu ‘before he forces earth/Jǫrð under him’. Faulkes includes this in a list of comparisons of the conquest of land to a man forcing a woman to submit to him. However, it is often hard to decide whether the reference is to the mythical Jǫrð or literally to land, which may be said to be ‘under’ its ruler without any sexual metaphor being intended. It seems safest to assume a sexual sub-text only where the word for territory is also a proper name, and not where it is only a common noun such as *land, grund or eyjar*.  

---

72 Kock I, 137.  
73 Kock I, 171, *Fageskiuna* ch. 51 (ÍF 29, 231), and (first half only) *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 24 (ed. I, 36; tr. 91).  
74 For Haraldr’s service with the Varangians, cf. *Haralds saga harðráða* chs. 2–15 (ÍF 28, 70–88). Greek sources confirm Araltes as leader of the Varangians, but he figures only in campaigns in Sicily (from 1038) and Bulgaria (late 1041) – see ÍF 28, Inngangur xv–xvii, where it is suggested that the supposedly African campaign may have been in Asia Minor.  
75 Kock I, 174 and *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 57 (ed. I, 85; tr. 134).  
76 *Skáldskaparmál*, ed. I, 158.  
77 Cf., for example, Þorðarhornskóli’s *Glymdrápa* 6.1–4 (c. 900, Skj I B, 21).  
78 Cf. respectively Eyjólfr daðaskáld, *Banðadrápa* refrain (c. 1010, Kock I, 101 and *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 55, ed. I, 84; tr. 133); Hallvarð háreksblesi, *Knutsdrápa* 4.1 (1016–35, Kock I, 149 and *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 57, ed. I, 86; tr. 134); Óttarr svarti, *Hafðálwaust* 19.5–8 (c. 1022, Kock I, 139 and *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 64, ed. I, 105; tr. 150).
In Skáldskaparmál ch. 24 Jóðr is the daughter of Nótt ‘Night’ (though no verse is cited to support this) and of Ónarr or Anarr (see the verses by Guthormr, Hallfreðr and Hjóðólfr cited above). Gylfaginning ch. 10 calls her the daughter of Nótt and Annarr, but ch. 9 makes her the daughter of Óðinn himself, as well as his concubine. The form Annarr is derived from Aðra or Haðra in the Anglo-Saxon royal genealogies, but Old English Haðra is not linked with Earth or Night, and is separated from Woden by ten generations. Snorri knew bróðr ‘Third’ as an Óðinn-name, and probably assumed that Annarr ‘Second’ was another, given because he was the second husband of Nótt. But there is no other evidence for Jóðr as the daughter of Óðinn, and Annarr is probably a learned error for Ánarr. Gylfaginning ch. 36 adds Jóðr and Rindr to the list of goddesses because they are the mothers of Þórr and Váli, but they do not really belong among them.

Anarr and Ónarr (and their simplex forms Án and Ónn) are dwarf-names, but spellings vary from one manuscript to another, and the scribes probably did not attach any meaning to the names, whose derivation remains uncertain. Dwarfs inhabit the earth and turn to stone if the sun shines on them (see, for example, Alvíssmál 35, 6–7, Helgakviða Hjórhards-sonar 30), so it is appropriate that Jóðr should be the daughter of Night and a dwarf. It connects her with the realm of giants, and perhaps with the dead whom she devours (see Völus-Steinn’s verse cited above).

Fjórgyn has been linked to the Lithuanian thunder-god Perkunas, but is more probably related to Gothic fairguni, Old English fyrgen- and the Old High German placename Fergunna, all meaning ‘mountain’. Hlóðyn has been related to the Germanic goddess Hludana, to whom there are five Latin votive inscriptions in Münster, the lower Rhine and Frisia (AD 197–235). None of its proposed interpretations seems convincing, and in the period of our texts it was probably simply accepted as a synonym for ‘earth’.

79 Ed. 13, tr. 12–13.
80 Cf. Snorra Edda, Prologue (ed. 5, 163; tr. 3). For Haðra, see Chambers and Wrenn 202–3, 314–22. The oldest English sources are the Parker manuscript of The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and Asser’s Life of King Alfred, both from Winchester, c. 890.
81 Ed. 30; tr. 31 and cf. Pula IV h 1.7 (Kock I, 325).
82 Anarr (Völuspá 11.7, Codex Regius); Onarr (Völuspá 11.7, Hauksbók, Gylfaginning manuscripts R, W; U reads annarr); Án (Völuspá 11.7, Codex Regius, Hauksbók; Gylfaginning has Ór (W), Óren (T), Órr (U); R omits); Óunn (Pula IV ii 3.4, Kock I, 336). DNM 253 says that Onarr is also the father of the dwarf Andvari in Reginsnál 2.2, but the manuscript form here is Óunn (cf. also Pula IV ii 3, Kock I, 336).
83 AEW 9, 419.
84 AEW 126.
85 DNM 153–4; Hludana has been linked to the ogress Hulðr (‘the Hidden’, see Chapters 5, 7), and to Frau Holle, the ‘Mother Winter’ of German folktales.
86 See AEW 239; DNM 153–4.
3. Rindr

Seið Yggr til Rindar.

‘The Terrifier (Óðinn) won Rindr by spells.’

This quotation from Kormákr’s Sigrðardrápa 3, composed in or before 963 for a feast in honour of the gods, is probably the oldest surviving reference to Rindr. She also appears as Óðinn’s mistress in the earth-kenning elja Rindar ‘Rindr’s rival’ (Þjóðólfr Árnarsson, Sexstefja 3,1–4, c. 1065; see section 2 above). Oddi litli, lausavísa 1,3–4 (mid-twelfth century) uses Baldr’s beiði-Rindr ‘Baldr’s asking-Rindr’ as a kenning for Frigg (Baldr’s mother), and this resembles the kennings of the ‘rival of’ type. In Bjarnar saga Hítdœlakappa ch. 12, Bjorn sits beside Oddný, of whose hand he has been cheated, and insults her husband Þórðr with a verse in which he calls Oddný Rindr mundar ‘Rindr of the bride-price’ (Kock I, 164). He implies that although Þórðr has managed to pay the bride-price for Oddný, she is Bjorn’s mistress and likely to bear him a son, as Rindr did to Óðinn. In Einarr Gilsson’s thirteenth-century warrior-kenning serkjar. . . . Rindar . . . Sannr ‘Sannr (‘True One’ = Óðinn) of Rindr’s shirt (= mailcoat)’, the context is a miracle in which a farmer called Kálfr has been cured of a running sore. As Kálfr is not a warrior, the kenning seems odd unless the miracle is being compared to the protection that might be given to a warrior by a magic garment or charm. This suggests that Rindr was not merely the object of Óðinn’s seiðr, but also a worker of protective magic herself. Gylfaginning ch. 36 and Pula IV h 2,2 list Rindr among the goddesses, presumably because she is the mother of Váli. She also appears in a number of woman-kennings of the type in which a goddess-name is modified with an item of female dress or jewellery.

87 Skj I B, 69; cf. Skáldskaparmál ch. 2 (ed. I, 9; tr. 68). The context may suggest that such enchantment by Óðinn was not always viewed with disapproval by heathens – see Hákonar saga góða ch. 14 (IF 26, 167–8). On the date of Sigrurðr’s death, which provides the terminius ad quem for the poem, see Inngangur xcviii.88 Kock I, 250.89 Lausavísa 10,3 (Kock I, 143 and IF 3, 145–6). The verse supposedly dates from the early eleventh century, but may actually imitate a verse attributed to Bjorn Breiðvíkingakappi (IF 3, Inngangur lxiii, and cf. IF 4, 108–9); the latter does not include the Rindr kenning.90 Guðmundardrápa 13,2–4 (Kock II, 231 and Guðmundar saga Arasonar, ch. 10, Byskupa sögur III, 189).91 Cf., for example, Orvar-Odds saga chs. 11–12 (FSN I, 313–18), and Boberg 70.92 Kock I, 325 and Skáldskaparmál, ed. I, 114; tr. 157.93 bands beiði-Rindr ‘the asking Rindr of the (hair?)-band’ (Kormákr, lausavísa 4,3, mid-tenth century, Skj I B, 71 and IF 8, 210); Rindr sõrva ‘Rindr of the jewelled necklace’ (Kormákr, lausavísa 56,3, Skj I B, 83 and IF 8, 292); Rindr hõrdúks ‘Rindr of the linen head-covering’ (Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld, lausavísa 27,1, early eleventh century, Skj I B, 163 and IF 8, 198); Rindr glymrastar fasta ‘Rindr of the fire of the roaring sea (i.e. of gold)’ (Árni Jónsson, Guðmundardrápa 18,5, early thirteenth century, Kock II, 243). Rindr is a...
Rindr is mentioned in two eddic poems. In *Baldrs draumar* 11.1–4, the prophetess replies to Óðinn’s question about future vengeance for the killing of Baldr by saying that Rindr will bear Váli in halls in the west, and that that son of Óðinn will fight at one night old.94 Váli is therefore the son of Rindr and Óðinn, born to take a magically precocious vengeance for Baldr. Since giants are usually associated with the north or east and the gods with the west,95 the phrase *í vestrsõlom* ‘in halls in the west’ suggests that Óðinn took Rindr back to Valhöll with him and Váli was born there. In the much later *Svipdagsmál* 6,3 (see Chapter 13), the first protective spell chanted by Gróa for her son Svipdagr is the one: *þann gól Rindr Rane*

‘which Rindr chanted for (or ‘against’?) Ranr (or Ránr?).’ *Rán* is a sea-goddess, but this masculine form is otherwise unknown. It might possibly be a by-name for Váli, and Rindr may have chanted a protective spell over her son just as Gróa does. Alternatively, *ráni* might be a common noun: ‘which Rindr chanted against plundering’.96 This might refer to Rindr’s resistance to Óðinn (see below), but Gróa would hardly chant a spell for her son which had failed when Rindr used it to defend herself. Other interpretations of the line involve emendation, and none is really convincing.97 The line thus remains obscure, but Rindr is clearly an enchantress as well as the victim of Óðinn’s sexual enchantment.

*Gylfaginning* ch. 30 confirms that Váli is the son of Óðinn and Rindr. *Skáldskaparmál* chs. 19, 24 says that he can be referred to as *son Óðins ok Rindar* ‘son of Óðinn and Rindr’ and *stjúp Friggjar* ‘stepson of Frigg’ (ch. 12); and that Frigg or Jõrð can be called *elja Rindar* ‘rival of Rindr’.98 Otherwise, *Snorra Edda* avoids explicit accounts of Óðinn’s seductions (except that of Gunnlöð, which was important for the myth of the origins of poetry; see below), possibly feeling that they are demeaning to the dignity of the old gods.

Saxo had no such inhibitions, and he gives the fullest account of Rindr (III.iv).99 After Balderus is killed by Hotherus, Othinus learns from the prophet Rostiophus Phinnicus that he will beget an avenging son on Rinda, daughter of the king of the Russians. He tries to seduce Rinda in the guises of military leader, smith and soldier, but is rebuffed, each time with increasing violence. On the third occasion he touches her with a piece of bark inscribed with magic songs, which drives her mad. Finally, he

---

94 *Baldrs draumar* 11, 3–8 are virtually identical to *Voluspá* 32,7–8 and 33,1–4. The relationship between the two poems has been much debated; for a summary, see von See et al. (2000), 379, cf. also Paroli.  
95 Cf., for example, *Helgakviða Hundingsbana* II 49,5–8 and SG III.2, 132.  
96 Cf. *AEW* 433.  
97 See SG III.1, 403.  
98 Ed. I, 19, 30, 35; tr. I, 76, 86, 90.  
disguises himself as an old maid servant called Vecha. In this form, when Rinda falls ill, he has her tied to the bed, supposedly for medical treatment, then rapes her before curing her. She bears a son named Bous who eventually takes vengeance for Balderus (in accordance with a second prophecy, made to Hotherus), but is mortally wounded in doing so.

Much of this is easily explained. Rostiophus Phinnicus (= Old Norse finskr Hrossbjófr ‘Lappish Horse-Thief’) is paralleled in Hyndluljóð 32,5–6, where Hrossbjófr and Heiðr are children of the giant Hrímnir ‘Frost-covered’, and this is followed by the ancestry of all volur ‘prophetesses’ and vitkar ‘wizards’.100 The Russian setting and Othinus’s need to disguise himself also suggest that the myth involved visits to a hostile giant. Othinus’s first disguise, muffled under his hat, and his adopted name Rofterus (MS Rosterus) on his second visit suggest his names Sídhõttr ‘Wide-hat’ and Hroptr101 (for example, Grímnismál 48,1, 8,4). The disguise-name Vecha is probably a feminine form of Old Norse vitki ‘wizard’ (cf. Hyndluljóð 33,3, Lokasenna 24,4–5). Practising such magic was regarded as ergi, the equivalent of a man behaving as a woman,102 and Saxo regards it as disgraceful.

Saxo probably distorted some features of this myth. There should perhaps have been three visits rather than four: the third, with its repetitive soldier disguise and inconclusive ending, seems illogical, for having driven Rinda mad, Othinus would surely have taken immediate advantage of her. Three disguised visits would make sense, with Othinus humiliating himself further each time, as soldier, smith and old woman. Rinda falling ill by chance is also unconvincing; her illness/madness should be caused by the charm (cf. Skírnismál 36 and the charm from Bergen,103 which both threaten the woman with ergi oc aði oc óþola ‘sexual perversion and frenzy and intolerable desire’). Binding Rindr to the bed would then be a way of restraining her lust, and the only cure for her frenzy would be for her to give herself to the man who had enchanted her, and bear his child in accordance with the prophecy. The cure and the sexual act thus become the same thing. Saxo’s alternative version, in which the king colludes in his daughter’s rape, contradicts the need for Othinus to disguise himself and cannot have been in the myth (though it may be derived from stories of human protagonists who have affairs with giantesses; see Chapter 11). Saxo is uneconomical in using two prophecies where Baldr’s draumar has only one. Finally, the funeral of Bous is probably derived from that of Baldr: in older poetic tradition Váli survives not only the killing of Hðór, but even Ragnarsök itself (see Vafþrúðnismál 51,1–3).

100 For Hrímnir cf. Skírnismál 28,3; Þula IV b 1,5 (Kock I, 323).
101 On the possible meanings of Hroptr, see AEW 260; DNM 161.
103 Liestøl (1963), 41–50.
Bous (cf. Old Norse bófi ‘lad’, Modern Icelandic ‘rogue, rascal’), also appears (as Bovi) in the exemplum told in Dublin by the Danish Franciscan friar Brother Peter c. 1260 (Liber Exemplorum’, ed. 110–11). A group of women attending a childbirth indulge in obscene ritual dancing with a straw figure called Bovi, to whom they call out Canta Boui, canta Boui, quid faceret. The Anglo-Irish author took Boui as a vocative (the name of the ‘Odinic’ straw man), but since bófi means ‘boy’, it may actually have been an accusative, giving the sense ‘Sing about Bovi, what he may do’; in this case Boui would be the new-born child. This connection between the Rindr myth and Danish folk customs surrounding childbirth is confirmed by a more recent version of the same ritual, known as Konebarse ‘women’s confinement’ or Kvindegilde ‘female guild’. Here the women attending a childbirth get drunk, using ritual drinking customs, and then go into the street and other people’s houses, forcing any man they meet to dance with them and tearing off his trousers, ‘or in recent times more often his hat’.106

A third text which may perhaps refer to Bófi in the context of childbirth is the eleventh century Kvinneby copper amulet, from Öland, Sweden, which reads:

A: h(æ)r k i kuri ms uti kupi r birk / bufi m er fult i hu / p i s þer
uis in bra l / t ili fran bufa þor keti h / ans mi ek þem hamri s am
hyn
B: haf ik am fyl fran iluit / fen eki af bufa kup ieu / untin hanum
auk yli ek han / um

Louis-Jensen regards this as a charm against a skin disease suffered by a man called Búfi, in which the soot-god Ímr is asked to give protection against Æmr, the demon who causes the affliction. Her translation runs:

A: Here I crouch (in the ashes of the hearth) under the god of soot; I, Bufi, carry a foul sore in my skin. You (the god of soot?) know where the glistening one (the demon?) is – keep evil from Bufi! May Thor guard him with the hammer with which he strikes Æmr (a giant = the demon).

104 Fritzner (1954), I, 162; CV 73; Sigfús Blöndal 93. The personal name is found occasionally in medieval Swedish (Büfi), Old High German (Bluov); cf. Middle High German buve ‘lad’, Modern German bube. The Shrove Tuesday players in Lübeck are also known as buwen (Stumpfl 178–82).

105 Latin uses the accusative for the subject sung about, for example, Virgil, Aeneid I: arma virumque cano ‘I sing of arms and the man’. In thirteenth-century Danish, the distinction between nominitive Bófi and accusative Bófa would be lost: both would appear as Bove (Gordon 323).

106 J. and A. Olrik 175–6. For other straw fertility figures, see Gunnell 103–5.

107 Louis-Jensen 111–13. I have introduced word divisions and rationalised ‘bind-runes’ (where more than one rune appears on the same stave).
SEEDING THE GIANTESS: ÖDINN

B: May you have the affliction, Ámr! Be gone, evil being! The affliction leaves Búfi, there are gods below him and above him.

But Ímr ‘the Sooty One’ is also a giant-name and almost synonymous with Ámr ‘the Dark One’; and eikki means ‘convulsive sobbing’ rather than merely ‘affliction’. This is not really appropriate to a skin disease, but it would be in a birthing charm. The following translation therefore also seems possible:

A: Here I crouch under (the control of) the ‘god’ of Ímr (the demon), while I, Búfi, keep myself fully inside the skin (i.e. before I am born). The glittering thing (= lightning, Þórr’s hammer?) is known to you – keep harm from Búfi! May Þórr guard him with the hammer with which he strikes Ámr (= Ímr)!

B: May you have the sobbing, Ámr! Be gone, evil creature! The sobbing leaves Búfi, there are gods below him and above him.

Many charm amulets are small, but this one is tiny enough to be worn by a baby (52 x 49 mm).

It is possible that Saxo, Brother Peter and the Kvinneby amulet all used the same name in different contexts by coincidence, but all three are from the same area; at least two of them focus on childbirth; and two involve female lasciviousness. Bous/Bovi was probably a Danish/Swedish nickname for Váli, and there was a folk ritual, associated with childbirth, which may allude to the myth of Öðinn and Rindr and the birth of Váli. That Brother Peter should associate the Odinic straw figure with the devil was only to be expected, and this may explain how the story got into Liber Exemplorum, which includes several other devil-tales. The women seem to be expressing their solidarity with the child-bearing woman by adopting the role of the sex-crazed and child-bearing Rindr. If so, it is an interesting example of women defining themselves as ‘other’, aligning themselves with the giantess rather than the god.

If the Swedish place-name Vrinnvi (perhaps *Wrindavi or *Wrindavipi ‘Shrine/Wood of Rindr’) includes Rindr’s name, its Primitive Old Norse root began with vr- rather than r-. Unfortunately, early verse lines including Rindr never depend on it for their alliteration, and so cannot either support or refute this. If the root began with Vr-, the name is probably related to Old English wiþdan, Old High German ridan, Old Norse (v)róða ‘to bind, wind, twist’, cf. Modern English ‘writhe’. This might suggest that

108 For Ímr see Vafþrúðnismál 5, 5, Pala IV f 1,4 (Kock I, 325) and LP 323; for Ámr see Öfeigr 5, 1 (supposedly eleventh century, Kock I, 187); Pala IV b 4,8 (Kock I, 323); LP 29.
109 LP 106.
binding Rindr to the bed is an ancient motif, or it might have directly sexual connotations. A root beginning with *r*- could be that of Crimean Gothic *rintsch* 'mountain',\(^{110}\) Norwegian dialect *rind(e)* 'ridge', which would imply a sense like that of *Fjorgyn* (see above). Vâli may be related to Primitive Old Norse *waihalr* 'little warlike one', cf. Gothic *waihjo* 'battle' and Old Norse *vega* 'to fight'.\(^{111}\)

The main features of the Rindr myth seem to be these: Óðinn discovers that his son Baldr is destined to be killed by Hôðr, and that he himself will beget an avenging son on Rindr, the daughter of an unnamed giant. He travels to the giant’s home three times, disguised as a warrior, a smith and an old woman, but is rebuffed by Rindr each time. She, too, is a worker of magic, and the contest between them may have been partly magical.\(^{112}\) He uses *seiðr* to drive her mad with desire, and she has to be tied to the bed. He lays the charm by having sex with her, then takes her back to Valhôll, where she gives birth to Váli (or in Danish versions to *Bó* 'the lad'). Váli takes vengeance on Hôðr one night after he is born. Rindr probably chants a protective spell over Váli. Like Jôrð, Rindr is linked to motherhood and wild nature, and particularly to the process of childbirth.

4. *Gríðr*

Gríðr’s son Viðarr, who will avenge Óðinn’s death at Ragnarök, resembles Váli, the son of Rindr who avenges the death of Baldr. In *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 18,\(^{113}\) Þórr visits Gríðr before confronting Geirrøðr and his daughters (see Chapter 8), and she lends him a belt of strength, iron gloves and her staff. But whereas Jôrð and Rindr are counted among the goddesses, Gríðr is known almost exclusively as a troll-woman, perhaps because her name was associated with *gríð* 'violence' (possibly its actual origin).\(^{114}\) One thirteenth-century verse (Anon. (III) B 37,1)\(^{115}\) makes this explicit, using *Gríðr* as a general term for ‘violence, disaster’, parallel to ‘sickness’, ‘fate’ and ‘death’ in the following couplets of the stanza.

Gríðr appears as the owner of her pole,\(^{116}\) and as the first of a list of troll-women.\(^{117}\) She may be alluded to in *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 19,\(^{118}\) where the kennings for Frigg include *elju Gerðar* ‘rival of Gerðr’: *Gerðar* here is

110 Feist 301.
111 See AEW 641, DNM 348 and SG III:1, 343–4 for several less likely suggestions.
112 For the magic contest motif cf. *The Two Magicians* (Child no. 44, I, 399–403), which ends with the ‘coal-black smith’ taking the lady’s maidenhead (cf. the second disguise of Othinus).
113 Ed. I, 24–5; tr. 82.
114 See DNM 117; AEW 188.
115 Kock II, 82.
116 *Þórsdrápa* 9.8 (Skj B, 141 and *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 18, ed. I, 27; tr. 84).
117 *bula IV* c1.3 (Kock I, 324 and *Skáldskaparmál*, ed. I, 112; tr. 156).
118 Ed. I, 30, 177; tr. 86.
probably a scribal error for Gríðr. This would confirm Gríðr as one of Öinn’s mistresses, although the list of poetic expressions for Viðarr in Skáldskaparmál ch. 11 makes no reference to her.119

Gríðr appears in wolf-kennings120 as a heiti for ‘hag’, and in two axe-kennings: Gríðr fjornis and Gríðr hjalma, both ‘Gríðr of the helmet(s)’.121 Two mysterious kennings use byr Gríðar ‘the breeze of Gríðr’ and gríðar glaumvindr ‘cheerful wind of Gríðr’ to mean ‘the mind’ (both in the context of benevolent behaviour).122 These probably use her name as a synonym for ‘giantess’, since there are also several similar kennings which do not name Gríðr.123 We must also disregard two valkyrie-names which include the common noun -gríð ‘violence’.124

Saxo may have derived his ancestress of the Danish kings, Grytha wife of Dan (I.i–iii),125 from the figure of Gríðr. He says nothing about her origins or that she is Dan’s concubine, and the careers of her sons Humblus and Lothenus do not resemble that of Viðarr. However, a link may be provided by another Gríðr, in Illuga saga Gríðarfóstra’ chs. 4–6.126 As in Ráðgríðr, she behaves as foster-mother to a hero who fights against giantesses, though the gift she gives him is her daughter rather than a weapon. This author probably knew that this kind of story usually involves a sexual liaison with a giantess (who must be beautiful), but he also wanted to portray Gríðr as a hag, and consequently needed two females, a hideous mother and a lovely daughter. Like Rindr, this Gríðr is hostile at fi hag, and consequently needed two females, a hideous mother and a lovely daughter. Like Rindr, this Gríðr is hostile at first. However, many of the giant race she lives in the far north, and the name of her father’s realm (‘Elf-worlds’) also suggests Other-Worldly origin. Saxo and Illuga saga have different but related genealogies of the earliest Danish kings:

119 Ed. I, 10; tr. 76.
120 gríðarð Gríðar ‘Gríðr’s herd of grey horses’ (Helgaskviða Hundingsbana II 25); glað-faxandi Gríðar ‘cheerful feeder of Gríðr’s horse (i.e. warrior)’ (Kormákr, Sigurðardrápa 4.3, later tenth century, Skj I B 69 and Skáldskaparmál ch. 49, ed. I, 70; tr. 121); Gríðar sóti ‘Gríðr’s horse’ (Bjarni Hallbjarnarson 1.5, early eleventh century, Kock I, 181); gríðar fakr ‘Gríðr’s horse’ (Porbjorn skakkaskáld 2.2, mid-twelfth century, Kock I, 252 and Haukur Valdísarson, Ævarflokkr 10.2 (early twelfth century, Kock I, 262).
121 Einarr Skúlason, Ævarflokkr 10.2 (early twelfth century, Kock I, 222 and Skáldskaparmál ch. 49, ed. I, 71; tr. 121); Draumar Porsteins Síðu-Hálssonar 3.4 (Kock II, 120 and II, 325, where the major manuscript reads Guðr, but Gríðr is probably correct).
122 Stúfr inn blindi 1.3 (Kock I, 186 and Olaf’s saga kyrra ch. 3, ff 28, 226); Anon. XII C 36.7–8 (Kock I, 293).
123 For example, bryr bursa tas ‘breeze of the mate of ogres’ (Eyvindr skáldaspillir, lausavísa 11.3–4, Skj I B, 64). Skáldskaparmál ch. 70 (ed. I, 108; tr. 154) notes this type of kennign but does not explain it.
124 Randgríð/Ramngríð, Ráðgríð, both in Grímnmál 36.7 and Gylfaginning ch. 36 (ed. 30; tr. 31). Randgríðr also appears as a valkyrie-name in Pula IV aas 2.5 (Kock I, 343), and randgríðr ‘shield violence’ as a battle-heiti in Pula IV k 1.6 (Kock I, 327 and Skáldskaparmál, ed. I, 118; tr. 158).
126 FSN III, 555–60.
Saxo: Dan (= Grytha) – Lotherus – Skyoldus (= Alvilda)

Illuma saga: Dagr – Skjöldr – Hringr – Sigurðr (= Gríðr, daughter of Álfrún).

Illuma saga may preserve a distorted memory of Gríðr as concubine, patroness of a young hero, and ancestress of the Danish kings, and Saxo’s Grytha could be partly derived from Gríðr, the concubine of Óðinn and mother of Viðarr.

The evidence about Gríðr is thin and relies heavily on Skáldskaparmál. Her myth may have resembled that of Rindr, but since her son did not have to take a precocious vengeance, she could remain among the giants. But the fact that she helps Þórr may suggest that, like her eljur ‘rivals’ she remained emotionally attached to Óðinn.

5. Gunnløð

The sources on Gunnløð are quite unlike those for Rindr and Gríðr. Overt narratives of her seduction appear in Hávamál and Skáldskaparmál, but she is mentioned only once in skaldic verse, in Steingþórir’s Óðinn-kenning farnr Gunnlaðar arma ‘cargo of Gunnløð’s arms’. Skáldskaparmál claims that Frigg and Jörd can be referred to as elja Gunnlaðar ‘rival of Gunnløð’ (chs. 19, 24), but this expression does not actually appear in verse. The sum of information about Gunnløð that can be derived from skaldic verse is therefore that she was a mistress of Óðinn.

The fullest verse source for her story is Hávamál 103–10, which probably formed part of a poem about the unreliability of men and women in love affairs that I shall call Hávamál B (Hávamál 84 and 91–110). In its present form, this poem may date from the twelfth century, for its framework contains a reference to the Wheel of Fortune (84) and probable echoes of Ovid’s Ars Amatoria. Within this framework there are two narrative exempla, of which the Gunnløð story is the second (for the first, see Billings mer below), and the verse in these may be older. The poet of Hávamál B is narrating the Gunnløð myth to illustrate the sexual treachery of men, and tells only the part of the story that is relevant to this theme.

Óðinn attributes his success when he visited the giant Suttungr to his skill with words (104: this must refer to his seduction of Gunnløð rather than his request for a drink of the mead of poetry, which Suttungr refuses). Óðinn used the auger Rati to bore a hole in the mountain for himself,

127 Eleventh century (Kock I, 192 and Skáldskaparmál ch. 2, ed. I, 9, tr. 68).
128 Ed. I, 30, 35; tr. 86, 90.
129 See McKinnell (forthcoming). For a discussion of the traditional sections of Hávamál, see ed. Evans 7–28. Von See (1972a and b) argues that all parts of Hávamál are indebted to Huggvinsmál and must date from the twelfth century or later; for a reply to this see Chapter 13.
risking his life in doing so (106). Gunnlöð gave him a drink of the precious mead as he sat in a golden chair, but he repaid her sincere love badly (105). He doubts whether he would have escaped if he had not made use of Gunnlöð by sleeping with her (108). He made good use of his vel keyptz litar (probably ‘profitably acquired good looks’, 107,1), for now Öðrerir (the mead of poetry) has arrived in the world of men (107). The next day the frost giants arrived at Öðinn’s hall to ask whether Bölvérkr (‘Evil-doer’, Öðinn’s alias while staying with Suttungr) had arrived among the gods, or whether Suttungr had killed him (109). Öðinn took an oath on the ring, but who can trust his word? He left Suttungr deceived and Gunnlöð in tears (110).

The story was doubtless familiar, and some details assumed by the poet have to be added from the prose narrative in Skáldskaparmál (ch. G58). Thus Suttungr had refused ‘Bölvérkr’s’ request for a drink of the mead in payment for the work he had done for Baugi, Suttungr’s brother. Öðinn transformed himself into a snake to get through the hole made by the auger. Baugi tried to betray Öðinn by not boring right through the mountain (whereas in Hávamál B Öðinn uses the auger himself), and then to kill him by throwing the auger after him. Öðinn slept with Gunnlöð for three nights, and she allowed him one draught of the mead each night. The mead was in three vats called Öðrerir, Boðn and Són, and Öðinn drank a whole vat at each draught. He then transformed himself into an eagle and flew away to Ásgarðr, pursued by Suttungr (also in eagle-form), before regurgitating the mead into vats which the Æsir had placed ready for it. Afterwards he distributed the mead to the gods and to human poets. But Hávamál B also includes some details not found in Skáldskaparmál: Öðinn’s seductive eloquence (104), the golden chair (105) and his (probably magically assumed) handsome appearance (107).

In Skáldskaparmál this is only the end of a long myth about the origins of the mead of poetry, most of whose details are supported with an impressive list of kennings for poetry. But none of these refer to Baugi or Gunnlöð, though one alludes to the theft of the mead and others to Öðrerir, Boðn and Són. In Hávamál B, Öðrerir is the mead itself rather than a container for it, and this is probably correct. The interpretation in Skáldskaparmál may have arisen from an over-literal reading of Hávamál 140,4–6, where the precious mead has been ausinn Öðreri ‘scattered from

130 Ed. I, 4–5; tr. 63–4.
131 Skáldskaparmál ch. 3 (ed. I, 11–14; tr. 70–2).
133 Öðreris ala ‘Öðrerir’s wave’ and Boðnar bára ‘Boðn’s wave’ (Einarr skálaglamm, Veðlæka 5,3 and 6,1, Skj I B, 117); Sónar sáð ‘seed of Són’ (Eilífr Goðrúnarson on Hákon jarl 1,3–4, late tenth century, Skj 1B, 139).
134 Öð-irerir ‘what stirs up the mind (to ecstasy)’ – DNM 250; AEW 416.
Óðrerir’ – probably a figurative way of saying ‘I was inspired with poetic utterance’.\textsuperscript{135} Són was probably another name for the mead itself, in its aspect as sacrificial blood;\textsuperscript{136} it is a heiti for ‘blood’ in the sword-kennings sónar fress ‘blood’s bear’ and sónar ófnir ‘blood’s snake’.\textsuperscript{137} But Boðn must refer to a container.\textsuperscript{138}

Neither account explains how Óðinn escaped from inside the mountain, though Hávamál 108 implies that Gunnlǫð helped him. In Skáldskaparmál (ch. 3)\textsuperscript{139} the mountain is called Hnitbjørg ‘colliding rocks’, which may imply that it could open and close.\textsuperscript{140} But we should take warning from Hávamál B that eddic poets were quite capable of telling only part of a myth, or of adapting its meaning, even for quite frivolous ends.

This is even clearer in the allusion to Gunnlǫð in Hávamál 14 – Fjalarr seems to be identical with Suttungr, whereas in Skáldskaparmál he is one of the dwarfs from whom Suttungr extorted the mead. The poet of Hávamál A probably preserves a genuine tradition here, for Fjalarr ‘the Concealer’ (cf. fela ‘to hide something’) is a giant-name in Háðarðþjóð 26 and Ælfrœb 3.6,\textsuperscript{141} though he is a dwarf in the interpolated Vǫluspá 16.3. Galarr ‘Screamer’, Fjalarr’s brother in the Skáldskaparmál story, is recorded in verse only as a giant-name (Ælfrœb 3.2).

Gunnlǫð ‘War-invitation’ is not a typical giantess-name. Gunn- names like Gunnhildr and Gunnr are common among human women, but I have found only two other examples of women called Gunnlǫð. Both appear in

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{135} For other interpretations see Evans, ed., 135; SGIII. 1, 151.
\item \textsuperscript{136} Cf. Old High German suona, són ‘reconciliation, atonement’, DNMM 298; AEW 530.
\item \textsuperscript{137} Kormákr, lausavísa 28.7 (later tenth century, Skj I B, 76 and IF 8, 243); Haukr Valdísarson, Iðlingadrápa 5.5-7 (perhaps twelfth century, Kock I, 262).
\item \textsuperscript{138} Cf. Modern Icelandic byðna, northern Norwegian dialect budna, byna, byna, Finnish putina, all meaning ‘a wooden vessel for holding foodstuffs’, DNMM 40; AEW 47.
\item \textsuperscript{139} Ed. I, 11; tr. 70.
\item \textsuperscript{140} Cf. DNMM 154; for supernatural beings who live inside rocks, see McKinnell (2001a), 247-8.
\item \textsuperscript{141} Evans argues that at least part of the ‘Gnomic Poem’ must be pre-Christian – for example, st. 76 seems to be echoed in Hákonarmál 21 (c.965, Skj I B, 60); but different parts of this poem may date from different periods.
\item \textsuperscript{142} See McKinnell and Ruggerini 30-8.
\item \textsuperscript{143} Egill Skallagrimsson and the author of Egils saga make the same comic association between poetry and drunken vomiting (Egils saga chs. 44, 71, IF 2, 108-11 and 224-7).
\item \textsuperscript{144} Kock I, 323.
\end{itemize}
fornaldarsögur about the legendary rulers of Haðaland, south-east Norway. The older is the daughter of Hrómundr berserkr, the great-grandson of Hóðr, the eponymous founder of Haðaland in Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka, chs. 10–16. The younger is her great-niece, the mother of Hrómundr Grips-son, in Hrómundar saga ch. 4. Both appear in the genealogy of the founders of Haðaland in Hversu Noregr Byggðist ch. 2, where they are the only women named. When Hrómundr Gripsson wrestles against the draugr of the berserk Þráinn, the ghost comments admiringly on his strength: ‘Þú munt fœdr vera af Gunnlõðu. Eru fái þínir líkar’ ‘You must have been born of Gunnlõð – there are few like you’. The implication is that Hrómundr’s mother must be a giantess. This suggests that the rulers of Haðaland may have claimed descent from Óðinn and Gunnlõð. It is not possible to reconstruct a coherent myth from the scatter of Odinic motifs in these fornaldböggur, but a few conclusions do seem probable:

1. The two Gunnlõðs were a single figure, probably originally a giantess. She had sons, who may have shared the same name. In both sagas, a treacherous attack leaves only one of her sons alive; he is gravely wounded, but is cured (possibly by magic, in one case by Gunnlõð, in the other by the anonymous wife of Hrómundr’s possibly giant-patron Hagall), and later takes vengeance.

2. There is a sprinkling of other Odinic motifs in both sagas, including the avenging brother and the mother who employs a magic charm on behalf of her son. These might suggest affinities between this myth and that of Rindr.

The Gunnlõð myth differs from those of Jóð, Rindr and Gríðr in that Óðinn’s motive is not to beget a heroic son, but to obtain the mead of poetry. But in other respects it repeats the same pattern: Óðinn travels to the home of a dangerous giant, using an alias and in disguise. He gains access to the giant’s daughter and seduces her, certainly by his clever words and probably using magic. Like Gríðr, Gunnlõð is abandoned after Óðinn has achieved his purpose. She remains emotionally attached to him, and weeps at his departure. There may have been a tradition of Gunnlõð as ancestress of the rulers of Haðaland; if so, this would make her, like Rindr and Gríðr, the mother of a heroic avenger.

6. Billings mær

The enigmatic story of ‘Billing’s maid’, which is told (or perhaps partly told) in Hávamál 95–102, also concerns unreliability in love, but in this case the betrayer is female: No suffering is worse than to be without contentment (95), as the speaker discovered when he sat in the reeds waiting for his...

145 FSN II, 168–81.
146 FSN II, 276–86.
147 FSN II, 141; Flateyjarbók ed. I, 25.
beloved, but never won her (96). He found Billingr’s maid asleep on a bed (97) but she then persuaded Óðinn, for the sake of secrecy, to leave and return in the evening (98). He returned to find the household ready with burning torches and cudgels (100). Returning again towards morning, he found the household asleep, but a bitch tied to the girl’s empty bed (101). She devised only mockery for him, and he never won her (102).

In Völfuspa 13.7 (Hauksbók text only) Billingr is a dwarf. In the poetry-kenning Billings burar full ‘the cupful of Billingr’s son’, he could be either a dwarf or a giant, the same ambiguity that we have already seen in the name Fjalarr. Billings hvíða, perhaps ‘a mighty attack’ would make better sense if Billingr were a giant. The name may mean ‘Twin’ or ‘Hermaphrodite’, which is also the usual interpretation of the name Ymir, and it seems likely that Billingr was also a giant in this story.

148 Alternatively, með bornorn viði ‘with carried wood’ (100,5) may refer to the torches, or to wood used for a barricade (SG III.1, 125; ed. Evans 119).
149 Ormr Steinþórisson 4.3 (probably eleventh century, Kock I, 191).
150 Anon. (XII) B 11.4 (Kock I, 289).
151 AEW 36; DNM 37.
152 In four other cases the generalised sense ‘woman’ is possible, for example, Lokasenna 3.44. A daughter is once defined by both parents (Sigurðarkviða in skamma 63.5–6) and once by her mother (Einarr Skúlason, Óxarflokkr 5.5–7; Kock I, 221).
153 Heðins mar, referring to Hildr, a pun on hildr ‘war’ (Hallfreðr, Ólafs erðr 17.4, Skj I B, 154).
154 Sigurður Nordal (1936), 288–95; Evans, ed. 119–20; but see Lindow, who alsoadduces several Icelandic folktales in which an unmarried girl escapes disaster by substituting a bitch for herself.
Seduction of a Giantess: Óðinn

kviða Hundingsbana I 13,7) or grey norna 'bitches of the Norns' (Hamðismál 29,4), and bitches are part of a giant’s household property in Skírnismál 11,6 and Brymskviða 6,3. Most famously, Hjalti Skeggjason is said to have been exiled for blasphemy after reciting a couplet in which he called Freyja a grey. Freyja is often associated with lascivious animals but even heathens who accepted this were apparently outraged by this couplet. The only non-mythological use of grey in verse is gamna greystóði ‘to give (sexual) pleasure to the stud of bitches’ (Atlakviða 11,7, where Gunnarr is insulting his Hunnish enemies); again, the connotations are of disgusting female lust.

But the story’s most distinctive feature is that this attempted seduction fails, although it does somewhat resemble Saxo’s story of Rinda, where Óðinn is rejected three times before finally succeeding. Similarly, Óðinn makes three journeys here: first he finds the girl asleep in her bed and is persuaded to wait until night; then he finds a military force waiting; finally, he finds a bitch in the bed. But the female bound to the bed also appears in the Rinda story, and if Rindr was thought to have been driven mad with lust by Óðinn’s seiðr, she could be said to have become a ‘bitch’ in the same sense as is intended in Hjalti’s accusation against Freyja.

This myth differs from Óðinn’s other seductions in that it fails, and in that he has no motive beyond pure lust. Perhaps the poet has told only part of a myth in which Óðinn had an ulterior motive and would ultimately have triumphed, as in the story of Rindr (whose father’s name is not known); perhaps, in a disguised form, this could even be the Rindr story.

7. Affinities and meanings

The earliest allusion to this myth pattern is Þjóðólfr’s reference to Þórr as Jarðar sunr (Hauðlóng 14,6, c. 900), but it may be centuries older than that. It involves Óðinn visiting a giant and seducing his daughter, using magic to overcome her hostility or the obstacles placed in his way by her father. He then abandons her (Gríðr, Gunnlöð) or takes her to Ásgarðr with him (Jǫrð, Rindr); she remains emotionally attached to him. She usually gives birth to a heroic son (Þórr, Váli, Viðarr), or to the founder of a noble dynasty. Thus the Völsungar are said to be derived from Hljóð (daughter of the giant Hrímnir) and Völsungr (who is probably Óðinn in another form); the Háleygjar from Skaði; the Haðalanders perhaps from Gunnlöð. If Háleygjatal is typical, most such claims by noble human families may be a

---

155 Íslendingabók ch. 7 (ÍF I, 15); cf. Chapter 6.
156 MRN 176.
157 Further, see McKinnell (forthcoming).
158 Völsunga saga ch. 2 (FSN I, 5–6; tr. 37).
159 See Háleygjatal 3–4, Skj 1B 60 and Chapter 5 above.
tenth-century development, but Jalkr, with its possible analogy in the legendary origins of the Kentish royal family, could be much older.

Myths of the Æsir may often resemble those of other Indo-European peoples, but the historical relationships between them remain doubtful (see Chapter 2). Pórr’s parentage has been compared to that of the Sanskrit Indra, son of the earth and the sky-god Dyaus. Both Pórr and Indra are gods of thunder, slay snake-like monsters, travel in chariots and have huge appetites, but these are all features that we might expect of an archetypal defender of mankind, as is the idea of such a figure being born of an earth-mother and a sky-father.

The story of the mead of poetry has been compared with myths from India, Greece and Ireland. In the Vedic myth, the soma is brought to Indra (an eagle breaks into an iron fortress to steal it for him, or in a later version Indra himself becomes an eagle to fetch it). This does involve a sacred liquid brought by an eagle, but Indra is not like Óðinn in other respects. There is no giant and no seduction, and the soma (which confers strength rather than poetic inspiration) is brought from heaven, not from the giants.

In the classical myth of Zagreus and Dionysus (Latin Bacchus), Persephone (Latin Proserpina), daughter of Zeus (Jupiter) and Demeter (Ceres), is abducted and held under the earth by Hades (Pluto). Zeus transforms himself into a snake to visit Persephone and make her pregnant with Zagreus, to whom he intends to hand over his power. The titans murder Zagreus and eat his body, except for the heart, which Athena takes to Zeus for him to eat. This enables Zeus to beget Dionysus on Semele, a mortal woman. Zeus destroys the titans with his thunderbolts and Dionysus becomes god of the irrational, vegetation and (in later sources) wine.

This myth resembles that of the mead of poetry in some respects. The protagonist is the chief god. He transforms himself into a snake to reach Persephone in the underworld. He seduces her to produce a son who will have a special role among the gods (as in the Jôrð, Rindr and Gríðr myths). Zagreus is murdered by creatures of the earth (the titans), as Kvasir is by the dwarfs. Dionysus is probably not related to intoxicating liquor until a fairly late date, but he represents the sacred irrational, which is not unlike the meaning of the mead of poetry. But the differences between the classical and Norse myths are at least as instructive as the similarities. Hades does nothing to obstruct Zeus. The classical myth has no sacred liquid, and it divides both son and mother into two in order to introduce a plan in which Zeus fails, which has no parallel in the Norse myth. Gunnlög has no divine

\[161\] MRN 40–1.
\[162\] See Cary et al. 288–9 (Dionysus), 666 (Phìlersephone).
son (unless we adduce the parallels of Þórr, Váli and Viðarr, all of whom have functions unlike that of Dionysus).

The Irish myth of Finn and the well of Bec mac Buain is closest to the Norse one in place and time. Bec mac Buain is one of the Tuatha Dé Danann, who live in mounds and represent an Other World connected with the dead. Finn, out hunting with two companions, finds the door of a mound open. They try to get in, while Bec’s three daughters, who guard the well of wisdom, struggle to shut the door against them. The eldest daughter is carrying a bowl of water from the well, and during the struggle some of the water is spilt into the mouths of the three heroes.

The three protagonists and three daughters are a commonplace elaboration, but this story shows some similarities to the Norse myth. There is an encounter between the protagonists and the daughters of the Other World figure. A sacred liquid represents wisdom of some kind, and the protagonists swallow some of it. But there are no parallels to the earlier part of the Norse myth. There is no sexual or emotional conquest of the Other World females. The theft of the sacred liquid is accidental, in marked contrast to Óðinn’s careful scheming. Finn and his companions only get a little of it (whereas Óðinn takes it all), and they derive benefit only for themselves as individuals.

Some of these differences reflect the overall religious assumptions of the cultures concerned. Zeus is all-powerful, usually motivated by lust, and takes all necessary vengeances himself. By contrast, Óðinn must place himself in danger, his seductions are motivated by the dangers faced by the Aesir, and he must breed avenging sons, including Viðarr, who will avenge his own death. In the Irish tale the protagonist is no longer divine, and his achievement is more limited. If he needs avenging sons, they will be be-gotten on human women and will be significant only in their own place and time.

Very little can be concluded from these comparisons. The seduction of Semele to engender Dionysus might suggest that the link between seduction and a sacred liquid is ancient, but Zeus seduces so many women that this may be insignificant. Within the Old Norse material, the motive for Óðinn’s seduction of Gunnlög looks unusual. Together with her virtual absence from skaldic poetry, this may suggest that the association between the mead of poetry and Óðinn’s seductions of giantesses may have arisen only at the end of the heathen period.

Whether the seduction pattern had a generally accepted meaning in Old Norse culture is a different question. In seeking to answer it, I shall regard Óðinn as a man, albeit one with extended powers, not an immortal deity like Zeus. It is therefore also necessary to consider some other legends in which the seducing protagonist is a human protégé of Óðinn, and these will be the subject of the next chapter.
CHAPTER ELEVEN

Seduced by the Giantess: the Ódinic Hero

When the sexual partner of a giantess is a human being, he may sometimes be a transformation of Óðinn, as in Bárðar saga (compare the human equivalents of Þórr discussed in Chapter 9), but usually he is either a devotee of Óðinn or, by a simple Christian reversal, a conspicuously outspoken opponent to him.

1. Óðinn’s protégés

Hadingum grandævus forte quidam, altero orbus oculo, solitarium miseratus…

‘An aged man with only one eye happened to take pity on the lonely Hading…’

Saxo I.vi.7

Five stories of this kind show a common pattern. They are those of:
a. Hadingus and Harthgrepa in Saxo I.vi.2–6;2
b. Òrvar-Oddr and Hildigunnr in Òrvar-Odds saga (ØOs) chs. 18, 21;3
c. Ketill and Hrafnhildr in Ketils saga hœngs’ chs. 3–4;4
d. Búi and Fríðr in Kjalnesinga saga (Ks) chs. 12–14, 18;5
e. Bárðr and Þórdís in Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss chs. 11–12, 21.6

Although they differ in many respects, all show a shared sequence of motifs; none includes every feature of the pattern, but each major feature is shared by at least three texts. The main elements are:

1. The protagonist is associated with Óðinn. Hadingus is Óðinn’s protégé and eventually hangs himself, presumably as a sacrifice to the

---

2 Ed. I, 21–3; tr. I, 22–4; see also Chapter 12 and footnote 17.
4 FSN I, 251–7.
6 IF 13, 137–42, 168–70; CS/II, 251–3, 265.
god. 7 Órvar-Odds and Ketill hœngr are grandson and grandfather; Oddr resembles the Odinic hero Starkaðr, and is fated to live for three hundred years8 (Starkaðr lives for three lifetimes), while Ketill, by Christian reversal, becomes a notable opponent of Óðinn.9 Búi also opposes heathenism, and is sent on his adventure because he has burned a heathen temple.10 Bárðar saga is more naturalistic, but Bárðr still appears demanding hospitality from his host’s son Eiðr, wearing a grey cowl and calling himself Gestr (cf. Óðinn’s alias Gestumblindi,11 and his disguise as Grímnir and patronage of the king’s son in Grímnismál). Bárðr has himself been brought up by the giant-king Dofri and is worshipped as a god.12

2. He is rescued by a hospitable giant. Hadingus is fostered by the giant Wagnofthus. Oddr is rescued by the giant Hildir from a mountain ledge where he has been stranded after being carried off by a giant vulture. Ketill reaches the farm of the Lapp Brúni after his boat is wrecked by a troll-woman. Búi bangs on the mountain cliff which is the giant’s door as part of a task set by the king in return for sparing his life. Bárðr arrives seeking shelter on a winter’s night.

3. The relationship with the giant includes some tensions (Ketill kills Brúni’s brother in self-defence; Oddr hides to avoid meeting Hildir again; Búi needs Fríðr to intercede with her father Dofri on his behalf), but the giant is basically friendly. This is in marked contrast to Óðinn’s relationships with giants, and may reflect a sense that even the strongest human being is too puny to confront a hostile giant.

4. The protagonist spends the winter in the giant’s household. Hadingus has been brought up by a giant and fostered and breast-fed by his daughter Harthgrepa. Hildir thinks that Oddr is a baby and entrusts him to his daughter Hildigunnr, who puts him in the cradle, swaddles him and takes him into bed with her. Dofri entrusts Búi to his daughter Fríðr for his own safety. Even where the hero is not regarded as a child, the giant conceals him from other giants and allows him to sleep with his daughter: as soon as he arrives, Ketill is asked whether he would prefer to sleep with Hrafnhildr or by himself. This motif is down-played in Bárðar saga, where ‘Gestr’ adopts Eiðr as his protégé and teaches him the law, but it is added that some people said that he had seduced the farmer’s daughter Þórdís during the winter.

5. The sexual relationship is often initiated by the giant’s daughter (Saxo, ÒOs, Kjs), who may make an emotional declaration of love (Saxo, ÒOs). She becomes pregnant (except in Saxo), but in the spring the

---

7 Saxo Lviii (ed. I, 35; tr. I, 35); cf. MRN 213–17.
8 Órvar-Odds saga ch. 2 (FSN I, 289; tr. 6); MRN 205–11.
9 Ketils saga hærngs ch. 5 (FSN I, 264–6).
10 Kjœnungs saga chs. 4, 12 (IF 14, 12–13, 28; CSI III, 310, 318).
11 Hervarar saga ok Heifreks ch. 10 (FSN I, 215).
12 Bárðar saga ch. 6 (IF 13, 119; CSI II, 244).
protagonist leaves. In ÓOs he accompanies Hildir on an expedition to capture a ferocious animal which can defeat those owned by Hildir’s brothers, thus enabling him to become king of the giants. In the other stories, the protagonist goes about his own business. In Saxo, Harthgrepa dresses as a man and goes with him (and the firmly military ethos here may explain why Saxo has suppressed the pregnancy), but in the other stories she is left behind.

6. Far from resenting his daughter’s pregnancy, the giant gives the protagonist a valuable gift. Wagnofthus later supports Hadingus at the vital moment in a battle. Hildir brings two chests of gold and a cauldron of silver for Órvar-Oddr. When Oddr hides from him, he leaves them under a stone to be collected later, but the stone is too heavy for Oddr to move, so he can reach only what is not buried underneath it. Ketill gains the sword Drangvendill and three wonderful arrows from Gusi, the giant’s brother. Búi is given the gaming board which King Haraldr sent him to get, and a gold finger-ring from Fríðr.

7. The child is a son, and is later sent to his father. Sometimes the protagonist and the giantess agree that he will be sent to his father when he is ten (ÓOs) or twelve (Kjs). In Ketils saga we are not told of the pregnancy until Hrafnhildr arrives at Ketill’s home with the three-year-old Grímr, whom she leaves with Ketill for three years. In Bárðar saga the motif is varied: Þórdís is not a giantess, but the day after her son Gestr is born, Bárðr’s giant-like daughter Helga appears and offers to foster the child (so that the protagonist has momentarily adopted the role of the giant). She brings Gestr back to his mother when he is twelve.

8. The affair with the giant’s daughter is only an interlude, and the protagonist makes a conventional human marriage later. This links the giant’s daughter to Óðinn’s abandoned giantess mistresses, except in the case of Harthgrepa, who is already dead when Hadingus marries Regnilda. Oddr later marries Silkisif, daughter of the king of Garðaríki (Russia).

The three later sagas all vary this element. In Bárðar saga the protagonist is already married when he seduces Þórdís. In Kjs, Búi returns to Iceland and we expect him to marry his fiancée Ólof; but after rescuing her from his rival Kolfinnr, he rejects her: ‘because I don’t want to love her after Kolfinnr has defiled her’ (this despite the fact that he has already had a child with her himself). Later, he has a successful marriage with Helga Porgrims-
SEDUCED BY THE GIANTESS: THE ODINIC HERO

dóttir, a newly introduced character. Only Ketils saga hœngs contains any
suggestion that the protagonist should have stayed with his giant mistress,
and even here it comes only from the mistress herself. After a human
marriage has been arranged for Ketill, Hrafnhildr visits him, but refuses his
offer to stay because, she says, he has negated their life together by his lack
of steadfastness. The older texts simply assume that there can be no lasting
relationship between a man and a giantess, but the later ones may suggest
that the protagonist is to some extent morally compromised by his
desertion of the giantess.

9. As in the Summer King myth (see Chapter 5), the son’s name is
reminiscent of one of his parents. In Ketils saga, Bárdar saga and QOs
the name is Odinic (Grímr, Gestr and Vignir or Vígnir);19 in KJs he has the giant-
name Jökull ‘Glacier’.20 His relationship with his father is uneasy, and a
failure by one of them to respect the other may lead to disaster. In KJs Búi
refuses to recognise his son until he has wrestled with him, and is
accidentally thrown onto a stone, which kills him in the same way as he has
previously killed King Haraldr’s wrestling champion.21 In QOs Ódhr’s
half-giant son Vígnir despises him and brings about his own death by
insisting on personally confronting the invulnerable ogre Ógmundr.22 In
Bárðar saga, Gestr’s conversion to Christianity enrages the dead Bárðr, who
appears to his son in a dream and inflicts on him the significantly Odinic
punishment of blindness.23

10. One might expect the liaison to lead to illustrious descendants, but
this happens only in Ketils saga, where the author must take account of the
already-existing Gríms saga lóðinkinna and QOs, and allow for the careers of
Ketill’s son and grandson. According to QOs, the family at Hrafnista
culminates in a number of Russian kings, but no Scandinavian descend-
ants. Otherwise, the protagonist has descendants, but they are not those
of the giant’s daughter. Hadingus is succeeded by his son Frotho (Saxo
II.i.1),24 but has no child by Harthgrepa. Órvar-Óddr has two sons by his
wife Silkisif, who become kings in Russia, and a daughter, Ragnhildr, by
his Irish princess, who returns to Hrafnista, marries and has descendants
there,25 but Vígnir, his son by Hildigunnr, dies without issue. In KJs, Jökull

18 Kjalnesinga saga ch. 17 (ÍF 14, 40–1; CSI III, 326).
19 See Grimmismál 46.1 and 47.6 (Grímr); Vafþrúðnir intends to test who knows more,
gestr eða gamli þulr ‘the guest/Gestr or the old sage’ (Vafþrúðnismál 9.6). AEW 661
interprets Vígnir as ‘the consecrated one’, but derivation from víg ‘slaying’ also seems
possible (cf. Óðinn-names like Sófnir, Fjólnir, Grímnir); if the vowel is short, it might be
related to vigr ‘spear’.
20 See DNM 179, Porsteins þáttr barjarmagns ch. 6 (FSN III, 406; tr. 131).
21 Kjalnesinga saga ch. 18 (ÍF 14, 42–3; cf. ch. 15, p. 37; CSI III, 326–7; cf. 323–4).
22 Órvar-Ódds saga chs. 21–2 (FSNI I, 350–5; tr. 67–71).

175
Búason is so upset by his accidental killing of the father who would not accept him that he leaves Iceland ‘and we have heard no story about him after that’. In Bárðar saga the protagonist himself has giant origins, and although he has a son and nine daughters, none of them has any descendants.

These stories reflect a pattern related to that of Óðinn’s seductions and perhaps originally told of his legendary devotees (they become his opponents in some late texts, presumably because medieval Christian audiences projected their own rejection of heathenism onto past heroes). The giant’s daughter welcomes the human protagonist without needing the seduction magic practised by Óðinn; perhaps it was assumed that any giantess could easily reject the advances of a mere human being if she wanted to.

In these tales the protagonist always needs something from the giants, and his destitution is expressed in terms of the forces of nature that the giants represent. Equally, because the giant’s daughter also represents nature, sexual morals are irrelevant to her and her father. But an alliance with them may reap rewards for both sides, empowering the protagonist and giving the giants a taste of civilisation, as when Óddr teaches Hildir that one can propel a boat faster by using wind-power than by rowing.

But these are not myths of family origins. When we ask for what purpose the son of the protagonist and the giant’s daughter is born, they look more like the myths of Váli and Viðarr, the sons born to take vengeance. But there is an important difference: here, the acts of the giantess’s son are disastrous (Jökull’s strength is diverted into parricide), or only partially successful (Vígnir drives away the ogre, but at the cost of his own life), or self-destructive (Gestr achieves success only by defying the supernatural forces represented by his father, and this leads to his own blinding and death). Perhaps medieval Christian narrators felt that these demi-giants were creatures of the past who could not be allowed to have modern descendants.

2. Adaptations and parodies

Fann ek þá hofingja myrkanna ... þótti mér sem þat mundi Óðinn vera, því at hann var einsýnn.

26 Kjalnesinga saga ch. 18 (ÍF 14, 43; CSI III, 327); but in the later Jökuls þáttu Búasonar (ÍF 14, 45–59; CSI III, 328–34). Jökull marries a princess and founds a dynasty among the Saracens. Again, this suggests that descendants of the giant’s daughter may only be kings in a remote country.

27 See ch. 2 (ÍF 13, 105; CSI II, 239); his daughter Þórdís marries Stjórnú-Oddr, but dies without issue after three years (ch. 10, pp. 135–7; CSI II, 251). Geistr is also childless (ch. 22, p. 172; CSI II, 266).

28 Órvar-Odds saga ch. 18 (FSN I, 341–2; tr. 59).
‘Then I met the lord of darkness … It seemed to me that it must be Óðinn, because he had one eye.’

Egils saga ok Ásmundar ch. 13

Comparison between the five tales examined above shows that each narrator could modify the pattern, either by supplying new rationalisations for major elements or by missing some of them out. This is further demonstrated by stories in which the pattern is more radically subverted.

One example is bætr Helga Börissonar in Flateyjarbók, where the affair with a giant’s daughter is merely a perfunctory device. The first third of this story is largely borrowed from Marie de France’s Lanval (probably via the Old Norse translation of which a fragment survives in Strengleikar). There are differences – Marie’s fée is unnamed and has only two ladies to the eleven in the þáttr – but their elaborate dress, the description of the pavilion, the invitation to the protagonist, the gilded hand basins, the precious bed, the lady stating that they must now part, the gift of gold and silver and the injunction to silence are all the same. Marie’s fée is simply turned into a giant’s daughter by the addition of Guðmundr of Glasisvellir.

The rest of this tale is of the type in which heathen beings try to destroy a Christian king; Marie’s benevolent fée becomes a jealous harpy who blinds her lover and decrees that his life will be short. This is completely unlike the attitude of the giant’s daughter, who retains her love for the protagonist even if she reproaches him for destroying their relationship, as in Ketils saga. This author has composed a hybrid story (see the definition in Chapter 9), in which a text of French origin has been thinly disguised as a giantess-seduction and combined with a tale of attack on a Christian king. The direction and sympathies of the lai have been radically altered, and if this could be done with an imported text, there is no reason to suppose that indigenous story patterns were immune to the same sort of change.

Two other episodes are best regarded as deliberate burlesque. They appear in chapters 12 and 13 of Egils saga ok Ásmundar, in which three autobiographical narratives are skilfully woven together. In ch. 12, Arinnefja relates how she was the youngest of eighteen giant sisters, who oppressed her so much that she promised Þórr one of her goats if he would come and help her. He arrived and slept with her eldest sister, but the others were so jealous that they killed her in the morning. The same thing then happened with each sister in turn, until only Arinnefja was left. Þórr

29 FSN III, 178; tr. 111.
31 Cf. Lanval 39–172 (ed. 59–62); the damaged text of Jánúals liðð in Strengleikar begins at the point when the lady tells Lanval that they must now part (ed. 212–15, cf. Lanval 157–646). The pavilion is called landtíaildít in both Strengleikar and bætr Helga Börissonar.
32 The date of this saga is uncertain; there are three fifteenth-century manuscripts.
also slept with her and gave her a daughter, Skinnefja, who did not grow properly, because each sister had cursed any offspring that any of the others might have with Þórr. Arinnefja inherited her sisters’ property, but was cursed with the ergi (perversion) of being unable to live without a man.33

This is not quite the only place where Þórr is said to have had sex with a giantess. In Skáldskaparmál ch. 17 Magni (‘Strength’) is his son by the giantess Jámsaxa (‘Iron Knife’), and in ch. 21 one of the poeticisms for Þórr’s wife Sí is elja Járnsóxu ‘rival of Jámsaxa’.34 Jámsaxa is also one of the nine giant mothers of Heimdallr in Hyndluljóð 77,8, and a troll-woman in Pûla IV c 3,35 But no surviving verse calls her Magni’s mother or uses the phrase elja Járnsõxu, which looks like an imitation of the same term applied to Óðinn’s partners (elja Jarðar, elja Rindar, elja Gunnladar, elja Friggjar).36 Snorra Edda probably did not invent Magni’s parentage, but it could still be a late imitation of Óðinn’s engendering of heroes on giantesses.

Þórr usually fights giantesses rather than having sex with them (see Chapter 8). Admittedly, the idea of wrestling turning into sex was not unknown to Norse narrators: when Jökull Búason throws the troll-woman Gnípa down in Jökuls þáttr ch. 1, she says: ‘Njóttu nú fallsins, karlmadr’ ‘Now make use of the fall, man’,37 and the context makes it clear that what she means is ‘Now use your advantage to take me sexually’. But Þórr usually destroys giantesses without any sexual involvement with them, so this episode of Egils saga ok Ásmundar is best regarded as a witty new way of killing giantesses. Their lust makes them eager to be seduced, so behaving in an Odinic way (cf. Óðinn’s boast in Hárbarðsljóð 18 that he seduced seven sisters) will exacerbate their mutual rivalry and make them kill each other.

In chapter 13 of the same saga, Arinnefja tells how she was caught trying to murder a bridal couple – the bride out of envy and the bridegroom because she wanted no other woman to enjoy him if she could not do so herself. To redeem her life she had to go to the underworld and fetch three precious things: a fire-proof cloak, a drinking horn which never became empty and a gaming board which would play by itself against a single player. After gaining the horn and the gaming board at the cost of various physical mutilations, she went down into the undirdjúp ‘abyss’, where the lord of darkness demanded sex with her: ‘It seemed to me that that must be Óðinn, because he had one eye. He offered me the cloak if I was prepared to fetch it from where it was in order to get it – and to do that one had to leap over a large funeral fire. First I lay with Óðinn, and then I jumped over the

33 FSN III, 175-6; tr. 109.
34 Ed. I, 30; tr. 86.
35 Kock I, 324 and Skáldskaparmál, ed. I, 112; tr. 156.
36 Skáldskaparmál chs. 19, 24 (ed. I, 30, 35; tr. 86, 90).
37 ÍF 14, 50; CSI III, 329.
fire, and I got the cloak, and since then I have had no skin anywhere on my body.  

This story shows some skilful reversals of the pattern. The task imposed as the price of saving the protagonist’s life is also found in Kjalnesinga saga (and a gaming board is one of the objects to be obtained in both stories), but here the giantess must get something from Óðinn rather than vice versa. Usually the quest takes the protagonist to Finnmark, the frozen abode of giants, but here Arinnefja must go down to hell and brave a large fire. In accordance with Christian belief, the chief heathen god becomes the chief devil in the abyss. Whereas Óðinn gains the mead of poetry by sleeping with Gunnlöð, here it is Arinnefja who gains the cloak by sleeping with Óðinn. These reversals show that seductions of giantesses were still a recognised Odinic story-type when this saga was composed.

3. Possible meanings

Giantesses are often equated with wild nature (see the sections on Jörð and Gríðr in Chapter 10),\(^{39}\) and gods or men need something that only they can supply – something powerful but non-rational. Consequently Jörð’s son Þórr, the earth-born guardian of earth (Midgards veurr, Voluspá 56,6) is more famous for action than for thought. Rindr’s son Váli takes vengeance at one night old with an emphatic lack of reflection, never pausing even to wash his hands or comb his hair (Baldr’s draumar 11). In Skáldskaparmál ch. 18, Gríðr’s son is ‘Viðarr the silent’.\(^{40}\) Poetry, too, was called óðr and related to the adjective óðr ‘raving’ (cf. Old English wod ‘insane’);\(^{41}\) the mead symbolises intoxicating, irrational inspiration.

But because they represent the irrational, the giants cannot use what they possess. Suttungr wants to hoard his daughter and the mead of poetry uselessly inside the mountain. The giants are lords of the frozen north and the bare mountains, where nothing can grow, and without the protagonist they can achieve nothing. This may explain why they welcome Óðinn’s protégés. The same welcome is not extended to Óðinn himself, but the magic with which he enchants the giant’s daughter is also a gift. What really drives Rindr mad is the desire for fertility (cf. also the curse on Gerðr in Skírnismál), which no giant can satisfy.

Because the giant’s daughter needs the initiative and sexuality of the protagonist, it is not surprising that she continues to love him even after he has abandoned her. But he must abandon her: using the powers of irrational

\(^{38}\) FSN III, 178; tr. 111.

\(^{39}\) Skáney, Scn[ó]dirnavia may be etymologically related to Skaldi (AEW 480; de Vries (1956–7) II, 335–40; Hymir’s daughters (i.e. giantesses) in Lokasenna 34,4–6 are probably rivers (cf. Gjálp in þórsdrápa 5–9, Skáldskaparmál ch. 18, see Chapter 8).

\(^{40}\) Ed. I, 24; tr. 82.

\(^{41}\) AEW 416.
nature is acceptable, but being controlled by them is not. This may suggest that wild nature was on some level perceived as being inside the human psyche (especially the feminine psyche) as well as in the outside world. Brother Peter’s story of Bovi suggests that women were particularly aware of this.

Male awareness of it is often indirect, expressed in terms of suspicion that the giantess may undermine the protagonist’s manhood. Saxo’s Harthgrepa declares her love to Hadingus amoris sui illecebris emollire conata ‘in an attempt to make him soft with the blandishments of her love’ (I.vi.2). In Ketils saga hœngs ch. 4, Ketill’s father goes to ask for an unwanted human bride for his son saying ‘ok er þat illt, at þú vilt elska troll þat’ ‘‘and it’s a bad thing that you insist on loving that troll-woman’’. Here, the giant’s daughter is treated with some sympathy, but Hallbjørn’s attitude is still regarded as normal, and his view prevails.

The early Odinic seduction myths may be responses to the inexorability of Fate. In the myths of Jôrð, Rindr and Gríðr, Óðinn foresees the need for a heroic defender or avenger and does what is pragmatically necessary to obtain one. Moral considerations do not arise, and although Pôrr, Váli and Viðarr all achieve the ends which motivated their conception, none of them can prevent Ragnað or Óðinn’s own death. These myths suggest that even if intellect could foresee its own end and subdue nature as a king subdues land or a man subdues a woman, Fate and death would remain unchanged. We may be consoled by begetting descendants and avengers, but we cannot prolong our lives beyond what the Norns have decreed.

The later stories show more variation of outlook. At one extreme, the distortion of Marie’s Lanval in báðr Helga Þórissonar looks like an emphatic rejection of the rule of ‘female’ forces. At the other, Búi’s determination in Kjalnesinga saga to reject the non-rational element in his own nature leads to a curiously modern outlook. His refusal to acknowledge Jôkull as his son (by the giant’s daughter Fríðr ‘Beautiful’) is almost a repetition of his arbitrary rejection of Ólóf; it leads to his death because he has tried to reject an essential part of his own nature. Yet such rejection is not always seen as unreasonable, even where its cost is recognised. In Bárðar saga ch. 21, Gestr, himself the product of an ‘Odinic’ affair, is clearly ‘right’ to reject his father’s religion, but it still costs him his eyesight and his life. Christianity insists on the dominance of reason and the rejection of amoral engagement with wild nature (including uncontrolled human nature). A medieval Christian had to accept the rightness of this, but he might still acknowledge its psychic cost, which he could not avoid by any amount of religious moralising.

42 Ed. I, 21; tr. I, 22.
43 FSN I, 256.
CHAPTER TWELVE

The Helpful Giantess

‘Behold thy mother!’

John 19,27

Chapters 8 to 11 focused on the giantess who is destroyed or exploited by the male protagonist. This chapter will consider the helpful giantess who actively helps the protagonist, and some of the meanings which may have been traditionally attached to her.

1. The pseudo-mother

In the oldest myths, the friendly giantess often treats the protagonist (usually a Þórr-figure) as if he were her son, although she is literally the mother of his half-brother or foster-brother. The relationship between Þórr and Gríðr appears in the oldest version of the Geirrøðr myth (Eilífr Goðrúnarson’s Þórsdrápa), and must have been traditional by the late tenth century (see Chapters 8 and 10).

Gríðr is the mother of Þórr’s half-brother Viðarr. As both she and Þórr’s actual mother Jõrð are giantess-concubines of Óðinn, she must be assumed to be motivated by a continuing love for Óðinn. Her most important service to Þórr is to lend him her pole, which he uses to save himself from being washed away (Þórsdrápa 4–11), possibly to destroy Gjálp and Greip (14), and in his fight with the surviving giants after Geirrøðr has been destroyed (20). It functions both as a symbol of the protagonist’s virility and as a weapon, though in Þórsdrápa the first role seems more prominent. In Skálaskáparmal ch. 18 Gríðr also gives Þórr a belt of strength and a pair of iron gloves. The latter were probably traditional; they are also a gift from

1 In Þórsdrápa 14.2, Skj I B, 142 and tr. 85 render fjallingum as ‘with swords’, but ‘with rods’ is probably preferable (see Skálaskáparmal, ed. I, 175–6). Eilífr may be using a poetic plural to refer to Gríðr’s pole, but the reference could be to swords or to roof beams.
the giantess in *Orms þáttir Stórólfssonar*, and the game of throwing a red-hot ball which motivates them can also be found in *Pósteins þáttir bažarmagns*.

The implication of Gríðr’s relationship with Þórr seems to be that the protagonist needs to be given confidence; this is regarded as a female function, and specifically that of a mother, connected with nature and hence with giantesses. He needs it partly to face his male enemies, but mainly to deal with threats to his virility from alien women. Even today, feminists often ask why many women bring up their sons to behave chauvinistically towards other women. Part of the answer may be that men must still show self-confident aggression in order to achieve success, and most mothers have a deeper loyalty to their offspring than to their gender. What happens to the man who lacks such confidence is illustrated by the figure of Pórr’s companion. He tags along as the servant of the hero, without whom he would be swept away, drowned in the giantesses’ urine or humiliatedly crushed against the roof of the cave. How many mothers would like their son to be Pjallr rather than Pórr?

But the young man cannot afford to acknowledge that it is his mother who has made him a man. Even today, it is widely regarded as discreditable for a man to be seen as a ‘mother’s boy’, lacking the independent self-reliance that a man is ‘supposed’ to show. It cannot be openly admitted that the helpful giantess is the protagonist’s mother, and so she becomes the mother of his brother or companion. This may also explain why, although Pórr is often called the son of Jórð (or Fjorgyn or Hlóðyn), Jórð never appears as a character in poems about Pórr. Where she is replaced with another of Óðinn’s giant mistresses, there may also be a sense of pride in the father’s sexual dominance over a succession of powerful women. The young man dreams of emulating this, thereby producing as many descendants as possible, both for himself and for his mother, who may expect to wield a powerful influence over her grandchildren.

The friendly giantess who acts as pseudo-mother to Pórr also appears in *Hymiskviða*. Pórr is sent to find a brewing kettle large enough to brew drink for all the gods, and Týr advises him that his father, who lives east of Élivágar (‘Stormy Waves’), owns a cauldron a league deep; for this poet, the giant Hymir is clearly Týr’s father. When the two gods arrive at

---

2 ÍF 13, 416; CSI III, 464–5.
3 FSN III, 406–7; tr. 131–2.
4 See Chapter 10. Such epithets are rare in poems featuring pseudo-mothers of Pórr: *Hymiskviða* has none, and *bôsdrápa* only *kvar Jarðar* (15.2, Skj I B, 142). Perhaps poets were reluctant to make the comparison with Jórð too obvious.
5 Some critics reject this. In st. 95, where Týr’s mother calls the giant her frei ‘lover’, LP 154 adopts the reading fáðir ‘father’ from the second manuscript, AM 748 40. This makes it necessary to emend fáðir (in both manuscripts) in st. 5.5 to aff ‘grandfather’. But this removes Týr’s clear statement that Hymir is his father. AM 748 40’s fáðir in st.
Hymir’s hall, they first meet Týr’s hideous grandmother, who has nine hundred heads (8,1–4), then his beautiful mother. She brings her son a drink (8,5–8) before hiding both gods in a cauldron so that they can avoid the wrath of Hymir when he returns home (9). Hymir is her fri’ lover’ (9,5), so she is probably the same character as the fri’lla’ concubine’ of 30,2. When the giant gets home, she tells him about their visitors, calling Týr sonr … Sá er við vøttom the son we two have been waiting for (11,3, 5).

In st. 30, Þórr cannot break Hymir’s goblet until the concubine advises him to strike it against Hymir’s skull. Þórr does so, and the goblet breaks (31), after which the giant allows them to take the brewing kettle if they can carry it (33,1–4). Týr cannot move it at all (33,5–8) but Þórr lifts it onto his head, sticking his foot through the hall-floor as he does so (34).

The fact that Týr’s mother is the giant’s sexual partner rather than his wife may be a remnant of the giantess’s usual role as concubine of Óðinn; substituting this would give Týr a more believable pedigree. She does not give Þórr a weapon, but does fulfil two other traditional roles: hiding the protagonist from the giant, and giving essential advice about how to defeat him.

Unlike Viðarr in the Geirðrøðr story, Týr actually appears in this narrative, and must therefore fulfil the role of the unheroic companion. When both gods hide in the cauldron, the spotlight falls mainly on Týr. When she offers to hide them, Hymir’s concubine addresses him as átmódr iptna ‘descendant of giants’, acknowledging Þórr’s presence only by the dual pronoun yer ‘the two of you’ (9,1–2). When she announces their arrival, she again dwells first on the coming of Týr, before adding (11,7–10):

Fylgir hánom Hróðrs andscoti, 
vínr verliða, Véorr heitir sá.

‘Hróðr’s opponent is with him, a friend of the race of mankind who is called Véurr.’

The unheroic hiding is therefore associated mainly with Týr, and the focus does not fall on Þórr again until Hymir sees his adversary face to face (13,7–8).

The giant greets the breaking of his goblet with a lament in which he says he will never again be able to say þú ert, ðôr, of heitt ‘Ale, you are brewed’ (Hymiskviða 32). The broken goblet and the lost brewing kettle seem to signify the end of Hymir’s ability to preside over revelry in his own household. In this poem, the giantess supports her proxy-son against her partner, who becomes a figure of the father as intimidating ogre, against whom the young man feels that his mother ought to protect and support him. He also feels that he deserves to inherit the good things of life (the brewing

9 is best explained as a clumsy attempt to ‘correct’ the obscure word fři.
cauldron) from his father without having to wait for them. That feeling can be indulged here without the feelings of guilt that would accompany it in the real world, precisely because it is not acknowledged that the giant is the protagonist’s father.

But this myth is not merely an indulgence of adolescent fantasy. The young man must prove his worthiness to take over adult responsibilities, and so Þórr must demonstrate his strength to Hymir by competing against him. In their first contest, Hymir catches two whales and Þórr outdoes this by pulling in the Mýgdagsormr (21–4). In the second, Hymir orders Þórr either to carry a whale home or to make the boat fast; Þórr chooses the apparently menial latter task, but transforms it into a feat of strength by carrying the boat home (26–7). The third and fourth tests, breaking the goblet and carrying the cauldron, are not balanced against any corresponding feats by the giant. Here, Þórr is not competing against the giant but asserting the right to possess his property. In the goblet test, the proxy-mother empowers him to displace the proxy-father, but because this subverts the father’s conventionally accepted authority, it is a role which can only be given to a giantess, who cannot be acknowledged as the hero’s actual mother.

In Egils saga ok Ásmundarchs. 5–17 (see Chapter 11), the stories told by the hero Egill and the giantess Arinnefja are linked by the theme of goat-herding and by the fact that they appear in each other’s narratives. The saga is full of comic reversals. Egill looks like a hero of the Þórr type, but instead of rescuing his associate, he becomes secondary to him. When the two heroes fight in ch. 4, it is Ásmundr who throws away his sword and wrestles with his opponent, and Egill who has to accept the gift of his life. Similarly, Ásmundr destroys the major giant unaided, while Egill needs Ásmundr’s help in disposing of Hildir (ch. 16). When Þórr encounters a giant called Egill, in a myth which involves goats and servants, he completely dominates him and his family. By contrast, this Egill is captured by an unnamed giant and forced to act as his goatherd for eight years (chs. 9–10), in a story whose outcome somewhat resembles the tale of Odysseus and the cyclops.

Again, Arinnefja is a mother, but this time that of Þórr’s daughter (see Chapter 11). There is no attempt to pretend that she and her daughter Skinnefja are anything other than hideous giantesses, and Skinnefja does not become the mistress of either foster-brother (contrast Illuga saga and Valdimars saga below). In fact, her only real function is to link Arinnefja to Þórr. But Arinnefja still behaves as proxy-mother to the ‘failed’ Þórr-figure Egill. Like the concubine in Hymiskviða, she tells the heroes how to

---

6 Hymiskviða 7, 37–8; Gylfaginning ch. 44 (ed. 37; tr. 37–8); the name Egill is found only in Hymiskviða 7, while the story is explicit only in Snorra Edda.
overcome the giants, her close relatives. Like the friendly giantesses of Illugásaga and Vilmundar saga (see below), she also acts as marriage-broker for them by revealing their identities to the two princesses (ch. 15).

More importantly, she also restores Egill’s right hand. Gautr, the giant who cuts off the hand, is also a common name for Pöör’s father Óðinn,7 and both Egill’s giants look like oppressive father-figures. The unnamed first giant fetters his feet to two heavy stones for seven years, then threatens to starve him to death. When Egill has at last escaped from him, he offers him a gold ring, but then tries to kill him when he stretches out his hand to take it; Egill only escapes with the ring by cutting off the giant’s right hand (ch. 10). In his subsequent conflict with Gautr, Egill enables Arinnefja to keep her gold ring, but has his own right hand cut off and has to flee (ch. 11).

The meaning here may be that the father shackles his son’s development, forcing him into menial work and starving his future prospects. The son cannot escape, because his father is constantly dragging him back into dependence by promising but withholding his inheritance (the ring). The conflict inevitably involves either father or son disempowering the other (‘cutting off his right hand’).8 The fight with Gautr repeats this pattern, but in the more specific and frightening context of a son’s powerlessness to intervene in quarrels between his parents, when he wants to support his mother but lacks the strength to do so. His father proves to him that he is not yet a real man (so Gautr cuts off Egill’s right hand). As in Hymiskviða, the mother figure sides with her ‘son’, but here she must also restore his sense of manhood (replace his severed hand). She can then help him to supplant the father figure and achieve his own destined mate.

In Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss chs. 11–16, Bárðr looks like an Odinic figure: he marries the half-giantess Fláumgerðr and has three daughters by her, and then a son by Þórdís in an episode where he adopts an Odinic pseudonym and teaches wisdom to a young protégé (see Chapter 11). His son Gestr grows up to have exceptional strength, like Pörr, and has a giant-derived foster-mother (his half-sister Helga), and a helpful giantess (Hít). Like Jórð, Hít is linked to the land itself, since Hitardalr is said to have been named after her. She is not explicitly said to have been Bárðr’s concubine, but he and his children are first on her guest-list, and he calls her his vinkona ‘female friend’.

Hít presumably gives Gestr the dog Snati (see Chapter 9) because of her love for Bárðr, but the gift seems to be linked to the name of her cave

---

7 For example, Grímnismál 54,6; Bragi, lausavísa 2,3 (Skj 1 B, 5).
8 On cancellation of a man’s status by mutilation, see Meulengracht Sørensen 81–5. Similarly, in Hálfdanar saga Brynhíður ch. 15 (see below), the hero blinds the treacherous Áki, cuts off his ears and nose, castrates him, breaks his legs and turns his feet to face backwards (FSN III, 346). The effect of this punishment, of which the narrator apparently approves, is that the king drives Áki away.
(Hundahellir ‘Cave of Dogs’), and thus to the land, as she is herself. Snati may be regarded as an emanation of his donor (cf. snati ‘overhanging cliff’), as a weapon (cf. snata ‘spear’) or simply as a tracking dog, but the ensuing story treats him as if he were a warrior. In any case, Hít gives Gestr the help he will need to support his half-brothers against a giant and an ogress.

Again, it cannot be admitted that the giantess is the hero’s mother, but Gestr’s mother resembles the seduced mistresses of Óðinn, his foster-mother is the granddaughter of a giant and his patroness is a giantess. Again, the gifts of the giantess pseudo-mother(s) to the hero are strength and self-confidence, but here they are applied mainly to the support of the hero’s brothers. It may also be important that the specific function of the dog is to destroy the ogress who is the counterpart of Hít herself. The benevolent ‘giantess’ mother can not only supply a young man with the means to assert himself and dominate other women (compare the Geirrøðr myth), and to escape and overcome the power of his father (compare Hymiskviða). She can also enable him to overcome her own hostile or threatening aspects – and perhaps, if we see resemblances between the hero and his giant opponent (see Chapter 9), also to subdue the dark influences within himself.

2. The partner’s mother

Some fornaldarsögur transfer the sexual partner from the associate to the hero himself, and further distance the hero from relationship with the helpful giantess by making her the mother, grandmother or foster-mother of the sexual partner rather than of the hero’s associate. The first change may reflect the influence of the bridal-quest romance on later medieval literary taste. The second, I shall argue, arises from a sense that giants belong to an alien, pre-Christian past.

One story illustrates an intermediate stage on the way to these developments: Orms þättr Stórólfssonar chs. 8–9 includes a helpful giantess who is neither mother nor sexual partner. In some respects Menglǫð resembles Gríðr (for example, she gives the hero gloves of strength) and the concubine in Hymiskviða (she tells him how to defeat a giant who is her close relative), but her affection for him is sexual rather than motherly. But she knows that she and Ormr cannot enjoy each other because of his Christian faith. This suggests that the author is familiar with stories in which the relationship between hero and giantess might be sexual, but that he regards giants as fundamentally heathen.

9 AEW 523.
10 See Kalinke.
11 ÍF 13, 415–18 and cf. Chapter 9 above.

186
This creates a problem: if the hero is to retain the sympathy of Christians, he can only have a lasting sexual relationship with the giantess if her giant nature is somehow cancelled. This may be done either by making her reject the giant part of her parentage and convert to Christianity, or by denying that she was ever really a giantess at all. The author of Orms þáttr chooses rather to retain Menglöð’s giantess nature, so a sexual relationship between her and Ormr can be no more than a wistful ‘might-have-been’.

Illugasaga Gríðarfóstra1 chs. 4–6 contains clear traces of the Þórr–Geirrøðr myth, notably the giantess called Gríðr who becomes the hero’s patroness. The attack on Gríðr and Illugi by the seven troll-women may reflect the attacks by Gjálp and Greip. The search for fire, and the demand that the hero should in return state three truths which turn out to be completely obvious also appear in the Saxo C version of the Geirrøðr myth (VIII.xv.5–6).13 As in Saxo, one of the ‘truths’ concerns the ugly nose of the giant(ess) he is speaking to. Gríðr’s invitation to the hero to sleep with her daughter is paralleled by that of Guthmundus in the Saxo B version, but whereas Illugi is only briefly hauled out of bed and threatened with death to test his courage, Saxo punishes those who give way to such voluptuousness with actual madness or sudden death (VIII.xiv.10, 19).14

The transfer of the sexual partner from the associate(s) to the hero is not surprising in view of the dominance of the bridal-quest in late fornaldr sagur. The surprise is rather that the associate’s role survives at all, especially as his need for a replacement bride leads to a strange ending in which he marries the transformed Gríðr herself.

In other respects, this story seems to deny the basic meaning of the inherited myth. Not only does the giantess become the mother of the hero’s sexual partner, but this Gríðr is not ‘really’ a giantess, but rather a princess who has been placed under a spell. However, that does not prevent her from having killed sixteen men, quite apart from her hanging of Björn. The latter is not said to be a giant, but Gríðr has supernatural foreknowledge of his presence, and her statement that she does not care if Björn dies of cold is reminiscent of the concubine’s disillusion with the frost-giant in st. 30 of Hymiskviða. There is an uneasy half-perception that Gríðr’s supernatural powers derive from an actual giant nature — a realisation which the author of the saga makes every effort to avoid.

He also resists the idea that the hero needs the help of the giantess. Gríðr’s patronage is achieved by releasing her and her daughter from a spell, so that she is more indebted to Illugi than he is to her. Together, they then slay seven hags who have been afflicting her. The effect is to suggest

---

12 FSN III, 355–60.
14 Ed. I, 240–1, 243; tr. I, 264, 267.)
that he has rescued her, and thus to play down his reliance on the mother
figure, which lies at the heart of the received myth.

Valdimars saga\textsuperscript{15} preserves some of the same motifs as Illuga saga
Gríðarfóstra, but in a rather disjointed form. The young giantess Alba
resembles the giant-mistresses of Óðinic heroes (see Chapter 11), though
we hear nothing more about the child she bears to Valdimar. As in Órvar
Ödins saga, the giant Aper regards the hero as a beautiful and precocious
child, and has no objection to his sleeping with Alba; and the hero
eventually marries someone else without any apparent blame. The need
for the sexual partner to be transferred from the associate to the hero is
avoided by giving both foster-brothers sisters, so that each can marry the
sister of the other.

Although Alba (Latin ‘White’) persuades her father to receive Valdimar,
becomes pregnant by him and gives him a mirror (a blind motif which
plays no further part in the action), she does not actually help him in his
quest. That is left to her grandmother Nigra (Latin ‘Black’), who gives him a
drink of strength, a powder of invisibility, and decisive military support,
and to the dream-woman, who gives advice and (it is implied) sustenance.
The drink of strength is equivalent to the belt of strength in the Geirrøðr
myth, and a memory of its original purpose may survive when its effective-
ness is tested by making Valdimar wrestle with Alba (p. 64).

Valdimars saga seems confused and over-complex, but it is not in a state of
denial of the myth, as Illuga saga seems to be. Its Latin names and non-
Scandinavian settings suggest the influence of romance, but most of its
material looks home-grown, and its author seems happy to accept the
patronage that his hero receives from giantesses. Indeed, it is thanks to
them that the male giants are also his allies. But apart from the fact that
Nigra is dressed in ‘a coat of rough, dry leather and a full head taller than
the giant’ (p. 63), there is little to distinguish giants from other beings in this
saga. It is not even clear whether the inhabitants of Risaland (‘the Land of
Giants’) in the army of Arkistratus are giants or not. Perhaps this writer
was not deliberately endorsing his hero’s use of the ‘female’ aspects of wild
nature, but merely telling a story whose traditional symbols had become
devalued and half-forgotten.

Vilmundar saga viðutans chs. 8–24\textsuperscript{16} shows considerable romance influ-
ences in both style and plot. Vilmundr’s initial ignorance of courtly ways,
Ruddi’s crude aggression and Hjarandi’s athletic urbanity echo the roles of

\textsuperscript{15} Ed. 51–78. The two oldest manuscripts date from the fifteenth century.
\textsuperscript{16} Ed. 152–201. This saga must be Icelandic: ch. 8 (p. 153) refers to a hot-spring pool. There are three fifteenth-century manuscripts.
Percival, Kay and Gawain in Chrétien’s *Conte del Graal*, which the author may have known through *Parscval's saga*.

In other respects, Vilmundr looks like a hero of the Þórr type (see Chapter 9), especially in ch. 18 (the conflict with the sow, the ogre Kolr and his mistress Øskubuska). Vilmundr’s father has what may be an Odinic name (Sviði). He himself is associated with goats, is helped by a giantess, has an associate and a prospective sexual partner, fights against a male and then a female ogre (the sow is symbolically equivalent to Øskubuska), and achieves victory mainly by fighting without weapons. But some features of the Bear’s Son pattern also appear: tearing off the sow’s leg echoes the tearing off of the ogre’s right arm; Øskubuska is finally decapitated with a sword; and her head, like that of Grendel in *Beowulf* 1647–50, is taken to the king as a trophy.

Many aspects of this saga resemble *Illuga saga*, and the two texts may be related. Both heroes have fathers with the same unusual name. Both are of humble birth but become foster-brothers to a king’s son, who also has a wicked retainer. Silven’s persuasion of Sóley to marry Vilmundr is more refined than Gríðr’s offer of her daughter’s bed to Illugi, but both cast the old giantess as marriage broker between the hero and her daughter or foster-daughter. Both sagas seem reluctant to admit that their heroes are associated with giantesses: Sóley is only the foster-daughter of Silven, who herself would not be recognisable as a giantess if she did not happen to live inside a rock, which she can open on demand. Both minimise the help that the hero needs from the giantess. Vilmundr does gain information from her, but only through eavesdropping, and Silven’s persuasion of Sóley to accept Vilmundr is unnecessary, because Sóley has already vowed to marry only the man who regains her magic shoe for her. And whereas in *Illuga saga* the wicked retainer is hanged through the magical intervention of Gríðr, Vilmundr deals with Kolr himself.

But Sóley also acquires some of the dangerous ambivalence normally associated with the giantess. In the Geirröðr myth and in *Bárðar saga* there is a contrast between the helpful giantess (Gríðr, Hít) and her hostile counterpart (Gjálp, Greïp, Skrukka), and a memory of this probably explains the brief appearance of Týr’s hideous grandmother in *Hymiskvida* 8. In *Vilmundar saga* this contrast is represented by Sóley and her serving-maid Øskubuska. Øskubuska becomes the mate and accomplice of the ogre Kolr, and is killed in a way that identifies her as the ogress figure, but her exchange of appearances with Sóley (ch. 5) suggests that they are in some sense aspects of the same figure. Other traces of the ogress also attach themselves to Sóley. She initiates the murder of Úlfr when she could simply have refused him (ch. 4), and when she attacks Vilmundr in the kitchen (ch. 11, p. 162) the details are reminiscent of a traditional ogress fight. She grabs him so violently that he falls, and his grip on her right hand is so tight that it leaves a permanent mark, which is still visible when she finally accepts his
MEETING THE OTHER IN NORSE MYTH AND LEGEND

proposal of marriage (ch. 23, p. 196). This recognition that the ogress and the partner are aspects of the same female nature is unusually explicit; the clash between it and the reluctance to admit the true nature of the giantess suggests that this story may have developed through at least two stages.

3. The incongruous partner

The tales I have considered so far present the friendly giantess as a quasi-mother of Þórr or a Þórr-like hero and as a counterpart and opposite to the ogress. When we turn to the Óðinnic seduction pattern, the seduced giantesses are of course ‘helpful’ in that they allow Óðinn to seduce them and remain in love with him afterwards. Óðinn never needs help from his former mistresses, but some of his human followers do. The seduction itself is also easier for the human hero, since he is not necessarily an enemy of the giantess’s family; indeed, she or one of her parents often initiates the affair.

Some of these stories have a tragic air. In Saxo’s tale of Hadingus and Harthgrepa (I. vi.2–9) the giantess moves from the role of foster-mother to an insistence on becoming the hero’s mistress, and is determined to be whatever Hadingus wants of her. She insists that she can vary her size, to terrify his enemies or to sleep with him, and later dresses as a man to accompany him back to the human world. She raises a dead man’s spirit to predict an attack on him by a giant hand, and then grasps the hand until Hadingus can cut it off (and her name, ‘Hard Grip’, may suggest that this is an ancient feature of her myth). However, a curse laid on her by the spirit leads to her being torn to pieces by members of her own race. The bereaved Hadingus then comes under the patronage of an old man with one eye, who must be Óðinn, and this looks like a sign that he has emotionally discarded Harthgrepa.

When Harthgrepa grabs the giant hand, there may be an allusion to the wrestling motif in stories of the Bear’s Son type (cf. particularly the giant claw in stories like Am Priomh Sgeul; see Chapter 9). She tries to take on the role of the hero’s associate without relinquishing that of mistress, but such a combination is impossible. Saxo does not tell us the gender of those who destroy Harthgrepa: she is lacerated ab originis suæ consortibus ‘by companions of her own race’ with their nails. But fingernails are a female weapon, and attacks on friendly giantesses in fornaldarsögur are usually the work of other giantesses, so this may be an inevitable retribution which

18 As Davidson points out (tr. II, 29–30) this echoes the words of Lady Philosophy in Boethius’s Consolation of Philosophy, Book I, prose 1, 2 (ed. and tr. 132–3, 138–9). But this is parody – Saxo is not suggesting that Harthgrepa has any wisdom to teach Hadingus, but rather presents her as a threat to his manly spirit.
19 Cf. Súrla saga sterka ch. 5 (FSN III, 201); Illuga saga Gríðarfóstra ch. 5 (FSN III, 359), see above.
Harthgrepa brings on herself by trying to deny her female nature. However much she may want to be with her lover, a woman cannot enter fully into the male realm without paying a social and psychological penalty for denying her nature as a woman.

Most giantess mistresses accept this limitation, although sometimes with great regret. Where the lover is human, the mistress usually allows him to leave because she loves him, though she may add that she could prevent him from leaving if she chose to (see, for example, Örvar-Odds saga ch. 18). In Ketils saga haengs ch. 4, Hrafnhildr reproaches Ketill for leaving her; but a more typical parting scene appears in Hálfdanar saga Brœnufôstra. Brana admits that she would rather that they did not have to part, but refuses an invitation to accompany Hálfdan, and adds that she wants him to marry Marsibil, the daughter of the king of England.

The acceptance that the hero and the giantess-mistress come from incompatible worlds is usually reflected in the arrangements made for their child. Örvar-Oddr’s response to this problem is that if the child is male, he is to be sent to Oddr when he is ten years old; if female, he will not concern himself with her. This may seem heartless, but similar arrangements are stipulated in Hálfdanar saga Brœnufôstra and Kjalnesinga saga, in the latter case by the giantess herself. The implication is that a son will naturally belong to the hero’s world, a daughter to that of the giantess. Like the polarisation of the sons of the Summer King and the Winter Princess (see Chapter 5), this emphasises the divide between the ‘male’ world of civilised human beings and the ‘female’ realm of wild nature. It may also explain why the child of the liaison rarely has any further descendants (see Chapter 11).

As I noted in Chapter 11, the Odinic hero’s giantess-mistress and her father often begin by assuming that he is a baby. This is rationalised in Saxo’s Harthgrepa story and in Bárðar saga, where the hero has actually been brought up in the giant’s household, but in Örvar-Odds saga ch. 18 it appears in what may be a more original form. Hildigunnr dandles Oddr on her knee (reciting a dandling verse which may be older than the saga’s prose) and sings lullabies to him before taking him into her bed. Similarly, in Kjalnesinga saga ch. 13 Fríðr introduces Búi to her father as ‘a little bearded child’. Apart from dramatising the relative sizes of giants and men, this motif demonstrates a powerful but indiscriminate mothering.

---

20 FSN I, 341.
21 FSN I, 257.
22 Chs. 8–9 (FSN III, 336–8); cf. also Kjalnesinga saga ch. 14 (IF 14, 34; CSI III, 321–2).
23 Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss chs. 1–2 is an exception (IF 13, 103–5; CSI II, 237–9); here Bárðr marries the giant’s daughter, they return to Hálogaland, and she dies a year later. Bárðr keeps his daughters, probably because two of them will be needed as characters later in the saga.
24 IF 14, 31; CSI III, 320.
instinct in the giantess. The ‘proper’ uses of this instinct, from the hero’s point of view, are for a young giantess to become pregnant by him and an older one to act as his foster-mother, giving him help and advice. The young giantess lacks the intellectual sense to direct her mothering instinct appropriately, and this leads to some comedy of incongruity. But because the resourceful hero can make use even of the misconception that he is a baby, this comedy is directed more at the giantess than at him.

_Hálfdanar saga Bróuðföstra_ 25 presents a hybrid between the pseudo-mother and the incongruous partner. Chs. 4–6 show a fairly typical Þórr combat, though with some features of the Bear’s Son tales (see Chapter 9). Ch. 7 presents Brana in a way similar to the Liberated Partner stories considered in section 4 below, including her persecution by other giantesses and the killing of her father. But chs. 8–9 tell of an abandonment of the pregnant giantess like those in Órvar-Odds saga and Kjalnesinga saga, except that the parting scene includes a succession of marvellous gifts which announce another change of role, to that of the protecting patroness. In arranging Hálfdan’s marriage to another woman, Brana suddenly begins to sound like his foster-mother, and this role continues to the end of the saga, not without some humour, as in ch. 13 she reproves him for constantly needing her help. However, this is mere motherly scolding, as we are then reassured.26

4. Liberating the partner

_Illuga saga_ and _Vilmundar saga_ illustrate a tendency to deny that the helpful giantess is ‘really’ a giantess at all. Actually, they suggest, she is a beautiful woman who has adopted a disguise or been placed under a spell. This may be due partly to the association of giantesses with a ‘forbidden’ heathen past, and partly to a tendency to treat the giantess as if she were a human woman. When she is regarded as human, her giant parents can be reinterpreted as tyrants who obstruct her fulfilment, and the seducer as her liberator from them. This may be a female counterpart to the pattern of the young man’s triumph over the ogre-father. But such salvation is worthless to her unless it involves marriage, so these tales cannot share the abandonment of the giantess that we find in the quasi-Ódinic stories. This tends to weaken their links to the pattern of Óðinn’s seductions, as does the medieval Christian view of Óðinn as a demon (see, for example, _Egils saga ok Ásmundar_).

---

25 _FSN_ III, 330–48; the two earliest manuscripts date from the fifteenth century.
26 _FSN_ III, 343.
The enchanted princess

Ectors saga ch. 5 contains an exceptional ‘liberation’ story in which there is no explicit marriage. Although the text ostentatiously refers to Trójumanna saga and other sources on the ancient world, this episode is clearly derived from Öðinn’s theft of the mead of poetry. A vat of wine-like liquid which makes the drinker happy but not drunk has been acquired by the giant from two dwarfs. Like Suttungr, the giant-king Nocerus refuses to let anyone else drink from it. The encounter between Vernacius and Almaria in the dungeon resembles that between Öðinn and Gunnlöð in the mountain. Finally, although there is a betrothal, Vernacius leaves Almaria in the castle.

In this story, the significance of the magical drink has been forgotten and the focus of interest has moved to the liberation of the giantess figure. Like Gunnlöð, Almaria helps her lover against the giant, but instead of being her father, he has killed her father. This makes it possible to deny that she is a giantess, and to excuse her for insisting that the giant must be killed and for betrothing herself without consulting her relatives. A less modified version of the same motif appears in chs. 6–7 of Hálfdanar saga Bróufóstra[28] where Brana really is the daughter of a giant (who has abducted her human mother), and she stabs him herself. For the daughter to be freed from future obligation to her ogre-father, he must be killed, and Almaria’s theft of his sword to give it to Vernacius symbolises her transference of authority over herself from her father to her lover.

In Hjálmpérs saga ok Ólvis[29] chs. 9–10 some of the same motifs appear in a double form, but Hjálmpér and Ólfrir resemble Pórr and his associate rather than Öðinn. The initial role of the giantess Skinnhúfa is that of protectress, like the concubine in Hymiskviða. Eventually, however, she will marry Ólfrir, the hero’s associate (cf. the pattern in Chapter 9), and although Hjálmpér kills the giant, she therefore insists that the giant’s sword be given to Ólfrir. Another Pórr-like episode follows in ch. 12, where the foster-brothers and their protector and supposed thrall Hrórðr destroy nine troll-women.

Like Illuga saga and Vilmundar saga, this saga also gives the protagonist a sexual partner. This is the supposed giantess Vargeisa, who gives Hjálmpér another sword, though he gains it only after demonstrating his courage and breaking the curse on her by kissing her. Her sword gives him virility, but in return he frees her from her father’s tyranny and his kiss validates her desirability. Here, the liberation of the ‘giantesses’ has been grafted onto a story whose heroes are derived mainly from the Pórr pattern.

---

27 Ed. 91–7.
29 FSN III, 245–51.
MEETING THE OTHER IN NORSE MYTH AND LEGEND

(though Hòrðr/Hringr, the thrall/king who protects them, ‘dies’ for three days and eventually rewards them for their good deeds, is clearly a type of Christ).

The liberation of the enchanted princess is also grafted onto a bòrr-type hero in the closely similar episodes in *Grims saga loðinkinna* chs. 1–2 and *Porsteins saga Vikingssonar* ch. 19. In these tales the helpful giantess/enchanted lady appears only after the fights with giant-figures (who in *Porsteins saga Vikingssonar* have become human, although one is an enchanter and the other is called Jòkull ‘Glacier’, a common giant-name). Both heroes have to be rescued by the giantess: Grímr has been seriously wounded during a fight on the beach, while Porsteinn is rescued twice, first from drowning and then after being wounded in a fight beside a river. Each hero is conscious but helpless, and expects to die; each is saved after promising the giantess two favours. In *Grims saga* she takes him to her cave in exchange for a kiss, then heals him in return for sleeping with her. In *Porsteins saga Vikingssonar* the first rescue is in exchange for a wish, to be granted later; the second is in return for a promise to marry the giantess. *Porsteins saga Vikingssonar* also has the motif of the giantess giving the hero a sword, though in this case it is his own lost one. Just as the sword symbolises the hero’s restored virility, the gift of his life may represent the new life of the offspring she will bear him. Both giantesses begin their rescue missions with the question *viltu þiggja lif af mér* ‘will you accept life from me?’

In *Grims saga* the transformation of the giantess into a beautiful woman is immediate, while in *Porsteins saga Vikingssonar* it is postponed (probably because they have not yet slept together). But both stories make the erstwhile giantess stipulate that the hero must return to her province of Norway and formally ask her father for her hand. This again emphasises that she is *not* a giantess, since it replaces the usual hostility of the giantess towards her senior male relative with a ‘proper’ deference towards her family.

**The giantess baptised**

An alternative strategy was to accept that the female really is a giantess, at least on her father’s side, but to integrate her into human society through Christian baptism. Examples of this can be found in *Porsteins þáttir*

---

33 FSN II, 227 and I, 274.
34 Cf. *Egils saga ok Ásmundar*, where Arinnefja contrives the death of Gautr, her brother (ch. 14) or uncle (ch. 12); *Hálfdanar saga Bronafístra*, where Brana kills her father; *Orms þáttir*, where Mengloð tells Ormr how to kill her half-brother and stepmother.
THE HELPFUL GIANTESS

_bæjarmagns_ chs. 11–12\(^{35}\) and the folktale _Inntak úr sögupætti af Ásmundi flagðagaefu_ ‘Summary of a Saga-Episode about Ásmundur “Lucky with Hags”’.\(^{36}\)

Þorsteinn _bæjarmagn_ is clearly derived from Þórr.\(^{37}\) He meets Guðrún, the daughter of the giant Agði jarl, and persuades her to elope with him. Agði is struck blind when he sees Þorsteinn’s ship. Guðrún accepts baptism and marries Þorsteinn when they get back to King Óláfr’s court. The next year they return to Agði’s realm on the fringes of Jötunheimar, and Þorsteinn successfully claims it as his wife’s inheritance.

Ásmundur is another Þórr-like figure, and he sets out on his first adventure with a sword given to him by his vaguely supernatural mother (cf. Gríðr’s pole). He kills a giant by wrestling with him and acquires his dog (cf. Snati in _Bárðar saga_; see Chapter 12), which later fights against a magically vivified horse-phallus (cf. _Völsa þáttr_). Like Þórr’s contest with Geirrøðr, Ásmundur’s confrontation with Þorgerðr involves red-hot iron. As in _Porsteins þáttr_, the girl’s giant-parent is disabled but not killed, and the daughter agrees to elope with the hero and is baptised before marrying him. This story is also interesting in that both the hero and his partner explicitly revolt against the tyranny of their same-sex parents.

The liberated giantess in these stories inhabits a determinedly heathen world, from which only she can cross into Christian Norway. Her function is not to give the hero practical help, but to provide him with a claim to the estates she inherits, and she must remain a giantess so that her inheritance rights are not in doubt. This function survives clearly in the end of _Porsteins þáttr bæjarmagns_; in Ásmundur’s story, people are sent to settle Þorgerður’s island, but Ásmundur and Hlaðvör cannot themselves inherit it because this would remove Ásmundur from court and make him unavailable for his next adventure. The motivation of inheritance may be a reinterpretation of the old association of giantesses with the land itself.

Whatever their origins, most stories of the liberated giantess involve marriage to a hero who resembles Þórr. The requirement for Christian marriage may explain why these authors felt the need to ‘cancel’ the giant nature of the female, either by giving her an aristocratic human origin or through baptism. Nonetheless, the fact that she at least _seems_ to be a giantess suggests that wild nature and its inherent threat were sometimes recognised, even in late texts and within even the most desired female partner.

\(^{35}\) _FSN_ III, 413–16; tr. 137–40. The four earliest manuscripts date from the fifteenth century.

\(^{36}\) Jón Árnason, I, 163–71 (original ed. I, 171–9), notes on I, 673, 678.

\(^{37}\) See McKinnell and Ruggerini 79.
5. Conclusion

The ‘pseudo-mother’ motif can be seen from börsdrápa to have existed in the heathen period. The ‘incongruous partner’ existed by c. 1200, when Saxo adapted it in the Harthgrepa story. The ‘partner’s mother’ motif certainly existed by the mid-fourteenth century (the probable date of Orms þáttr Stórólfssonar). The ‘liberated partner’ pattern can be dated only from the earliest manuscripts of the texts concerned, but certainly existed in the fifteenth century. However, any or all of these story-types could be much older than the earliest texts that now embody them.

Although the motherly giantess of the Þórr myths and the seduced mistress of Óðinn both continued to appear in later medieval Icelandic literature, both underwent change. One reason for this seems to have been an increasing reluctance to allow the hero to depend on powers that were seen as female and heathen. This tendency is in keeping with medieval Christian thought, which often regarded women as more attuned to the body than men, but as less reasonable, with reason seen as an essential attribute of God.38 Female control, even at its most innocent, was therefore seen as dangerous.39 Modern critics often regard this perception as typical medieval anti-feminism, but it was probably shared by both Christians and heathens and by both genders. Indeed, the same perception survives today in the popular view that women are more intuitive but less analytical than men, and it is only because romanticism and Darwinism have tended to privilege nature over reason that this opinion is not also considered anti-feminist. Where heathenism and Christianity differed, if the surviving story patterns are any guide, is that Christians began to feel a moral imperative to privilege reason over nature, and this made it less acceptable for the hero to be helped by a ‘real’ giantess.

However, the variety of ways in which the motifs could be used show that the idea of the helpful giantess remained useful, and to some extent expressive of psychological facts that resisted religious or moral censorship. The helpful giantess patterns could be used to express much of the psychological relationship between mothers and sons, notably the mothering instinct itself, and the mother’s strengthening of her son against external aggressors, other women, his father, and even some aspects of herself. These patterns might also be useful from a female viewpoint, reflecting and validating the impulses and strategies which led a young woman’s emotional consciousness away from her parents and towards her sexual partner.

38 See Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica I, q. 92, art. 1 (ed. L 709).
39 Thus the Anglo-Norman Ordo Adae (c. 1140) stipulates that even before the Fall, Eve stands further away from Figura (the Figure of God) than Adam, and that she is parum demissiori ‘not quite sufficiently humble’, ed. 80.
CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Consulting the Dead

1. Traces of early belief

**birg(u(bo)j(ø)s)westarminu liubum(w)age**

This inscription appears on the early fifth century rune stone from Opedal, Hordaland, Norway. Krause’s translation is ‘Grave. Bora, my sister, dear to me, Wagar’. Alternatively, the last word might be the present subjunctive of Old Norse **vægja** ‘to spare’, which would give the translation: ‘Grave. May Bora, my dear sister, spare me’; Krause objects that this should have appeared in runic Old Norse as **wagij(e)**, but his own solution is also doubtful, since the single-element personal name **Wagar** is not found elsewhere. Both interpretations share another difficulty: **birg(j)u** is equivalent to Old English **byrging**, which does not mean ‘grave’, but ‘the act of burying someone’. Some other early Norwegian memorials are labelled with a noun referring to the monument and the genitive singular of a personal name, but that is not done here. The nearest burial is about twenty metres away, and unlike the tall **bautarsteinar** commonly found on grave-mounds, the Opedal stone is irregular in shape and unworked, and large and heavy enough (132 x 77 cm) to be difficult to move. It may always have lain flat on the ground where it was discovered.

Von Friesen had earlier taken **birg** as the imperative singular of **bjarga** ‘to save, defend’, and **(i)guboro** or **(i)guborg** as the common Old Norse female name **Ingibjorg**. In that case, the last word could be the dative singular of **vágr** ‘bay’, ‘sea’ (though von Friesen, like Krause, regarded it as a proper name). The inscription could then be interpreted: ‘Ingubora, my

---

1 RÅF no. 76, 174–8, Tafel 36.
2 Vág- appears occasionally as a name-element (for example, Vág-Ulfr, Váganefr), but never as a name by itself (Lind (1905–15), col. 1064; Lind (1920–5), cols. 395–6).
3 Bosworth and Toller (1898), 139; cf. Old Norse **byrging** ‘the act of shutting in’, ‘a conclusion’, *A Dictionary of Old Norse Prose* 2, col. 1039.
4 For example, Be, Rogaland (RÅF no. 78, 181–2); Rävsal, Bohuslän (RÅF no. 80, 183–5).
5 Von Friesen (1904), 44; he later suggested the interpretation ‘grave’ (von Friesen (1924), 124–5).
dear sister, preserve me at sea’; the site is beside Sørfjord. This would then be a prayer rather than a memorial, and that would suggest that at least some Migration Age Scandinavians believed that the spirits of individual dead female relatives could give them protection. Unfortunately, this is hard to support from other inscriptions.

There is, however, abundant evidence that dead female relatives in general were venerated in the pre-Christian Germanic world. Votive stones and altars from the Roman period dedicated to the *matronae* or *matres* are common on the lower Rhine, in eastern Gaul and in upper Italy. They may have Celtic origins and could have originated among the mixed Celtic-Germanic populations on the lower Rhine, but the majority include Germanic names. Dedications include *matribus Suebis* ‘to the Suebian mothers’, *matribus Frisiavis paternis* ‘to the Frisian mothers on [my] father’s side’, *matribus germanis* (probably ‘to the mothers related [to me]’). Gerhard Eis⁹ states that worship of the *matronae* ended with the arrival of the Franks, but since the stones resemble Roman altars and commemorative stones, they may simply reflect the influence of Roman sculpture. The cult itself may also have existed before and/or after the Roman period; de Vries suggests that in southern Germany it survived long enough to be Christianised into the veneration of the Three Holy Virgins, whose cult was in place by 1028.¹⁰

Most stones depict three *matronae* sitting or standing side by side, at least one of whom has a basket of fruit in her lap. Sometimes the central one looks like an unmarried woman, with loose hair and a garland, while the other two have headdresses which suggest that they are married women. The fruit and other attributes often carved alongside them suggest that they were invoked for fertility,¹² but most of those who erected the stones seem to have been soldiers, and a few names of *matronae* suggest that they could be invoked for protection in war. There is no evidence that they represent individual dead relatives of their worshippers.

---

⁶ On *vágr* see LP 596; it often alliterates with *vindr*, suggesting a dangerous, windswept sea (for example, *Vafþrúðnismál* 36.4–5, *Guðrúnarkviða* 1 7.3–4). Óðinn’s ninth charm in *Hávamál* claims: *vind ec kyrrí / vági á / ok svefik allan sæ* ‘I calm the wind on the bay and send all the sea to sleep’ (154.4–6).
⁷ *DNM* 204–8. For three examples, see Simek (2003), 12.
⁹ Eis 62.
¹¹ Eis 61 and de Vries (1956–7), II, 288 state that some examples have nine *matronae*, but Rudolph Simek (private communication) assures me that this is not so, though a few stones depict devotees alongside the three *matronae*.
¹² *DNM* 206; Eis 63.
Bede’s *De Temporum Ratione* ch. 15 (written in 725), refers to a heathen Anglo-Saxon festival called *modranect* ‘night of the mothers’, which he says was the heathen new year, celebrated on what is now Christmas Day and involving unspecified nocturnal rituals. We do not know whether these aimed to secure help from female ancestors or to placate them, but they may represent a continuation of the worship of the *matronae*. There may be further evidence for this in the *First Merseburg Charm*, whose tenth-century manuscript probably comes from Fulda, central Germany. The charm itself is doubtless older, but Eis’s confidence in dating it to the third or fourth century (solely because of its resemblance to the cult of the *matronae*) seems misplaced. It reads:

Eiris szazun idisi  szazun hera duoder.
    Suma hapathtidun, suma heri lezidun,
    suma clubodun  umbi cuoniuuuidi.
    Insprinchapatbandum, inuar uigandun!

In l. 1, *hera duoder* is problematic: the line should clearly alliterate on a vowel, and *duoder* is obscure. Eis therefore emends to *era muoder* ‘honoured mothers’ and translates:\textsuperscript{14}

‘Long ago the Idisi sat down, the honoured mothers sat down.
    Some bound bonds, some held back the army,
    some split around the fetters.
    Spring out of imprisoning bonds, escape from warriors!’

He also points to the south German gloss *matrona : itis*,\textsuperscript{15} and to Old English *ides* ‘lady’. Bede’s *modranect* and the *idisi* probably reflect a concept similar to that of the Germanic Latin *matres* or *matronae*. The *First Merseburg Charm* gives them three functions: binding, hindering enemy armies and releasing from bonds. They may also have been called upon to ensure crop and human fertility, perhaps particularly at the beginning of a new year.

This recalls the pre-Christian Norse festival of *disablót*, which is mentioned in *Víga-Glúms saga* ch. 6.\textsuperscript{16} Old High German *idis*, Old English *ides* and Old Norse *dis* are probably related, although the Old English noun has lost most of its supernatural connotations.\textsuperscript{17} According to *Víga-Glúms*...
MEETING THE OTHER IN NORSE MYTH AND LEGEND

saga, the disablót was held at vetrnóttum ‘at the winter nights’, the official beginning of winter, the first of the year’s two seasons. It appears from Ynglinga saga, where King Aðils is accidentally killed while riding round the disarsalr, that the disir could harm their devotees as well as help them. The association of disir with konur dauðar ‘dead women’ in Atlamál 28 again suggests that they were dead female relatives. In Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks ch. 7, Heiðrek’s wife Helga is so infuriated when her husband kills her father that she hangs herself in the disarsalr, possibly in order to become a malevolent dis.

It remains doubtful whether individual dead women were called on to help their living relatives, and even if they were, that is a different thing from actively ‘waking them up’. But by the end of the heathen period there was also a tradition that the dead could be raised by magic incantation and/or ‘sitting out’ at night at a crossroads or in a cave. The earliest literary example is probably Völuspá 28 (where the dead ‘sits out’ to raise the living rather than vice versa). Baldrs draumar 4–5, where Óðinn forces a völva to rise from her grave and prophesy for him, is probably more conventional. In the early Christian period this tradition is also reflected in beliefs about real life. Hákonar saga herdibreiðs ch. 16 reports a rumour of a sitting-out performed by a woman called Þórdís skeggja (‘the bearded’) on Hákon’s behalf during his conflict with King Ingi in 1161, whose outcome is that Hákon is advised to fight only at night. He takes this advice, and Ingi is killed in the ensuing battle (ch. 17), though not until after daybreak. The fact that the prophecy is not fulfilled exactly may suggest that the rumour really did circulate at the time.

Several early Norwegian legal codes prohibit ‘sitting out in order to wake up trolls and perform heathen acts by that means’. Medieval Christians probably believed that ‘sitting out’ was performed with the aid of devils. Since these could have no power over the souls of the dead (except as guardians of limbo), it was argued that they could produce only the illusion of raising the dead. However, these legal codes suggest that ‘sitting out’ was either illegally practised in fact, or was at least believed to be possible and socially and religiously dangerous.

2. The pattern

Six eddic poems feature consultations of ‘Other World’ figures who are literally or symbolically dead. Two of them – Völuspá and Baldrs draumar –

Tiso), but even if dis is older than idis, the words are probably related.
19 ÍF 28, 366, see Chapter 7.
20 See Chapter 7, note 76.
21 See, for example, Ælfric, The Witch of Endor, 36–89, ed. II, 792–4.
will be touched on only in passing, since they do not suggest that Óðinn and the völva are related. The others are Hávamál D (see below), Sigrdrifumál (Sigrdr, where Sigrdrífa is symbolically but not literally dead), Swipdagsmál (Svipdr), and (with the usual gender-roles reversed) Hervararkviða. They represent variations on a common pattern, which is presented in dialogue (except in Hávamál D; see below):

**The protagonist goes to the grave-mound** (Svipd 1,4–6; Hkv 19–22; Bdr 4,1–4; to the hill where Sigrdrífa is sleeping, surrounded by fire, Sigrdr opening prose).

**The protagonist calls on the dead person to rise** (Svipd 1,1–3; Hkv 23–6; Bdr 4,5–8), using some persuasion or compulsion. In Svipd he reminds her of her instructions to him; in Hkv and Bdr the dead are compelled to rise by a curse or spell; in Sigrdr Sigurðr cuts loose the coat of mail in which Sigrdrífa is imprisoned, causing her to wake.

If the dead person is a parent (s)he acknowledges the protagonist and asks why (s)he has been woken (Svipd 2; Hkv 27,1–2). If not, she asks who has woken her (Bdr 5; in Sigrdr 1,1–4 she asks both why and who). **The protagonist names himself or herself** (honestly in Sigrdr and Hkv, deceitfully in Bdr).

**The protagonist states what he or she wants** (protective spells in Svipd 5; the answers to some mythological questions in Bdr 6,3–8; her father’s sword in Hkv 23,5–8).

The dead person lists a sacred number of protective magic spells or pieces of occult information (nine protective spells in Svipd 6–14; nine mighty magic songs, from which he learns another nine, in Hávamál 140–1, 146–63; seven types of magic runes in Sigrdr 6–13; the answers to three mythological questions, followed by refusal to answer the fourth, in Bdr 7–11. Hkv diverges from the pattern, since its heroine wants her father’s sword, but Angantýr would have given the lives, strength and endurance of twelve men if Hervör could have trusted him, Hkv 4,1).

**The dead person invokes a blessing on the protagonist** (Svipd 16,4–6; perhaps Hávamál 164,5–8; Hkv 42, where the blessing is apparently spurned; Sigrdr 20–1, where it is accompanied by a request for love; Bdr 14,1–2, where it survives despite fierce hostility between the two characters).

The framework situation varies with each poem, and all show some deviations from the pattern, but the sequence of magic songs (or runic

22 Cf. also the Danish ballad Ungen Sveidal (Danmarks gamle folkeviser no. 70, II, 238–54) and the Icelandic folktale Himinbjargar saga (summarised in Falk 314–15).

23 In Ungen Sveidal the spells are replaced with a horse that never tires and a sword that always gains victory (cf. Skírnismál 8–9 and the substitution of a sword for magic spells in Hervararkviða).
spells) suggests that they belong together, and in most cases this was probably the main point of telling the tales.

3. Svipdagsmál

Svipdagsmál consists of two parts, usually called Grógaldr and Fjõlsvinnsmál. It appears as a single text in three manuscripts; in the other four, the two sections appear in reverse order with Þynduljóð between them. But Svipdagr is the protagonist throughout, and the substance of both sections is combined in Ungen Svedal; there are also textual echoes between the early stanzas of Grógaldr and the closing ones of Fjõlsvinnsmál. Fjõlsvinnsmál 45 is probably echoed in Sólarljóð 67; but as Sólarljóð has sometimes been dated to the later thirteenth century, Svipdagsmál might still be as late as c. 1250. Despite this, it may preserve an early form of the pattern. In Grógaldr 1–16, Svipdagr wakes Gróa from her grave-mound; she acknowledges him as her son and asks why he has raised her. He explains that his wicked stepmother has sent him to find Menglõð, and asks his mother to chant protective spells over him. Gróa chants nine spells, the last of which will give him words and wits in a verbal contest with a giant.

De Vries and Holtsmark regard Svipdagsmál as a folktale about a young hero and his wicked stepmother, to which a muddle of mythological details has been arbitrarily added. But the poem’s personal names suggest at least some derivation from mythological tradition. Saxo’s Svipdagerus, king of Norway, murders King Gram of Denmark but is later killed by Gram’s son Hadingus (whose mother is called Gro). The name Svipdagerus has here been transferred from the protagonist to his enemy, but the protagonist’s mother is still called Gro, and this suggests that the plot of Svipdagsmál was not invented from nothing.

Elsewhere, the name Svipdagr is usually related to Óðinn. The prologue to Snorra Edda lists among Óðinn’s descendants Svebdæg, er vêr kóllum Svipdg’ Svebdæg, whom we call Svipdagr’. In Hrólf’s saga kraka chs. 18–23, the one-eyed Svipdagr deserts one king for another who is a greater warrior. Svipdagr the blind, the evil foster-father of King Ingjaldr

24 See SG I, 194–5.
25 See Kragerud 37–9; cf. Grógaldr 4,1–3 with Fjõlsvinnsmál 45, 49 (on the length of Svipdagr’s journey), and Grógaldr 15, 5, 16, 2 with Fjõlsvinnsmál 45, 6, 49, 6 (mõgr, see below).
26 Einar Ólafur Sveinsson (1975), 32–3; Sólarljóð 67 (Kock I, 3, 14–15).
27 Einar Ólafur dates Sólarljóð to c. 1200, Falk (331–7) to the later thirteenth century.
28 De Vries (1934), 30–1; Holtsmark cols. 585–7.
29 Saxol. i.4–vi.11 (ed. I, 19–24; tr. I, 20–5).
30 Ed. 5; tr. 4; the source was a version of the Deiran royal genealogy (Sweet 170). For theories about the origin of Old English Suebdæg among the north German Suebi, see Höfler 37–41, Schröder (1966), 113–19; but Snorra Edda associates the name with Óðinn.
31 FSN II, 29–39; cf. also Rœgnvaldr kali, Háttalykill 12a (Kock I, 241).
CONSULTING THE DEAD

Ǫnundarson in Ynglinga saga chs. 34–8,32 is reminiscent of Hroßhárs-Grani, the foster-father of Starkaðr in Gautreks saga ch. 7,33 who turns out to be Óðinn.

Saxo’s Gró has previously been the object of a proxy wooing by Bessus on behalf of his friend Gram, in a verse-dialogue which recalls Skirnismál.34 Like Gerðr, Gró is revolted by the thought of becoming a giant’s wife, but Gram’s defeat of her father suggests that, like Gerðr, she may have originated as a giantess herself. In Skáldskaparmál ch. 17 Gróa is a völva, the wife of a giant, who uses a charm to try to loosen a whetstone in Þórr’s head. Þjóðólfr of Hvin also alludes to this myth, so it must date back at least to c. 900.35 In Vatnsdæla saga ch. 36 another Gróa holds a feast at which her magic causes a landslide that kills everyone in the house. The traditional associations of the name Gróa therefore suggest magical ability, giant connections, association with Svipdagr and possibly also with the dead.

Menglòð, who eventually becomes Svipdagr’s mate, is also the name of the hero’s half-giantess ally in Orms þúttir Stórólfssonar chs. 8–9; but Ormr resembles Þórr rather than Óðinn (see Chapter 9), so it seems unlikely that Menglòð comes from the same story as Svipdagr and Gróa.

Svipdagr’s opponent is the giant Fjólsvíðr ‘Wise in Many Things’, which is also an Óðinn-name and a dwarf-name.36 It resembles Alviss ‘All-wise’, the dwarf-opponent in Alvissmál, and may simply have been invented as a suitable name for a wise Other World opponent.

We cannot show that the whole story of Svipdagsmál existed before the present poem, but it seems likely that there was at least a tradition about Svipdagr (an Óðinic hero) and Gróa (his mother, a völva with giant connections).

Einar Ólafur Sveinsson suggests that the substance of Svipdagsmál comes from the Irish legend of Art Mac Conn:39 the Other World maiden Bécuma marries Conn, high king of Ireland, but loves his son Art. She turns against Art when he rejects her love, and lays a curse on him after defeating him in a game of chess: he can never eat food in Ireland until he fetches Delbachaem, daughter of Morgan, king of the Other World. She is imprisoned on an island, guarded by many dangers. Art reaches another island, where Creide, a giant’s daughter, gives him three passionate kisses and tells him what dangers he will face on his journey. Helped by her warnings, he

32 Jf 26, 64–9.
33 FSN III, 25–8; tr. 38–41.
35 Ed. I, 22–4; tr. 79–80.
36 Haustlòng 20.2 (Skj I B 18).
37 Jf 8, 95–6.
38 See Grímnismál 47.7; Pula IV ii 5.2 (Kock I, 336).
39 From the fifteenth-century Book of Fermoy—see Einar Ólafur Sveinsson (1975), 64–98; ed. and tr. Best.

203
surmounts all obstacles, defeats Morgan, frees Delbchaem, and returns to Ireland with her. His wicked stepmother flees and is never seen again.

There are parallels between this story and *Svipdagsmál*, but whether they go beyond a common archetype is questionable. The closest is in *Grógaldr* 3.1–3, where Svipdagr says that his stepmother has attacked him *Ljótolkeikborþe* 'With an ugly playing board'. This may be a figurative expression meaning ‘she has put me into a difficult situation’, but could refer to a literal board game which Svipdagr lost to his stepmother, as in the Irish story. But the differences between the two narratives are generally more striking than the similarities:

1. Creide is not related to Art and is not dead.
2. The wicked stepmother is central to the Irish story, but peripheral in *Svipdagsmál*.
3. Creide recites no protective charms; the parallels between her prophecies and Gróa’s charms are not very close.\footnote{See Einar Ólafur Sveinsson (1975), 90–4.}
4. Art does exchange insults with a male guardian of the castle, but his major opponent is the enchantress Queen Coinchend; there is no contest of wits, as in *Svipdagsmál*.
5. Delbchaem is imprisoned and is glad to be taken to Ireland, but Menglõð commands her castle and there is no suggestion that she and Svipdagr will ever return to This World.

A tale like the Irish one might have suggested the motifs of the wicked stepmother, the board game and one of the nine charms (see below), but it cannot have provided the major source.

Lotte Motz argues that *Svipdagsmál* is a ritual induction of the young hero into a mother-goddess cult, that the end shows Menglõð welcoming Svipdagr back as both son and lover, and hence that Gróa and Menglõð are both aspects of the mother goddess.\footnote{Motz (1975), 133–50.} Motz makes some telling points: Menglõð is no helpless maiden, and what Svipdagr achieves is an unlocking of something destined for him rather than a conquest. We must also accept that Menglõð welcomes Svipdagr back. All manuscripts of *Fjôlsvinnsmál* 49,6 read: *at þú ert aptr komenn, mogr, til minna sala* ‘that you have come back, young man, to my halls.’ The editors excise *aptr* ‘back’ mainly because it is unexpected.\footnote{Motz (1975), 146. SG III.1, 425 argue that *aptr* overfills the line, but it is heavy even without it. In *Fjôlsvinnsmál* 45,6, *mogr til minna sala* forms a complete line; if it also does so here, *at þú ert aptr komenn* becomes the last line of a galdralag stanza and *aptr* is needed for the alliteration.} But *mogr* can mean ‘young man’ (for example, *Fáfnismál* 44,1) or ‘husband’ (for example, *Guðrúnarkviða* I 5,4, 11,4) as well as ‘son’. At the beginning of this poem (*Grógaldr* 1,5; 16,2) it clearly means ‘son’; at the end, the probable sense is ‘husband’ (*Fjôlsvinnsmál* 45,6; 49,7), and this reflects the replacement of Svipdagr’s protecting mother with his
consulting the dead

There is no need to identify Mengloð with Gróa, and the attempt to see Gróa’s spells as an initiatory ritual distorts the obvious meanings of several of them. The idea of Svipdagsmál as a ritual re-enactment also requires us to believe either that the poet worshipped the mother goddess in the midst of thirteenth-century catholic Iceland, or that Svipdagsmál is centuries older than has been thought. Both seem unlikely. There was certainly a fertility goddess cult in late heathen Norway (see Chapter 6), but its characteristic features – physical passion for the chief and his descendants, lust for gold, the dark sister – are not present here.

Gróa’s nine spells are:

1. A generalised charm against fearsome things, which Rindr chanted for Ranr (6). This is comparable with Öðinn’s first charm in Hávamál 146 (see Table 1 below). Art Mac Conn’s ability to slay fierce sea creatures is quite different.

2. A charm so that Fate will protect him when he wanders viljalauss on the roads (7). Motz takes viljalauss to refer to a loss of conscious self-control by the initiand in the cult of the mother goddess; but elsewhere viljalauss seems to mean ‘deprived of joy’, and this would also fit here.

3. Against life-threatening rivers (8). The Irish prophecy that Art must cross a dangerous bridge seems remote from this. Motz takes it as symbolic of death and rebirth, like baptism, but that is not how it is phrased: the rivers are to dry up in front of him (Grógaldr 8, 4–6), not to be waded through. They are probably seen simply as a threat to travellers.

4. To turn the minds of enemies waiting on the road to kill Svipdagr, so that they will make peace with him (9). This has no Irish parallel, and despite Motz’s attempt to connect it to ritual hanging, it looks like another practical charm.

5. To release him from fetters (10); this resembles part of the First Merseburg Charm, and must be ancient. Motz relates it to ritual fettering (cf. Tacitus, Germania ch. 39), but no magical release from this would be necessary, since they would be unlocked when the ritual was over. Again, it is probably a practical charm.

6. To calm storms at sea (11). In the Irish tale, Art will slay monsters in a stormy sea, but that is quite different. Motz suggests that it will give the hero a calm crossing of the ocean between the living and the dead. But meira probably refers to the size of the waves rather than the width of the sea, especially if we retain the contrasting reading lõgn ‘calm’ (Grógaldr 11, 4). This looks like another practical charm.

---

43 Cf. Völundarkviða 11, 4; 31, 2, Guðrúnarkviða 11, 9, 3.

44 Motz relates gorver á galgvege ‘ready on the gallows road’ (Grógaldr 9, 3) to Hávamál 138, but as the charm in Grógaldr aims to avert a hanging, this makes poor sense. The problem can be avoided by adopting Falk’s emendation to gaglvege ‘the mighty (long) road’ (Falk 346, 355). Cf. gaglviði, Völuspá 42, 6, ed. Nordal 83–4.
7. To protect against cold on high mountains (12). This resembles the 'venomous icy mountain' that Art must cross in the Irish story (Art chs. 20, 22), and Irish origin seems possible here. Motz links it to the ritual suffering common in shamanistic ritual, particularly the windswept tree of Hávamál 138 and the frost of the Shetland Ballad of the Crucifixion. This seems unnecessary: a charm against frostbite would be of practical use in Iceland, and Svipdagr's later alias (Vindkaldr, son of Vårkaldr, grandson of Fjölkaldr, Fjölsvinsmál 6,4–6), suggests that it may also have been functional in the story.

8. To protect against harm if Svipdagr meets a 'Christian dead woman' when night overtakes him on the road. Kristin 'Christian' may be a misreading of kerskin 'shameless' in a source manuscript. Parallels in Sigrdrífrumál 26 and Hávamál 113 suggest that this idea comes from the tradition of gnomic poetry rather than that of magic charms. Motz suggests that the initiand might meet beneficent spirits as well as malicious ones, but no protection would be needed against them. Einar Ólafur's argument that this charm is derived from the enchantresses predicted by Creide seems unlikely.

9. To give him words and wits in any verbal contest with a giant (14, cf. Hervararkvída 41). There is no Irish parallel to this, and this is important, since it is the one charm in Svipdagsmál which is certainly functional to the story.

Finally, Gróa gives Svipdagr her blessing, telling him that she stood on a stone fast in the ground while chanting her spells (15,4–6), and that he will continue to have good luck while he remembers her words (16).

Most of Gróa’s spells look practical and probably derive from Norse tradition. Number 5 is paralleled in the First Merseburg Charm. Numbers 1, 4, 5, 6 and 9 have thematic counterparts in Hávamál and/or Sigrdrífrumál, and number 8 echoes the gnomic wisdom sections of the same two poems. Number 7 may be of Irish origin. Numbers 2 and 3 are of obvious practical use to travellers; they show that although Svipdagsmál could have been influenced by Hávamál to some extent, it is also an independent witness to the tradition.

4. Hávamál D

Hávamál is probably a poetic anthology rather than a single poem (see Chapter 10). The section which I shall call Hávamál D contains most of the stanzas commonly called Runatal and Ljóðatal (138–64). I exclude the
metrically irregular stt. 1.42–5, which are probably interpolated.49 St. 162.4–9 and st. 164 may also be recent editorial additions, although Jackson and Grønvik50 have argued that stt. 111–64 are a single poem. Apart from some interpolations (137, 1.42–5), this is possible, although there is some dichotomy between the quasi-Christian advice in Loddfáfnismál (111–36)51 and Óðinn’s conspicuously heathen self-sacrifice by hanging on Yggdrasill (138–9). Grønvik argues that the speaker is a human priest of Óðinn, who in stt. 138–9 does not die but undergoes an ordeal of initiation into mystic union with the god. I think that mystic union is a late-medieval Christian concept and that the speaker of stt. 138–41 must be Óðinn, but for the purpose of this argument it is only important that he gains occult information from a dead ancestor.

One obvious deviation from the pattern is that Óðinn’s informant here is male. In Hávamál 1.40,2–3 Óðinn claims that he learned nine mighty songs ‘from the famous son of Bólþórr, Bestla’s father’, but nothing is known about this figure. Bestla is Óðinn’s mother (he is son Bestlu in Einarr skálaglamm’s Vellekla 4.2, c. 986, Bestlu niðr in Steinarr Sjónason, lausavísa 2.6, later tenth century).52 In Gylfaginning ch. 6, Búri (‘Parent’), the primeval figure licked out of the frost-stones by the cow Auðhumla, has a son called Borr (‘Son’), who marries Bestla, Bólþorn’s daughter. Their sons are Óðinn, Vili and Vé.

Bestla has been derived from Proto-Germanic *bastilōn ‘bark-giver’, cf. Old Norse bastr ‘the inner bark of a tree’, bestisíma ‘a rope made of bark fibre’. This might suggest an origin myth in which gods, like men, were created from trees (cf. also Heimdallr, which has sometimes been interpreted ‘world tree’). Because trees grow out of the ground, this has been taken to suggest a chthonic origin for Bestla, which would explain why she was regarded as a giantess.54 A second interpretation relates her to Old Frisian bōst ‘marriage’, bōstiga ‘to marry’, bōstita ‘wife’. Although this would merely refer to her role as Borr’s wife and tell us nothing further, it may be the likeliest interpretation, especially since Būri, Burr and Bestla would all then be names of the same kind (‘Parent’, ‘Son’ and ‘Wife’).

The account in Snorra Edda is partly based on Hávamál; Bestla’s father may have been either Bólþórr ‘evil Þórr’ or Bólþorn ‘evil thorn’. Both would

49 The speaker in st. 1.38.4–6 must be Óðinn (he is ‘wounded with a spear and given to Óðinn, myself to myself’), whereas in st. 1.43 he cannot be, since he lists Óðinn and himself among those who have carved runes.
51 Do not seduce another man’s wife (1.15.5–7); never be the first to break off a friendship (1.21.5–7); do not flatter (1.24.4–7); never be pleased at harm (1.28.5–7); do not mock guests or travellers (1.32.5–7); be kind to the wretched (1.35.7).
52 Skj I A, 123 (Codex Regius þettlo corrected to þettil, other manuscripts þetlo (T), þetlo (W), þetlo (U), þettlu (AM 757, 410), I B, 117; Skj I A, 95 (manuscript þettlu), I B, 89.
53 Ed. 117 tr. 11.
54 AEW 34; DNM 35–6.
be giant-names, but Bolþorn looks more probable. The rune þurs ‘ogre’ was also called born,55 and Eilífr’s bōrsdrápa 2,4, 7,6 uses born as a giant-name or heiti.56 All manuscripts of Gylfaginning read Bolþorns, whereas Bolþórs rests on the Codex Regius alone. Whatever the correct form, Hávamál is the only poetic source for the name, and the poet may simply have made up a giant-name to alliterate with Bestla.

Óðinn also claims (Hávamál 140,4–6):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{oc ec drycc of gat} & \quad \text{and I got a drink} \\
\text{ins dýra miaðar,} & \quad \text{of the precious mead} \\
\text{ausinn Óðrer.} & \quad \text{sprinkled from Óðrerir.}
\end{align*}
\]

Sijmons and Gering suggest that Bestla’s ‘famous’ brother is Mímir, from whose well or spring Óðinn gained a drink by pledging his eye.57 Mímir would be a suitable informant, and the oddity of an uncle requiring a maiming ‘payment’ from his sister’s son could be explained as part of an initiation ritual. Míms hõfuð ‘Mím’s head’ is a source of information about runes in Sigdrifumáls, but otherwise this theory is fraught with difficulties. No source says that Mímir was Óðinn’s blood-relative, and it has been doubted whether he was actually a giant.58 Sijmons and Gering also interpret Óðrerir as the brewing kettle in which the mead of poetry was made, from the outflow of Mímir’s well, and which was later used for keeping the water from the spring itself. This defies Skáldskaparmáls,59 which says that the mead was made from the blood of Kvasir and stored (not made) in Óðrerir; Hávamál 107 treats Óðrerir as the name of the mead itself, and this is probably original (see Chapter 10). No source links Óðrerir with Mímir’s well.

It seems preferable to take Hávamál 140,4–6 figuratively, as ‘I was inspired to express myself in verse’. True, the mead of poetry usually refers to the inspiration which produces poetic composition rather than the ability to recite verses which already exist. But Óðinn continues (Hávamál 141,4–7):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ord mér af ord} & \quad \text{one word after another} \\
\text{ordz leitaði,} & \quad \text{found out the next for me,60} \\
\text{verc mér af verki} & \quad \text{one deed after another} \\
\text{vercs leitaði.} & \quad \text{found out the next for me.}
\end{align*}
\]

56 Cf. also bōrranenn ‘giant’s hall’, Drápa 13,2; see Skj B, 139–42 and Skáldskaparmáls, ed. 1, 26–8; tr. 83–5.
57 SG III, 151; cf. Voluspá 27–8; Gylfaginning ch. 15 (ed. 17; tr. 17).
58 See Clunies Ross (1994–8), I, 212–15; for the idea of an initiation ritual see I, 225.
59 Ed. I, 3; tr. 62.
60 Literally ‘word from word sought out a word for me…’.

Consulting the Dead

This explains why there are eighteen magic songs rather than nine: each of the nine *fimbulljóð* leads to another ‘mighty song’, and the second nine are Óðinn’s own discoveries and poetic compositions.61

This poet was clearly able to adapt his received material. It might have demeaned Óðinn’s reputation to admit that these spells came from a woman,62 but the relationship with one’s mother’s brother was traditionally sacred.63 The shadowy maternal uncle may therefore be an invention, designed to conceal the fact that Óðinn originally learned the nine mighty songs from his dead giantess mother. All that remains is her name, the minimum hint required to unlock the poetic tradition of the list of magic spells.

Some of the spells in *Hávamál* are paralleled in *Svipdagsmál* and *Sigrdrífu-mál*, in one case in similar words (cf. *Hávamál* 149 with *Grógaldr* 10; see Table 1). Since this list is longer than the other two, it naturally includes several spells that are not paralleled elsewhere. Numbers 6 and 7 (for countering a curse and against fire) are like the practical charms in the other lists. But most of the ‘extra’ charms concern specific functions of Óðinn himself: protecting individuals in battle (11, 13), making a hanged man talk (12), counting the gods (14), seducing a woman and keeping her love (16, 17); these are all in the second half of the list. The last spell is a secret which should only be transmitted through close female confidantes; this also suggests that Óðinn’s informant may once have been Bestla.

In *Svipdagsmál* and *Sigrdrífu-mál* the charms are delivered to the protagonist, so their stanzas are addressed to þú ‘you’. In *Hávamál* the protagonist is himself the speaker, so one would expect the beneficiary of each spell to be ec ‘I’, but Óðinn claims that the first charm þér hálpa mun ‘will help you’ (*Hávamál* 146,5). This suggests that the þú of *Svipdagsmál* and *Sigrdrífu-mál* is ambiguous, referring both to the protagonist and to any individual in the poem’s audience; this again implies that the spells were expected to be of practical use. The poem’s audience are also recalled in charms 2 and 8, which refer to people who will find the charm useful (*Hávamál* 147, 153,1–3).

*Grógaldr* 6,1–3 and *Hávamál* 160,1–3 each refer to a spell having been used before, in *Svipdagsmál* by Rindr (see above), in *Hávamál* 160 by the dwarf Pióðrerrr fyrr Dellings durom ‘in front of Dellings’ doors’, probably ‘at dawn’ (160,3). Both stanzas allude to myths that are now lost, but some

---

61 Elizabeth Jackson points out (private communication) that Óðinn’s spells are divided into two groups of nine by two stanzas of *galdralag* at the beginning of the second half (*Hávamál* 155, 156).

62 For the sexual disgrace attached to men who practised ‘female’ magic, see, for example, *Ynglinga saga* ch. 7 (ÍF 26, 19); cf. Ström (1974), 8–10.

63 Tacitus, *Germania* ch. 20,4 (ed. Anderson; tr. 85 and note on 208), and cf. SG III.1, 151, Clunies Ross (1994–8), I, 227.
meeting the other in norse myth and legend

mythological 'precedent' may have been a feature of the tradition, or these charms may have been regarded as particularly important.

5. Sigrdrífrumál

It is uncertain whether Sigrdrífrumál should be regarded as a single poem or a series of disparate elements. It has three main sections:

1. Sigrdrífa is woken; she tells Sigurðr about seven types of protective runes, attributing their origins to Hroprtr (= Óðinn) (1–13).
2. Another account of the origins and types of runes follows (14–19).
3. Sigrdrífa gives Sigurðr eleven numbered pieces of advice (20–37). A lacuna in the manuscript begins here, but the summary in Völsunga saga (ch. 21), made when the lost leaves were still in the Codex Regius, adds no more of them.

This structure resembles the second half of Hávamál, which contains a section on the origins of runes (138–45) flanked by lists of magical spells (146–63) and pieces of advice (111–37). Some of the spells/types of runes in the two poems are similar (see Table 1), as is some of the advice (‘don’t quarrel with a fool’ – Sigrdrífrumál 24, Hávamál 122–3; ‘don’t lodge with an enchantress’ – Sigrdrífrumál 26–7, Hávamál 113–14; ‘don’t seduce women’ – Sigrdrífrumál 28, 32, Hávamál 115; ‘be wary in drinking’ – Sigrdrífrumál 29–30, Hávamál 131, 7).

These similarities suggest one of three explanations:

1. This shape appealed to the Codex Regius editor, who combined distinct fragments in the same way on two different occasions; but this would not explain the verbal similarities between the two poems.
2. Hávamál 111–64 and Sigrdrífrumál represent an otherwise lost poetic genre which had this kind of structure and content.
3. One poem has been influenced by the other.

The likeliest explanation is probably that Hávamál has influenced Sigrdrífrumál. If both poems belong to a recognised genre, or if Hávamál borrows from Sigrdrífrumál, Hávamál 111–64 must all be the work of the same poet, since there are verbal similarities between all its sections and Sigrdrífrumál. But the different speakers of st. 138, 143 and the Christian/heathen dichotomy between Loddfáfnismál and st. 138 make this seem unlikely. The word gamanrúna appears only in Sigrdrífrumál 5,8 and Hávamál 120, 6, 130, 6. In Sigrdrífrumál it refers literally to a spell which

64 Nerman 61 excludes stt. 1 and 5 and takes most of the remainder as two poems, one about runes and one containing gnomic advice.
65 FSN I, 45; tr. 71.
67 This is Jackson’s view.
68 Jackson 47–52.
Sigrdrífa chants and/or carves to make Sigurðr love her, but in Hávamál it is used figuratively, of beginning a loving relationship with a good woman (130) or maintaining a good relationship with a (male) friend (120). The Sigrdrífunál poet has probably borrowed the word from Loddáfnismál but misunderstood it. This impression is strengthened by verbal echoes of Hávamál 120,5–7 in Sigrdrífunál 4,6 and 5,6–8.

Sigrdrífunál modifies the pattern of Consulting the Dead in ways that suggest late composition. The advising mother is replaced with a potential sexual partner (cf. Chapter 12). This new advisor has been only symbolically dead, and this may defer to Christian anxieties about liaisons between the living and the dead (cf. Chapter 14). The sacred number nine (nine spells in Svipdagsmál, eighteen in Hávamál) is derived from Germanic heathenism, while the seven rune-types in Sigrdrífunál 6–13 hint at Christian number-symbolism. Most of the spells in Svipdagsmál and Hávamál are chanted orally (only Hávamál 157 refers to a runic charm), while Sigrdrífunál is concerned mainly with the written runes of each charm, and even with what they are to be written on.

In st. 1, Sigrdrífa asks who has cut the fõlvar nauðir ‘pale constraints’ off her, and Sigurðr replies that the son of Sigmundr and the sword of Sigurðr have cut Hrafns hrælundir. Both phrases refer to her coat of mail, but Mundal points out that nár nauðfõlva in Atlakviða 16,7 refers to the pallor of a corpse, and Myhren argues that hræ-lundir means ‘white strips on a corpse’, i.e. the strips of cloth used to wrap a body for burial. The sleeping valkyrie in armour may have replaced an older tradition in which she was woken from the dead.

The types of runes about which Sigrdrífa tells Sigurðr (6–13) are:

1. sigrúnar ‘victory runes’ (including a double t rune to be carved on one’s sword). The common noun is not found elsewhere, but Sigrún is the valkyrie wife of Helgi Hundingsbani (Helgakviða Hundingsbana I–II). There are inscriptions on sword-blades from Steindorf and Halflingen (both Germany, seventh century), and Battersea (London, probably ninth century).

Jackson 44; cf. the manrúnar of Egils saga ch. 76 (ÍF 2, 238; tr. 141), which are carved on whalebone and placed in the victim’s bed. It is not clear whether the runes in Sigrdrífunál are carved on the horn or on something else which is then added to the drink.

See Schröder (1952).

Cf. the nine worlds below Hel (Volsunga saga 2, Vafþrúðnismál 43), Öðinn’s nine nights hanging on Yggdrasill (Hávamál 138), Heimdallr’s nine mothers (Hyndluljóð 35).

In the Apocalypse alone there are seven churches (14), seven stars and seven candlesticks (2,1), seven spirits of God (4,5), seven seals (5,1), seven trumpets (8,6), seven plagues (ch. 16).

Late origin might also be suggested by bótrúnar ‘book-runes’ (Sigrdrífunál 19,1, Volsunga saga ch. 20, FSN I, 44; tr. 70), but this is probably an error for bótrúnar ‘remedy runes’, cf. the Bergen seduction charm (B257), Liestøl (1963), 41–6.

Mundal (1972). On nauð, see para. 2 below.

RAF nos 1 58 and 159, 300–2 and Tafeln 68–9.
and on a sword-hilt from Korsøygarðen, Hedmark, eastern Norway (c. 1100). No surviving weapon is inscribed with a double t, but a triple t appears on Sjælland bracteate 2 (Køge area, fifth or sixth century).

2. ôlrunar ‘ale runes’ (against poisoned ale; to be carved on the horn, with nauð ‘n’ on one’s nail). Ôlrun is Egill’s swan-maiden wife in Volundarkviða, and ôlrunar must originally have been connected with Primitive Old Norse alu ‘good luck’, although ‘ale runes’ also appear as a precaution against poisoned drink in Egils saga ch. 44 and st. 9 (dated c. 923 in Skj I, B, 43). Runic inscriptions on horns survive from Eyr, Herrem and Hamarøy (all Norway, undated). None of them uses the rune nauð, but it does appear in healing charms like the Sigtuna amulet (Sweden, early eleventh century), and on a sword-hilt from Korsøygarðen, Hedmark, eastern Norway (c. 1100). No surviving weapon is inscribed with a double t, but a triple t appears on Sjælland bracteate 2 (Køge area, fifth or sixth century).

3. biigrunar ‘saving runes’ (for helping a woman in childbirth, to be inscribed on her palm) are also mentioned in a fourteenth-century seduction charm from Bergen. Neither of the rather male-centred lists of spells in Hávamál and Svipdagsmál includes a birthing charm, but runes may often have been used in fact to help women during childbirth.

4. brimrunar ‘ocean runes’ (for safety at sea, to be carved on the ship’s prow and burnt into the blade of the steering-oar). No literal example is known, but an interesting adaptation survives in Sakshaug church (Nord-Trøndelag, Norway, c. 1184). Sakshaug II is attached to the prow of a drawing of a ship, while Sakshaug VII, on the ‘starboard’ side of the window at the east end, refers to itself as written on the ‘rudder oar’. The whole church is thus visualised as a ship, with the runes inscribed on its ‘prow post’ and ‘rudder oar’.

5. limbrunar ‘limb runes’ (for medical use, to be carved on bark from the trunk of a tree whose limbs face east); cf. Egils saga ch. 72 and st. 48 (c. 951, century), and on a sword-hilt from Korsøygarðen, Hedmark, eastern Norway (c. 1100). No surviving weapon is inscribed with a double t, but a triple t appears on Sjælland bracteate 2 (Køge area, fifth or sixth century).

Page (1987), 40; RMR 11, 103.

77 Norges linskrifter med de Yngre Runer, 1941–, no. 28, l, 66–70. According to Sigdrifumál 63–4, the runes should be inscribed on the hilt, the vettrími (? near the point, LP 612) and the unidentified valbøst.

78 RÅF no. 127, 261–3, Tafel 57; RMR E26, 78. Nerman 62–3 uses this to argue for a sixth-century date for this part of the poem, but this seems improbable on linguistic grounds.

79 Nerman 61–2. Twenty-three inscriptions including alu have been found, dating from c. 200–c. 700 (see RMR 90–6). Egill and Ólrun probably appear together on the Pforzen silver buckle (Bavaria, late sixth century, see RMR C7, 57–9), but the meaning of this inscription has not been satisfactorily explained.

80 ÍF 2, 109, tr. 62; Egill, lausavísa 3 (Skj IB, 43).


82 Eriksson and Zetterholm; RMR O16, 126–7.

83 Manuscript BL Cotton Caligula A.xv, ff. 119v–120r; RMR O17, 127.

84 Molbe 493–5; RMR R1, 142–3.

85 R257, Liestøl (1963), 41–2; RMR P6, 131–3.

86 Norges linskrifter med de Yngre Runer, 1941–, nos. 527, 532 (V, 98–110).
according to *Skj* I B, 51). Medical runic inscriptions are common, but it does not seem to have mattered what they were carved on. Most are on wood, but the Sigtuna amulet is on copper, and the fragmentary Lincoln 2 is on a piece of cattle bone.


7. *hugrúnar* ‘thought runes’ (for superlative intelligence).

*Máihrúnar* and *hugrúnar* have no parallels in saga accounts or surviving inscriptions, and they may be survivals from a list of magic charms like those in *Svipdagsmál* and *Hávamál*.

The poet does not explicitly number these types of runes, but it can be no accident that there are seven of them. It would have been easy to add further types, such as *manrúnar* ‘girl runes’ (for seduction), runes to prevent the dead from walking and sexual curses.

The poet of *Sigrdrífrumál* uses the pattern of Consulting the Dead to set up the first section of his poem, but modifies it in ways that might appeal to Christian audiences. The raising of the dead is blurred; the wisdom-giving relative becomes a potential sexual partner; the morally suspect magic spells are changed to practical runic ‘recipes’; and *Hávamál* is imitated by associating the material on runes with a sequence of pieces of advice, most of which would be approved of by a Christian audience.

6. Conclusions

The pattern of Consulting the Dead probably evolved during the late heathen period as a more personal form of the veneration of the *dísir*, who represented dead female ancestors in general; its oldest surviving example may be *Hávamál D*. In the basic form of the pattern, which is usually presented as a dialogue in *ljóðaháttr*, a male protagonist went to a grave mound and called up his dead mother to chant a magically significant number of spells for him (probably nine). These had practical purposes, and may have begun with a general spell and ended with one linked to the...
frame narrative. The protagonist had to learn and remember the spells, presumably so that he could activate them by repeating them when they were needed (see Grögaldr 16.4–6, Hávamál 140.1–3 and the magic beer (probably of memory) in Sigðrífumál 5). The dead relative gave a final benediction (Grögaldr 15–16, Hervararkviða 42, Baldars draumar 14.1–2, possibly Hávamál 164.5–7).

In Hávamál, Baldars draumar and Voluspa the protagonist is Óðinn, and the other protagonists all have Ódinic connections: Svipdagr and Sigurðr are his descendants and protégés; Hervör’s son Heiðrekr figures in a story of the type in which Óðinn turns against his favourite. The raising of the dead mother to chant protective spells was probably connected with the cult of Óðinn, but it is not clear whether the story of Óðinn and Bestla was a mythic ‘original’ of which the other versions are re-enactments, or merely one example of a pattern whose protagonist was usually a human being.

One possible human ‘meaning’ of the pattern relates to bereaved young men, who often wish that they had been more responsive to their mothers’ nurture and advice while they were alive. To believe in the continuing patronage of one’s mother after her death is an obvious source of personal comfort and social empowerment, but the relationship is rarely simple. In Svipdagsmál the protective mother is briefly balanced against her opposite, the deceitful stepmother (Grögaldr 3.2–3); her motherhood of the hero is denied, but she retains the powers of a mother over him. The hero’s dangerous expedition to find his predestined bride may represent the search for a sexual mate to replace his lost mother; this would explain the parallels between the speeches of Gróa and Mengloð. The displacement of the hero’s resentment onto a ‘stepmother’ is also understandable: he is hurt that his mother has ‘abandoned’ him, but cannot allow himself to feel conscious resentment against her, because he loves her and relies on a sense of still receiving her help. That the mother and stepmother are aspects of the same figure can also be seen from Himinbjargar saga, where it is the dead mother who lays the curse on her son, while his virtuous stepmother advises him how to counter it. This change may have been brought about by an increased physical horror of the dead which can also be seen in some versions of the Dead Lover pattern (see Chapter 14).

Hávamál D may reflect a feeling that the protagonist’s reliance on his mother is demeaning. He believes that she continues to help him, and knows that esoteric wisdom can be had from older female relatives, but he also wants independence, and sees it as ‘manly’ to claim that his mother’s advice is actually the wisdom of her male relatives. His desire to assert his

---

94 See Heiðrekss saga ch. 10 (ed. (1956), 36–51); cf. the prose ending of Grímnismál.
self-reliance also leads him to add nine spells that he has composed himself to the nine that he has learned.

Sigdrifumál takes this a stage further by replacing the mother who gives magical help with a sexual partner whom the hero has released by his own valour. This protagonist has earned the right to the spells by his own efforts, and offers the fruits of his achievement to the poem’s audience in the new and more acceptable form of a series of written signs that can be learned and applied.

Hervararkviða reverses the usual gender roles, and shows some sympathy with the ambition and resentment of a bereaved young woman. However, it also presents her as headstrong, deaf to her father’s warnings, determined to treat him only as an antagonist, and too heedless to accept his final blessing. One possible implication is that daughters should not try to be sons, however much they might wish for male levels of empowerment. But this does not exhaust female experience of the male dead, and my final chapter will discuss the pattern of the living woman and her dead lover.
Table 1. The charms in *Svipdagsmál*, *Hávamál D* and *Sigrdrífrumál*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Svipdagsmál (Grógaldr)</th>
<th>Hávamál D</th>
<th>Sigrdrífrumál</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. General, which Rindr chanted for Rán(r)</td>
<td>1. General, called <em>hálp</em></td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. For the protection of Fate when wandering on the road</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Against dangerous rivers</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. To turn enemies towards peace</td>
<td>8. For reconciling enemies</td>
<td>6. (reconciling enemies is an effect claimed for <em>málrúnar</em>, 126–9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. For release from fetters</td>
<td>4. For release from fetters (similar wording, 149)</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. For calming storms at sea</td>
<td>9. For calming storms at sea</td>
<td>4. (<em>brimrúnar</em> protect a ship in a storm, 10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Against cold on high mountains</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Against harm on meeting a ‘Christian dead woman’ at nightfall on the road</td>
<td>(cf. gnostic advice: you meet a deceitful witch, go on rather than spend the night with her, 26)</td>
<td>(cf. gnomic advice: if you meet a deceitful witch, go on rather than spend the night with her, 26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. For words and wits in a verbal contest with a giant</td>
<td>15. (includes wisdom for Óðinn himself, 160)</td>
<td>6–7. <em>málrúnar</em> and <em>hugrúnar</em>, for eloquence and wisdom (12–13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>–</td>
<td>2. For doctors (147)</td>
<td>5. <em>limrúnar</em>, if you want to be a doctor (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>–</td>
<td>3. For blunting enemies’ weapons (148)</td>
<td>1. (possibly included in <em>sigrúnar</em>, for victory, 6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>–</td>
<td>5. For stopping an arrow in flight (150)</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>–</td>
<td>6. For turning a curse back on the sender (151)</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>–</td>
<td>7. Against fire (152)</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>–</td>
<td>10. To lead witches’ spirits astray (155)</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

95 Cf. the *First Merseburg Charm*. 
## Consulting the Dead

- | 11. For protection in battle (156) | 1. (possibly included in *sigrúnar*, for victory, 6) |
- | 12. To make a hanged man speak (157) |  |
- | 13. To protect a young man in battle by throwing water on him (158) |  |
- | 14. To enumerate the gods (159) |  |
- | 15. (Sung by the dwarf Þióðrórir): Strength to Æsir, fame to elves, wisdom to Öðinn (160) |  |
- | 16. To gain a wise woman’s love (161) |  |
- | 17. To keep her love (162) |  |
- | 18. A secret charm, to be told only to his lover or sister (163) |  |
- | 2. *ólrúnar*, against poisoned ale (7–8) |
- | 3. *biargrúnar*, for childbirth (9) |
CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The Dead Lover’s Return

I’ll do as much for my true love
As any young woman may;
I’ll sit and mourn upon his grave
A twelvemonth and a day.

*The Unquiet Grave*, Hb2, Child IV, 475

1. Gender and grief

So far, I have considered stories of raising the dead that are typically based on a mother–son relationship. Only in *Hervararkviða* does a daughter raise her dead father, and this poem clearly uses deliberate gender reversal, perhaps partly to warn women not to usurp masculine roles.1 Norse daughters doubtless grieved as much for their fathers as sons did for their mothers; the scarcity of such tales therefore demands some explanation.

Perhaps young women found it difficult to gain a hearing as poets. Most verses attributed to female skalds are by older women of high birth or magical abilities, such as Hildr Hrólfsdóttir, Queen Gunnhildr or Steinunn Refsdóttir, the antagonist of the missionary Þangbrandr. Occasionally, a young woman responds to a verse addressed to her by a would-be lover, as in *Kormáks saga* ch. 6.2 But even the longest sequence of early skaldic verse attributed to a woman, the *Sendibítr* of Þórðr skáldmærg, runs to only five stanzas.3 Yet any poet, female or male, might be interested in female bereavement as a subject (see, for example, *Guðrúnarkviða*), so it is unlikely that the scarcity of father–daughter encounters with the dead is due simply to young women failing to gain a hearing.

Another explanation might be in terms of social need. Stories about calling up one’s dead mother might often influence a young man who was already shouldering major responsibilities. If his own mother was alive, they would encourage him to heed her advice, and allow the family the

---

2 ÍF 8, 223; tr. CSII, 188.
3 Jesch 161–8; Skj I B 27, 54, 127–8; for *Sendibítr*, see Skj I B 53–4.
benefit of her greater experience. If she was already dead, such tales might strengthen her son’s authority by suggesting that he still enjoyed her magical help. Young women were unlikely to be in positions of such authority, so there would be less need for the community to devote imaginative attention to their personal grief.

Alternatively, there could be a psychological explanation. Eddic poetry often dramatises what is forbidden or difficult; but women in Norse society were permitted to grieve openly (for example, all five speakers in Guðrúnarkviða I are female, probably because this enables the poet to make grief explicit). But men were expected to be stoical. For example, when Grettir hears of the deaths of his father and brother and his own outlawry, he is allowed only one laconic verse – and half of that is taken up with the comment that other men would show their grief more openly. This reaction is clearly admired, but bottled-up grief must be expressed somehow. Perhaps the story pattern of calling up the dead mother was a suitably distanced way of admitting grief, which women, who could weep openly, did not need.

2. Helgakviða Hundingsbana II

In Helgakviða Hundingsbana II a woman does calls a man back from the dead, but he is her husband rather than her father. In this pattern, a woman’s lover dies (sometimes at the hands of her brother), and she calls him back from the dead for one night. He leaves the next morning, sometimes despite her pleas to go with him, and does not return. She lives only for a short time afterwards.

Helgi Hundingsbani is probably an ancient figure, and Höfler argues that his slaying goes back to a ritual among the Semnones of central Germany. But this does not prove a pre-Christian origin for his return from the dead, and it tells us little about the two surviving eddic poems about him. These present many textual problems, and their subject matter overlaps (sometimes in similar words). In Helgakviða Hundingsbana I the poet sporadically regards Helgi’s wife Sigrún as a valkyrie who watches over his voyages and battles (for example, st. 30), and the prose editor enthusiastically expands this element. But in the verse of Helgakviða Hundingsbana II she is a living woman, and is grief-stricken at his death (whereas a valkyrie would have welcomed him joyfully into Valhöll). Helgakviða Hundingsbana II looks the older poem, and the characterisation of Sigrún as a valkyrie is probably antiquarian romanticism.

---

4 Grettis saga ch. 47 (ÍF 7, 147–8; tr. CSIII, 119–20).
5 See Tacitus, Germania ch. 39; ed. Anderson; tr. 93, 288–9.
Helgakviða Hundingsbana II seems to be composite, and some of its narrative elements survive only in the prose of the thirteenth-century editor. Up to st. 29, this prose might be explained as summary of subject matter already covered in the verse of Helgakviða Hundingsbana I. But as the prose passages continue after the end of Helgakviða Hundingsbana I’s story material, the later ones probably result from parts of Helgakviða Hundingsbana II (or the separate poems of which it is made up) having been lost or omitted. Loss seems more likely than deliberate omission, since the prose contains few of the alliterating phrases that we might expect in ‘submerged’ verse.

The order of stanzas in Helgakviða Hundingsbana II is also confusing. In the Codex Regius, the flying before battle (19–24) is placed after Helgi’s confession that he has killed Sigrún’s relatives in that same battle (26–8). This suggests that there were at least two source poems (besides a single ljóðaháttr stanza (29), which may come from a third poem that is otherwise lost). The prose editor refers to the stanzas beginning with st. 14 as coming from Völsungakviða in forma ‘the ancient lay of the Völsungar’, but it is not clear whether this title is meant to apply only to stt. 14–18, or also to some other stanzas.

The poem has two largely separate thematic strands:
1. Helgi’s conflict with Hundingr’s family (1–4, 19–24, 39);
2. Helgi and Sigrún (probably 5–13 and certainly 14–18, 25–8, 30–8, 40–51).

The only section relevant to both themes is stt. 5–13, where Sigrún questions Helgi as he returns from taking vengeance on Hundingr; but the point here seems to be to show Sigrún’s growing attraction to Helgi rather than to linger over the vengeance that has already been narrated.

The ‘Helgi and Sigrún’ stanzas include eleven kennings, compared with only one in the ‘Helgi and Hundingr’ stanzas. They also repeat words and images: úrsvæl ‘cold with moisture’ is used of waves (13, 5), the stone on which Dagr swore his oath (31, 7), the hands of the dead Helgi (44, 9) and each of Sigrún’s tears (45, 4). Helgi’s corselet is blood-sprinkled after he has killed Hundingr (7, 5–6) and again when Sigrún wants to kiss him on his return (44, 3–4). These features suggest that the ‘Helgi and Sigrún’ stanzas probably come from a distinct poem.

7 This is complicated by Neckel and Kuhn’s renumbering of stanzas into chronological order; Larrington (1996) exacerbates this by keeping Neckel and Kuhn’s stanza-order without explaining it.
8 gõgl Gunnar systra ‘goslings of Gunnr’s sisters’ (= ravens) 7, 3–4; grãnstôô Þriðr ‘the grey stud-horse of Gríðr’ (= wolf) 25, 7; dólpør ‘battle traces’ (= wounds) 42, 7; sárdropi ‘wound drop’ (= blood) 42, 9; Óðins haucar ‘Óðinn’s hawks’ (= ravens) 43, 4; valdõgg ‘slaughter dew’ (= blood) 44, 8; harmdõgg ‘grief dew’ (= blood/tears) 45, 4; flugstíg ‘flying path’ (= sky) 49, 4; vindhálms briar ‘the wind-helmet’s (i.e. sky’s) bridge’ (= Bifröst, the rainbow bridge) 49, 5; draumþingar ‘dream meetings’ (= sleep) 50, 10; draughús ‘houses of the walking dead’ (= grave mounds) 51, 4.
9 brinís dómar ‘courts of the sword’ = battle, 22, 8.
The main features of the story (with sections preserved only in prose in square brackets) are:

Sigrún loves Helgi, but has been betrothed to Hóðbroddr against her will. Helgi tells her to stay with him and not to fear her family’s anger (14–18). [After the ensuing battle] Sigrún tells the dying Hóðbroddr that she will never be his wife now (25). Helgi tells Sigrún that he has slain most of her kinsmen (26–8). [Her brother Dagr kills Helgi in vengeance for his father and brother] and tells Sigrún what he has done (30). She curses him; he replies that Óðinn caused the strife, and offers her and her sons half the world in compensation (31–5). She has no wish to live unless Helgi returns; she laments him as the greatest prince in the world (36–8). [As Helgi returns to his grave-mound] Sigrún’s maid asks whether what she sees is an illusion, a sign of Ragnarök, or dead men riding; Helgi replies that he has been allowed a journey home (40–1). The maid tells Sigrún to come to the mound (42). [Having got there,] Sigrún expresses her joy, asks for a kiss, but notes that Helgi is covered with blood. He says this is caused by her tears, but rejoices that they are together in the mound (43–6). They spend the night together. In the morning he must leave (47–9). [She tells the maid to watch the mound in case he returns, but] late the next evening admits that he will not (50). The maid warns her not to go alone into a house of draugar at night (51).10

Einar Ólafur Sveinsson and Jónas Kristjánsson date part or all of Helgakviða Hundingsbana II to before c. 1000.11 Jan de Vries suggests that it may not all be of the same date, but attributes most of it to the twelfth century.12 He places Helgi’s return among the poem’s younger elements, because of its romantic and emotional content.

The very slight evidence suggests a late date for all parts of Helgakviða Hundingsbana II. Instances of the expletive particle are extremely few; this suggests a late date, but is not reliable, since some early skaldic poets also use the expletive particle relatively rarely. The test of or-/r- alliteration produces only one relevant form (28,7–8), where alliteration is on r, but this shows only that this stanza dates from after c. 900. Three vowels must remain uncontracted to preserve the metre (grá-an, 15; sé-i, 11,2; sé-a, 43,8), of which two are in the ‘Helgi and Sigrún’ stanzas; but as Fidjestøl admits, this test is ‘extremely inconclusive’.13 The prose editor clearly regarded some of the ‘Helgi and Sigrún’ stanzas as ancient, but this suggests only that they are earlier than the thirteenth century. A tentative dating to the twelfth century seems reasonable.

---

10 This last stanza should perhaps come after st. 43.
12 De Vries (1957), 138–9; Fidjestøl (1999), 178, 183.
3. Other versions

Some other examples of the pattern are probably derived from Helgakviða Hundingsbana II (HH II):

1. The Danish ballad Fæstemanden i Graven1 ‘The Fiancé in the Grave’ (FG).14

2. A group of British ballads probably derived from a lost version of FG: Clerk Saunders (CS), Sweet William’s Ghost (SWG) and an attenuated remnant in The Unquiet Grave (UG).15 The Wife of Usher’s Well (WUW), derives some features from reversing the pattern of summoning the dead parent, others from the pattern of the returning lover.16

3. The Faroese ballad Riddarin Klæmint1 (RK).17

Other versions are probably independent of HH II but have analogues throughout northern Europe; I shall consider two examples:

4. The Icelandic folktales Djákninn á Myrká ‘The Deacon at Myrká’ (DM).18

5. The English ballad The Suffolk Miracle (SM).19

Ballads are notoriously difficult to date, but the earliest surviving version of FG(A) appears in two seventeenth-century manuscripts.

Child regards CS and SWG as two separate ballads, the former presenting only the lover’s murder by the woman’s brother (cf. HH II 30–8), the latter only the lover’s return; he accepts only SWG as a descendant of HH II. But three Scottish versions of CS include both episodes (CS A + SWGB; CS F + SWG F; CS G).20 It seems more likely that these preserve the whole ballad than that the SWG tradition forgot the killing, but some versions later recombined the lover’s return with another similar killing (but only in

---

15 Child nos. 69, 77, 78 (II, 156–67, 226–38, III, 512–13, IV, 474–6). Two other Danish ballads from c. 1600 or earlier are derived from the Helgi and Sigrún story, Ribold og Guldborg (Danmarks gamle folkeviser no. 82; II, 338–90, 674–80; III, 848–56; X, 103–30) also has versions in Norwegian, Swedish, Icelandic and Scots (Earl Brand, Child no. 71, 1, 88–105); it may also be influenced by Helgakviða Hjórvardssonar. Neither it nor Herr Hjælmer (Danmarks gamle folkeviser no. 415; VII, 201–13) includes the lover’s return, although one version of Ribold og Guldborg makes the heroine commit suicide (A40–1).
16 Child no. 79 (II, 238–9; III, 513–14; V, 294–5). Here a living mother calls up her three dead sons. Features derived or adapted from the lover’s return are the return for one night; the cocks that wake the sons; the suggestion of a love-affair between the youngest son and a serving-girl (A12); the sons’ taking the mother to a chapel, which they enter while she must stay outside (C10–12); and the death of the mother nine days later (C13). (Note: ballad stanzas are cited by abbreviated title, version letter and stanza number).
17 Fornøg krædi no. 145 (X, 135–6).
18 Jón Árnason I, 270–2.
19 Child no. 272 (V, 58–67).
20 CS A is from Herd’s manuscripts, completed 1776; F, from Jamieson (1806), was collected in Arbroath, Angus; G, from Buchan (1828), probably comes from Aberdeenshire. At least F and G are therefore from north-east Scotland, F from a fishing port with strong links to Scandinavia.
versions from an area closely linked to Scandinavia). If this view is correct, CS B, C, D, E have lost the lover’s return (though E21 refers to his ghost), while SWG A, C, D, E have lost the murder. The earliest witness for this ballad is SWG A, printed in 1740. UG is a reduced and socially refined form of SWG which preserves only the conversation beside the lover’s grave. It was popular in England in the nineteenth century, but its oldest version (D) is from northern Scotland (Buchan’s manuscript collections, 1826 or earlier).

RK is probably of late medieval origin, since it shows signs of catholic beliefs in what was a protestant community at the time when it was collected. It has lost the story of the man’s death, but in some other ways is the closest of the ballads to HH II; it is the only one where the heroine spends her night with the dead man in his grave. It looks independent of all the other ballad versions.

DM was widely known when it was collected in the early nineteenth century. It may borrow some details from HH II or FG – notably the serving-maid from HH II, and the adaptation of Sigrún’s name to Guðrún (to allow the motif of the dead lover being unable to pronounce the name of God, Icelandic Guð) from FG. But the belief that devils and the damned cannot pronounce the divine names was widespread, and in most respects this folktale belongs to a common European type.

In SM (printed in 1689) the terrifying dead lover becomes a ghost who, for no apparent reason, transports the woman from her uncle’s house to her father’s. Debased as it is, it resembles DM in some details. In both stories the ghost unexpectedly tells the woman to wait while he attends to his horse. In SM 14 the ghost complains of a headache and the woman ties her handkerchief round his head. This seems pointless until it is compared with DM, where the deacon’s fatal wound is revealed to the woman riding behind him when his hat rides up the back of his head. Child cites a nineteenth-century Cornish folktale which is closer to DM and probably resembles the lost source of SM. There are many European versions of this folktale; their distinctive characteristics are that the woman does not know that her lover is dead; the lover recites a verse about the moon shining and the dead riding; and he tries to drag her into the grave with him.

4. Major features and their adaptation

There is some variation within this story pattern, but its basic form may have been roughly as follows:

1. The woman’s youngest brother kills her lover in an act of vengeance. In HH II Dagr kills Helgi to avenge his father and brothers. In

21 Cf. Mary of Nemmeggen (ed. 71), where the devil persuades Mary to change her name to Emmekin (‘Little M’).
CS, the youngest brother kills Clerk Saunders to avenge the seduction of his sister. **She curses her brother (HH II 31–3; CS B19, C17, E16, F23, the narrator curses him, G16).** Elsewhere, the cause of the lover’s death is unstated (FG, RK, UG), or he has been drowned (DM; cf. WUW). In SM he dies of sorrow at being separated from her – a sentimental modernisation.

2. **The whole action has been provoked by Óðinn (HH II only, 34, 43, 49).**

3. **The woman forces her lover to return from the dead. HH II probably implies this in Sigrún’s declaration that she does not want to live unless Helgi returns (36) and his statement that her weeping covers him with blood (45).** Similarly, in FG, Herr Åge (whose name may be derived from Helgi) tells Else-lille that his coffin is filled with blood whenever she weeps (A17, B8). This is weakened in UG, where the lover complains that her tears prevent him from sleeping (A3, B3, F3). In RK the dead man’s return is postponed until he is needed to rescue the woman from being burned because of her pregnancy by him. Here it is her clothing that is bloody (32); this makes no sense, and is probably borrowed from the bloodstained lover motif. In CS the lover returns to receive back the promise he plighted while he was alive.

WUW preserves what may be an older form of the compulsion: the Wife lays a curse (in this case on the weather) which will not be lifted until her sons return (A4; cf. *Hervararkviða*, and the compulsion of the *völkna* in *Bdr*). This is dropped elsewhere, probably because of the Christian belief that it was demonic or impossible to force the souls of the dead to appear to the living (see Chapter 13).

In the pattern considered in Chapter 13, the dead relative is in her funeral mound and has apparently been there since burial. But in HH II 41, **Helgi returns from Valhöll, and goes back there after his night in the mound with Sigrún.** The later texts are often inconsistent. In RK, Klæmint takes Frú Medallín down into the grave and ‘far into another world’ (cf. Valhöll in HH II), but later on, he is in his grave when God sends St Michael to summon him. FG and CS make the dead man travel from his grave to the girl’s home. The sons in WUW come from Paradise, but in A11 must return to the grave in the morning. The lover may even return to the grave and to heaven in the same stanza:

‘Nu galler hannen den sorte, to the earth I must go,
til iorden maae ieg: the gates of heaven stand open,
aaben staar Himmeriges porte, so now I must be off.’

A few versions locate the dead man only in the grave [22] or only in heaven (WUW C), or make him explain that his bones are in the churchyard and

---

only his spirit is speaking to the woman (SWG A9, E11), but most are inconsistent. Such contradictions are often a sign of something changed or misunderstood; in this case, the old idea that the dead ‘lived on’ in the grave is already disturbed in HH II by Christian concepts of heaven and hell.

5. **The first person to see the returning Helgi is a maidservant (HH II 40), who then takes a message telling Sigrún to come if she wants to meet him, and to stop weeping (42).** If st. 51 belongs here, she also warns Sigrún against going to a draughús (house of the walking dead). Otherwise, the maidservant appears only in DM, where she answers a knock on the door but sees nobody outside. Guðrún responds that this business must be meant for her, and goes out. Since she does not know when the deacon will arrive, this seems illogical, and it may be derived from the motif in HH II. The maidservant in HH II serves to emphasise that Sigrún goes to the grave-mound willingly and defies warnings not to go. She somewhat resembles the stock figure of the herdsman who tries to frighten the hero (cf. Hk0, Skirnismál 12).

6. **The woman goes joyfully to the grave-mound.** In HH II she asks for a kiss, makes a bed for them in the mound and wants to sleep in Helgi’s arms (43–7). A continuing sexual relationship is implied. Similarly, in RK the woman seeks out the dead man in his grave and becomes pregnant by him that night. In the other ballads, the dead man comes to the woman’s chamber and knocks on the door, and there is no sexual encounter, although in British versions she may ask for a kiss; he replies that she will not live long if he kisses her. In FG she refuses to let him in until he proves that he can still name Jesus (A9–10, B6, D9–10). In DM he cannot name her properly, calling her ‘Garún’ (i.e. ‘G-rún’) because the first element of her name coincides with Guð ‘God’.

The shift of scene to the woman’s chamber makes it necessary for her to follow him to the graveside afterwards (except in UG, where only the graveside scene survives). Most versions of SWG preserve the motif of the marriage bed in the grave: she asks whether there is room for her beside him. He may reply that there is room (B13, D15) or that there is none (A13, F9). The former reply probably derives from HH II; the latter may have been altered as a result of Christian insistence that separation from the dead must be accepted as God’s will. FG omits her request to share his grave, and in DM she desperately resists his attempt to drag her into the grave.

---

23 SWG F, UG (all versions) and probably DM, where the lover returns to the grave, though it is not said where he comes from.
24 SWG A5, B3, C7, E7; UG A4, B4, C3, D4. In CS G3–4 she refuses to let him in until he names some of the love-tokens that have passed between them.
7. Next morning the lover is summoned to leave by a cock, or by three cocks. Helgi must be west of the sky-bridge (i.e. Bifröst, the bridge leading to Valhöll) before Salgofnir wakes the victorious people (HH II 49, 5–8). This name is found only here and in a list of poultry-names; it may mean ‘the mighty one in the hall’ or ‘the one gaping wide in the hall’; and is probably a name for Gullinkambi, the cock who wakes the Æsir.

In FG there are usually three coloured cocks: white, red and black (two cocks, B9–10), red and white and black (C12–14); cf. the bright red, golden and soot-red cocks that wake giants, gods and the dead in Ælfasömm 42–3. Most British versions have two cocks (red and grey, SWG A14, WUW A9; white and grey, SWG G3), but WUW C8 preserves three (white, ‘the second’, whose colour is not stated, and red). The grey cock may arise simply from the need for a rhyme with ‘away’. The white cock probably expresses the sanctity of the gods, and the red and black ones may wake the living and the dead respectively. FG apparently preserves this feature better than HH II does, and CS and WUW probably derive it from FG or something like it. RK also has a ‘sacred’ way of waking the dead man, but it is St Michael bringing a message from God. In DM the deacon must return to the grave when Guðrún succeeds in ringing the church bell.

8. The dead lover never returns again. Sigrún orders her maid to watch the mound in case Helgi returns, but finally admits that he will not. The fact that the dead man returns only once is shared by every other version except RK and DM. In RK there is only one night of sexual union, but Klæmint must return once more to save his lover and their unborn child; even so, his speech announcing their final separation is emphatic. In DM, the deacon tries to return the following night, and the whole household has to be raised to keep him at bay. When he returns a third time, a hired magician traps him under a great stone, where he remains ‘to this day’. This looks like an ill-judged attempt to prolong the horror and suspense.

9. The woman dies soon afterwards. According to the prose after HH II 51, Sigrún soon died, but she and Helgi were reborn as Helgi Haddingia-scaði and the valkyrie Kára: svá sem qveðit er í Károlióðom ‘as is recited in the Songs of Kára’. Such a claim of reincarnation and reunion may have been made in this lost poem, or this may be only the prose editor’s understanding. In FG the woman is dead within a month (A34, B13), or eight days (D24). In CS G37 her lover says that they will be together in Paradise before nine nights have passed, and Jesus makes the same promise to the wife in WUW C12–13 (though since this resembles Christ’s words to the repentant

26 Pula IV au 3 (Kock I, 341).
27 LP 478 and AEW 460 respectively.
28 White is associated with Heimdallr in Ærmisvöðla 15,1–2 and with Baldr in Gylfaginning ch. 22 (ed. 23; tr. 23).
29 Probably an error for Haddingiascati ‘prince of the Haddingjar’; see Chapter 5.
The scarce of early examples makes it hard to know whether this pattern is ancient or grew up in the twelfth century, and it is also difficult to determine what is individual in Helgakviða Hundingsbana II itself.

Helgi ends his welcome to Sigrún in the mound with the words (Helgakviða Hundingsbana II 46,9–12):

\[
\text{nú ero brúðir byrgðar í haugi,}
\text{lofða dísir, hiá oss liðnom.}
\]

‘now brides are buried in the mound, ancestral human spirit-women, beside our dead selves.’

He clearly refers to himself using a ‘royal we’, and it is usually assumed that the plural forms brúðir and dísir similarly refer only to Sigrún. This is possible, as is the reference to her as a dís although she is a living woman. But the choice of these expressions hints at the presence of other female ancestral spirits in the mound, and perhaps that Helgi sees Sigrún as fulfilling her destiny by joining them.

In other respects the characterisation of Sigrún seems more individual, and in stt. 30–8 there may even be some questioning of whether her passion for Helgi is quite proper. It is true that Dagr has broken an oath of loyalty to Helgi in killing him (see 31), but only because he must avenge his father and brothers. He breaks the news to Sigrún as gently as possible, acknowledging that Helgi was the best prince in the world (Helgakviða Hundingsbana II 30). This may be contrasted with Hógni’s bluntness in Brot af Sigurðarkviðu 7, when he tells Guðrún: ‘we have cut Sigurðr to pieces with swords’, or Atli’s claim that Guðrún is partly to blame for his murder of her brothers (Atlamál 68,5–8). Dagr is presented as sympathetically as the

30 Cf. also the crucifixion folksong collected from Unst, Shetland in the nineteenth century (MRN 43).
31 SG III, 2, 17 lists other contexts where plurals other than pronouns stand for the singular. Some may be simple plurals (for example, Völundarkviða 19,4) or general categories (for example, Brynjarlaug 25,3), but others are certainly plurals with a singular meaning (for example, Brot 15,3–4).
32 Cf., for example, Atlakviða 35,3.
meeting the other in norse myth and legend

... would allow, permitted to claim that the conflict was caused by Óðinn, and shown offering Sigrún half the world in compensation (34–5).

In view of this, her curse on him is ferocious, especially considering that Helgi has recently told her of his killing of her father and brother without provoking any such reaction (26–8). The curse has three parts. The first calls down on Dagr the consequences of breaking his oaths (31). The second wishes that the things he relies on may fail him (32–3, 4). The third wishes him reduced to the status of a wolf or outlaw, deprived of property, society and any food except human corpses (33, 5–12). The only poetic curse in Old Norse that comes close to this in intensity is Guðrún’s curse on her husband Atli for murdering her brothers (Atla víða 30), and that runs in the opposite direction. Unlike Dagr, Atli has no excuse for betraying his oaths beyond personal greed, and a woman’s relationship to her brother was traditionally closer than that to her husband.33 Many early listeners may have agreed when Dagr says that Sigrún is mad to curse him in this way (Helg víða Hundingsbana II 34, 1–4). The ultimate cause of this tension may be the new influence of Christian scripture, which placed the bond between husband and wife above that between birth relatives (see, for example, Mark 10, 7–8).

The imagery of st. 43 may also hint that Sigrún’s passion is not entirely admirable: she is as glad to meet Helgi, she says, as Óðinn’s hawks (ravens) are when they know there is warm meat from newly slain corpses, or when, drenched with dew, they see the dawn. This not only suggests the physical passion of a woman who wants to ‘devour’ her lover, but also reminds us that he is dead, and that it is ravens, not women, who normally lust after dead men. This produces a disturbing suggestion that however much we may sympathise with her, there is something unnatural about Sigrún’s continuing passion.

The image of ravens at dawn, drenched with dew, also contains a tragic foreshadowing. After her night with Helgi, Sigrún too will be cold with dew, but she will not be glad to see the dawn. Even her joyful anticipation of her night with Helgi therefore carries suggestions that it will be brief and unrepeatable. This tension between sympathy for her wholehearted passion and the sense that it is unreasonable and ultimately doomed may reflect the same sort of moral unease as often surrounds the male protagonist in other myth patterns (see Chapter 1). Perhaps, therefore, this one may also be exploring a social and/or psychological problem.

6. Changing uses

In ibn Fadlan’s account of a Rus chieftain’s funeral (see Chapter 8), the concubine who volunteers to die with him is thereafter regarded as his

See Chapter 5, note 71.
Similarly, Brynhildr’s ostentatious suicide on Sigurðr’s funeral pyre in *Sigurðarkviða in skamma* is intended to demonstrate to her brother Atli that the ‘thin-minded’ Guðrún should never have been allowed to take Sigurðr away from his ‘real’ wife, Brynhildr herself (*Sigurðarkviða in skamma* 40.5–8, 41.1–4). Brynhildr also expresses the view that if Guðrún had been better advised or more courageous, she would have chosen to die with Sigurðr herself (*Sigurðarkviða in skamma* 61). We cannot assume that the first audiences of *Sigurðarkviða in skamma* necessarily agreed with Brynhildr (in st. 50 her maids politely decline the honour of accompanying her in death), but her attitude must have seemed at least understandable, and to many perhaps admirable. The same ethical code motivates Signý in *Völsunga saga* ch. 8 and Bergþóra in *Njáls saga* ch. 129. Traditionally minded women in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries may have continued to feel guilty about not dying with their husbands, even though the new religion forbade suicide.

*Helgakviða Hundingsbana* II finds an imaginative way of escaping this dilemma. Sigrún’s loyalty to Helgi could not be more emphatic, and she goes eagerly to the grave-mound to sleep with him. At the same time, the symbolic funeral of her night with him is not actually suicide. She may not wish to live after him, and the prose editor probably reports the traditional story accurately in saying that she died of grief soon afterwards. But she remains blameless according to Christian ethics, yet still has her symbolic ‘common funeral’ with Helgi.

In the end, however, the ethical tension is not so easily resolved. The morning comes, when Helgi must leave and Sigrún remain. And the night in the mound could happen only once. The next night approaches (*Helgakviða Hundingsbana* II 50, 9–10): *oc drifr drött öll draumþinga til ‘and the whole company moves towards the dream-meetings’. Whether the *drött* are Helgi’s dead companions or Sigrún’s living household, *draumþing* (which appears nowhere else in Old Norse poetry) reminds us that from now on, it is only in dreams that they will meet.

Even if *Helgakviða Hundingsbana* II fails to resolve its ethical clash completely, it does allow the widow’s grief to be regarded sympathetically according to both heathen and Christian ethical systems. But even as late as the thirteenth century, the prose editor could not leave it at that. His final paragraph wistfully suggests that Helgi and Sigrún were reunited through

---

34 Jones 426–9.
35 FSN I, 18–19; tr. 47 (*Völsunga saga*); ÍF 12, 330; tr. CSI III, 156 (*Njáls saga*).
36 Even today, such attitudes persist in some parts of the world. A Mauritian friend told me that when his father died, a Hindu priest instructed his mother that although *suttee* is now illegal, she must do lifelong penance to expiate the sin of not having killed herself to be with her dead husband. This happened in 1997.
meeting the other in norse myth and legend

reincarnation, even though this defies Christian common sense: enn þat er nú kolluð kerlingavilla 'but that is now regarded as an old wives’ tale’.37

An echo of this desire to have it both ways also survives in RK. The older Frú Medallín tells her unborn daughter that she will have three misfortunes: her mother will die giving birth to her, she will have the same name as her mother, and she will become the mistress of a man who has been dead for fifteen years. There is no suggestion that the younger Medallín has ever met Klæmint before their night together, but the inscrutability of this sequence hints at a possible previous relationship between Klæmint and the older Medallín. The experiences and names of mother and daughter are similar enough to suggest reincarnation.

With centuries of inculcation of Christian values, the ‘quasi-suicide’ function of the pattern disappears. In later versions, the woman becomes the fiancée or mistress of the dead man rather than his wife. This sometimes adds the extra poignancy of an unconsummated relationship (though not in CS or RK, where the relationship is consummated, with fatal consequences in CS and almost fatal ones in RK), but its main effect is to widen the separation between the couple. The implied ideology of the ballads is that the survivor must get on with her own life. Even in RK, the dead man returns ‘far into another world’, while the woman goes home to give birth to their son. More decisively, when Margaret returns his troth to Clerk Saunders, it is a cancellation of vows that were appropriate while they were both alive, but are so no longer; and in FG Herr Åge tells Else-lille to go home and never weep for him again (A28–9).

There is also a tendency in the ballads to dwell on the macabre. In FG, Herr Åge takes his coffin on his back and bangs on the chamber door with it because he has no skin (A6–7, B4–5). He resumes his living appearance in her bower, but when they reach the graveyard, his golden hair and rosy cheeks fade and he decays, both hand and foot (A25–7, C17). SWG (F) develops this into a full-blown memento mori lyric, complete with physical decay, the ‘behold and see’ topos, the warning against earthly pride, and the grim assurance that the living will become as the dead is now:38 This element is handled with fine understatement in DM, where the dead man’s hat is partially dislodged when the horse stumbles, revealing the damage caused to his skull and backbone by the sharp ice of the river in which he drowned. He recites a verse in which he asks whether Guðrún can see the white spot on his neck, and she replies: ’Sé ég það sem er’ ‘I see what there is’.

Less sensitively, later versions often show a tendency towards moral distrust of the lover. This is absent from RK, where Klæmint is a heroic rescuer, but the beginnings of it can be seen in FG, when Else-lille only lets

37 But compare the same idea in the prose at the end of Helgakviða Hjorvarðsonar.
38 For these topos, see Woolf ch. 9, esp. 312–30, 354–5; they could be paralleled in almost any European language.
Herr Åge in after he proves that he can still name Jesus (A9–10, D9–10, cf. B6). Two versions of CS/SWG carry it further, damning the dead man for his sexual sins (see SWG C11–13, E13), but this must be a Presbyterian distortion, for both still end with Marjorie/Margaret wishing his soul good rest. It reaches a climax in DM, where the deacon (or a demon inhabiting his body?) deceives Guðrún into going with him, cannot name God, tries to drag her into the grave, and can only with difficulty be kept at bay by a psalm-chanting priest. In this story everything has been overtaken by the sheer physical horror of death and the dead body.

In artistic terms, recent ballads and folktales are often pale reflections of their medieval predecessors, but there are three good reasons for considering them here. First, although some parts of Helgakviða Hundingsbana II may have ancient roots, there are no other early examples of this pattern, and it cannot be assumed to be older than the twelfth century. Second, however, it was popular thereafter and had some mythic significance, although the ways in which it was used continued to change. Finally, these recent versions, some of which survived in popular tradition until my own lifetime, should remind us that the myth patterns discussed in this book were important to our recent ancestors and remain part of our psychological inheritance today.
Afterword

There is no doubt that we had all heard the story in different ways, that it brought us different insights depending on our own life-experiences and central concerns.\(^1\)

My first aim in this book has been to establish what is typical in the various patterns of cross-gender encounter between gods or men on one side and giantesses or prophetesses on the other. It is clear that different types of encounter were consistently associated with particular gods, and that gods and men usually represent the human, civilised and rational world, while giantesses are associated with chaos, wild nature or the irrational. Beyond that, ‘meaning’ is a shifting target, changing from one period to another and capable of being adapted or contradicted to fit the particular concerns of individual poets and saga writers.

Most of the patterns I have considered may have either a god or a man as the male representative of This World, but the relationship between the god and the human being varies from one pattern to another. In those connected with the Vanir, the human protagonist is typically a ruler descended from the Vanir or the lover of a goddess who is one of the Vanir. The fullest versions of these patterns concern human rulers. The names Njörðr ‘Strength’, ‘Power’ and Freyr ‘Lord’\(^2\) may be connected with political authority, and the Stentoften stone probably shows an ancestor being venerated as guarantor of crop fertility (see Chapter 4). These things may suggest that these gods originated as mythical ancestral kings, though probably at a very ancient period.

Myths and legends associated with Þórr produce human protagonists of two different types. The older is undoubtedly the ‘Bear’s Son’ hero. He shares Þórr’s features of unique physical strength and ultimate self-sacrifice against overwhelming odds, and his parallel fights against a male and a female ogre. But he differs from Þórr in that he has animal (notably bear) characteristics himself, sometimes resembles the ogre against whom he fights, and is to some extent an outsider in the society he defends. The younger type of hero is represented by Saxo’s Thorkillus, Þorsteinn bæjar-magn and Ómr Stórólfs; these look like transformations of Þórr.

\(^1\) Narayan 47.
\(^2\) AEW\textit{4} 10–11, 142.
himself, and may arise from a desire among Christians to retain him as a hero while rejecting his heathen origins.

Where the human protagonist is associated with Óðinn, he is typically a devotee or protégé rather than a descendant or a transformation of the god. The worship of Óðinn was probably expanding in the last phase of heathenism, at least among poets and aristocrats. Thus Eyvindr skáldsplír’s Háleygjatal 4 (c. 985) makes Óðinn the ancestor of a family which must earlier have claimed descent from the Vanir (cf. st. 9 of the same poem). Other Odinic poetry from the late heathen period suggests that his devotees included moral arguments about justice in their religious lives. This tendency, which was apparently quite alien to the cults of the Vanir and of Þórr, reaches its peak in Völspló. But this made Odinism utterly irreconcilable with Christianity, and after the Conversion Óðinn becomes a demonic figure; in Egils saga ok Ásmundar ch. 13 he has even replaced Satan as the Lord of Darkness. Some later heroes of the Odinic type are accordingly presented as notable opponents of Óðinn (see Chapter 11), and the offspring of the union between them and the pre-Christian giantess cannot be allowed to prosper in the new world of the Christian Middle Ages.

Although my first aim has been to establish what the conventional patterns were, the question of what their typical received meanings might have been is unavoidable. This study suggests that:

1. Most Norse myths and legends appear in texts which in their present form were probably composed and certainly written down by Christians. These poets, saga-writers and scribes had certainly no intention of upholding or preserving heathen religion for its own sake. The texts must therefore have continued to seem useful in Christian medieval Iceland.

2. In a traditional society like that of the Norse-speaking world, it is virtually impossible to separate social and psychological interpretations. Psychological readings (for example, of the friendly giantess as pseudo-mother) often seem unavoidable, and the personal problems to which they most obviously relate are usually those of a male ruling class. But the non-aristocratic majority probably adopted the problems and struggles of their leaders as their own through Freudian suggestion, as happens all over the world in folktale, which is told by peasants but usually concerned more with kings and princesses than with other peasants.

3. The traditional ‘meanings’ of these myth patterns probably did not have much to do with legitimising the rule of the aristocratic male ruling elite, because the protagonist is usually too morally problematic to be uncritically admired. In any case, in a society where class and gender rules

---

233
were fairly stable, little such defence would be needed except at times of unusual stress.

4. The possible traditional ‘meanings’ that I have suggested for different patterns are not all associated with one phase of life. Few if any seem to relate to childhood. Some address the problems of adolescents (for example, the pseudo-mother married to the ogre-father, Chapter 12) or young adults (for example, raising the dead mother, Chapter 13). But others deal with the fear of death, or of being dynastically supplanted (see, for example, Chapters 5, 6). Their common feature is concentration on a moment of dynastic crisis. This may be the death of a ruler (Chapters 5, 8); his wife’s bereavement (Chapter 14); assertion of a son’s right to inherit (Chapter 6); defence of one’s dynasty through ‘just’ vengeance, executed by those whose ‘destiny’ it was to carry it out (Chapter 10); the threat posed by ‘alien’ marriages (Chapter 5); or the workings of Fate and the knowledge that all things must end, including one’s own life and dynasty (Chapter 7).

5. The moral ambiguity of the protagonist and the complexity of his relationship with ‘wild’ nature allow these patterns to function as open-ended investigations of human problems. Because their Christian scribes claimed no moral authority or orthodoxy for them, they could be used without the need to arrive at a religiously ‘correct’ answer. Myth is about problems and contradictions, and it has no ‘right answers’; often, it does not even have any ‘right’ questions, and the problems it seemed to address may have varied from one hearer to another.

6. We ourselves are also involved. The meanings attached to mythic patterns may change, but modern interest in myth is a reminder that we are like our ancestors, makers of stories that we use in pursuit of understanding of our own lives, our relationships with each other and our place in creation. That is the main reason why, for me, this book has been worth writing.
Inntak úr sögubætti af Ásmundi flagðagæfu 1 (‘Summary of a Saga-Episode about Ásmundur “Lucky with Hags”’)

Ásmundur is the youngest of three brothers; his father despises him, but his mother defends him. His two brothers set off to visit the king, but turn back when they meet a giant. Later, all three brothers set out again; their father falls into the smithy fire while giving Ásmundur a rusty old helmet, mail-coat and shield. His mother gives Ásmundur a knife (sax); when he tries it out, it cuts through a rock easily, but the rock is his mother’s lifsteinn; 2 and she falls dead.

The brothers meet the giant. His brothers flee, but Ásmundur wrestles with the giant and kills him. He takes the giant’s dog, then joins the household of St Ólafur. The king sends him to collect tax from the heathen Þorgerður Höldaströll, who lives on an island in the north. When he arrives, Þorgerður is out hunting; her daughter Hlaðvör agrees to come with Ásmundur and convert to Christianity if he defeats her mother.

Þorgerður refuses to pay the tax, but agrees to abandon the island if Ásmundur defeats her in three tests. The first two contests (walking on fire and resisting a sword blow on the bare foot) are drawn (because Ásmundur is helped by the sign of the cross). The third test is to swallow three red-hot nails. Þorgerður successfully swallows two, but Ásmundur marks the sign of the cross on the third, and it burns her and leaves her helpless. He returns to court with Hlaðvör; she is baptised and marries him, and the king sends people to settle the island.

(The last part of this story is not relevant here; it is derived from Völsa þáttr.)

1 Jón Árnason I, 163–71 (original ed. I, 171–9), 673, 678. The priest Eyjólfr Jónsson of Vellir in Svarfaðardalur (1670–1745) derived the story from his grandmother Björg Ölafs dóttir (c. 1614–90), who, he says, learned it by heart from an old manuscript, with twelve rimur about Ásmundur (of which Eyjólfr quotes some stanzas). Eyjólfr is perhaps exaggerating his grandmother’s knowledge, but the story may be genuinely derived from late medieval written sources.

2 The lives of uncanny beings were sometimes thought to reside in particular stones, so the mother must be assumed to be a giantess or something similar.
Djákninn á Myrká ('The Deacon at Myrká')

The (unnamed) deacon at Myrká often visits Guðrún, a serving-maid at Bagísá. Just before Christmas he sets out as usual, during a thaw. He tries to cross a 'bridge' of ice across the river, but it breaks, and he is drowned. His body is washed downstream and found the next day, with the back of the head badly lacerated by the ice floes in the river. He is buried at Myrká, but the river remains dangerous, and news of his death does not reach Bagísá.

Guðrún prepares to spend Christmas with the deacon at Myrká. On the evening before Christmas Eve there is a knock on the door. Another maid answers it, but sees no one outside. Guðrún says 'The game must be intended for me'. She goes out, hurriedly thrusting one arm through the armhole of her cloak and throwing the other side of the cloak over her shoulder. The deacon lifts her onto his horse Faxi and mounts in front of her. As they descend a slope, his hat slips forward, revealing his bare skull as the clouds roll away from the moon. The deacon recites a verse:

'The moon it glides,
the dead man rides,
do you not see the white patch
on my neck,
Garún, Garún?'

Some say she was frightened and said nothing, others that she lifted his hat and said: 'I see what there is'. When they reach Myrká, the deacon dismounts at the lychgate and says:

'You wait here, Garún, Garún,
while I take him, Faxi, Faxi,
up into the churchyard, churchyard.'

She sees an open grave in the churchyard and grasps the bell-rope in terror. She is seized and pulled towards the grave, but the cloak tears away along the arm-seam where she put her arm through. Deacon and cloak tumble into the grave, which immediately closes. Guðrún rings the bell until long after the people at Myrká have come to rescue her.

The next night, the deacon tries to fetch Guðrún, and the household stays up all night keeping him away. For two weeks Guðrún is watched all night, and some say the priest had to read the Psalter over her. Later, a magician is hired; he orders a large boulder to be rolled to the gable-end of the hall. At dusk the deacon tries to come in, but the magician paralyses him with a powerful spell and rolls the stone on top of him – and there he remains to this day. The hauntings cease, but Guðrún never fully recovers.

3 Jón Árnason I, 270–2, 678, from Ingibjörg Þorvaldsdóttir of Belgholt, Borgarfjörður, and Páll Jónsson á Völlum (1812–89), who had been priest at Myrká (Eyjafjörður, north Iceland), 1846–58. Jón also notes a variant from Myrká in Svarfaðardalur. On Páll Jónsson, see Páll Eggert Ólason IV, 127–8.
**APPENDIX**

*Fæstemanden i Graven* (*The Fiancé in the Grave*)

There are two alternative openings; *a*: The beautiful and faithful Elselil serves at court for eighteen years (for many years, E), but her beloved dies (C1–2, E1–2); *Or b*: Three (D two) maidens are sewing gold in their bower; one weeps for her dead fiancé. Herr Åge and Jomfru Else-lille were betrothed, but he died the day before their wedding (A) / a month after the betrothal (B) (A1–3, B1–2, D1–3).

Herr Åge, under the black earth, hears Else-lille’s lament (A4–5, B3). He gets permission from Our Lord to visit her (D4–5). He gets up with his coffin on his back and goes to her bower (A6, B4) / one evening as the dew is falling (C) he gets up and goes to her (C3, E3). He bangs on the door with his coffin because he has no skin (with his skin, C; with his hand, D; with coffin, pole and stick, E), and asks her to let him in (A7, B5, C4, D6, E4–5). She wonders whether it can be Herr Åge (A8), but will only let him if he can still name Jesus (A9, B6, D7–9); he does so (A10, D10), and she lets him in (A11, E6). She sits him down on a gilded chest (D11, E7), washes his legs in the clearest wine (C5, E7), dries them with fine white linen (C5). She combs his hair with a gold (A), gilded (D), silver (C) comb; at every stroke she lets fall a tear (A, B) / a hair comes out of his head (D) (A12, C6, D12). She gives him stockings and silver-buckled shoes (E8).

He asks what her life is like on earth; she says it is like hell – if only she could be with him! (C7–8). She asks what it is like with him in the black earth; he says it is like heaven (it would be like heaven if she were with him, C), but when she asks to go with him, he admits that it is like hell (C transfers this to the graveside scene) (A13–16, D13–16, C9–11, 15–16). His coffin fills with blood every time she weeps, but the inside of his grave is hung with roses every time she is glad (A17, 19, B7–8).

The white cock crows, the dead must return to the earth and he must leave. The red cock crows, the dead must return to the earth and he must go with them. The black cock crows, the gates of heaven stand open, so he must follow (A20–2, B9–10, C12–14).

Åge takes his coffin on his back and returns to the churchyard (A23). Else-lille follows him through the dark wood (A24, E9) / through the town, where the dogs bark loudly (D17–18). When they reach the churchyard, his golden hair and rosy cheeks wither (A25–7, C17, D19–20).

He tells her to go home and never weep for him again (A28–9). ‘Look up at the small stars in the sky and you will see how the night is passing’ (A30, B11, C18, D21). As she does so, he slips into the earth and is gone (A31–2, B12, C18, D22; E9 replaces the stars with falling dew, cf. E3). She wonders where he has gone (D23) / sits on the grave and weeps until daylight (C19). She goes home sorrowfully; a month (a week, D) later she is dead (A32–4, B13, D24).

---

4 Danmarks gamle folkeviser 90 (II, 492–7, 870–4; X, 178–80); A and B date from the early seventeenth century, C–E from the nineteenth, but only A and D preserve the whole ballad. C (from Fyn) and E (from south Sjælland) are geographically and textually close to each other.
Gríms saga loðinkinna (‘The Saga of Grímr Shaggy-Cheek’), chs. 1–2

Grímr’s fiancée Lopthæna has been abducted. During a famine in Hálogaland, he goes fishing north and east to Gandvík. He and his men beach their ship. After a ferocious storm, Grímr catches two troll-women trying to shake his ship to pieces. He kills Kleima ‘Bashful’ with an arrow and wounds Feima ‘Blot’ with his axe; she flees to her parents’ cave, pursued by Grímr, and warns them about him before falling dead. It turns out that she was six years old, and her sister seven. The troll parents sprawl by the fire wearing short leather garments, and the eavesdropping Grímr can see their sexual parts. He cuts the head off the male troll (Hrímnir ‘Frost-covered’). Then the female (Hyrja ‘Knocking’) attacks him; they wrestle, and he throws her and cuts her head off (ch. 1).

The next day Grímr is involved in a fight over a beached whale; his opponent is killed and he is seriously wounded (Grímr’s two men and his enemy’s twelve are also killed). He is rescued by the hag Geirríðr Gandvíkarekkja (‘Geirríðr the widow of Gandvík’), on condition that he kisses her. Later, she heals his wounds in return for his sleeping with her, and is magically transformed back into Lopthæna (ch. 2).

Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld, Hákonardrápa (‘The Poem about Hákon’) stt. 3–6

‘The keen taker of wind-steeds [= ships] lures under himself with the true language of swords [= battle] the pine-haired deserted wife of Priði [Óðinn, whose ‘deserted wife’ is Jõrð, the land].

So I think the famous distributor [of wealth = the ruler] very reluctant to leave Auðr’s splendid sister [Jõrð] alone – land/Jõrð comes under the necklace diminisher [= generous ruler, Hákon].

The match was later consummated by which that bold-ruling friend of kings [Hákon] married the tree-grown only daughter of Ónarr [Jõrð/land].

The guider of harbour horses [= helmsman, Hákon] managed to entice to himself Báleygr’s [‘Flaming-eye’s’ = Óðinn’s] broad-faced bride [Jõrð/land] by the politics of steel [= battle].’

5 FSN I, 269–76; this saga is a later ‘prequel’ to Órvar-Odds saga, whose hero is Grímr’s son and which existed by 1314 (Jónas Kristjánsson (1997), 361). The three earliest manuscripts of Gríms saga date from the fifteenth century.
6 995 or earlier; Skj I B, 147–8. All four quatrains are quoted separately in Skáldskaparmál, ed. Faulkes I, 8, 36, 35–6, notes on pp. 136, 158, 181–2. Faulkes’s readings are followed here; cf. tr. Faulkes 67, 91, 90.
When King Hringr of Denmark is killed by the usurper Sóti, his children Hálfdan and Ingibjõrg flee. They are forced by storms to beach their ship in Helluland ('Flat Slab-land', the Labrador coast). While out hunting, Hálfdan finds some huge footprints on a cliff-face; he follows them to a cave, where he overhears a troll couple (Járnmefr 'Iron-nose' and Sleggja 'Hammer'). They are cooking the flesh of horses and human beings; he has a hook on his nose and she a ring, and they amuse themselves by attaching the hook to the ring and rolling about. Járnmefr uses magic to lure people to them; Sleggja brings out two twins, the only captives from last year who have not yet been eaten.

Hálfdan enters and decapitates Járnmefr with his axe. Sleggja greets him by name, and they wrestle until someone plucks Sleggja’s feet from under her, and she falls into a chasm in the floor of the cave. Hálfdan holds her by the hair, then sees a knife (sax) lying beside him, and uses it to cut her head off. He calls out, asking who supplied the knife, but receives no answer (ch. 4).

In a side-cave he frees a woman who is sitting bound to her chair by her hair. She is Hildr, daughter of the jarl of Scotland, and the captive twins are her brothers Sigmundr and Sigurðr, whom they then revive. After five nights they all leave the cave, taking many precious things with them (ch. 5).

Hálfdan, Sigmundr and Sigurðr meet and wrestle with three hag-women (flagðkonur), Brana,8 Molda ‘Earth’ and Mána ‘Moon’. When Hálfdan throws Brana, she reveals that she helped him against Sleggja. She is the daughter of the giant Járnhauss ‘Iron-skull’ and a human princess, and the other giantesses abuse her. Hálfdan and his companions throw Molda and Mána over a cliff; then Brana reveals that they were aged five and six (ch. 6).

Brana and the foster-brothers eavesdrop on Járnhauss through a window in his cave. She gives them clubs, with which they destroy the other giants, but they cannot kill her father, so she stabs him with his own sax. Hálfdan sleeps with Brana every night (ch. 7).

When summer comes and Hálfdan prepares to leave, Brana is pregnant by him. They agree that she will send him the child if it is a boy (but in ch. 13 we learn that it is a girl; Brana worries about leaving her in order to help Hálfdan, but nothing more is said about her). Brana regrets losing Hálfdan, but wants him to marry Marsibil, daughter of a king in England. Before they part, she gives him herbs that will make Marsibil fall in love with him, a magic mailcoat and ring, a fine ship, and advice not to trust Áki, the English king’s counsellor (chs. 8–9).

---

7 FSN III, 330–48. This saga is difficult to date; its two oldest manuscripts date from the fifteenth century.
8 Brana is a common Icelandic name for a cow (CV 76), but AEW 53 interprets it as ‘the one who hurries to come’ (cf. bruna ‘to advance with the speed of fire’).
After Hálfdan has won Marsibil’s love, Áki tries to rape his sister Ingibjörg, but Brana prevents this (ch. 12), then rescues the foster-brothers when Áki tries to burn them to death (ch. 13). Hálfdan goes to Denmark to avenge his father; Áki ambushes him, but is captured and mutilated (ch. 15). Hálfdan avenges his father and becomes king of Denmark, but the dying Sóti curses him so that he forgets Marsibil (ch. 16). Brana appears and warns him that Marsibil is about to be married to King Eiríkr of Miklagardr (Constantinople). He returns to England, marries Marsibil, and arranges for Eiríkr to marry Ingibjörg. Hildr marries the English king (ch. 17).

**Hálfs saga ok Hálfrsrekka** (‘The Saga of King Hálf and His Champions’), chs. 10–16

The first Gunnlög marries Álfr the Old, jarl of Hǫrdaland. They have two sons, both called Steinr, who become known as Innsteinn and Útsteinn (though in a verse in ch. 16 they are Styr and Steinarr) and are often called sons of Gunnlög. Útsteinn joins King Hálf’s champions (ch. 10). When Hálf and his men are treacherously attacked and killed, Gunnlög finds Innsteinn dead and Útsteinn apparently dying. She nurses him and two other warriors back to health (ch. 14), and Útsteinn joins an avenging expedition in which the treacherous King Ásmundr is killed and Hálf avenged. This is led by Hrókr inn svarti, the son of Gunnlög’s brother Hámundr. He has a namesake brother called Hrókr inn hvíti, and later becomes the father of the second Gunnlög, one of whose nine sons is Hrómundr Gripsson, the hero of **Hrómundar saga**.

**Hjálmphís saga ok Ólvis** (‘The Saga of Hjálp and Ólvis’), chs. 9–10, 21–2

While out hunting, Hjálmþér and Ólvis seek shelter in a cave, where they see two giant-like creatures. The giant sends the giantess Skinnhúfa (‘Skin-hood’) to look for some men whom his sister (Hjálmþér’s wicked stepmother) promised to send him as food, but when she finds the foster-brothers, Skinnhúfa hides them by changing them into cocks. After the giant falls asleep, she changes them back into men, hands Hjálmþér the giant’s sword (the only one that can wound him), and helps to kill the giant. She tells Hjálmþér to give the sword to Ólvis (ch. 9).

9 *FSN* II, 168–81; this saga survives in a large number of manuscripts, the oldest of which dates from the fifteenth century.

10 This scene resembles the arrival of Hnikarr (= Óðinn) in *Regnsmál* 16–18. Similarly, in ch. 15, at the end of a confrontation with a Dane called Úlfr, Útsteinn recites some verses which end with the claim that his life was preordained, and that Óðinn advanced him in his youth.

11 *FSN* III, 249–51, 277–82. This saga survives only in seventeenth-century manuscripts, and its date is uncertain.
Later, Hjálmþér meets a hag called Vargeisa, who carries a splendid sword, which she agrees to give him if he will kiss her. After some hesitation he agrees; he must rush into an embrace with her and kiss her while she throws the sword into the air and catches it behind his back. She explains that the first time he uses it, he will not be able to wield it, and the second time it will not cut, but after that it will be an excellent weapon (ch. 10).

At the end of the saga (chs. 21–2), the two giantesses are revealed as Hildisíf and Álsól, sisters of King Hringr of Arabia (who has accompanied and protected the foster-brothers in the guise of the thrall Hóðr). By killing the giant and kissing Vargeisa, Hjálmþér has released the sisters from a spell cast by the stepmother. Hjálmþér marries Álsól and Ólvir marries Hildisíf.

Hrómundar saga Gripssonar (‘The Saga of Hrómundr Gripsson’), chs. 4–10

Hrómundr is trying to get the sword Mistilteinn ‘Mistletoe’ from the funeral mound of the berserk Práinn (‘Obstinate’). When he wrestles with the draugr, Práinn comments on his strength: ‘You must have been born of Gunnlöð — there are few like you’. Hrómundr’s brothers are killed in battle through the treachery of an enchantress (chs. 6–7), and Hrómundr is severely wounded. He is healed by an old woman, the wife of a man called Hagall (‘Hail’) (ch. 8), who also hides him from his enemies, first by concealing him at the bottom of her cauldron,13 then by dressing him as a maid and making him grind corn. The enemy who searches for him is called Blindr ‘Blind’. Blindr has a series of foreboding dreams, and Hrómundr finally takes vengeance for his brothers (ch. 10).

Illuga saga Gríðarfóstra (‘The Saga of Illugi, Foster-son of Gríðr’), chs. 4–6

Illugi, a peasant’s son, has accompanied Sigurðr, son of a Danish king, on a viking expedition to Scotland; with them is Björn, a wicked counsellor. While sailing home they are driven north to Gandvik by a storm. Illugi goes to seek fire; in a cave he meets Gríðr, a troll-woman. She refuses to give him fire until he tells her three truths and sleeps with her daughter Hildr; if he will not do this, she does not care if Björn freezes to death.

Illugi says that he has never seen a larger or stronger house than Gríðr’s cave, that he has never seen anyone more hideous than Gríðr, and that there is a huge difference between her ugliness and her daughter’s beauty. These

12 FSN II, 276–86. This saga survives in relatively few manuscripts, all from the seventeenth century or later; cf. Hálfs saga ok Hálsrekka above.
13 Cf. Hymiskviða 12.
14 FSN III, 355–60. The earliest of many manuscripts of this saga dates from c. 1600.
remarks are accepted as the three truths, and Gríðr invites Illugi to sleep with Hildr, but then drags him out of bed and threatens to kill him. He shows no fear, and is allowed to return to Hildr's bed. This happens three times, after which Gríðr becomes his patroness and gives him Hildr, first to sleep with and then as his wife. Illugi's fearlessness has freed them both from a spell cast by Gríðr's stepmother. Illugi helps Gríðr to kill seven hags (probably her half-sisters). She then regains her original form and name, as Signý, daughter of the king and queen of Álfheimar. Bjǫrn is hanged by Gríðr from the ship's yard-arm for calling Hildr a troll-woman; Illugi marries Hildr and Sigurðr marries Signý/Gríðr.

*Ketils saga hœngs* (*The Saga of Ketill “Salmon”*), chs. 3–4

Defying his father's prohibition, Ketill goes north to Finnmark on a fishing expedition and spends the winter with Brúni ('Brown, Swarthy'), brother of the Lappish king Gusi. Brúni offers to betroth him to his daughter Hrafnhildr, and he sleeps with her. When he leaves, Brúni gives Ketill a magic arrow, which he uses to kill Gusi in a duel; Brúni becomes king of the Lapps, and Ketill returns home.

Three years later Hrafnhildr visits Ketill, bringing their son Grímr (later the protagonist of *Gríms saga loðinkinna*; see above), whom she leaves with him. Ketill's father is hostile to Hrafnhildr, calls her a troll-woman, and arranges a marriage between Ketill and Sigríðr, the daughter of a local farmer. After a further three years, Hrafnhildr comes back, but refuses Ketill's offer of hospitality, reproaches him for his inconstancy, and sadly returns home to Finnmark. One summer Ketill and Grímr set out to visit Brúni and Hrafnhildr again, but they fail to find them.

*Liber Exemplorum ad usum Praedicantium* (*A Book of Moral Stories for the Use of Preachers*, c. 1260)

Adhuc autem de ludis inordinatis hoc pretereundum non puto quod frater Petrus, quondam socius Concedi (sic) visitatoris, qui et eidem mortuo successit in officio, michi et quibusdam fratribus aliis Dublini narravit. Dixit itaque quod in patria sua, videlicet in Dacia, consuetudo est, quod quando mulieres jacent in puerperio, solent venire mulieres vicine et eis assistere et facere

16 FSNL, 251–7.
17 Ed. 110–11, in a section headed ‘De Ludis Inordinatis’ ‘On Unlawful Amusements’. The manuscript dates from the mid-fourteenth century, but the author, an English Franciscan working in Ireland, was writing about 1275; he heard this story in the friary in Dublin c. 1256–64 (ed., Intro., v–ix). See also Stumpfl 179 and Little's note, ed. 152–4. Nothing more is known about Brother Peter, and this is his only contribution to the collection.

'But further on the subject of unlawful amusements, I think it should not be omitted what Brother Peter, who was at one time the companion of the (official?) Visitor and succeeded him in the same office after his death, told me and some other brothers in Dublin. He said that in his country, that is to say in Denmark, it is the custom when women are lying in childbirth that neighbouring women come and help them, and perform their ritual dances with unlawful magic songs. It happened on one occasion, when women had gathered for someone’s childbirth and wanted to perform their follies according to the bad custom of the country, that they collected a bundle of straw, shaped it into the form of a man with straw arms, attached a hood and a belt to it, and called it Bovi. Then, performing their ring-dance, two women led it between them as they danced and chanted, and as the custom was, while they chanted they turned towards it with lascivious gestures, saying; “Chant, Bovi, chant, Bovi, what will it (the child) do?” Well, the devil, since he had power over those wretched women, replied to them, saying in a terrible voice: “I will chant”, and at once cried out, certainly not as a bundle of straw, but as the devil residing in it, and sent forth a sound so horrible that some of the women fell dead. Others were struck by such fear and horror that they barely escaped with their lives after lying sick for a long time.'

Am Prionh Sgeul ('The Chief's Story')18

A king’s son in Greece is transformed into a wolf by his stepmother, but is taken in by his uncle, who rules another kingdom. There the queen bears a child, who is snatched away by a great claw-like hand that comes through the roof. The same thing happens a second time, and the wolf is falsely blamed on both occasions. On the third occasion, the wolf bites the claw off at the shoulder, but its owner, the Great Tuairisgeal (cave-dwelling troll), snatches the child away with his other hand.

18 From McKay; for a longer summary and further references, see Puhvel.
The next day the king sets out for a castle on an island and finds his children there, and the Great Tuairisgeal asleep. Seeing a ‘sword of light’, he uses it to cut off the giant’s head. He goes home with his children, taking the sword and a magic wand with which he restores his nephew to human form.

This whole story is told by an old man to a king in Erin; the king must tell the Young Tuairisgeal what happened to his father, and bring him the ‘sword of light’. The old man gives the king the sword and the old giant’s head. Meanwhile the Young Tuairisgeal has been waiting so long that he has turned into a heap of bones on a hillock, but he returns to life when the king shouts three times that he has come. The Young Tuairisgeal demands the ‘sword of light’, and the king cuts his head off with it.

**Riddarin Klæmint (‘Sir Clement’)***

An unborn child threatens to tear her mother apart if she does not give birth quickly (1), then asks what will happen to her in the world (2). Her mother says she will have many enemies (3) and three afflictions: her mother will die when she is born (4), she will have her mother’s name, Frú Medallín (5), and she will become the mistress of a man who has been dead for fifteen years (6–7). She must go to church, call on Mary for help, and fall at her enemies’ feet (8–9). This all happens, and she obeys her mother’s instructions (10–14). She has many enemies on high horses (15–16), but the grave opens (17) and ‘he’ takes her down into it (18), far into another world, and begets a son on her (19). He places her back outside the grave, and the grave closes (20). The king comes in the morning and sees her standing by the church (21). He asks which of his men has slept with his only daughter (22); they reply that none of them has — she was outside for a winter’s night, and slept with a man who has been dead for fifteen years (23–4). In that case, the king says, they must burn her (25). They are about to throw her on the pyre, but the earth holds her fast (26). God tells St Michael to take his coat of feathers and fly to the churchyard where Klæmint lies, and Michael does so (27–8): ‘Stand up, Sir Klæmint, God sent me here. Medallín lies on the pyre — I expect she is burned’ (29). Sir Klæmint gets up and rides to the wood (30–1). ‘Stand up, Frú Medallín’ (her clothes were bloody) ‘go home to your hall and pray for us both (32). I shall go down into my grave, far into another world; you will go home and bear a son’ (33). These things then happen (34).

---

19 *Føroya kvædi* no. 145 (X, 135–6); collected 1848 or earlier by V. U. Hammershaimb from Anna Sofía Joensdatter of Vágar. In a protestant society, the prominence given here to the Virgin and St Michael suggests pre-Reformation origin.
Samsons saga fagra (‘The Saga of Samson the Fair’), chs. 7–8, 12, 15

(Samson is the son of King Artus of England. His fiancée Valentína has been abducted by Kvintelín kvennuhjófr ‘woman-thief’, the son of Galinn the miller and the ogress who lives under the waterfall by the mill. Samson goes in search of Valentína.)

Samson meets Galinn beside the river and asks for his help, offering gold, silver and his friendship in return (ch. 7). When they have pledged friendship, Samson’s legs are seized and he is thrown into the waterfall; the ogress drags him to the bottom and tries to tie him up. He gets an arm free and stabshér with a knife that Valentína gave him; her guts fall out, and the river is full of blood. He swims under the waterfall into a cave, where he finds treasure and some of Valentína’s clothes; he takes these and some of the treasure, and escapes through the upper end of the cave (ch. 8).

Galinn tells Samson that the dwarf Grelent intends to imprison Valentína inside the rock in which he lives, and volunteers to kill the dwarf if Samson will lend him his sword; Samson agrees. Galinn and Kvintelín return to attack the unarmed Samson. Samson grabs Galinn, and Kvintelín’s sword kills him instead of Samson. Samson regains his sword and fights Kvintelín, cutting off two of his toes (ch. 12). With the help of his foster-mother Olimpia(t), Samson rescues Valentína (ch. 13).

Samson chases Kvintelín to the cave under the waterfall, captures him, and takes all the treasure from the cave (ch. 15).

Sörla saga sterka (‘The Saga of Sörli the Strong’), chs. 2–4

Sörli, the son of King Erlingr of Upplönd in Norway, is returning from a viking expedition. His ships go astray in fog and land in the east in Bláland (‘Blue/black land’). Sörli goes ashore with eleven men; they are attacked by twelve blámenn, who resemble trolls. Sörli’s men are killed, but he kills all the blámen (ch. 2).

Hearing a loud noise, he traces it to a cave, through whose window he sees a giant (Skrímnir) lying in bed while a giantess (Mána ‘Moon’) chops up the flesh of horses and human beings. Mána tells Skrímnir that they have run out of meat; he replies that he has magically caused the fog and lured the ships ashore, and will kill their crews before nightfall. Sörli enters, runs the giant through with his spear and props his jaws open with his sword; the bed breaks

20 Ed. 12–16, 23–5, 28–30; for parts of chs. 7–8 see Beowulf and Its Analogues 322–4. This saga is of uncertain date; its two earliest manuscripts date from the fifteenth century.
21 FSN III, 194–200. This is clearly a very late saga; its two earliest manuscripts date from the late seventeenth century, and it has probably been influenced by Hálfdanar saga Brónuföstra (see above).
22 With Skrímnir (or Skrimnir, AEW 503), cf. Modern Icelandic, Faroese skrímsl, Nynorsk skrimsle, Swedish dialect skrymsle, all meaning ‘monster’, ‘ghost’; see also the Shetland noun skrim ‘shimmer’.
and the giant falls noisily to the floor. Mána attacks Söðri with a short sword (skálm), forcing him to retreat towards a chasm in the cave floor. He throws away his sword and they wrestle; her nails penetrate his flesh to the bone. They both fall into the chasm and land on a ledge, with Söðri on top; he has both hands on her neck and his knee in her stomach. He agrees to spare her life provided that she gives him an impenetrable corselet and a sword that will cut steel and stone. She gives him generous hospitality (ch. 3) and various treasures (ch. 4).

(In chs. 5–6 Söðri, with another eleven men, finds Mána fighting another hag-woman; in helping her, his men are killed, but Söðri runs the hag through with his sword; Mána rewards him with more treasures and the promised corselet and sword.)

**Völsa þáttr** (‘The Tale of Völsi’)\(^{23}\)

Saint Óláfr and two companions visit a remote farm in northern Norway; all three adopt the alias Grímr ‘Mask’. Each evening the housewife leads the company in worshipping the preserved phallus of a horse, which is called Völsi. It is passed round, from the housewife to her husband, their son and daughter, their thrall and servant girl, and finally the guests; each person must recite a verse and pass Völsi to the next. Each verse ends:

> ’may Mórnir accept this sacrifice,  
>   but you, x, y Völsi.’

(\(x\) is the next person to receive Völsi; \(y\) alliterates with \(x\), and is a synonym for ‘receive’; some of the verses are obscene.) Finally, Völsi reaches the king himself, who also recites a verse, but then throws the phallus to the dog. The king casts off his disguise and converts the household to Christianity.

**Porsteins saga Vikingssonar** (‘The Saga of Porsteinn Vikingsson’), ch. 19\(^{24}\)

Porsteinn is shipwrecked in a storm raised by his enemy Ógautan. He has almost drowned when a giantess offers to save him in return for one (unnamed) wish; he agrees. She is clad in a leather coat, long in front and short at the back, and is called Skellinefja (probably ‘Laughable Nose’). She carries him ashore, and they wrestle until he has warmed up.

Later Porsteinn and his brother Þórir are attacked by another enemy, Jökull (‘Glacier’), who has thirty men. Þórir is killed and Porsteinn, badly wounded,

---

\(^{23}\) Flateyjarbók: Óláfs saga helga chs. 265–6 (ed. II, 441–6); the manuscript was copied between 1387 and 1394.

\(^{24}\) FSN II, 226–30; this saga was evidently very popular, but may not be much older than its four fifteenth-century manuscripts.
is pushed over a cliff. He falls onto a ledge, and his sword falls into the river below; he expects to die. Skellinefja appears and offers to save his life if he will keep his promise; her wish is that he shall marry her. He reluctantly agrees. She rescues him, heals his wounds and brings back his sword, adding that she has hanged Ógautan from the yard-arm of his own ship. She reveals that she is Ingibjorg, daughter of the king of Sogn (western Norway). If he becomes the foster-brother of her brother Beli and asks for her hand in marriage: ‘It may be that I shall look different then than I do now.’
This bibliography is not intended to be exhaustive, but only to direct the reader to
works cited in this book; for further bibliography see Clover, KLNM, Simek, The
International Medieval Bibliography (University of Leeds, 1967–) and the online
Bibliography of Old Norse-Icelandic Studies (http://embla.bib.sdu.dk/bonis/). Where
more than one edition or translation of a source is included, the one normally cited
is asterisked. Prefixes to surnames are ignored (for example, de Vries, la Farge
appear under V and F respectively). Old Norse and Icelandic authors are listed
under first names, and the bibliography follows the alphabetical order of the
relevant language (for example, Old English æ appears at ae, but Icelandic æ after þ;
for Icelandic alphabetical order, see the note at the beginning of the Index).

Adamus, Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum, ed. J. M. Lappenberg, Scrip-
tores Rerum Germanicarum, Hannover, 1876; tr. F. J. Tschan as Adam of
Bremen, History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen, New York: Columbia
UP, 1999.

Ælfric, De Falsis Diis, Saul and the Witch of Endor, ed. J. C. Pope in Homilies ofÆlfric,
786–98.

Ágrip, in Ágrip af Nörgskonunga sögum, Fagrskinna – Nöregs konunga tal, ed. *Bjarni

Alvíssmál, in Neckel and Kuhn 124–9.

Andersson, Theodore M., The Legend of Brynhild, Islandica 43, Ithaca: Cornell UP,
1980.


Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: see Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel.

The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records, ed. George P. Krapp and Elliott van K. Dobbie, 6

Aquinas, Thomas, Divi Thomae Aquinatis Summa Theologica, 6 vols., Romae: Ex
Typographia Senator, 1886–7.


Ármann Jakobsson, ‘History of the Trolls? Börðar saga as an Historical Narrative’,

Arngrím Brandsson, Guðmundar saga Arasonar, ed. in Búskupa sögur III, 155–506
(and verses in Kock II, 200–11).

Asser, Life of King Alfred, ed. W. H. Stevenson, rev. D. Whitelock, Oxford:


Axboe, Morten, ‘Brisingamen — også et arkeologisk problem’, Danske Studier 81
(1986), 16–21.


Balds draumar, in Neckel and Kuhn 277–9.
Bibliography

Best, R. I., ed. and tr., ‘The Adventures of Art, and the Courtship of Delbchaem’, *Eriu* 3 (1907), 149–73.


Butler, Peter, Ancient Ballads and Songs of the North of Scotland, 2 vols., Edinburgh: Laing and Stevenson, 1828.


Butler, Judith, ‘Desire’, in Lentricchia and McLaughlin, Chaudwick, Norah K., ‘Norse Ghosts (a Study in the


Chadwick, Norah K., ‘Norse Ghosts (a Study in the Draugar and the Haugbúi)’, Folklore 57 (1946), 50–65, 106–27.

— ‘Pørgerð Hólgabríðr and the trolla þing: A Note on Sources’, in The Early


Cædmon’s Hymn, in ASPRV I, 106.

Campbell, Alastair, Byskupa Butler, Judith, ‘Desire’, in Lentricchia and McLaughlin —


Chadwick, Norah K., ‘Norse Ghosts (a Study in the Draugar and the Haugbúi)’, Folklore 57 (1946), 50–65, 106–27.

— ‘Pørgerð Hólgabríðr and the trolla þing: A Note on Sources’, in The Early


BIBLIOGRAPHY


Cort Mantel: see Mottuð saga.


Danmarks Rúneidskrifter, ed. Lis Jacobsen and Erik Moltke, 3 vols., København: Einar Munksgaard, 1941–2.


Derolez, René, Runica Manuscripta, the English Tradition, Rijksuniversiteit te Gent, Werken Uitgegeven door de Faculteit van de Wijsbegeerte en Letteren 118, Bruges: De Tempel, 1954.


A Dictionary of Old Norse Prose. Ordbog over det norrøne proasprog, Copenhagen: Arnamagnæan Commission, 1989–.


Düwel, Klaus, Das Opferfest von Lade und die Geschichte vom Volsi, Habilitationschrift, University of Göttingen, 1972.

Ectors saga, ed. Agnete Loth in Late Medieval Icelandic Romances I, Editiones Arnamagnaeanae B 20, Copenhagen, 1962, 79–186.


Egils saga ok Ásmundar, in FSN III, 153–89; tr. in Hermann Pálsson and P. Edwards (1968), 89–120.

—*‘Kormákr the Poet and His Verses’, Saga-Book 17:1 (1966), 18–60.


—*Óxarflokkr*, in Kock I, 221–2.


Eyvindr skáldaspillir, Hálegjatal, in Skj B, 60–2.

Fáfnsnál, in Neckel and Kuhn 180–8.


Falk, Hjalmar, *‘Om Seiplagsmál’*, ANF 9 (1892–3), 311–62.


BIBLIOGRAPHY


Hallvarðr háreksblesi,
Grímnismál
Gríms
—
Óláfsdrápa
—
Óláfs
Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld,
Grønvik, Ottar,
: see
Svipdagsmál.
Guðrúnarkviða
Halldór Halldórsson,
Hallfreðar
Hallberg, Peter, 'Om
Hamðismál, in Neckel and Kuhn
—
Hákonardrápa
Skj
Guthormr sindri,
—
Grettis
Grimm, Jac
and tr. in Chambers and Wrenn
Pálsson, Toronto UP,
and in Snorri Sturluson,
herðibreiðs
—
Gods, Skalds and Magic', Saga-Book
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Hafardssjóð, in Neckel and Kuhn, 78–87.

Harðar saga, ed. Pórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmssson, ÍF 13, 1991, 1–97;


Harris, Joseph, ‘Cursing with the Thistle: Skírnismål 31,6–8 and OE Metrical Charm 9,16–17’, Neuphilologische Mitteilungen 76 (1975), 26–33.

Hättatal: see Snorri Sturluson.


Haukur Valdisarson, Íslandsgláðraþáttr, in Kock I, 261–5.


Helgakviða Hjörvarðsson, in Neckel and Kuhn, 585–7.

Helgakviða Hundingsbana I, in Neckel and Kuhn 130–9.


Helreð Brynhildar, in Neckel and Kuhn 219–22.


Hjálmar saga ok Ólivs, in FSN III, 229–82.


Holman, Katherine, Scandinavian Runic Inscriptions in the British Isles: Their Historical Context, Trondheim: Tapir, 1996.


Hró mundur saga Grippssonar, in *FSN II*, 271–86.


Hymiskvöðla, in *Neckel and Kuhn 88–95*; ed. with tr. into Italian in del Zotto.

Hynddiljóð, in Neckel and Kuhn, 288–96.


Illuga saga Gríparforsta, in *FSN III*, 349–60.


Íslendingabók see Ari Porgilsson.


BIBLIOGRAPHY

Karg-Gasterstädt, Elisabeth, Theodor Frings and Rudolf Grosse, Althochdeutsches Wörterbuch, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1952–.
Ketils saga hœngs, in FSN I, 243–66.
MEETING THE OTHER IN NORSE MYTH AND LEGEND


Lexicon Poeticum: see Sveinbjörn Egilsson.

Liber Exemplorum ad Usum Prædicantium, ed. A. G. Little, British Society of Franciscan Studies 1, Aberdeen UP, 1908.


Ljósvetninga saga, ed. Björn Sigfússon, ÍF 10, 1940.


Markús Skoggiason, Kristdrápa, i Kock I, 208.


BIBLIOGRAPHY


MEETING THE OTHER IN NORDIC MYTH AND LEGEND

Müller, F. Max, Contributions to the Science of Mythology, 2 vols., London: Longmans, Green, 1897.
Njáls saga; see Bremnu-Njáls saga.
Ólafs saga helga: see Snorri Sturluson, Heimskringla II.
Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar: see Snorri Sturluson, Heimskringla I, 225–372.
Samsons saga fagra, ed. J. Wilson, Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur 65, Copenhagen, 1953.
—, ‘Svipdagsmál’, Germanische-Romanische Monatschrift, n.s. 16 (1966), 133–19.
—, ‘Disticha Catonis und Hávamál’, Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Sprache und Literatur (Tübingen) 94 (1972b), 1–18.
—, *Common Sense und Hávamál*, Skandinavistik 17 (1987), 135–47.
*Sigurðarkeðla in skamma*, in Neckel and Kuhn 207–18.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Skáldskaparmál: see Snorri Sturluson.


Skúli Porsteinsson, poem on the Battle of Svold, in Kock I, 1:45.


Storr, Gustav, *Vom Thorgerd Hjølgebrud*, ANF 2 (1885), 124–35.


MEETING THE OTHER IN NORSE MYTH AND LEGEND


Swipdagssmál, in *Sjimons and Gering I*, 194–213.


Sóðr saga stæra, in *FSN III*, 191–228.


Unge Sweidal, in *Danmarks gamle folkeviser II*, 238–54.


Valdimars saga, ed. Agnete Loth with summary tr. in *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances I*, Editiones Arnamagnæanae B20, Copenhagen, 1962, 51–78.


Vestfirdinga sögur, ed. Björn K. Þorlófsson and Guðni Jónsson, ÍF 6, 1943.

Vímunard saga vóðtan, ed. Agnete Loth, with summary tr., *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances IV*, Editiones Arnamagnæanae B23, Copenhagen, 1964, 137–201.


Vries, Jan de, ‘*Om Eddaens Visdomsdigtning’*, *ANF 50* (1934), 1–59.


Västergöltalands Runinskrifter, ed. Hugo Jungner and Elisabeth Svärdström, Stockholm: Kungliga Vitterhets Historia och Antikkvitets Akademien, 1940–70.
Völuspá in skammar: see Hjánlutfjöd.
Ynglinga saga, in Snorri Sturluson, Heimskringla, I, 9–83; tr. Samuel Laing, rev. Peter
Zachrisson, Torun, ‘Den hängde med halsringen. Om en figurin från järnåldern
Zotto, Carla del, La Hymskvida e la pesca di bôrr nella tradizione nordica, Roma:
þátrr Helga þórrissonar, in Flateyjarbók, ed., I, 398–402; tr. in Hermann Pålsson and P.
þórrs saga af Ber, ed. H. Bertelsen, Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk
litteratur 34. 2 vols., Copenhagen, 1905–11; tr. E. R. Haymes as The Saga of
Þjóðólfur Hvini, Haustlýping in Skj I B, 14–18.
— Ynglingatal, in Skj I B, 7–14; *with commentary in Ynglinga saga, 26–83.
bóðar saga hreðu, in Kjalnesinga saga, 161–247; tr. Katrina C. Attwood, ČS III, 361–
96.
borgils saga ok Hafliðu, in Sturlunga saga, I, 12–50; tr. II, 25–70.
borgils saga skarða: see Sturla bóðvarson.

265

BIBLIOGRAPHY
Þorkell Gíslason, Búadrápa, in Kock I, 260–1.


Þorskifringa saga: see Gull-Bóris saga.


Brýmskviða, in Neckel and Kuhn 111–15.


Ævidrápa Orvar-Odds, in FSN I, 391–8; *Kock II, 173–82.


The order of entries in this index generally follows the sequence of the Old Icelandic alphabet, whereby ð follows d and the end of the alphabet runs: y, z, h, a, o, æ. In Danish and State Norwegian the end of the alphabet runs: z, æ, ø, å; these symbols are fitted into the Icelandic order at the relevant points. In Swedish it is z, å, ä, ö; here, ö and å are conflated with the corresponding signs in the other Scandinavian languages, while ä is added after å. In Old English entries, æ is treated as equivalent to ae, and both þ and ð as equivalent to th. Old Norse and Icelandic individuals are listed under their first names. Entries in square brackets are doubtful members of the categories in which they are listed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Absolon, Archbishop of Lund</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam of Bremen, historian</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aðils, legendary king of the Swedes</td>
<td>74, 75, 200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ádra: see Hádra</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ælfric of Eynsham, Old English homilist: De Falsis Diis</td>
<td>13, 19, 44, 47, 137; The Witch of Endor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Æschere, counsellor of Hröðgar</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aestii, Baltic tribe</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Africa',</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agði jarl, giant</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agni, legendary king of the Swedes</td>
<td>70–2, 75, 80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ágrip, synoptic history</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Áki, a treacherous steward</td>
<td>185, 239–40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alba, giantess</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcuin, Northumbrian scholar; as letter-writer</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aldafðr (= Óðinn)</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ale of memory</td>
<td>88–9; see also cup.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Álfheimar 'Elf worlds', an imaginary country</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Álfr, son of Hrōðmarr</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Álfr the Old, legendary jarl of Hrōðaland</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Álfrún, mother of Gríðr</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Álfr (= Óðinn)</td>
<td>31, 103, 147–8, 152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Áli Friðleiðsson</td>
<td>153; see also Olavus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Álmaria, [giantess]</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alrekr, legendary king of the Swedes</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Álsól, sister of King Hrīngr of Arabia</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Álvida, wife of Froðbo III</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Álvida, wife of Skyldus</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alvismál, eddic poem</td>
<td>4, 38, 156, 203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Am Priorn Sgeul, Gaelic folktale</td>
<td>132, 135–6, 142, 143, 190, 243–4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angerðr, giantess</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amr, giant or demon</td>
<td>160–1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Án, dwarf</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anarr, father of Jóðr</td>
<td>153, 155, 156; as dwarf-name, 156; see also Ónarr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andvari, dwarf</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angantýr, berserk, father of Hervör</td>
<td>104, 201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angantýr, rival of Óttarr the Foolish</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Angel of Death’,</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglíi, 50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglo-Saxon Chronicle</td>
<td>53, 149, 156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angra Mainyu, evil spirit (Iranian)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angrboða, giantess</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angry Young Man story-pattern</td>
<td>50, 100, 104–6, 108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Áni, supporter of Fridlevus, husband of Iuritha</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anima/Animus</td>
<td>29, 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>animism</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annarr: see Anarr</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Auðhumla, mythical cow,
Aþi inn auðgi, Winter King,
Atli, emissary of King Hjõrvarðr,
228,
Atlamál
Atlakviða
Athena, Greek goddess,
Ásmundr, legendary hero,
240
Árni Jónsson, skaldic poet:
Arngrimus, champion of King Frotho
Ármann Jakobsson,
Arkistratus, giant,
Arinnefja, giantess,
Ásmundar saga kappabana
Askr, the
Árni Magnússon, manuscript collector,
Árni Magnússon, personal name on rune-stone,
Ármann Jakobsson,
Arkistratus, giant,
Arinnefja, giantess,
Ásmundar saga kappabana
Askr, the
Árni Magnússon, manuscript collector,
Árni Magnússon, personal name on rune-stone,
Ármann Jakobsson,
Arkistratus, giant,
Arinnefja, giantess,
Ásmundar saga kappabana
Askr, the
Árni Magnússon, manuscript collector,
Árni Magnússon, personal name on rune-stone,
Ármann Jakobsson,
Arkistratus, giant,
Arinnefja, giantess,
Ásmundar saga kappabana
Askr, the
Árni Magnússon, manuscript collector,
Árni Magnússon, personal name on rune-stone,
Ármann Jakobsson,
Arkistratus, giant,
Arinnefja, giantess,
Ásmundar saga kappabana
Askr, the
Árni Magnússon, manuscript collector,
Árni Magnússon, personal name on rune-stone,
Ármann Jakobsson,
Arkistratus, giant,
Arinnefja, giantess,
Ásmundar saga kappabana
Askr, the
Árni Magnússon, manuscript collector,
Árni Magnússon, personal name on rune-stone,
Ármann Jakobsson,
Arkistratus, giant,
Arinnefja, giantess,
Ásmundar saga kappabana
Askr, the
Árni Magnússon, manuscript collector,
Árni Magnússon, personal name on rune-stone,
Ármann Jakobsson,
Arkistratus, giant,
Arinnefja, giantess,
Ásmundar saga kappabana
Askr, the
Árni Magnússon, manuscript collector,
Árni Magnússon, personal name on rune-stone,
Ármann Jakobsson,
Arkistratus, giant,
Arinnefja, giantess,
Ásmundar saga kappabana
Askr, the
Árni Magnússon, manuscript collector,
Árni Magnússon, personal name on rune-stone,
Ármann Jakobsson,
Arkistratus, giant,
Arinnefja, giantess,
Ásmundar saga kappabana
Askr, the
Árni Magnússon, manuscript collector,
Árni Magnússon, personal name on rune-stone,
Ármann Jakobsson,
Arkistratus, giant,
Arinnefja, giantess,
Ásmundar saga kappabana
Askr, the
Árni Magnússon, manuscript collector,
Árni Magnússon, personal name on rune-stone,
Ármann Jakobsson,
Arkistratus, giant,
Arinnefja, giantess,
Ásmundar saga kappabana
Askr, the
Árni Magnússon, manuscript collector,
Árni Magnússon, personal name on rune-stone,
Ármann Jakobsson,
Arkistratus, giant,
Arinnefja, giantess,
Ásmundar saga kappabana
Askr, the
Árni Magnússon, manuscript collector,
Árni Magnússon, personal name on rune-stone,
Ármann Jakobsson,
Arkistratus, giant,
Arinnefja, giantess,
Ásmundar saga kappabana
Askr, the
Árni Magnússon, manuscript collector,
Árni Magnússon, personal name on rune-stone,
Ármann Jakobsson,
Arkistratus, giant,
Arinnefja, giantess,
Ásmundar saga kappabana
Askr, the
Árni Magnússon, manuscript collector,
Árni Magnússon, personal name on rune-stone,
Ármann Jakobsson,
Arkistratus, giant,
Arinnefja, giantess,
Ásmundar saga kappabana
Askr, the
Árni Magnússon, manuscript collector,
Árni Magnússon, personal name on rune-stone,
Ármann Jakobsson,
Arkistratus, giant,
Arinnefja, giantess,
Ásmundar saga kappabana
Askr, the
Árni Magnússon, manuscript collector,
Árni Magnússon, personal name on rune-stone,
Ármann Jakobsson,
Arkistratus, giant,
Arinnefja, giantess,
Ásmundar saga kappabana
Askr, the
Árni Magnússon, manuscript collector,
Árni Magnússon, personal name on rune-stone,
Ármann Jakobsson,
Arkistratus, giant,
Arinnefja, giantess,
Ásmundar saga kappabana
Askr, the
Árni Magnússon, manuscript collector,
Árni Magnússon, personal name on rune-stone,
Ármann Jakobsson,
Arkistratus, giant,
Arinnefja, giantess,
Ásmundar saga kappabana
Askr, the
Árni Magnússon, manuscript collector,
Árni Magnússon, personal name on rune-stone,
Ármann Jakobsson,
Arkistratus, giant,
Arinnefja, giantess,
Ásmundar saga kappabana
Askr, the
Árni Magnússon, manuscript collector,
Árni Magnússon, personal name on rune-stone,
Ármann Jakobsson,
Arkistratus, giant,
Arinnefja, giantess,
Ásmundar saga kappabana
Askr, the
Árni Magnússon, manuscript collector,
Árni Magnússon, personal name on rune-stone,
Ármann Jakobsson,
Arkistratus, giant,
Arinnefja, giantess,
Ásmundar saga kappabana
Askr, the
Árni Magnússon, manuscript collector,
Árni Magnússon, personal name on rune-stone,
Ármann Jakobsson,
Arkistratus, giant,
Arinnefja, giantess,
Ásmundar saga kappabana
Askr, the
Árni Magnússon, manuscript collector,
Árni Magnússon, personal name on rune-stone,
Ármann Jakobsson,
Arkistratus, giant,
Arinnefja, giantess,
Ásmundar saga kappabana
Askr, the
Árni Magnússon, manuscript collector,
Árni Magnússon, personal name on rune-stone,
Ármann Jakobsson,
Arkistratus, giant,
Arinnefja, giantess,
Ásmundar saga kappabana
Askr, the
Árni Magnússon, manuscript collector,
Árni Magnússon, personal name on rune-stone,
Ármann Jakobsson,
Arkistratus, giant,
Arinnefja, giantess,
INDEX

Beowulf, Old English poem, 41, 46, 53, 74, 120, 127, 131–6, 138, 140, 142, 143–4, 149, 189.
Bera, mother of Þóðvarr bjarki, 75, 131.
Bergen runic charm, 65, 159, 211, 212, 213.
Berghóra, wife of Njáll, 229.
Bernicia, province of Northumbria, 53.
Bessus, retainer of Gram, 203.
Bestla, giantess, Óðinn’s mother, 207–9, 214.
Bjâro (= Þóðvarr bjarki), 131.
Bibire, Paul, 65.
Bírðrost, the rainbow bridge, 220, 226.
Billingr, giant or dwarf, 164, 167–8.
Birka ship burial, 116.
bishops’ sagas, 98; see also Gudmundar saga Arasonar, Hungvaka, jöns saga helga.
bitch, 87, 168–9.
bjârngóruar, childbirth runes, 212, 217.
Bjarkamâl, eddic poem (mostly lost), 43, 130, 131–6, 138, 140, 153.
Bjarkarinur, 131, 132, 133, 135, 143.
Bjarnar saga Hitdalakappa, family saga, 157.
Bjarni Hallbjarnarson, skaldic poet, 163.
Bjarni Kolbeinsson, bishop and skaldic poet: Jömsveingadrâpa, 83.
Bjárby stone, 117.
Bjorn Hitdalakappi, saga hero, 157.
Bjorn Hringsson, father of Þóðvarr bjarki, 75, 102, 131.
Bláland ‘Blue/black land’, an imaginary country inhabited by giants, 139, 245.
Blond covers dead lover when heroine weeps, 224, 237.
boar, as emblem of Freyr, 20, 56, 57, 60, 85, 87, 148.
Boðn, container for the mead of poetry, 165–6.
Boethius, philosopher: De Consolatione Philosophiae, 190.
Bófi (also Boui, Bous, Bove, Bovi) (probably = Váli), 159–62; as demon, 8, 27, 137, 180, 243.
Book of Fernow, 203.
Borr, Óðinn’s father, 207.
Boui, Bous, Bove, Bovi: see Bófi.
Bourdieu, Pierre, 25.
Bósa saga ok Herrauðs, legendary saga, 41, 96, 97, 101–4, 128, 136, 137–8, 142, 143.
Bragi Boddason, skaldic poet: Ragnarsdriða, 40, 63, 114, 150.
Brana, giantess, 139, 191, 192, 193, 194, 239–40.
Breton lat, 41, 44, 140, 177.
bridal quest romance, 186.
‘brides of berserks’ (= giantesses or waves), 110.
brînriðar, seafaring runes, 212, 216.
Broddenbjerg idol, 55.
Broderus, associate of Thorkillus, 121.
Brot of Sigurðarheviðu, fragmentary eddic poem, 227.
Bruce, Lady Elisabeth, 69.
Bruce, Robert I, king of Scots, 69.
Brynblíðr, legendary heroine, 5, 104, 116, 229.
Buchi, associate of Thorkillus, 121, 123.
Búfi: see Bófi.
Bulghar, Norse-settled area in Russia, 116, 125.
bull, uniquely created (Zoroastrian), 12.
Busla, prophetess, 96, 101.
Búfi: see Bófi.
Búi Andriðsson, legendary hero, 172–6, 180, 191.
Búri, Óðinn’s paternal grandfather, 207.
Búseyra, giantess, 112, 118.
Byggvir, servant of Freyr, 54, 77.
Byleiptr (or Byleistr), brother of Loki, 89.
Bægisá, Icelandic farm, 236.
Bjâðvarr bjarki, legendary hero, 41, 75, 131, 133–4, 144.
Bjâðvarr þáttr, legendary short story, 75, 131; see also Hrifþs saga kraka.
Bjâlverkr (= Óðinn), 165.
Bjâlþorn (or Bjâlpórr), giant, 207–8.
Bösarp picture stone, 114.
Conn, legendary king of Ireland, 170.

Ceres, Roman goddess (= Demeter), 79.

d de Chanteloup, Walter, bishop, 69.

Chercheni Mogli bronze figure, 123.

Chretien de Troyes: Conte del Graal, 189.

Christophorus saga, saint’s life, 134.

Clerk Saunders, ballad, 222–7, 230–1.

Codex Regius, 37–9, 91, 156, 207–8, 210, 220.

Coinchend, Irish legendary queen and enchantress, 204.

collective unconscious: see unconscious.

Coon, legendary king of Ireland, 203.

contagion, myths of, 109, 119, 146, 195.

Conn, legendary king of Ireland, 203.

contagion, myths of, 109, 119, 146, 195.

contemporary sagas: see Sturlunga saga.

Copenhagen amber figure, 123.

Cort Martiel, French romance, 140.

Creide, Irish giantess, 203–4, 206.

cup, as symbol of wisdom or memory, 57, 60, 76, 88.

curse: by the heroine on her brother, 224, 228; on the bereaved son, 203, 214; on dead relatives, 201, 224; on the giantess figure, 190, 193; on Grettir, 133; on the Summer King, 71, 77, 88, 102; on woman who will not give her love, 65, 67, 179.

cyclops, 184.

Dagdr, legendary king of the Swedes, 70–2, 80, 94.

Dagdr, legendary king of the Danes, 163–4.

Danish ballads, 45–6, 222.

David, Saint, 79.

Dänn, dwarf, 87.

De Falsis Diis see Ælfric of Eynsham.

De Temporum Ratione, see Bede.


Debjerg waggons, 52.


Dellingr, [dwarf], 209.

Demeter, Greek goddess, 170.

Denmark, exploits of the Bear’s Son in, 130, 132, 135, 143.

Descripicio Insularum Aquilonis: see Adam of Bremen.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus, legendary historian, 16.

Dionysus, Greek god, 170–1.

Dioscuri, Greek mythic twins, 15.

disir, female ancestral spirits, 199–200, 213, 227.

Disticha Catonis, 213.

Dius Fidius, Roman god, 52.


Disticha Catonis, 213.

Dionysus, Greek god, 170–1.

Dioscuri, Greek mythic twins, 15.

disir, female ancestral spirits, 199–200, 213, 227.

Diu Fidius, Roman god, 52.


Dionysus, Greek god, 170–1.

Dioscuri, Greek mythic twins, 15.

disir, female ancestral spirits, 199–200, 213, 227.

Diu Fidius, Roman god, 52.

INDEX


Dyaus, Sanskrit god, 11, 12, 14, 170.

Dyggvi, legendary king of the Swedes, 70, 72, 77.

eagle, transformation into, 165, 170.

Earl Brand, ballad, 222.

Ectors saga, legendary/romance saga, 193.


Eddica Minora, 37–8.

Eddius Stephanus: Vita Wilfridi, 97.

Eggja runic inscription, 18, 120, 213.

Egil, giant, 184.

Egil, legendary hero, companion of Asmundr, 184–5.

egil, legendary hero, brother of Volundr, 212.

Egil Skallagrímasson, saga-hero and skaldic poet, 96, 151, 166, 213; Arinbjarnarkviða, 62; Hofudlausn, 119; Sonatorrek, 13, 233.

Egils saga ok Asmundar, legendary saga, 41, 177–9, 184–5, 192, 194, 233.

Egils saga Skallagrímassonar, family saga, 166, 212, 213.

Eiðr Skeggason, 173.

Ellífr Geðrunarson, skaldic poet, 165; bördrápa, 8, 9, 40, 119–23, 128, 151, 162, 163, 179, 181–2, 196, 208.

Einar Olafur Sveinsson, 203–6, 221.


Einar Skúlason, skaldic poet: Geisl, 28; Haraldsdrápa, 110; Sigurðardrápa, 120; Óxarflokkr, 62, 163, 168.

Einherrjá, Óðinn’s chosen warriors, 4.

Eiríkr, legendary king of Constantinople, 240.

Eiríkr, two legendary kings of the Swedes called, 70, 107.

Eiríks saga rauða, family saga, 95, 97, 98, 100, 104, 107, 138.

Eis, Gerhard, 198–9.

Ekketorp, guldgubbe site, 56.

Elg-Frøði, brother of Bððvarr bjarki, 133.

Elvágar, a river between worlds, 182.

Elli, giantess, 118.

Else-lille/Elselil, ballad heroine, 224, 230, 237.

Embla, the first woman, 4, 23.

Empedocles, Greek philosopher, scientist and poet, 15.

Enguz: see Ing.


Eostre, Old English goddess, 13.

Eré, mother of Earth, Old English goddess, 13.

Erga runic inscription, 212.

Ergi, perversion, 159, 178.

Ericus, legendary hero, 73–4.

Erlingr, legendary king of Upplönd, 245.

Erlingr, son of Hákon jarl, 83.

Erlingr Skjálfgsson, Norwegian nobleman, 148.

Eskilstuna, guldgubbe site, 56.

Eteocles, Greek legendary character, 24.

Europa, Greek legendary character, 24.

exploitation, myths of, 32, 109, 147.

Ejþólfur daðaskáld, skaldic poet: Bandadrápa, 155.

Ejþólfur Jónsson of Vellir, folktale informant, 235.
Eyjólf Valgerðarson, skaldic poet, 151.
Eyrarland bronze figure, 123.
Eyrtryggja saga, family saga, 137.
Eysteinn Ægirsson, skaldic poet: Lilja, 87.
Eyvindr skáldaspillir, skaldic poet, 13, 163; Hákonarmál, 151, 166; HÍleygjatal, 9, 40, 42, 62–4, 65, 169, 233.
Fáfnir, dragon, 104.
Fáfnismál, eddic poem, 104, 204.
Fagrskinna, 155.
failed weapon motif, 130, 133–5.
family sagas, 1, 41, 95–6, 127; see also [Bardar saga Snæfellssætt], Bjarnar saga Hítadælakappa, Egils saga Skallagrímssonar, Eiriks saga rauba, Eyrtryggja saga, Flóamanna saga, Fóstbrøðra saga, Gísla saga, Grettis saga, [Gull-bóris saga], Hardar saga, Hávarlar saga Ís-firðings, Hrafnskels saga, Kjalnesinga saga, Kormáks saga, Laxdæla saga, Njáls saga, [Orms þattir Stóröfssonar], Vatnsdæla saga, Víga-Glúms saga; léttr.
Faroe ballads, 46; see also Riddarinn Klamint.
Fate, 105, 180, 205, 216, 234.
 Faulkes, Anthony, 129, 155.
Faxi, horse, 236.
Féima, giant girl, 238.
Fenn, Finno-Ugric tribe, 47.
Fenrir, the monstrous wolf, 16, 49, 89.
Fergusson, Old High German place-name, 156.
fetishism: see shamanism.
Fidjestøl, Bjørne, 92, 221.
Finn, Irish hero, 171.
Finnmark, province of Norway, 70, 74, 75, 99, 179, 242.
Finnur Jónsson, 148, 149.
fire, death associated with, 71–2, 76–8, 102.
First Grammatical Treatise, 208.
First Merseburg Charm, 46, 199, 205, 206, 216.
Fjalarr, giant or dwarf, 166, 168.
Fjolknarf þr, supposed grandfather of Svipdagr, 206.
Fjólnir (= Óðinn), 175.
Fjólnir, legendary king of the Swedes, 68, 70, 71, 72.
Fjósliðr (= Óðinn), 203.
Fjósliðr, giant and/or dwarf, 203.
Fjósliðsnímð: see Svipdagsnl.
Fjorgyn (= Jóðr), 153, 156, 162, 182.
Flateyjarbók, 42, 68, 76, 79, 82–5, 92, 96, 100, 167, 177; Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in, 81, 95, 104–8; Óláfs saga helga in, 104–6, 148, 167, 246.
Flaumgerðr, half-giantess, 185.
Flores Historiarum, English propagandist history, 47, 69.
Flóamanna saga, family saga, 131.
Foerlev Nymølle idol, 55.
folktales, 41, 46; see also Am Priomh Sceul, Djákninn á Myrká, Gullbrá og Skegg, Gimhjárgar saga, Innfuk ur sagahætti af Asmundi flaðargæfu.
Foráð, giantess, 82, 118.
Fornaldarsögur: see legendary sagas.
Fornyrsðlag metre, prophetic verse in, 97, 103, 104–6, 122.
Fornþofu, poetic nicknames, 39, 40, 43.
Forseti, god, 16.
Fortune, wheel of, 164.
Fóstbrøðra saga, family saga, 96, 107–8, 151.
Franks Casket, 13.
Frau Holle, German folktales figure, 196.
Frazer, Sir James, 13.
Frey, Sigmund, 26–8, 32.
Freyja, goddess, 5, 15, 18, 22, 52, 55, 57, 62, 85–9, 90, 91, 92, 93, 110, 122, 169; see also Gullveig, Skjofl, Sýr, Þrõng.
Freyr, god, son of Njórr, 15, 52, 54–5, 57, 60, 62, 66, 69, 148; mythology of: Beli, kills with a stag’s antler, 65–6; Gerðr: gives away his sword to win, 8, 61–2, 77; lover of, 8, 57, 64–7; Gullinbursti, his boar, 87; lustfulness of, 76, 80; name of, 66, 232; Surtr, killed by at Ragnarök, 65, 78; Unjust Patriarch, patron of, 103; Ýnglingar, ancestor of, 42, 68; worship of: followers conceal his death for three years, 73; Hadingus institutes a sacrifice to him, 67; idol of, 54, 84; see also Inguna-Freyr, Lýttir, Yngvi, Prør.
INDEX

Fridlevus, legendary king of the Danes, 74, 100, 153.
Fríðr, giantess, 172–6, 180, 191.
von Friesen, Otto, 197.
Freg(e), Old English name of Frigg, 13, 18.
Frigg, goddess, wife of Óðinn, 13, 152, 157, 158, 162, 164, 178: magical ability of, 44; worshipped by all the Germanic peoples, 18, 46.
Frigga (= Frigg), wife of Othinus, 43.
Fria, Old High German name of Frigg, 13.
Frisia, 196.
Frisiavi, the Frisians, 198.
Frosti, giant, 110.
Frosti, Winter King, 70.
Frotho I, son of Hadingus, legendary king of Denmark, 67, 175.
Frotho III, legendary king of Denmark, 54, 72–4, 77, 80, 94, 102.
Fröða þáttr, 74, 101; see also Hröðs saga kraka.
Frúði, legendary king of the Danes, 68, 72, 74, 96, 98, 101; his peace, 42.
Frú Medallin, ballad heroine (and her mother), 224, 230, 244.
Freblot, sacrifice to Freyr, 67, 77.
Fulla, goddess, 13; see also Volla.
funar mound, 49.
Færeginga saga, 82.
Fastemanden i Greven, Danish ballad, 222, 224–7, 230–3, 237.
Gaea, Greek goddess, 14, 27.
Gallar, giant or dwarf, 166.
Galinn the Miller, 140, 245.
Gandvik, the White Sea, 128, 151, 238, 241.
Gátur Gestumblínda, eddic poem, 38.
Gautland, 130, 132, 135.
Gautr (= Óðinn), 148.
Gautr, giant, 185, 194.
Gautreks saga, legendary saga, 16, 48, 105, 203.
Gawain, Arthurian knight, 189.
Gayomartan, the first man (Iranian), 12.
Gefjon, goddess, 42.
Geirròr Gandvikjarekkja, hag/giantess, 238.
Geirvimul, mythical river, 120.
(G)esl, son of Winter Princess, 71.
Gerðr, giantess, daughter of Gymir and wife of Freyr, 3, 7, 8, 57, 60, 64–7, 77, 78, 82, 93, 168, 179, 203; Beli, sister of, 64; name, 65, 66; Skrymir, daughter of, 140; see also Grytha.
Geri, one of Óðinn’s wolves, 152.
Gering, Hugo, 86, 208.
Germania: see Tacitus.
Geruthus (= Geirreðr), 120–1, 124.
Gesta Danorum: see Saxo grammaticus.
Gestr, alias adopted by Barðr, 173.
Gestumblindi (= Óðinn), 173.
Geya, giantess, 7.
giantesses, 78, 94; represent danger, ugliness, humiliation, etc. 8, 112–13, 117–18; dangerous because female, 8, 113; represent mothers: of Þórr, 5, 181–6, 196; to hero’s partner, 186–90, 196; as wives of fertility gods, 62–7; wolf-riding giantesses, 113–15; see also: giantesses in myths of the gods: Angrboða, Bestla, Báseyra, Ellí, Fjörgyn, Forðr, Gerðr, Gjálp, [Goeip], Greip, Gríðr, Gunnlod, [Hel], Hlíðr, Hjóð, Hjóða, Hjyrrokkin, [Júritha], Jámsaxa, Jóðr, [Nátt/Nótt], Rinda, Rindr, Skáði; giantess-partners of human beings: Alba, [Almaria], [Flaumgerðr], Fríðr, [Guðrún], Harðgrep, Harþrepa, Hildigunnur, [Hildr], [Hlađvör], [Hrafnhildr], [Skjólf], [Sóley]; hags: Arinnefja, Ámgerðr, Brana, Feima, Geysa, Gniga, Gríðr, Gróa, Gullbrá, Heiðr, Hengjankjapta, Hít, Hljóð, Hrímrgerðr, Hryja, Ímgerðr, [Irpá], Járnglumr, Járniða, Keila, Kjalandy, Kleima, Leikn, Margerðr, [Maurnir], Mána, Menglod, Molda, Nigra, Silven, Skellinefja, Skinnhufa, Skinnnefja, Skjálvdvr, Skrukkja, Sleggja, Svívor, Vargése, Þorgeirrur
Hölgabrúður, [Porgerðr Þorgrøkatroll], Óskubuskas; see also Guthmundus’s daughters, Hymir’s daughter, Týr’s grandmother, Prymir’s sister; Old English giantess figure: Grendel’s mother; Irish giantess: Creide.

giants, 78; abduct goddesses, 5; the Giant Builder, 5, 30, 45, 91; demand goddesses as their wives, 4; giant husbands, 81; Saami, equated with, 100; see also Ágði jarl, Ámr, Anarr, Aper, Arkistratus, Auðr, Aurgelmir, Baugi, Beli, [Billingr], [Brúsi], [Byleiptr/Býleistr], Bólþorn, Dofri, Egill, Fjallar, Fjölsvíðr, Frosti, Galar, Gautr, Geirrøðr, Geruthus, [Glámr], Gljúfra-Geirr, Goðmundr of Glæsisvellir, [Grendel], [Grubbi], [Gusi], Guthmundus, [Gymir], Hagall, Hildir, Hlér, Hrímnir, [Hróðr], Hrossþjófr, Hymir, Járnhauss, Járnnefr, Járnskjõldr, Kaldrani, Kári, Kolbjõrn, Kolr, Kvintelín kvennuþjófr, Leiði, [Litr], Loðinn, Logi, Lútir, Mím(i)r, Nocerus, Onarr, Skrîmnir, Skrymir, Snaer inn gamli, Starkeðr, Surtr, Suttungr, Utgarða-loki, Utgarðathuotis, Vaþþrúðnir, Wagoþþoðhus, Ymir, Þjazi, [Þorn], Þrivaldi, Þrymr, [Ægir], Õgmundr.

Gildas, Saint, 79.

Gimlé, place of the just after Ragnarök, 44.

Ginnarr (= Óðinn), 150.

Gisla saga, family saga, 31.


Glamr, ogre, 132, 133–6.

Glapsvíðr (= Óðinn), 149, 152.

Glavendrup monument, 114; rune stone, 117.

Gleipnir, fetter, 16.

Gljúfra-Geirr, giant, 128.

Greip, giantess (possibly an error for Greip), 120.

Glipa, troll-woman, 178.

Godan, Langobardic name of Óðinn, 13.

goddesses: see Asynjur; Norse goddesses: Freyja, Frigg, Fulla, Gefjon, [Gerðr], Gullveig, Þóðrun, [Jótðr], Nanna, [Rán], [Rindr], Sif, [Skaði], Sól, Porgerðr Hölgabrúðr, Prúðr; other Germanic goddesses: Old English: Eostre, Erce, Frig(e); Old High German: Friia, Sinthgunt, Sunna, Volva; Langobardic: Frea; early Germanic: Hludana, Nerthus; non-Germanic goddesses: Egyptian: Isis; Greek: Athena, Demeter, Eos, Gaea, Persephon; Roman: Aurora, Ceres, Proserpina; Saami: Ravdna.

gods: ancestors of kings, 4, 42, 63, 70, 148–9, 167, 169; creators, 4; downfall of: see Ragnarök; protectors against giants, 4 (and see also Þórr); see also: Norse gods: the Vanir: Byggvir, Freyr, Njõrðr, [Ullr]; the Æsir: Baldr (= Balderus), [Bárðr Snæfellsás], Bôf/Bovi, [Borr], [Buri], Forseti, Heimdallr, Hœnir, Hrôð (Hotherus), [Loki], Lýtir, Magni, Òðinn (= Óthinus), [Óðr], [Skîmir], Thor, Þyr, Váli, Vé, Viðarr, Vili, Yngvi, Pórr; other Germanic gods: Old English: Ænlor, Tiw, Woden; Old High German: Phol, Uodan; Langobardic: Godan; early Germanic: Ing(u), Mannus, Tuisto; non-Germanic gods: Greek: Dionysus, Ouranos, Zeus; Indo-Iranian: Dyaus, Indra, Mitra, Nasatya, Varuna; Lithuanian: Perkunas; Roman: Bacchus, Dius Fidius, Hercules, Jovis (= Jupiter), Mars, Mercury, Quirinus; Saami: Hora Galles.

Godafoss, waterfall, 133.

Goðmundr / Guðmundr of Glassivellir, giant, 140, 177.

Gokstad ship burial, 117.

Gormo, legendary king of the Danes, 120–1, 125.

Goths, religion of, 18, 54.

Gotland, 17, 49, 52, 70.

Grenalent, Breton lâi, 140.

Gnîgas, code of law, 45, 79.

Gram, legendary king of Denmark, 202, 203.


Grenalent, dwarf, 245.

Grendel, ogre, 131, 132, 133, 144, 189; his mother, ogress, 132, 133.
INDEX

Grep, son of Westmarus, 73.
Grettir Asmundarson: legendary figure, 133–4, 135, 143; skaldic poet, 219. Ævínkviða, 122.
Grettis saga, family/legendary saga, 41, 139, 127, 130, 132, 133, 61, 38, 143, 219.
Gríðr, wife of Sigurðr the Dane, 164. Gríma, two prophetesses called, 107.
Grímr, alias of St Ólafr and two companions, 246.
Gríms saga loðincins, legendary saga, 9, 41, 97, 111, 127–9, 137, 138, 142, 175, 194, 238, 242.
Gro, mother of Hadingus, 202–3.
Gróða, giantess völva, 203.
Gróða, human völva in Iceland, 203.
Gróða, mother of Útbakgr, 9, 107, 198, 202–6, 214.
Gröguldr: see Svipdagsmál.
Grottásings, eddic poem, 38.
Grubbi, 153.
Grytha, legendary Danish queen, 163–4.
Gævnik, Ottar, 207.
güðber: see guðguber.
Gúmnundar saga Arasonar, bishop’s saga, 157.
Gúmundur, brother of Þórbroddr, 93.
Gúmundur Arason, bishop, 28.
Gúmundur of Glæsisvellir: see Gómundr of Glæsisvellir.
Gúrni Jónsson, 133.
Guðrøðr Portbjarndáttir, assists a völva, 107.
Guðrún, giant’s daughter, 195.
Guðrún, folk tale heroine, 223, 225–7, 231, 236.
Guðrúnarkviða, eddic poem, 145.
Guðrúnarkviða I, eddic poem, 168, 198, 204, 218, 219.
Guðrúnarkviða II, eddic poem, 68, 205.
Gúgin, Breton lat., 140.
Gulatingslóð, code of law, 86.
guldguber, 49, 56–60. Fig. 4, 76, 90.
Gulinbursti, mythical boar, 87.
Gullinkambi, mythical cock, 226.
Gullveig, goddess (probably = Freyja), 22, 89–92, 105.
Gull-bóris saga, family saga, 95, 107–8, 133.
Gunnarr Gjúkason, legendary king of the Burgundians, 169.
Gunnars þáttir helminga, 51, 52, 54–5, 85; see also Ógmundar þáttir dyttis.
Gunnell, Terry, 20.
Gunnhildr, wife of Êiríkr blóðøx, 77; as skaldic poet, 218.
Gunnlöð, giantess, daughter of Suttungr, 9, 147, 152, 158, 164–7, 169–71, 178, 179, 193.
Gunnlöð the elder, wife of Álf the Old, 166–7, 169, 240.
Gurevich, Aron, 86.
Gusi, [giant], legendary king of the Lapps, 174, 242.
Guthmundur (probably = Gómundr), giant, 9, 121, 123, 187; his daughters, 121, 124.
Guthormr Helgason kótrr, skaldic poet, 96.
Guthormr sindri, skaldic poet, 150: Hákunartrápa, 154.
Guthorms, husband of Útlvida, 68.
Guthred, Norse king of York, 78.
Gyðinginning: see Snorra Edda.
Gylfi, mythical king of the Swedes, 44.
Gynir, giant, 64, 65; father of Gerðr, 64–6, 168; personification of the sea, 66–7, 80, 110.
Gýndlir (= Óðinn), 151–2.
Gýndul, valkyrie, 151.
Gætarus, legendary king of Norway, 73.
Gotvar, sister-in-law of Westmarus, 73.
Gardstänga stone, 117.

Habitus, 25.
Haddingi, children of Arngrimus and Ofira, 68, 73.
Haddingjaldr, region of Norway, 68.
Haddingjar, Norwegian noble family, or hereditary name of its leaders, 53, 68, 77, 92.
Haddingr, 68, 74; see also Hadingus.
Hades, Greek lord of the underworld, 170.
Hadingus, legendary king of the Danes, 39, 63, 77, 79, 92, 107–8, 120, 172–5, 180, 190, 202; father of Frotho, 67–8; Freoblot, institutes, 67; hangs himself, 68; name, 68; Njórðr, similarity to, 63; Regnildr: marriage to 63, 67–9; leaves her to return to sea, 67–8; survives attempt to murder him, 68.
Háaland, Norwegian province, 167, 169.
Hádra / Aðra, Old English royal ancestor, 156.
Hagall, [giant], 167, 241.
Hallfingen runic inscription, 211–12.
Hákon Adalsteinsföstri, king of Norway, 154.
Hákon Hákonarson, king of Norway, 43.
Hákon berðbreiðr, king of Norway, 100, 200.
Hákon jarl Sigurðarson, ruler of Norway, 81–5, 86, 87, 91, 92, 154, 238.
Hákonarbók, code of law, 45, 99.
Háleymjar, Norwegian noble family, 42, 84, 169.
Háldan, legendary king of the Danes, 74.
Hálfur, king of Hróaraland, 240.
Halga, legendary king of the Danes, 74.
Hallbjørn, father of Ketill hœngr, 180.

Hallfreðr vandradæaskald, skaldic poet, 62, 157; Hákonadrápa, 70, 154, 238; Óláfsdrápa, 112, 150, 152, 154, 152, 155; Óláfs erðfrápa, 168.
Hallgerðr langbrók, 66.
Hallvarðr hæreksblesi, skaldic poet, 112; Knútsdrápa, 155.
Hamarey runic inscription, 212.
Hamðismál, eddic poem, 84, 169.
van Hamel, A. G., 2.
Hamer, Andrew, 89.
Hanunda, wife of Frotho III, 73, 74.
Haraldr harðráði Sigurðarson, king of Norway, 119, 155; as skaldic poet, 150.
Haraldr inn hárfragri, first king of Norway, 174, 175; marriage to Snjófróð, 64, 76–7.
Haralds saga hárfragra: see Snorri
Sturluson, Heimskringla.
Hardrar saga, family saga, 81, 82, 84.
Hardgreip, giantess/troll-woman, 107, 120.
Hasdingi, Vandalic tribe, 69.
Haugspor, dwarf, 4.
Haukr Valdisarson, skaldic poet: Íslandingadrápa, 127, 148, 163, 166.
Hauks þáttir hábrókar, short story, 96, 97, 107–8; see also Flateyjarbók, Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar.
Hauksbók, 104, 156, 168.
Hauþuwlada, ancestral patron, 52.
Hálogaland, province of Norway, 81, 84, 127, 191, 238.
Hánumdr, brother of Gunnlód the elder, 240.
Hárbarðr (= Óðinn), 150, 153.
Hárbarðsljóð, eddic poem, 8, 109–11, 118, 129, 150, 152, 153, 166, 168, 178.
Háttatal: see Snorra Edda.
INDEX

Hávarðar saga Ísfeirings, family saga, 129.
Healdene, legendary king of the Danes, 74; see also Hálfdan.
Heardingas (cf. Haddingjar), 53, 68.
Heiðinn, brother of Helgi Hjörvarðsson, 93.
Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, 32.
Heiðrún, mythical nanny-goat, 117.
Heimlaus, poet, of beginnings and endings, 16; hearing, sacrifices part of his, 22, 149; horn, 49; name 207; nine giant-mothers, son of, 89, 119, 178, 211; white god, 226.
Heimlaung, prophetess, 107.
Heiðrún, giantess, 159.
Heiðr, giantess, 159.
Heiðrún, mythical nanny-goat, 117.
Heimdallr, god: of beginnings and endings, 16.
Heiðreks saga, see Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks.
Helga þáttr, 117.
Helgakviða Hundingsbana II, eddic poem, 174, 185.
Helgi Haddingiascati, 92; as reincarnation of Helgi Hundingsbani, 68, 229–30.
Helgi Hjörvarðsson, legendary hero, 38, 91–4.
Helgi Hundingsbani, legendary hero, 38, 68, 92, 211, 219–30.
Hella, daughter of Gríðr, 159.
Helga Þorgrímsdóttir, wife of Búi, 92.
Helgi, as dynastic title, 92.
Hengist, Roman demi-god, 38.
Hengjankjapta, giantess, 159.
Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks, legendary saga, 38, 41, 68, 110, 150, 173, 201, 215.
Hervararkviða, eddic poem, 7, 9, 38, 104, 201, 206, 214, 215, 218, 225.
Hervor, legendary heroine, 201, 215.
Hildebrandslied, Old High German poem, 38.
Hildigunnr, giantess, 172–5, 191.
Hildir, giant, 173–4, 176, 184.
Hildisif, sister of King Hringr of Arabia, 241.
Hildisvini, mythical boar, 87.
Hildr, [giantess], daughter of Gríðr, 241–2.
Hildr, daughter of jarl of Scotland, 239–40.
Hildr Hrólfsdóttir nefja, skaldic poet, 151, 218.
Hildr Högnaðdóttir, legendary heroine, 150, 168.
Himinhjargar saga, Icelandic folktales, 201, 214.
Historia Ecclesiae Dunelmensis: see Symeon of Durham.
Historia Langobardorum: see Paulus diaconus.
Historia Norwegiae, 25, 42, 54, 68, 70–2, 75, 97, 151.
Hit, giantess, 127, 185–6, 189.
Hittardr, Iceland, 185.
Hjálmpés saga ok Ólvis, legendary saga, 111, 193–4, 240–1.
Hjalti, associate of Ægvarr bjarki, 131, 133.
Hengikceptr (= Øiðinn), 113.
Hengist, legendary ancestor of kings of Kent, 149.
Henry of Huntingdon, 111.
Heorot, royal hall of the Danes, 132.
Hepti, 130, 133–4.
Hercules, Roman demi-god, 15; as interpretatio Romana of Pörr, 17, 47.
Hermann Pålsson, 90.
Herminones, branch of the Germanic peoples, 47.
Herr Hjælmer, Danish ballad, 222.
Herr Æge, ballad protagonist, 224, 230–1, 237.
Herraunr, legendary secondary hero, 137, 138.
Herrem runic inscription, 212.
Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks, legendary saga, 38, 41, 68, 110, 150, 173, 201, 215.
Hervararkviða, eddic poem, 7, 9, 38, 104, 201, 206, 214, 215, 218, 225.
Hervor, legendary heroine, 201, 215.
Heimlaus, poet, of beginnings and endings, 16.
Heiðrún, giantess, 159.
Heiðrún, mythical nanny-goat, 117.
Helga þáttr, 745, 79; see also Hrólf's saga kraka.
Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar, eddic poem, 66, 91–3, 95, 97, 152, 156, 222, 230.
Helgakviða Hundingsbana I, eddic poem, 91–4, 96, 100, 168–9, 211, 219.
Helgi, as dynastic title, 92.
Hjalte Skeggjason, blasphemer of Freyja, 87, 169.
Hjarandi, associate of legendary hero, 188.
Hjermind 1 picture stone, 114.
Hjörvarðr, son-in-law of King Helgi Hálfdanarson, 75.
Hjörvarðr, father of Helgi Hjörvarðsson, 92–3.
Hlaðir, 137; jarls of; see also Hákon Sigurðarson.
Hlaðvör, folktale giantess-heroine, 195, 235.
Hlér (probably = Ægir, Gymir), a giant, personification of the sea, 110; ‘Hlér’s brides’ 110; see also ‘brides of berserk’.
Hlésey (= Læsø), Danish island, 110.
Hljóð, giantess, 149, 169.
Hlóðyn (= Jórð), 153, 156, 182; see also Hlöðyn.
Hludana, Germanic goddess, 156.
Hlóðskviða, eddic poem, 38, 41.
Hlóðyn (= Jórð), 153; see also Hlöðyn.
Hnìkarr (= Ólfinn), 240.
Hnithjörg, mountain, 166.
Holgarða-Refr, skaldic poet, 66, 96.
Höfner, Otto, 219.
Holmby picture stone, 114.
Hollmengu-Bersi, skaldic poet, 118, 148.
Holmmark, Anne, 202.
Hora Galles, Saami thunder-god (probably = Þór), 122.
Horatius coles, Roman legendary hero, 15.
Horsa, legendary ancestor of kings of Kent, 149.
Hotherus, mythical hero (= Höðr), 43, 158–9.
Houseseds altar, 16.
Hrafnista, estate of Órvar-Oddr’s family, 175.
Hrafnkols saga, family saga, 137.
Hrimgerðr, giantess, 66, 93, 94, 95, 152.
Hrímir, giant, 122, 127, 128, 149, 159, 169, 238.
Hringr, legendary king of Arabia, 194, 241.
Hringr, legendary king of the Danes, 164, 239.
Hringr, legendary king of Uppdalir, Norway, 75, 101, 102, 103.
Hróarr, brother of Helgi Hálfdanarson ( = Old English Hroðgar), 75.
Hróðgar, legendary king of the Danes, 132, 144.
Hróðmarr, rival of Hjarvarðr, 93.
Hróðr, (giant), 183.
Hrókr inn hvíti, legendary hero, 240.
Hrókr inn svarti, legendary hero, 240.
Hrólf's saga Gautrekssonar, legendary saga, 145.
Hrólf's saga kraka, legendary saga, 38, 41, 74–5, 80, 92, 95, 96, 97–8, 101–4, 131, 132, 133–5, 202.
Hrómundr berserk, 167.
Hroptr (= Óðinn), 159, 210.
Hrosshárs-Grani (= Óðinn), fosterfather of Starkaðr, 203.
Hrosshjörr, giant, 159.
Huginn, one of Óðinn’s ravens, 25.
Huginn, one of Óðinn’s ravens, 25.
Hugsvinnsmál, 164, 213.
Huld, troll-woman, 41 (probably = Hulbh).
Hulbh, prophetess, 71, 95, 96, 101, 156.
Humblus, son of Dan and Grytha, 163.
Hundahellir, cave-dwelling of Hít, 186.
Hundingr, enemy of Helgi, 220.
Hundingus, legendary king of the Swedes, 68.
Hungrvaka, church history, 1.
Hunnestad lost picture stone, 114.
Hunnestad picture stone 2, 114, Fig. 1.
Hversi Noregr byggðist, legendary history, 41, 167.
Hvit 'White', evil stepmother-queen, 75, 95, 102.
Hvít 'White', evil stepmother-queen, 75, 95, 102.
Hvítnes saga Fastinga, Valdimars saga, Vilmundar saga víðutan, báttir Helga bórissonar.
Hymir, giant, 182–4; his daughters, giantesses, 179.
Hymiskeða, eddic poem, 2, 4, 9, 26, 86.
Ingibjörg (= Skellinefja), legendary Ingibjörg Hringsdóttir, daughter of Ingi Haraldsson, king of Norway, Ingeld, legendary hero, ibn Fadlan, Arab travel-writer, identi
Keila, giantess, mother of Þór, 7, 20, 66, 148, 151, 152–6, 156, 162, 164, 167, 169, 170, 178, 179, 180, 181, 182, 185, 238; see also Ígjargyn, Hlòðyn, Hlòðyn.
Kaberry, Phyllis, 31.
Kabyle (Berbers), 144.
Kári, giant, 97.
Kabyl, giant, 144.
Kleima, giant girl, 238.
Kormákr Õgmundarson, saga hero
Kfindegilde, Danish childbirth ritual, 160.
Kvinnby amulet, 160–1.
Kvinteln kvennuþjófr, ogre, 140, 245.
Køge area runic inscription, 212.
Labdacus, grandfather of Òdipus, 24.
Laius, father of Òdipus, 24.
Kjallandi, giantess, 112–13.
Kjallningsaga, family saga, 41, 172–6, 179, 180, 191, 192.
Kleima, giant girl, 238.
Klæmint, ballad protagonist, 222–6, 230, 244.
Knútr: see Cnut.
Knutukast, game, 129.
Kolbjorn, giant, 127, 128, 137.
Kolfinnr, rival of Búi, 174.
Kolr, ogre, 189.
Konebarsel, Danish childbirth ritual, 160.
Kormákr Õgmundarson, saga hero
Kraftr e Ruslendinga, poetic metaphors, 39–40, 43, 220.
Kent, kingdom of, 194, 197.
Ketils saga haungs, legendary saga, 9, 41, 81, 82, 85, 152, 172–6, 180, 191, 242.
Kings, divine ancestry of, 4, 70, 148–9, 167.
Kjalnesinga saga, family saga, 41, 172–6, 179, 180, 191, 192.
Kleima, giant girl, 238.
Klæmint, ballad protagonist, 222–6, 230, 244.
Knútr: see Cnut.
Knutukast, game, 129.
Kolbjorn, giant, 127, 128, 137.
Kolfinnr, rival of Búi, 174.
Kolr, ogre, 189.
Konebarsel, Danish childbirth ritual, 160.
Kormákr Õgmundarson, saga hero
Kraftr e Ruslendinga, poetic metaphors, 39–40, 43, 220.
Knut: see Cnut.
Knutukast, game, 129.
Kolbjorn, giant, 127, 128, 137.
Kolfinnr, rival of Búi, 174.
Kolr, ogre, 189.
Konebarsel, Danish childbirth ritual, 160.
Kormákr Õgmundarson, saga hero
and skaldic poet 13, 66, 96, 107, 157, 166: Sigurðardsrápa, 97, 157, 163.
Kormáks saga, family saga, 95, 107, 148, 218.
Korsøygarden runic inscription, 212.
Kræghede waggon, 52.
Kræghul rune-inscribed spear-shaft, 18.
Krause, Wolfgang, 197.
Kronos, Greek demon, 14, 15, 27, 79.
Kvasir, mythical wise man, 170, 208.
Kvinnby amulet, 160–1.
Kvinteln kvennuþjófr, ogre, 140, 245.
Køge area runic inscription, 212.
Labdacus, grandfather of Òdipus, 24.
Laius, father of Òdipus, 24.
lake, dangerous, as barrier to hero, 130; see also waterfall.
Lamberton, William, bishop, 69.
Landnámabók, 1, 104–6, 129.
Lang, Andrew, 19–21, 35.
Langá waggon, 52.
Lappr: see Saami.
Law-codes, 45: Norwegian, 99–100, 152, 200; see also Grágas, Gulathinglaw,
Hákonarbók, Járnside, Jonsbók, Ældre Bjárkó-RET, Ældre Borgarthings-
Christenret, Ældre Eidsvatnings-
Christenret, Ældre Frostathing-lov,
Ældre Gulathing-lov.
Laxdela saga, family saga, 100.
Layton, Robert, 17, 48.
Legendary kings: of Arabia: see Hringer;
of the Burgundians: see Gunnarr; of
Constantinople: see Eiríkr; of the
Danes: 74–5; see also Dan, Fridlevus,
Frotho I, Frotho II, Fróði, Gormo,
Gram, Hadingus, Hálfdan (Old
English Healdene), Helgi (Old
English Halga), Hringer, Hroðgar,
Hrólfr kraki, Lotherus, Scef (Old
English), Sigurðr, Skjólfr (= Sky-
Oldus, Old English Scyld Scæting),
Sóti; of the English: see Artus; of the
Gautar: see Beowulf (Old English),
Heiðrek; of the giants etc.: see
Arkistratus, Frosti, Nocerus, Snjár
inn gamli, Svási; of the Huns: see
Atli; Irish legendary kings: see Conn,
Morgan; of Kent: see Hengist (Old
English), Horsa (Old English);
Norwegian legendary kings: see
Erlingr, Getarus, Hálfr, Hringer,
Svipdagenus, Vikarr; of the Saami
(Lappr): see Brúni, Gusi; of the
Swedes, 70; see also Abils, Agni,
Álrek, Daigr, Dómaldí, Dómarr,
Dyggvi, Eiríkr, Fjónir, Gyði,
Hundingus, Ingjaldr Ónundarson,
Sveigår, Vanlandi, Visburr; of an
unspecified country: see Æsmundr.
Legendary sagas, 40–2, 49, 96, 98–9, 127,
145; see also Æsmundar saga
Kappabana, [Bárdar saga Snæfellsás],

Meeting the Other in Norse Myth and Legend
INDEX

Bösa saga ok Herrauds, [Ectors saga], Egils saga ok Asmundar, Gautreks saga, Grims saga loðiðkinna, [Gull-bóris saga]. Hálfdrápa saga Brynhíðar, Hálf's saga ok Hálfrekka, Hervarar saga ok Hibréks, Hjálphís saga ok Ólafs, Hröf's saga Gautrekssonar, Hröf's saga kraka, Hrómundar saga Grippsonar, Hversa Noregr byggðist, Illuga saga Gríphíðar, Ketils saga hàvngs, [Orns þáttr Stórolfssonar], [Samson's saga figra], Sǫrla saga ystka, Sǫrla þáttar, [Valdimars sagal], [Vílmundar saga], Volsunga saga, Íðreks saga, Porstein's saga Vikingssonar, Órvar-Ódd's saga; see also þaðir.

Leiði, giant, 112.
Leikn, giantess, 112.
Lévi-Strauss, Claude, 24–6, 78.
Lévy-Bruhl, Lucien, 31.
Liber Exemplorum, 47, 160, 161, 242–3; see also Petrus de Dacia.
Liberated Partner pattern, 192–6.
Lifsteinr 'life-stone', 235.
Light: mysterious light associated with triumph over ogre(ss), 130, 134, 135, 143; 'sword of light', 135, 244.
Limrunar, medical runes, 213, 216.
Lincoln 1 rune inscription, 213.
Litr, dwarf or giant, 113–14, 116, 125.
Liutprand of Cremona, 116.
Livy, Roman historian, 16–17.
Ljóðatal, traditional name of part of Háumál D, 206.
Loddafnisnáki: see Háumál C.
Loðin, giant, 93.
Logi, brother of Skjölf, 71–2; giant, 110.
Lokasenna, eddic poem, 2, 7, 8, 9, 16, 39, 54, 55, 60, 62, 63, 65, 66, 96, 97, 100, 108, 118, 150, 159, 168, 179.
Loki, 9, 16, 55, 63, 65, 72, 89, 110, 118, 121; as trickster, 16; deceives Pórr, 120.
Loptharna, fiancée of Grimir loðiðkinna, 127, 238.
Lutherus, son of Dan and Grytha, 163–4.
Louis-Jensen, Jóhna, 160.
Lübeck, 160.
Lugii, Celtic tribe, 47.
Lund: bone figure, 123; picture stone, 114; weaving tablet rune inscription, 213.
Lundeborg, guldgubber site, 56.
Lútr (or Litr), giant, 112, 114.
Lýtir, a god resembling Freyr, 107.
Læborg stone, 117.
Maeshowe runic inscriptions, 131.
Magni, son of Þór, 136, 178.
maid servant motif, 221, 225–6.
Malinowski, Bronislaw, 21.
Máðrinnar, eloquence runes, 213, 216.
Malshátakviði, skaldic poem, 87.
Mána 'Moon', name of two different hags, 139, 239, 245–6.
Máni, 'Moon', mythical figure, 13.
Mannus, Germanic god, 47.
Manriñar, seduction runes, 211, 213.
Margaret of Antioch, Saint, 7.
Margaret/Marjorie, ballad heroine, 230–1.
Margerór, giantess, 66.
Marie de France, 140; Lanval, 177, 180.
Maríuvisur I, skaldic poem, 150.
Markús Skeggjason, skaldic poet: Kristsdrápa, 28.
Mars, Roman god, 15; as interpretatio Romana of Tyr, 16, 47.
Martebeo, picture stone, 17, 52.
Mary of Nemmegen, 223.
Matronae, altars dedicated to, 46, 198–9.
Maurnir, [giantesses], 149.
mead of poetry, 3, 39, 147, 164–7, 170–1, 179, 193, 208; see also Óðrérir, Són, soma, mediators, 24–5.
Mengloð, partner of Svipdagr, 202–5, 206, 214.
Mengloð, helpful giantess, 127–8, 186–7, 194, 203.
Mercury, Roman god: as interpretatio Romana of Óðinn, 17, 19, 47, 48.
Meulengracht Sørensen, Preben 185.
Michael, archangel, 27; as God’s messenger, 224, 226, 244.
Múgradormur: see World Serpent.
Míþleitinn, sword, 241.
Mitra, Sanskrit/Iranian god, 15.
Mim(i)r, giant, 208.
Mjöllnir, Þór’s hammer, 5, 117, 120.
modranect, Old English heathen festival, 199.
Molda, hag, 239.
Morgan, Irish king of the Other World, 203.
Motz, Lotte, 84, 204–6.
Mucius scaevola, Roman legendary hero, 15–17.
Muller, F. Max, 14.
Münster, 156.
Muntal, Else, 211.
Mundilfœri, father of Sun and Moon, 216.
Nabbi, dwarf, 239.
Myklebostad rune stone, 233.
Morgan, Irish king of the Other World, 3.
Morton, 62.
Möhr, F. Max, 140.
Motz, Lotte, 84, 204–6.
Mucius scaevola, Roman legendary hero, 15–17.
Muller, F. Max, 14.
Münster, 156.
Mundal, Else, 211.
Mundilfœri, father of Sun and Moon, 216.
Nabbi, dwarf, 239.
Myklebostad rune stone, 233.
Morgan, Irish king of the Other World, 3.
Morton, 62.
Möhr, F. Max, 140.
late heathen period, 233; human pro-tégés, 6, 9, 16, 172–6, 185, 233: spear, men dedicated to him by marking with, 42; worshipped by all the Germanic peoples, 47; as ancestor: his legendary descendants, 202–3, 214: Hálseygar, ancestor of, 62–3, 233: Hringr, grandfather of, 103: see also Aldaðör, Álfóðr, Báleygg, Bólverkr, Æjófnir, Fjolsvirð, Gautr, Gestum-blindi, Gunnar, Glapsvíðr, Grímnir, Gondlir, Hárbærð, Óski, Sann, Síðhõttr, Skoll-Hringr, grandfather of, 104: Óski (= Óðinn), 149, 150, 152, 155. Othinus (= Óðinn), 9, 43, 158–9, 162, 169: identification with Mercury, 19. Óttarr byrtingr, 86. Óttarr the Foolish, Freyja’s lover, 81, 85–9, 92, 93. Óttarr svart, skaldic poet: Höfdlauðan, 155: Ólafsfrippa, 150–1, 155. Ouranos, Greek god, 14, 27. Ovid, Roman poet: Ars Amatoria, 164.

Rati, Öðinn’s auger, 164.
Ravna, Saami goddess (probably = Siť), 122.
Rebild Skovhuse idol, 55.
Réginsmál, eddic poem, 25, 38, 240.
Regnilda, wife of Hadingus, 63, 67–9, 174; wins Hadingus as husband by inspecting his legs, 67; fails to persuade Hadingus to remain on land with her, 67.
Reiðgotaland, 70.
reincarnation, 91–2, 94.
Rhineland, 156.
Ribe runic inscription, 212.
Ribold og Guldborg, Danish ballad, 222.
Riddarinn Kjemint, Faroese ballad, 222–6, 230, 244.
Riddles of Gestumbinda: see Gátur Gestumbinda.
right arm of ogre torn or cut off, 130, 133, 134, 136, 138, 140, 143; see also giants.
Rigveda, 170.
Rígsþula, eddic poem, 38.
Rinda, mother of Bous, 9, 158–60, 169.
ring (necklace or armring); kingship, symbolic attribute of, 57, 71, 73, 75, 77; völva, payment to, 102–3, 108; Winter Princess, desired by, 78.
Risala: see ibn Fadlan.
Risaland ‘Giant-land’, 188.
river, dangerous crossing of, 120–2, 123–4, 134, 140.
Robinson, Rodney, 50–1.
rock carvings, Swedish Bronze-Age, 48.
Rofterus: see Hroptr.
Rollerus, half-brother of Ericus, 73, 74.
Rostiophus Phinnicus, prophet, 158–9.
Rudí, associate of Vilmundr, 188.
Rude Eskilstrop idol, 55.
runes, 49, 115, 117, 160–1, 201, 208; legendary origins of, 207, 210; types of, 211–13; see also þiurgríðrar, þrýmríðrar, hugríðrar, limríðrar, manríðrar, máðríðrar, sigríðrar, oðríðrar.
runic inscriptions in the Older and Younger Futharks, 45; see also Battersea, Bergen, Bø, Canterbury, Eggja, Erja, Franks Casket, Glavendrup, Hailfingen, Hamarøy, Herrem, Køge, Korsøygarden, Kragehul, Kvinneby, Lincoln, Lund, Maeshouse, Myklebostad, Nordendorf, Øpedal, Pforzen, Pietroassa, Rävsal, Ribe, Sakshaug, Siguna, Sölvesborg, Sønder Kirkeby, Steindorf, Steinfeld, Stentoft, Tullstorp, Velanda, Vimose, Virring.
Rus, 47, 228: Rus funeral, 116.
Russia, 42, 104, 123, 174, 175; as home of the Winter King, 70.
Rävsal stone runic inscription, 197.
Rognvaldr rettilbeini, son of Snjófríðr, 76–7, 97.
Saami, 76–7, 99; deities, 122; magic, 151; magicians, 97, 100; women, 45, 100.
Sabine women, 15.
sacral kingship, 78, 86.
Sakshaug church runic inscriptions, 49, 212.
Saldís, 106.
Salgo gnir, mythical cock, 226.
Samsons saga fagra, legendary saga, 41, 139–40, 142, 245.
Sannr (= Öðinn), 157.
Sauðey, 127–8.
Saxo grammaticus, 8, 9, 19, 34, 42–3.
Saxoyn, 42, 43, 44, 74.
Sceaf, legendary royal ancestor, 77.
Scyld Scelenium, legendary royal ancestor, 53.
Second Merseburg Charm, 13, 46.
von See, Klaus, 51, 55, 164, 213.
seiðr, magic, 76, 90, 96–7, 99, 100, 157, 162, 169.
Semele, mistress of Zeus, 170, 171.
Seminones, Germanic tribe, 219.
senna, abuse contest genre, 86, 93–4, 96.
Shadow, 29, 30, [63], 80.
shamanism, 20.
Shetland Ballad of the Crucifixion, 206,
227.
ship, symbolic use in funerals, 113–17.
Stóðtr (= Öðinn), 159.
Stí, goddess, wife of Þórr, 113, 122, 150,
152, 178.
Sigemund, legendary hero (Old
English), 149.
Sigmundr, legendary father of Sigrðr,
92, 93, 149, 211.
Sigmundr, legendary son of jarl of
Scotland, 239.
Sigmundr Breistisson, 82–3.
Signy, legendary sister of Sigmundr,
229.
Signý, legendary sister of Helgi
(Hálfdanarson), 75.
Signý (alias Gríðr), legendary princess,
242.
Sigrdrífa, valkyrie, 88, 201, 210–11.
Sigrdrífumál, eddic poem, 38, 86, 88,
Sigróðr, wife of Ketill hængr, 242.
Siglinda, mother of Helgi Hjörvarðson,
92–3.
Siglinda, wife of Helgi Hundingbani,
92, 93, 94, 211, 219, 221, 222, 223–9.
sigrímr, victory runes, 211, 216, 217.
Sigtuna: Öðinn’s legendary capital, 44;
runic inscription on amulet, 212, 213.
Sigrubarkvida in skamma, eddic poem,
Sigrðr, legendary king of the Danes,
164.
Sigrleifr, legendary Danish prince, 241–
2.
Sigrleifr, legendary son of jarl of
Scotland, 239.
Sigrðr Fáfnisbani, legendary hero, 68,
88, 201, 210–11, 227, 229; as
descendant of Öðinn, 214.
Sigrðr Hákonarson, earl of Hlaðir,
157.
Sigrðr Jorsalafari, king of Norway, 86.
Síðhótr (= Óðinn), 159.
Sigvatr Þórðarson, skaldic poet, 148:
Éfrdrápa Ólafs helga, 27.
Síjmouns, Barent, 208.
Silven, giantess, 189.
Simek, Rudolf, 198.
Sinfjötli, legendary hero, 93.
Sinthgunt (or Sinhtgunt), Old High
German goddess, 13.
Stones, Finno-Ugric tribe, 47.
Skáli, giantess, 74, 77: Háleygjar,
ancestress of (with Öðinn), 9, 62–3, 169.
Loki, obscenely entertained by,
64; Njótr: wife of, 8, 60, 62, 77;
chooses him by his legs, 8, 64, 93;
leaves him, 8, 77; unfaithful to him
with Loki, 63; name, 7, 63, 179; sea,
cannot bear to live by, 64; Þjazi;
daughter of, 63–4; is diverted from
revenge for, 64.
skaldic poetry, 1, 39–40; Christian, 27–
8; see also Arni Jónsson, Amórr
jarlaskáld, Bjarni Hálbjarnarson,
Bjarni Kolbeinsson, Bragi Bodason,
Egill Skallagrímsson, Eilfr
Godrúnarson, Einarr Gílsó, Einarr
skálaglamm, Einarr Skúlason, Eiríkr
völsjá, Eyjólfr daðaskáld, Eyjólfr
Valgerðarson, Eysteinn Asgrímsson,
Eyvindr skáldaspíllir, Grettir
Ásmundarson, Gunnhildr, Guth-
ormr Helgason kortr, Guthormr
sindri, Hallfreðr vandrabráskáld,
Hallvarðr háreksblesi, Haukr Val-
dísason, Heilags anda visur, Hildr
Hrafnisdóttir nefja, Hofgarða-Refr,
Holmgungu-Bersi, Jórunn skáldmar,
Kormákr Ógmundarson, Mariuvisur,
Markús Skeggjason, Máslháttakvæði,
Oddi litli, Ófeigr Skíðason, Ormr
Steinprórisson, Óttarr svarti, Placitus-
drápa, Rognvaldr kali, Sigvatr Þór-
ðarson, Skúli Porsteinsson, Sólariþó,
Steinarr Sjónason, Steinunn Refs-
dóttir, Steinþórir, Stúfr inn blindi,
Sturla Þorðarson, Tindr Hallkelsson,
Úlf Uggason, Vetlúlu Sunnarlóðason,
Veður-Steinn, Þjóðólfr Amorson,
Þjóðólfr of Hvin, Þorarin mahlö-
ingr, Þorbjörn disarskáld, Þorbjörn
hornklofi, Þorbjörn skakkarðskáld,
Þórð Kolbeinsson, Þórbjörn Sjáreksson,
Þorkell Gíslason, Porvaldr Hájtlason.
Skáldsþarœnaí: see Snorra Edda.
Skøldr (= Scyld, Skyoldus), legendary
Snorri Sturluson, 174.
Skjølnífja, giantess, 246–7.
Skinnhufu, giantess, 193, 240–1.
skimlekr, game, 129.
Skinnnefja, giantess, 177, 184.
Skírnismál, eddic poem, 2, 3, 7, 8, 52, 57.
60, 62, 64–7, 72, 76, 77, 78, 92, 93, 94.
159, 168, 169, 179, 201, 203, 213, 225.
Skjáldvör, giantess, 136–7.
Skjóldr (= Scyld, Skyoldus), legendary
king of the Danes, 164.
Skjólli (= Freyja), 71.
Skjólf, Winter Princess, 70–1.
Skollvaldr (= Óðinn), 150.
Skirnir, giant, 245–6.
Skrukkla, giantess, 189.
Skrymir, giant, 128, 140.
Skuld, daughter of King Helgi of
Denmark, 75.
Skúli jarl, Norwegian nobleman, 43.
Skúli borsteinsson, skaldic poet, 81.
Skylfingar, the Swedes, 71.
Skyoldus (= Scyld, Skjóldr), legendary
king of the Danes, 164.
Slay, Desmond, 131.
Sleggi, giantess, 138, 239.
Snaith, dog, 127–8, 185–6, 195.
Sneglu-Halla játtir, short story, 119.
Snjar inn gamli (= Snaer inn gamli),
giant, 70, 110.
Snio, legendary king, 8 (probably =
Snjár).
Snjófróð, legendary Saami princess,
22, 42, 76–7.
Snuma Edda, 2, 13, 38, 40, 43–5, 64, 77.
Gylfaginning, 3, 4, 8, 11, 12, 13, 16, 17.
87, 89, 110, 111, 113–14, 116–18, 147.
152, 153, 156, 157, 158, 163, 184, 207–
8, 226: Skáldskaparmál, 5, 12, 39, 43.
62, 63, 64, 67, 81, 87, 110, 111, 112.
113, 118–22, 125, 127, 128, 132, 147.
150, 151, 152, 153, 154, 155, 156, 157.
158, 162, 163, 164, 165–6, 178–9, 181.
203, 208, 238; Háttatal, 43.
Snorri Sturluson, 156; as Christian
writer, 34: Heimskringla, 42: Prologue,
40, 42, 73; Yinglinga saga, 8, 17, 22, 25.
41, 42, 55, 64, 68, 70–2, 73, 74, 75, 77.
79, 85, 95, 100, 101–4, 149, 151, 153.
199, 200, 203, 209; Haralds saga ins
harfagra, 42, 63, 76–7; Hákonar saga
góða, 154, 157; Olafs saga
Tryggvasonar, 137, 154; Olafs saga
helga, 132, 148; Haralds saga hardróa,
155; Olafs saga lýra, 163; Hákonar
saga herðubreða, 100, 200.
Snaer inn gamli: see Snjár inn gamli.
Sockburn hogback, 16.
Sogn, province of Norway, 247.
Sól, goddess, 13.
Sóley, [giantess], 189–90.
Sólrun, later wife of Þorðr Bárðarson,
127, 128.
Sonu, 170.
Són, the mead of poetry, or a vat in
which it is kept, 165–6.
Sorste Muld, guldgubber site, 56–7, Fig.
1.
Sóti, brother of Borgerðr Þolgrábóðr,
82.
Sóti, legendary usurping king of the
Danes, 239–40.
South English Legendary, collection of
saint’s lives, 7.
sow, as emblem of Freyja, 60.
Spanneholm idol, 55.
Spartoi, Greek legendary warriors, 24.
Spentrup 1 picture stone, 114;
Spentrup 2 stone, 117.
Sphinx, 24.
Starcatherus, legendary hero (= Starkaðr),
43.
Starkaðr, legendary warrior, 15–16,
105, 153, 173, 203; as protégé of
Óðinn, 16.
Starkeðr, giant, 112.
Steblin-Kamenskij, Mikhail, 216.
Steindorf runic inscription, 211.
Steindorf rune stone, 18, 53.
Steinunn Ræfsdottir, skaldic poet, 218.
Steinvör, mistress of Grettir, 143.
Steinþórir, skaldic poet, 164.
grandmother a giantess, 189; 
supposed legal function actually 
military, 15–16. 
tóflr, board-game, 123.

Úlfur, unwelcome suitor of Sóley, 189. 
Úlfur, opponent of Útstein, 240. 
Úlfr Uggason, skaldic poet: Húsdrápa, 
40, 120, 121. 
Úlr, god, 62: patron of legal ring, 16. 
Ulvida, daughter of Hadingus, 68. 
unconscious, the, 26–34, 35: collective 
unconscious, 29.
Unferð, envious counsellor of King 
Hrodgar, 134.

Ungen Sveidal Danish ballad, 201–2. 
Unjust Patriarch story-pattern, 50, 101– 
4, 107–8. 
The Unquiet Grave, ballad, 218, 222–7. 
Uodan, Old High German name of 
Óðinn, 13. 
Uppákra, 56, Fig. 3. 
Úlgarðaloki, giant, 118. 
Úlfr, opponent of Útstein, 118. 
Úlfr, unwelcome suitor of Sóley, 189. 
Úlfr, opponent of Útstein, 240. 
Úlfr Uggason, skaldic poet: Húsdrápa, 
40, 120, 121. 
Úlr, god, 62: patron of legal ring, 16. 
Ulvida, daughter of Hadingus, 68. 
unconscious, the, 26–34, 35: collective 
unconscious, 29.
Unferð, envious counsellor of King 
Hrodgar, 134.

Valentina, fiancée of Samson fagri, 140, 
245.
Valbholl, Óðinn’s hall, 82, 158, 162, 219, 
224, 226.
Váli, 156, 157, 158, 159, 161, 162, 176, 
179, 180; son of Rindr, 169, 171; see 
also Ranr.
valkyries, 4, 93, 219.
Valsgärde ship burial, 116.
Vana, wife of Sveigðir, 71.
Vanir, race of gods, 5, 42, 50–67, 68, 72, 
77, 108, 148, 212; battle magic of, 91; 
female Vanir, 89, 87; their liaisons 
with human rulers, 7: incest among, 
22; marriages of, and limitations on 
them, 6, 8, 22, 77–80; royal 
descendants of, 5, 6, 8, 101, 102; sea, 
gods of the, 80; Æsir: war with, 16, 
18–19, 89; distinctness from, 17–18; 
see also Freyja, Freyr, Njótr, 
Þorgerðr Þorgrímbr, 
Vanlandi, legendary king of the 
Swedes, 70–4, 77. 
Varangian guard, 155. 
Vargéisa, giantess, 193, 1. 
Várkaldr, supposed father of Svipdagr, 
206.
Varuna, Sanskrit god, 15.
Veneti, [Slavonic] tribe, 47. 
Véor (= bört), 183.
Verland, 153.
Vernacus, legendary hero, 193.
Vetröldi Sumarliðason, skaldic poet, 
111–12.
Vidarr, son of Óðinn and Gríðr, 162–4, 
169, 171, 171, 176, 179, 180, 181, 183. 
Víðir, Víðurr (= Óðinn), 165, 168.
Viga-Glúms saga, family saga, 96, 97, 
100, 106, 199.
Viga-Hraðr, worshipper of Þorgerðr 
Hrógrímr, 82.
Vigrnir (or Vignir), son of Óðin-Oddr, 
175–6.
Víkur, legendary king, 16.
Viken, province of Norway, 154.
Vili ‘Will’, brother of Óðinn, 42, 72, 207.
Vilmundar saga vikbatun, 
legendary/romance saga, 41, 97, 99, 
101, 185, 188–90, 192, 193.
Vimose rune-inscription, 18. 
‘Vimarkvīða’, fragment of eddic poem, 
119–21, 123.
Vindald, alias of Óttar, 206.
Vigil, Roman poet: Æneid, 160.
Virgin Mary, 87, 244.
Viring rune stone, 117.
Vissarr, legendary king of the Swedes, 
70–2, 75, 79, 101–2.
Vitgeirr seiðimaðr, verse attributed to, 
97.
Volga, river, 47, 116, 124, 125, 128.
Volla, Old High German name of 
Fulla, 13, 18.
INDEX

Vølsa þáttr 42

Waldo, Margrethe, 56, 57, Fig. 1

Wælfs, father of Sigemund, 149.

Wagnothrus, giant, 173-4.

Wanalir, Australian aboriginal god, 17;
water, death of Summer King
associated with, 71-2, 75, 77-8;
waterfall, as barrier to hero, 130, 133, 134, 136, 140, 245; see also lake.

Watt, Marigrethe, 56, 57, Fig. 1

West Saxon royal genealogies, 44.

Westmarus, counsellor to Frotho III, 73, 92.

The Wife of Usher’s Well, ballad, 222-7.

Winter King, 55, 69, 70-2, 75, 76-8, 80; see also Auði inn auðgi, Frosti, Snjár
inn gamli, Svási.

Winter ‘marriage’ ritual, 69.

Winter Princess, 70-2, 75, 76-7, 78-80, 95; see also Drifa, Hvít, Skjót, Snjófróðr.

Woden, Old English name of Óðinn, 13, 18, 44, 149, 156.

wolf; giantess rides on, 113, 114, 152, 163, 220; prince transformed into,
243-4; swallowes the sun, 4; see also Fenrir.

women; prophetic powers of, 47;
representative of wild nature, 113.

Wooing and Combat folk plays, 69-70, 88.

World Serpent (= Miðgarðsormr), 4, 49, 151, 153, 184.

Yama, the first man (Sanskrit), 11, 12.

Yasht, Iranian Avesta, 12.

Yggdrasill, the World Tree, 44, 207, 211.

Yggr (= Óðinn), 157.

Yima, legendary Iranian king, 11, 12.

Ymir, primeval giant, 4, 11, 12, 22, 23, 152-3, 154, 168.

Ynglinga saga: see Snorri Sturluson,
Heimskringla.

Ynglingar, 42, 63, 68, 70-2, 73, 77, 88, 94, 148.

Ynglingatal: see bjóðólfur of Hvín.

Yngvi, god, 44, 53-4, 72; as ‘king of
Turks’, 42; see also Freyir.
youngest brother kills heroine’s lover,
222-4, 227-8.

Yrsa, daughter and wife of Helgi of
Denmark, 74-5, 92.

Zagreus, son of Zeus, 170.

Zeus, Greek god, 11, 12, 14, 24, 27, 170–1.

Zuni Indians, 24.

Pangbrandr, missionary, 218.

báttr Helga Þóríssonar, short story, 41, 177, 180.

Pekkr (= Óðinn), 151.

Þóðrek saga, legendary saga, 139-40, 142, 143.

Þóórórr, dwarf, 209, 217.

Þjálfr, bór’s servant, 121, 125, 182.


Þorarinn máhlíðingr, skaldic poet, 96.

Þordís Skeggjadóttir, mistress of Bárðr, 82.

Óláfsdóttir, patroness of Þórdís the Bearded, Norwegian poet, 136, 137, 140, 142, 143, 144–5, 148, 152, 171, 182, 185, 189, 190, 192, 232–3: mythology of: appetite (huge), 170; axe, uses as weapon, 128, 138; his chair lifted, 121–4; Geirrœðr, visit to and destruction of, 27, 40, 118–24, 129, 145, 187, 195; giantesses, destroyer of, 5, 6, 109–25; giantess, friendly, helped by, 5, 6, 9, 139, 163, 166; giantesses, sleeps with, 178; lover of giantess Arinnefja, 177–8, 184, of giantess Járnsaxa, 178; goats, lord of, 121, 184; Gríðr, visit to, 121–2, 136, 162, 163, 164, 181–2, 187; Hercules, interpretațio Romana as, 17, 47; Hymir, expedition to, 182–4; Jövis, identification with, 19; Jóðr, son of, 20, 39, 152–3, 156, 169, 171, 179, 180, 182; Magni, his son by Járnsaxa, 136, 178; Mjölnir: his hammer, 5, 109–10, 161; used to consecrate funeral pyre, 113, 116; depicted on rune-stones, 117; Óðinn, tricked by, 150, 153; Priam, supposedly son of, 44; Sif, husband of, 111, 122; Skinnefja, his daughter by Arinnefja, 184; thunder god of, 170; Vimur, river: crosses, 120–4; saves associate during crossing, 134; waves, fights against personified, 111; weapons, uses primitive or none, 130, 137, 140; whetstone, stuck in his head, 203; woman, dresses as, 21; world protector of, 4, 28, 118; World Serpent, fishes for, 17, 49, 184; Þjálfi, his servant, 182; Brúdr, his daughter, 122; Úsir, defender of, 112; worship: fails to support his worshipper, 134, 141; Germanic peoples, worshipped by all, 46; hammer on memorial stones, 118; human transformations of, 5, 6, 9, 126–9, 136–41, 163, 172, 189, 193, 194, 195, 232–3 (and see also Thorkillus, Porsteinn); image carved on high seat pillars, 136; runic inscriptions, invoked in, 45, 49.

Fig. 2, 117: statuettes of, 82, 123; (supposed) warrior function of, 15; see also Véorr.

bôrsdrápa: see Eilífr Goðrúnarson.

Bôrsdrápa saga: see Gull-bôris saga.
INDEX